Inclusive Culture at UBC

- Based on the experiences of graduate students with disabilities

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- *Based on the experiences of graduate students with disabilities*

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Executive summary (SEEDS)

The long-term purpose of the work was the following: 'Increase accessibility for graduate students with disabilities and put in place interventions to support this goal.' Initially, we were asked by SEEDS to conduct a UBC policy analysis based on prior research and identify areas of improvement for accessibility on campus for graduate students. A study carried out in 2018 by a UBC student has indeed been our main focus throughout the semester. We were initially given a summary of the study which identified 7 key themes of all the interviews conducted. As a team, we chose to focus more specifically on Theme 3: Building an Inclusive Culture. We chose this theme because it is regarded as a key element that directly influences the university experiences of the students.

This report includes a detailed analysis of the interviews and allowed us to provide specific recommendations. Realizing that the Coronavirus pandemic greatly affected all students, our team decided to take our project a little further than what was required and we created a survey through Qualtrics. From the survey, our team asked graduate students with disabilities how the pandemic affected their involvement and engagement in class and with other peers. We also asked how the accommodation at UBC has changed in light of the pandemic and how it impacted their sense of inclusivity on campus. Was the online classes during the academic year an improvement or a worsening for the students? Did the pandemic affect the availability of the Centre for Accessibility? These are all questions we posed ourselves and wanted to know more about. Therefore, both the 2018 study analysis and the survey analysis account as our two major information sources from which our team was able to draw conclusions. In addition to this, a conversation with a student who has previously worked with the Centre for Accessibility and who recently worked as a student leader in University Affair unexpectedly gave us additional key insights on the experiences of graduate students with a disability on campus. The student, who also identified with a disability, was able to provide us with multi-faceted information as they had the viewpoint of the Centre and the viewpoint of a disabled student in need of accomodation. An extensive literature review was performed in order to draw the current picture of disability and accessibility in Canada and on university campuses more specifically. Based on all the information we were able to gather, we were able to conclude that a majority of the students with a disability felt 'neutral' towards whether they felt UBC had created an atmosphere of inclusivity. With regards to certain survey answers and the 2018 study, we were able to identify some of the successes and failures of the University's approach.

A major recurrent aspect is the paperwork and bureaucratic processes that dibaled students have to experience before having access to accomodations. It is understandable and necessary for students to fill in papers about their specific needs in order for the university to be able to help them in the best possible way and in order to avoid any type of abuse. Nevertheless, questions need to be posed about the extent of the paperwork. For example, it is counterproductive, if not impossible, for students with neurodevelopmental problems to fill in cast amounts of paperwork. In addition, various students have expressed one significant side effect of this paperwork as being a loss of time which could have been used to do other things

that foster the students' feeling of inclusivity; socializing, preparing for classes to better participate, and attending associations meetings. Furthermore, students have expressed that the lengthy process of having to prove their disability caused additional stress and trauma.

In relation to the pandemic, answers have been varied. Some students have expressed positive aspects about class access and e-learning. Nevertheless, a majority of students specified the increased mental health issues and lack of social interactions, as expected. While non disabled and disabled students alike suffered from this, it should be noted that for students with disabilities, the stress they experienced was in addition to the stress already acquired from getting access to accommodation and from having a disability in the first place.

Finally, there is one important focus that is more important than one may think. Raising awareness amongst students who do not have disabilities could make a big difference on campus. A recurrent experience that students with disability almost always experience is that of feeling different. The Centre for Accessibility can attempt to close that gap but non-disabled students also have a role to play. While this policy analysis is potentially more utopic, it remains an ideal that should be one of the university's objectives. Raising awareness and inviting to adapt one's behaviour could include getting non-disabled students involved in accommodating disabled students or organising workshops and conferences that raise awareness.

Introduction

UBC has published "An Inclusion Action Plan" to build an effort in creating an inclusive campus in 2018. In order to understand the level of accessibility at UBC, the study was carried out from the Graduate Student Society and it had provided a lived experience of graduate students with disabilities. In general, students with disabilities have expressed concerns about the low level of inclusiveness and accessibility to education, services and facilities due to financial, social and physical barriers ("Graduate Students with Disabilities").

From the study, 7 major themes/the areas to improve on have emerged, listed as follows:
1. Equitable funding
2. Campus access
3. Building inclusive culture
4. Systems change
5. Intersectionality of marginalized identities
6. Burden, a product of lack of accessibility
7. Accessibility facilitators.

Among these themes, our team has decided to focus on '**building inclusive culture**' as our main theme throughout this project. We chose this theme because it is regarded as a key element that heavily influences the university experiences of disabled students. Also, a study conducted by Mullins and Preyde had identified a need for further research on delivering more universal experiences of students with disabilities as their study only focused on experiences of female university students.

In regards to this, our main research question is *how disability or diversity-related policies at UBC influence the experiences of graduate students with disabilities and how we can adapt changes in policies to improve the experiences.*

In addition, given the current shift to online learning due to the pandemic, our team has decided to add a focus to examine how the current pandemic has influenced the UBC's inclusiveness of graduate students with disabilities, especially regarding their academic and social engagement. For this reason, we are also aiming to investigate *how the shift to online due to pandemic has influenced the inclusiveness of graduate students with disabilities.*

Furthermore, we try to look at *what makes inclusive culture* in a university setting based on the findings in the literature and suggest how UBC can strive to shape a better inclusive culture for students with disabilities.

Statement of the problem

Students with disabilities are important community members of UBC. However, as it is mentioned in the earlier study, the students with disabilities have expressed their concern that

the current system of UBC does not successfully deliver their needs and therefore lack the inclusiveness on the campus.

We first want to discuss what makes inclusive culture. First of all, Denisova et al. describe the inclusive culture as "the fundamental basis for forming a culture of inclusive society in which the diversity of needs is welcomed, supported, accumulated by society" (3). In regards to academic settings, 'inclusive culture' can be considered to be "a decisive element to their guiding principles for special education" (Goodfellow 69). At the same time, Booth and Ainscow suggest that inclusiveness at an educational setting "developed as a (pedagogical) concept, focusing on the elimination of barriers for participation" (qtd. in Köpfer and Óskarsdóttir 876). These findings agree that inclusive culture or inclusiveness can be built through welcoming and supporting the special needs of people while removing the barriers that prevent them from participating – which then can seek to increase accessibility.

Opini also makes a note on the importance of acceptance and equitability in disability suggesting "it is not easy to grow an inclusive field of disability studies that embraces, welcomes, and accepts diversity if there is no equitable representation of all groups of people" ("Walking the Talk" 69). Opini further notes "disability studies will be strongest and most meaningful if it offers an inclusive space for students, faculty, researchers, community and everybody to engage/participate in" ("Walking the Talk" 80). Considering all these perspectives and discussions together, inclusive culture can be understood as a way of understanding the different needs of people and building an attempt to create space for everyone to engage and involve equitably as one of the members of the community/society.

For this reason, an attempt to understand different needs of people and create a space for everyone to engage and involve remains as an important goal for UBC, in order to encourage the meaningful and successful university experiences of students with disabilities. Through this research, we ultimately have the objectives to raise the awareness on disability and accessibility issues on campus and invite non-disabled students to take an active role in shaping inclusive culture together. Lastly, we aim to provide suggestions for the future that can better shape the disability-related accommodations and programming initiatives which speak to the specific needs of graduate students with disabilities.

Literature review

In addition to the action plan published by UBC in 2018, a few other topics identified in the literature sparked our interest and shed light on what we believe to be the main focal points on the debate regarding disability in Canada and more specifically on University campuses. We first noted an important point made about e-learning. A study carried out by Assuncion et al. look closely at the implementation of e-learning possibilities for students in post-secondary institutions all over Canada. Strictly speaking, institutions from 9 out of the 10 Candian provinces were taken into consideration. The study reminds of the important role of three specific groups; namely professors, e-learning professionals, and campus disability service providers. The study concludes that a higher cooperation was needed between these

three groups to improve the experience of diasbed students and to make sure that confusion was avoided as to who exactly should take responsibility for this (Assuncion et al. 198). Disability and education do not account as one distinct and evident problem to categorize and to solve, it is rather understood in many different dimensions and requires the implications of various people. The study clarifies that this multi-facetted matter made it less obvious who exactly was to take matters in their hands and ensure improvements. This relates to the topics of intersectionality that will be covered later. Despite significant information provided by this study, the Covid crisis must have immensely changed the narrative about e-learning due to the forced remote classes since the start of the pandemic in early 2020. E-learning is a major aspect that improves 'accessibility' on various different levels. Regarding the study performed by the Graduate Student Society, e-learning would address theme 3: Building Inclusive Culture because access to class, even virtual, can allow students with disabilities to participate in the group discussions and this fosters a feeling of inclusion. The discussion surrounding disability and accessibility becomes increasingly relevant not only because a realization occurs in terms of the previous relative disregard of students with disabilities and also because "numbers of these students in postsecondary education have been rising during the past decade" (Assuncion et al. 188). Synder and Dillow's study demonstrates that as of 2004, "11% of U.S. undergraduates had a disability" and this adds the need for increased attention on disability issues at a university setting (qtd. in Assuncion et al. 188). Some of the advantages accounted for in the study include enhanced opportunities for people who cannot physically attend classes and for people with print impairments.

Another important reflection focuses more on politics, which further improves our understanding of implementing policies for disabled students in Canada. The political structure of Canada requires the consideration of how federalism affects implementation of rules regarding disability. Studies made by Cameron and Valentine and Prince specify that "the general influence of Canadian federalism seems constraining in that Canada does not have a national policy or a robust intergovernmental process on disability issues to the degree that other federations do" (qtd. in Prince 210). Indeed, the federal government as well as the other 10 provincial governments need to cooperate and agree on methodologies in implementing rules about disabilities. Regarding this issue, the Standing Committee on Human Resources in Canada states that "given the intricate federal condition of our body politic, parliamentarians recognize that to formulate a national disability law in Canada, consultations are essential with provincial and territorial governments as well as rights holders and stakeholders" (qtd. in Prince 210).

In conjunction with studies mentioned, we also found a few other thought provoking papers that illustrate particular topics in relation to inclusiveness. First of all, The importance of disability-inclusive culture at a post-secondary institution is well addressed by Mullins and Preyde, which have investigated the experiences of students with disabilities at a Canadian university setting through in-depth interviews. Mullins and Preyde suggest students with disability value the access to "adaptive" services, such as librarians dedicated to students with special needs, because it promotes "a sense of acceptance, community, and safety" (152). At the same time, the participants in the study have expressed they often encounter limitations in

the current accommodation system and they feel uncomfortable in using it as it "identified them as a student with a disability" (Mullins and Preyde 153). The students claim the accommodation system had made their disabilities "extra-visible in a negative way", which had resulted in further stigmatization (Mullins and Preyde 153). Moreover, students have shown the concerns for the general lack of understanding towards disability (Mullins and Preyde 153). This was especially challenging for students with invisible disabilities that often people surrounding them "questioned the validity of their invisible disabilities" (Mullins and Preyde 154). To prove their disability, they had to submit documentation and that resulted in some participants undergoing "lower levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy" (Mullins and Preyde 154).

Mullins and Preyde further claim that the students with disabilities want to see "increased consideration for their limitations" for future change (156). Participants also suggest developing awareness programs for the staff and the faculty members to break down the stigma and social attitudinal barriers (Mullins and Preyde 156). In essence, study conducted by Mullins and Preyde shows the students value the experience of acceptance and consideration for their limitations coming from disabilities. It also suggests that improvements on accommodation may not be an absolute solution to satisfy the certain needs of students with disabilities especially for those with invisible disabilities. Instead, students seek for better inclusiveness and deeper understanding of disability which they can avoid the stigmatization and involve as an active member of the community. For this reason, eliminating social barriers without stigmatizing their disabilities remains a key future challenge.

Second, the article of "Where We Are: Disability and Accessibility" by Wood et al., focuses on the importance and usage of a checklist to assess the extent and availability of accessibility inclusion for students with disabilities in educational institutions in Canada. Using these checklists teachers and educational staff can evaluate the usage of inclusive infrastructure in terms of both physical and teaching methods and strategies (Wood et al. 147). The checklists not only provide information of the extent of inclusion but allow for further research and opportunities for assessing and knowing what methods and aspects should be undertaken to combat lack of accessibility for students with disabilities (Wood et al. 148). Through this, the article mentions how there is an understatement and lack of provisions for students with disabilities, further reiterating the need for improvements. It views the perspective not as being a 'problem', but rather an opportunity for increasing literature of teaching methods and writing. This viewpoint allows brainstorming and focus groups to use questions such as "How does disability better help us to focus on important concepts including adaptation, creativity, community, interdependency, technological ingenuity and modal fluency" (Wood et al. 148). In relation to this, Stephenals et al. also points out how the educational setting lacks the attempt in improving accessibility and the importance of ensuring increased accessibility at the "small, medium and large scales in Canada through policy regimes, programmes and funding" (596). This again signifies the serious problems of school inaccessibility and the fundamental importance of adequate policy and programmes to tackle the disability issues in an educational setting .

Third, the article by Roth et al. on "Disability Awareness, Training, and Empowerment" focuses on a group of university faculty members, teachers, and students working together to provide a literature on Disability Awareness, Training, and Empowerment (also known as DATE) (Roth et al. 116). This initiative facilitates the training and awareness modeling for over 350 university faculty and administration in Northeastern universities across the USA (Roth et al. 121). This work focuses on educating university staff on the lacking infrastructure for students with disabilities, and the active methods that may be undertaken to involve the engagement and inclusion of disabled students. DATE outlines issues such as the various approaches on the lack of inclusion such as tangible infrastructure developments, graduation of forms of reading material and textbooks for greater accessibility and facilitation, as well as IT improvements in universities (Roth et al. 116). Although the program is based in the United States, it is an important initiative that can be applied universally for different educational institutions, thus not restricting the scope of the possibilities for inclusion of disability accommodation awareness.

Fourth, the paper "Postsecondary Students Who have a Learning Disability" written by Cawthone et al. explores the perspective of identifying the extent and awareness of individual's own disabilities in an educational setting. The paper sheds light to the problems faced by students with disabilities in educational institutions, and how these specific concerns by the students may be understood and further addressed (Cawthon et al. 112). Rather than viewing from a general perspective of different accessibility issues for students with disabilities, the researchers use the information provided by those who face such barriers. The study utilizes the approaches and viewpoints of 110 undergraduate students at a chosen four-year public University, using surveys to assess barriers, knowledge on the student's disabilities, as well as self-advocacy strategies (Cawthon et al. 112, 116). Not only does the research collect data on the definitive barriers faced but uses the surveys to determine how students do not fully practice outreach in areas where certain facilities may be already provided to hear their voices and concerns, thus making it difficult to provide the resources with lack of information (Cawthon et al. 112).

As a final point, we want to mention another important aspect that we hope to look at throughout our study. Intersectionality, as coined by Kimberley Crenshaw, depicts the relationships of overlapping dimensions of individual identities and is necessary to consider when it comes to understanding disability issues. A study that looked at the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA) as implemented at the University of Toronto identified that "the intersectionality between disability and gender is not voiced in the plan" and looked at how this affected female students with disabilities (Opini, "Strengths and Limitations" 127). For this reason, we want to look at how multiple types of identity can come together within an individual and why it should be taken into consideration when discussing disability issues.

Altogether, the current literature on disability and accessibility commonly raise voice on raising awareness on disability issues and increasing the need of devising various kinds of accessibility programs. This speaks to the importance of investigating inclusive culture at UBC and in other public settings in general.

Methodology / Research Design

We decided to create a summary of the transcript of the interview (that was conducted by the Graduate Student Society) based on the theme of 'Building Inclusive Culture' instead of doing the policy review paper. In addition, we determined to conduct a complementary survey that asks how the pandemic influenced the students' university experience.

For the complementary survey, we used Qualtrics to create 16 questions that ask students' university experiences before and after the pandemic and how the access to classes and social interactions may have changed as a result. With the feedback from the teaching team and classmates, our team edited and developed the draft questions several times and made sure that questions were clear, engaging and understandable to the survey participants as much as possible. After finalizing questions, we created a consent form and made sure to include all the necessary information for the people who decided to fill in the survey.

The first question asked whether the student is a graduate student with disability. If they were not, the survey would end. There were a total of 6 multiple choice questions where the survey respondents could choose the answer from the choices that best describe their experiences and a total of 10 questions where we ask them to provide us with a longer answer. We believe the survey to last approximately 15 minutes. The first part of the survey asks the students what they study and their experience as a disabled student in UBC during the pre-coronavirus period. The second part of the survey focuses on how the coronavirus may have had an impact on their university experiences. We asked for positive and negative impacts and tried carefully not to shape answers based on flawed questions. We also made sure to not just focus on the academic environment. Classes are of course a big part of the university experience but social engagement is just as important if not more important. Hence, we asked a few questions about their sense of belonging and inclusivity in relation to the covid.

After the survey questions were finalized, we sent it out on a UBC facebook group in hope that we would let the tide of social media carry it across students. Along with this, we were also able to get in touch with the Student Services Manager at UBC's Department of Geography who, after reviewing the survey, was able to email it out to the rest of the department. This would be our largest direct outreach in terms of survey disbursement as in one email. We were able to forward the surveys to 579 students who study Geography at UBC. With the help from our project clients from the Graduate Student Society (GSS) , we also were able to publish our survey link to the newsletter for the GSS. Unfortunately, while we also tried to contact the Center for Accessibility via email, we were unable to hear back from them.

If we were to do this again, more time would have allowed us to have interviews with some disabled students from UBC. This would indeed improve the quality and of the information gathered. With the ethics workshop, the readings we had to do and the lab with the professor we learned about the importance of making clear questions with a good choice of words,

making sure no vague terms could confuse the students filling in the survey. If the COVID pandemic hadn't shifted work dynamics online, we would have had the opportunity to meet students with a disability on campus in person and conduct interviews. We would have been more likely to gain qualitative data in this manner as people often find it easier to speak face to face rather than to have to answer questions on a computer screen.

Analysis

- *Summary of transcript from 2018 pre-conducted interviews*

Besides the draft report on the study conducted by the Graduate Student Society, we had the opportunity to read through the transcript of the focused groups and the interviews that were carried out. While students had expressed challenges and barriers across many areas such as medical leave and funding issues, we have summarized the students' lived experiences based on our major theme 'Building Inclusive Culture'. We looked for specific aspects within the transcripts that affected specifically the feeling of inclusivity of the students with a disability. What made them feel included and accepted, but more importantly what made them feel excluded? For disabled UBC students with reading deficiencies or blindness among others, one of the accommodations made available to them was that students would do their readings and record themselves and then send the recordings by mp3 to the students. This gave the students the possibility to be up to date with readings and more importantly to participate in class and contribute just as much as the other students. This fostered a feeling of inclusivity simply through increased participation.

Another student suffering from respiratory deficiencies shared her experiences on campus. Any kind of fragrance had the possibility to infect her lungs and impact her breathing. These sudden and inevitable episodes forced her to exit the room and return home to take the necessary treatment. "I would go home and rest in bed because I couldn't breathe. So I never even know how things are going to affect me because it depends on the chemical used in the fragrances. And so I never know when I come to school, I never know, if I can stay, if I can stay for the lecture or, you know, what I can do" ("Accessibility Focus Group and Interview Transcripts"). This lack of awareness and consideration has greatly affected the feeling of inclusivity for this student. The student also mentioned that the need to leave the building reduced their class participation and caused significant emotional distress. The need for accommodations and consideration from others and the lack of it has often made the students with disability feel excluded, ultimately making them feel like they are an "anomaly" and that they are "inconvenient" in addition to having to face the people who said "Oh, you are too much bother" ("Accessibility Focus Group"). Furthermore, students expressed frustrations with regards to field trips that students with disabilities often couldn't attend. One of the interviewee shared her attempts to virtually participate but none of the classmates except one put effort into it, further reinforcing the feeling of exclusion.

Time-consuming and tiring paperwork and bureaucratic procedures are a day-to-day reality for students with disabilities. The problems arising from this is that the time taken to fill in

the right papers is time that could have been done to socialize or get involved. According to one of the students "when you are spending all this time doing this extra work, just to make sure you have access to the information, or the physical space, that everyone else has access to, you don't have time to like build relationships, to network" ("Accessibility Focus Group"). This time spent on paperwork therefore impacts the students' feeling of inclusivity.

Finally, some of the students noted the difference between the rhetoric of 'building an inclusive culture' compared to actual, clear and tangible actions. Various students were aware of all they were eligible to, thanks to the website and the assistants but the actual accommodation provided was different than what was promised. "You can change all the policies and all the rhetoric you want, but if people's hearts don't change, then we will never have a place where everyone can belong" ("Accessibility Focus Group"). The student further stated that having a sense of belonging greatly affects their level of success at work or in school and therefore hopes to see more sense of belonging at the Campus.

From this summary, we suggest that the UBC needs more efforts in informing disability issues and how our daily speech and actions can greatly influence the sense of belonging to disabled students through various events and programs. This would raise the awareness on disability issues to non-disabled students and encourage them to be a part of creating 'inclusive space' by thinking how one's behavior could influence others and by acting respectively of other people. In addition, placing posters that inform people about various types of disabilities and how our daily actions can influence people with disabilities in public space (such as discourage wearing fragrance in the library or study space for people who have respiratory problems) would be also helpful to increase the sense of inclusiveness on campus. Furthermore, it is encouraged to include accessibility-related information on the event invitation or programs happening on the campus. This would allow students with varying disabilities to immediately be aware whether the event organised will be accessible for them or not, and encourage them to join various events and programs when it is accompanied with disability accommodation services.

- *The Results of Complementary Survey with COVID-19 focus*

We have collected the survey responses from March 20th to April 16th, 2021. We had 9 survey participants who have identified themselves as current UBC graduate students with disabilities.

To share the responses, 8 out of 9 participants had experienced using at least one of the types of services (e-learning, medical assistance, mental health assistance, transportation on and off-campus and financial aid) before the pandemic. However, in general, students were not aware that the various kinds of services are available. One participant had specifically mentioned despite the availability of services, the services are "generally limited in scope". For instance, the participant made a comment that services are mostly intended for the short-term and therefore often not sufficient to fulfill the long-term needs of students, especially for those with mental health conditions and long-term chronic issues.

Meanwhile, 5 participants felt 'neutral' to the question asking *to what extent do you believe that UBC has successfully put its policies into practice allowing you to feel more included?* while 3 participants responded 'not very successful' and 1 participant answered 'successful'.

Among the students who have experienced using accommodations before the pandemic, the satisfactory level was all different and some students found experiences were satisfactory with prompt response to accommodation requests and the support coming from the faculty members. On the other hand, other students expressed using accommodation was not very satisfactory and said "*got stuck in an endless cycle of proving disability to the access services office that never allowed me to actually get an accommodation approved*" ("Results of Complementary Survey").

One student also mentioned the process and the amount of work to do for getting accommodation is heavy and challenging, especially for those who have neurodevelopmental issues. Additionally, a participant addressed concern regarding the lack of accommodation services that are appropriate for graduate students, and therefore wants to see new services that speak to the specific needs of graduate students (besides the exam accommodations). The participant also stated the classes and the courses "are one of several aspects of graduate students and make up less than 50% of that more" ("Results").

To the question that asks how the pandemic impacted their university experience positively, the participants mentioned they could study in their private space at their own pace while being able to navigate their symptoms and have flexibility.

However, interestingly, most participants said the online learning has not increased (or remained the same) their involvement and engagement in the class. Only one participant had indicated that they are participating a lot more compared to the pre-pandemic era.
Some participants even noted their engagement had decreased and found they are likely to contribute more during in-person classes. In this regard, 6 participants responded there has been no significant change to access to course materials with the shift to online learning, while 3 responded more access compared to the pre-pandemic era.

At the same time, to the question that asks how the pandemic impacted their general university experiences negatively, students answered that the pandemic made it harder to connect with other people and became more socially isolated. They also have a difficult time accessing mental health resources while struggling from mental health issues. One participant even mentioned the pandemic has increased suicidal ideations as going through the instructors who do not understand how to engage with students with disabilities and other issues such as "inability to work in solitude, increased distraction, agitation, irritability" and many more ("Results").

Similarly, relating to the question that asks their social engagement on virtual campus with other peers after the pandemic, 6 participants answered there has been much less/less social

engagement, 2 answered a little more/much more, and 1 answered no significant change in comparison with the pre-pandemic era. They explained their answer to this question that "Doing things online puts a lot of pressure on social interaction. You can't just chat with someone during a class break, you have to either set a time to video conference or chat, or be okay with getting a response possibly days later" ("Results").

Last but not least, we asked the students if there were any changes regarding accommodations or student support/service due to the pandemic, and has that changed their disability concerns. Many students showed their concern regarding the inaccessibility of the services. A student responded that They have been on the "wait list to see a ubc psychiatrist for over 2 months" and "essential services became much harder to access" ("Results"). Another student mentioned "Note taking services have been removed for some classes, but the reason the notes were needed has not, which makes it more difficult to succeed in these classes" ("Results").

Altogether, the survey results show that many students were not aware that the various programs are provided by UBC to support the students with disabilities. This highlights the need for a platform where students can share the information about the accessible services and disability-related accommodations. In addition, the expansion of mental health services seems to be needed, as many of the students expressed concern for having difficult time accessing mental health resources while struggling from mental health issues. Lastly, the result highlights that the coursework is just one of the aspects of graduate students, and therefore UBC needs to implement specific accommodation services that speak to the needs of graduate students, other than exam or academic accommodations.

● Conversation with the student leader, expertised in disability issues

While we did not originally plan to take the conversation with the disability expert as part of our research, we were able to get in touch with one of the student leaders – who has worked on the University Affair and experienced in working with disability issues on the campus – through a zoom call. We thought the conversation with this student leader allowed important sights in how UBC works towards the disability issues and decided to include some findings into this report.

From the conversation, we were able to narrow down certain key elements that were relevant to our research, namely, both the benefits and drawbacks faced by students with disabilities regarding their interaction with the Centre of Accessibility, and the shift in dynamics faced by students with disabilities due to the transfer to online learning brought about by COVID. The Centre for Accessibility is the first stop in achieving accessibility accommodations for disability, both physical and mental.

Due to the COVID pandemic the Centre for Accessibility has been overburdened, they face very high volumes of online applications and accommodation requests which they are unable to handle all at once. This is troublesome for individuals with disabilities as it creates longer

wait times, which may jeopardize accommodations that are time sensitive as well as increases their anxiety as to whether their accommodation requests will be processed on time. Prior to COVID, the Centre for Accessibility would require recommendation letters from certified physicians in order to enroll students for accessibility accommodations, however, after all processes went online due to the pandemic, the requirement for official documentation has become quite relaxed. The ease with which one can apply for accommodation requests has a downside to it, where individuals who do not actually require specific accommodations register themselves, thus increasing wait and processing times for accommodations required by students with actual disabilities, hindering their access to the required aid.

Online learning has also been a burden for many students with disabilities. Students who are blind or have severe visual disabilities find online classes to create a sense of loneliness and isolation, where in person classes facilitate an environment where other peers can help each other, communicate, and socialize. Individuals suffering from depression also report similar problems where sitting at home alone furthers their sense of isolation. Often professors and TA's themselves have trouble adjusting to the shift to E-learning, which further increases stress levels for those suffering from anxiety as there is minimal support when it comes to technical difficulties. Online learning also has many technical requirements such as the need for high-speed internet access, the problem arises when certain factors such as internet speed and connection are well beyond an individual's control, thereby furthering their anxiety.

The shift to online learning has also brought some benefits, as lectures are now recorded online, there is no real requirement for note takers. Lecture recordings are also beneficial to those who require more processing time, as now, individuals can study at their own pace and simply slow down or rewind where necessary. Individuals with hearing disabilities are also supported as they can control the speed and volume of the lectures, thereby enabling them to fully capture the purpose of the lecture. Individuals suffering from disabilities which create barriers for them to leave the house for class such as, depression and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, find it easier to attend class online from the comfort of their own homes.

UBC Alma Mater Society (AMS) has tried to take steps toward a more accessible, inclusive campus space by creating a global lounge, increasing outdoor learning spaces, increasing inclusive spaces, as well as campus and community planning. The use of outdoor learning spaces helps support individuals with varying disabilities, for example, it is easier for a student who suffers from a walking disability to access an outdoor learning space, as compared to having to access the third floor. Global lounges include facilities throughout the area which provide aid for students with disabilities such as wheelchair access throughout the space, railings to walk, brail indicators on all the signs, along with others.

Significance and implication

Through this research, we had the objectives to raise the awareness on disability and accessibility issues on campus and invite non-disabled students to take an active role in shaping inclusive culture together. We also aimed to provide suggestions for the future that

can better shape the disability-related accommodations and programming initiatives which speak to the specific needs of graduate students with disabilities.

We believe this paper was successful in raising the awareness on disability and accessibility issues by providing important insights from graduate students with disability through the summary of the interview and the results of the survey. We expect this finding can be used to develop the future program initiatives of Center for Accessibility and to improve the experience of disabled students on campus. We hope the Center for Accessibility would take our research into consideration to be more aware of what needs to be put in place.

In addition, we believe this paper could encourage some of non-disabled students to be interested in disability issues and invite them to take considerable actions to shape a more inclusive culture at UBC. Working on this project, we can say for sure that at least it has definitely informed our team about the disability issues and become a lot more aware of what behaviour or the actions may make students with disabilities feeling excluded (such as rudely commenting about the disabilities and wearing fragrance in public space). We also think that the class presentation of our findings would have informed our classmates of the current accessibility status at UBC and hopefully invited them to consider taking inclusive actions in their daily lives as well.

Last but not least, we came up with a few suggestions throughout the analysis based on a summary of the pre-conducted interviews and the results of our survey. Suggestions include the following:
1. introducing events or programs that can better inform the students and faculty members of disability and accessibility issues within the campus
2. placing posters in public space that inform people about various types of disabilities and how our daily actions can influence people with disabilities (such as discourage wearing fragrance in the library or study space for people who have respiratory deficiencies)
3. creating the platform where students with disabilities can share the information and interact together
4. expanding mental health assistance services

While these suggestions may not be new or seem significant, we hope that these can be taken into consideration and applied into real practices to make UBC a place with better inclusiveness and sense of belonging.

Furthermore, our research has significance that it focused on the experiences of 'graduate' students with disabilities. While previous researches had attempted to deliver the disability and accessibility issues at a university setting, it was often limited to the perspective of undergraduate students. For this reason, it is meaningful that it attempted to shed light on how the needs of graduate students with disabilities may be different from the undergraduate students.

Future Research Directions

This research project shows UBC lacks the disability-related accommodations that speak to the specific needs of graduate students with disabilities. Unlike undergraduate students, classes or the courses are just one of the aspects of their university life and therefore graduate students have responded they need other services besides the exam or academic based accommodations. For this reason, future research can take place on what type of specific services and program initiatives are needed for graduate students with disabilities

In addition, as many students express dissatisfaction about the 'unnecessary' paper works and 'time-consuming' procedure to get approved for the accommodation, a study on UBC's disability-accommodation policy can take place to better understand its bureaucratic processes. This study would provide a better understanding of the 'behind-scenes' of the process and what makes it challenging to receive accommodation for students. To be specific, it would shed light on the reasons why applying for and receiving accommodation is time consuming. Also, this study would help identify if the processing time varies by the medical conditions of the students, and if that's the case, which disabilities or medical conditions are regarded as the priority for the Centre for Accessibility. Finally, this study would make it possible to see the flaws in the Center for Accessibility's current approach and could come up with suggestions to improve the efficiency of the services.

Furthermore, potential research can be done by looking at how the disability-related accommodation programs of other Canadian universities differ from UBC. Although universities may operate differently, making a comparison on the accommodation programs would allow for a more integral analysis and therefore gives an idea on what policies should be commonly implemented in the post-secondary settings. Simultaneously, this would give universities the opportunities to learn from each other and to improve on their accommodation programs. Lastly, as universities rely on national and provincial policies, additional research could be directed towards politics in Canada and identify what provincial and federal measures are in place for disabled students today and how it influences the educational settings.

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Appendices

Inclusive Culture at UBC: experiences of (graduate) students with disabilities regarding the Inclusivity and accessibility on campus compared to the pre-pandemic era

You are invited to be part of our class project for our UBC course GEOG371 Research Strategies in Human Geography. Our group is interested in the university experiences of students with disabilities regarding the inclusivity and accessibility and how the pandemic has influenced the experiences.

We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Why are we doing this study?

The Coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly impacted students across the globe, including at the University of British Columbia. Simultaneously, the crisis may have shed some light on prior shortcoming of the University. The transition to full time online classes and online social interactions may have granted opportunities for graduate students with disabilities that were not addressed beforehand. Our study therefore aims to draw comparisons between pre and post March 2020 experiences of graduate students with disabilities. This should help us to provide clear reviews on UBC's best approach towards accessibility and inclusivity.

What will happen in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to take part in an online survey that takes around 5-10 minutes.

Who is doing this study?

Our research group is under the guidance and supervision of the course coordinator Bonnie Kaserman from the University of British Columbia. Ms. Kaserman can answer any questions or concerns you have regarding the study. You can email her at bonnie.kaserman@ubc.ca

This study is also contributing to the 'SEEDS Accessibility Project - GSS' with principal investigator Julia Heaton. If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598. The BREB ID # is H16-03315.

Are there any risks in taking part in this study?

We do not foresee any risks if you agree to participate.

What are the benefits to you participating in this study?

Sharing your experiences on campus will contribute to a better understanding of specific needs coming from students with disabilities. This improved understanding will then allow for adequate actions and policies in order to improve this experience. Along with the help of SEEDS, the Centre for Disability and our research project, we believe that a clear action plan can be provided.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Researchers will not identify you by name in any reports using information obtained from this study and confidentiality will remain secure. The data will be stored for 7 months at UBC on a secure server and then destroyed.

Voluntary nature of the study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge:

Your participation in the study is voluntary.
You are 18 years of age.
You are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation at any time for any reason.

○ I consent. Begin the study
○ I do not consent. I do not wish to participate

Are you a current UBC graduate student with disability that impacts your learning or engaging with other people on campus?

○ Yes
○ No

What do you study at UBC? (optional)

[   ]

Which of the following services made available to students with disabilities have you used before the pandemic?

○ Transportation on and off campus
○ E-Learning

○ Financial help of any kind (discounts, aid, reimbursements)

○ Mental health assistance

○ Medical asistance

○ Other [   ]

If any, which one(s) of these 5 services did you not know was available to you?

[   ]

To what extent do you believe that UBC has successfully put its policies into practice allowing you to feel more included?

○ Very successfully

○ Successfully

○ Neutral

○ Not very successfully

○ Not at all successfully

Do you have any experience in using accommodation at UBC?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Other [   ]

Before the pandemic, how satisfactory was your experience in using accommodation?

○ Very Satisfactory

○ Satisfactory

○ Neutral

○ Not Satisfactory

○ Not very satisfactory

What made your experiences in using accommodation satisfactory/not satisfactory?

[   ]

Block 2

How has the pandemic impacted your general university experience positively?

How has the pandemic impacted your general university experience negatively?

Compared to the pre-pandemic era, has the shift to online learning increased your involvement and engagement to the class?

Compared to the pre-pandemic era, has the shift to online learning increased your access to course material?

○ Much more access
○ More access
○ No significant change
○ Less access
○ Much less access

Compared to the pre-pandemic era, has the shift to online learning increased your social engagement on virtual campus with other peers?

○ Much more social engagement
○ A little more social engagement
○ No significant change
○ Less Social engagement
○ Much less social engagement

Explain your answer to the previous question?

If there were any changes regarding accommodations or student support/service due to the pandemic, has that changed your disability concerns?