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Equity

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UTFA Disability Survey Summary

On March 31st, 2025, the University of Toronto Faculty Association (UTFA) circulated a survey to its members to gain insight into their experiences with disability services and accommodations at the University.

While the survey responses reveal a range of perspectives regarding the current state of disability services and support for faculty and librarians at the University, some key concerns and priorities emerged. One of the survey's most prominent findings is that faculty and librarians feel a disjuncture between student accommodation, which appears robust, and faculty and librarian accommodation, which is characterized by inattention, inordinate delays, suspicion, and refusal.

A key theme that emerged from the survey is strong dissatisfaction with current supports, including the Health and Well-Being Office, Human Resources, and others, with respondents describing the University's faculty and librarian accommodation processes as slow, confusing, idiosyncratic, and lacking empathy.

The survey respondents make clear that there is a substantial need for a centralized and streamlined process in the form of a separate UofT accessibility office dedicated to faculty and librarians. This approach would help to ensure equitable and consistent support, as well as the implementation of compassionate policies that consider intersectionality, disability justice, and proactive inclusion.

The survey also identified that there is a significant lack of awareness and education about what supports are available for those with medical conditions recognized as disabilities. Many responded that they believe there weren't enough or any at all, and that they had uncertainty about what conditions could be accommodated. There is a clear need for education and better communication about existing services.

With regard to the physical accessibility of campus buildings, there is widespread dissatisfaction with the

long delays in processing maintenance requests for broken infrastructure. The survey revealed that these issues are compounded by a lack of forethought regarding classroom and office accessibility, with respondents citing difficulties physically navigating rooms, inadequate seating, poor or broken signage, dim lighting, and poor or broken audio/visual equipment. Many called for more flexible work options that allowed for hybrid meetings to better accommodate those with physical or mobility needs, chronic conditions, and other disability-related conditions.

Finally, there is general criticism of systemic ableism and an institutional culture that prioritizes minimizing costs over productivity and well-being. Many respondents reported facing challenges and increased workload while trying to access accommodations. These issues arose from cumbersome, excessive paperwork, inflexible processes, and unnecessary, costly, or invasive requests from the Administration. Responses revealed a theme of institutional stigmas and hostility against disability leading to fear of ramifications on respondents' career trajectories if they couldn't meet the institutional culture of excessive workload and unrealistic performance expectations.

Based on the predominant themes highlighted by the responses to the survey, we identify the following three priorities that will inform UTFA's future advocacy, negotiations, and ongoing conversations with the Administration:

1. Establish a faculty and librarian-specific accessibility office, tasked with centralizing accessibility requests and developing educational content for faculty, librarians, and administrators.

2. Prioritize repairing existing infrastructure that impairs accessibility and mobility, and assess the accessibility of existing infrastructure for renovation and improvement.

3. Incorporate disability justice and access into the ways the University conceptualizes everything, including current accommodation request processes, teaching schedules and room booking, the physical design of campus spaces, and electronic platforms and forms.

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