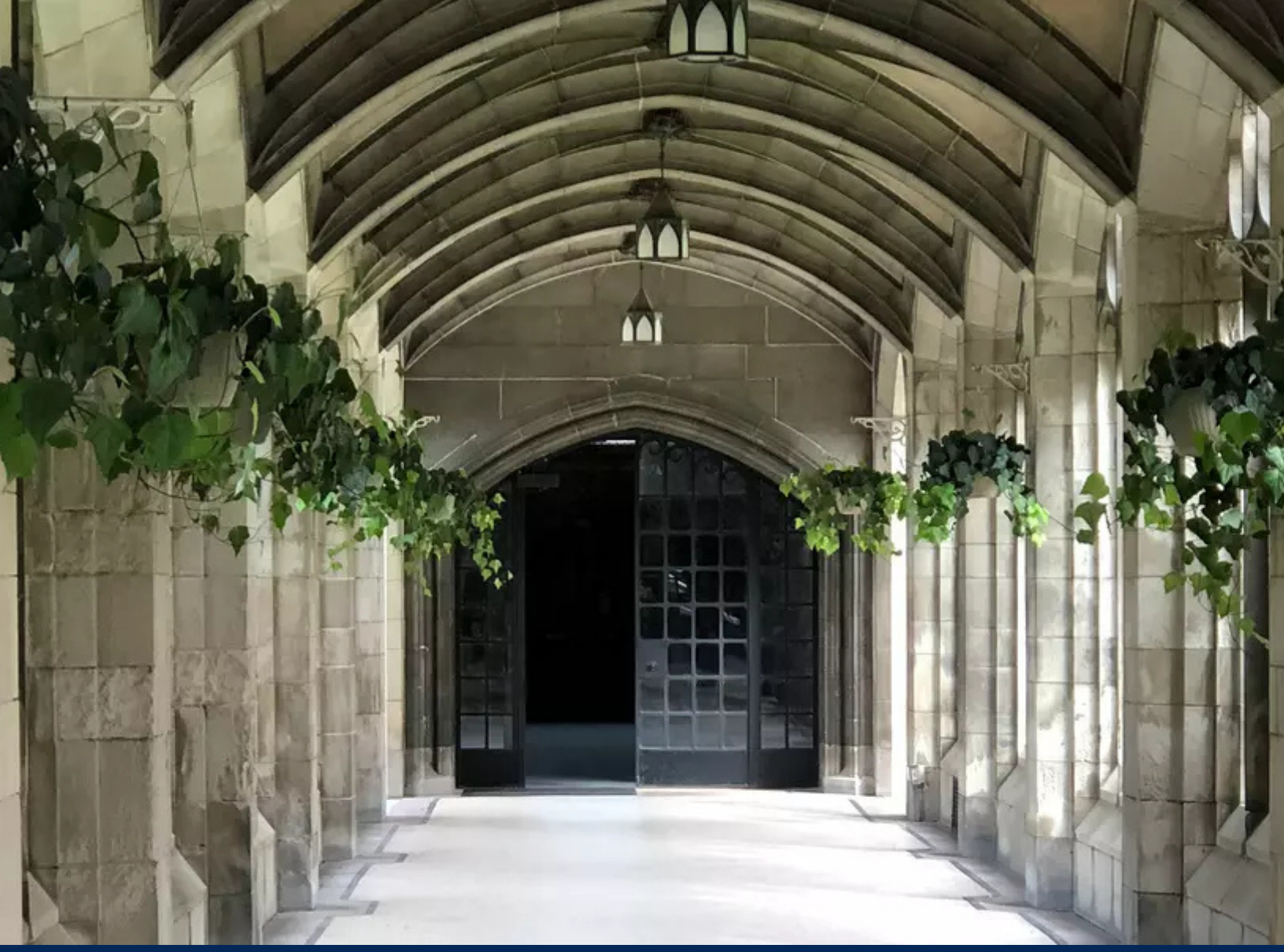

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Accessibility Survey Report

March 2024

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Preface

Purpose of the Report and Survey Creation

EDPP Vision and Purpose of Report

The Equity, Diversity and Public Policy Initiative (EDPP) is committed to fostering an environment at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy where students can actively engage in intersectional policy analysis. In mid-February to mid-March 2024, a sub-team of EDPP created an Accessibility Survey to gauge Munk community members' feelings, attitudes and experiences around Accessibility, and Disability/Chronic Illness. Accessibility issues and gaps in disability policies are ongoing concerns that EDPP pledges to follow closely and engage with. This report is intended to serve as a reference point for students, Munk faculty, and UofT Accessibility Services to identify existing issues and points of concern within the Munk community. We hope that this report will lead to an increase in support and available services for all current and potential Munk students moving forward. This report will reflect on the key findings of the survey, including personal experiences from students who are registered with Accessibility Services.

Survey Creation and Limitations

The creation of the survey, the information collected, and the analysis process were completed within the sphere of equity and inclusion. Our team was committed to ensuring that all themes of the survey were included and cross-tabulated per the relevant categories to ensure an appropriate and thorough analysis was completed. The Accessibility Survey was created by team members who are well-informed on disability advocacy, in addition to some members identifying as Chronically ill/Disabled students themselves. The survey was distributed to Michael Donnelly, the executives of EDPP, and a representative at Accessibility Services. Munk administrators were also consulted in the preliminary stages of survey development. Certain individual survey responses have been edited to remove identifying information to uphold student's privacy and anonymity. EDPP wants to acknowledge that individuals who belong to other equity-deserving groups (Indigenous, Black, or other racialized groups, 2SLGBTQIA+, amongst others) may have compounded factors which may play a role in their experiences. These aspects of one's identity were not explored in this survey to help ensure the anonymity and comfort of respondents. However, our team believes Munk should take into account these factors when improving services and opportunities for the Chronically ill/Disabled student community at Munk.

Demographics & Key Takeaways

Demographic Information

EDPP employed various outreach strategies to maximize participation in the survey, aiming to ensure a representative sample of opinions and experiences from Munk students.
In analyzing the data, it is important to keep in mind that there is a limitation to the data that was collected. The following facts may be relevant to the results:

- A total of 30 respondents filled out the Accessibility Survey .
- 60% of respondents were MPP1s, 23.3% of respondents were MPP2, and 16.7% of respondents were MGA1.
- There were no MGA2 respondents.
- The majority of respondents were not registered with UofT Accessibility Services, with only 33.3% of students noting they currently receive accommodations at Munk.
- 13.3% of respondents are in the process of registering with UofT Accessibility Services

Specifics: What Are You Registered With Accessibility Services For?

- 9.1% of respondents are registered for an Acquired Brain Injury
- 36.4 % of respondents are registered for ADHD
- 18.2% of respondents are registered for Autism
- 27.3% of respondents are registered for Chronic Illness
- 9.1% of respondents are registered for Blind/Low Vision
- 63.6% of respondents are registered for a Mental Illness
- 9.1% of respondents are registered for Mobility Issues
- 27.3% are registered for a Learning Disability
- 0% are registered for Hearing Loss or for a non-listed option

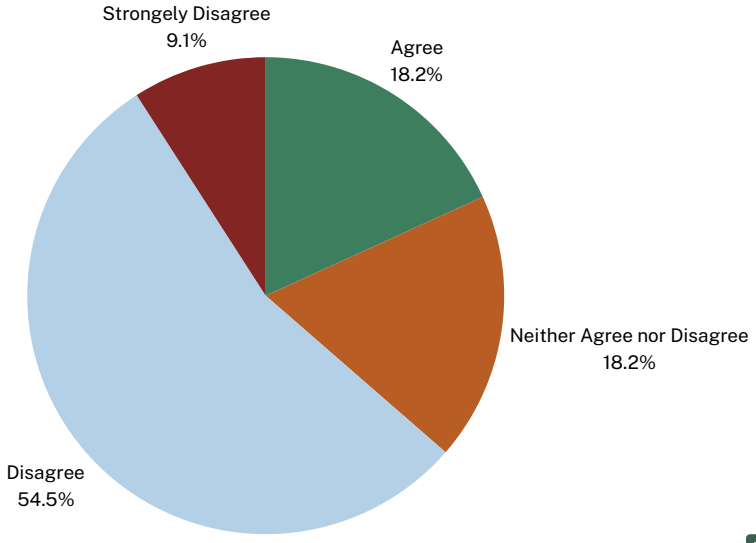
Key Takeaways

- Among the 13.3% of students not registered with UofT Accessibility Services, all of the respondents cited the complicated process of registration as either a barrier or a reason for their lack of registration.
- 0% of students who are registered with UofT Accessibility Services agreed with the statement: “Registration with Accessibility Services was a straightforward process”.
- Most individuals who use accommodations feel there is a disconnect between UofT and Accessibility Services and believe strong communication between the two and specific supports at Munk to help students use their accommodations would help them feel more supported.
- 54.5% of respondents “Disagreed”, 27.3% of respondents “Strongly Disagreed”, and 18.25 “Neither Agreed nor DIsagreed” with the following statement: I feel Munk provides students with an adequate level of training and education on Disability/Accessibility issues.

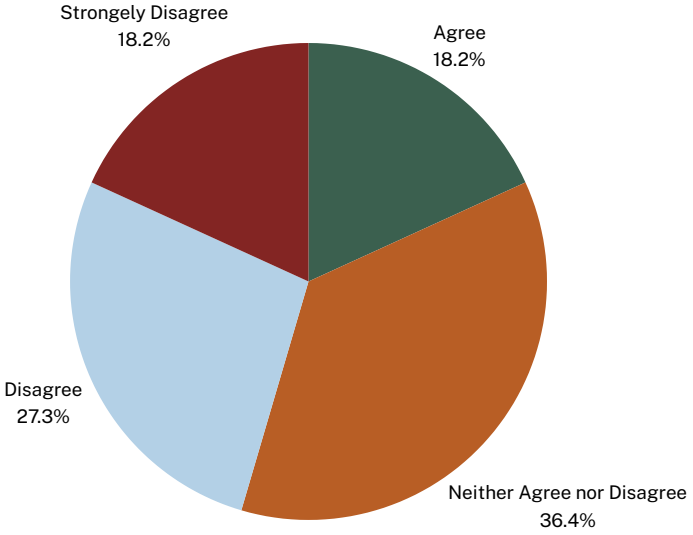
Results From Disabled and Chronically Ill Students

Registering with Accessibility Services and Accommodation Quality

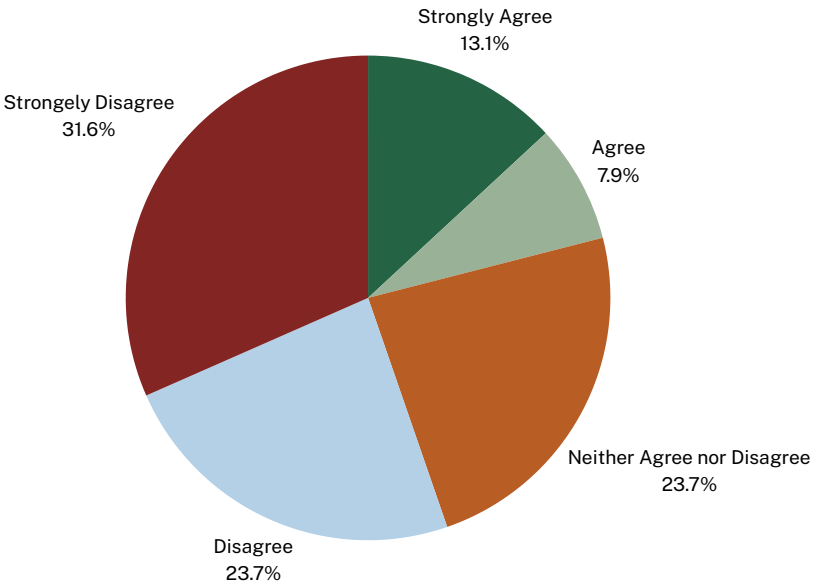
Statement: I feel well supported by Accessibility Services.



Statement: I feel satisfied with my accommodations.



Statement: The process of registering with Accessibility Services was straightforward.



What Does This Suggest?

The data provided by these questions indicates that there is a varying degree of comfort and support felt by students who are registered with Accessibility Services on the training and education that professors receive.

Answers in later questions further contextualize these responses. For instance, many students find that accommodations are helpful but more so focused on receiving extra time or passing a test than supporting students with other challenges their disability or illness brings upon them.

Accessibility Services and Accommodation Quality

"I have found that accessibility advisors at UofT contribute to the stigma that is associated with a permanent disability by reinforcing stereotypes. Anytime I have asked for an accommodation to be added to my plan, I receive comments such as "you can't use this as an excuse to not do your work" and "don't rely on these too much because time management is important"

"[Accessibility Services is,] very focused on 'let us help you pass your tests' and not 'let us find ways for you to grow professionally and personally with this'.

"I started the processes early on in the summer and it still took me over a semester before permanently being granted status as a student with a disability since my paperwork had to be translated and the tests done by doctors in my jurisdiction were not recognized by the government of Ontario. It was a stressful process and I felt like I was alone in navigating this process since Munk wasn't able to help. I know that my case was a lucky one since I got recognized and many of my friends just stopped trying to get recognized because it was too hard to be judged and undermined by Accessibility Services. I will also note that it took time and funds that I hadn't calculated to get these accreditations"

13.3% of Students have an illness/disability but are not registered with UofT Accessibility Services. Why?

A student cited personal reasons such as not having a family doctor to verify their symptoms. They shared *"I tried to find a wellness centre or person through campus to do this for me but it was difficult and I decided to not go through with sorting it out because of that and also because I have heard that using accommodations is a bit difficult anyways, so I didn't bother."*

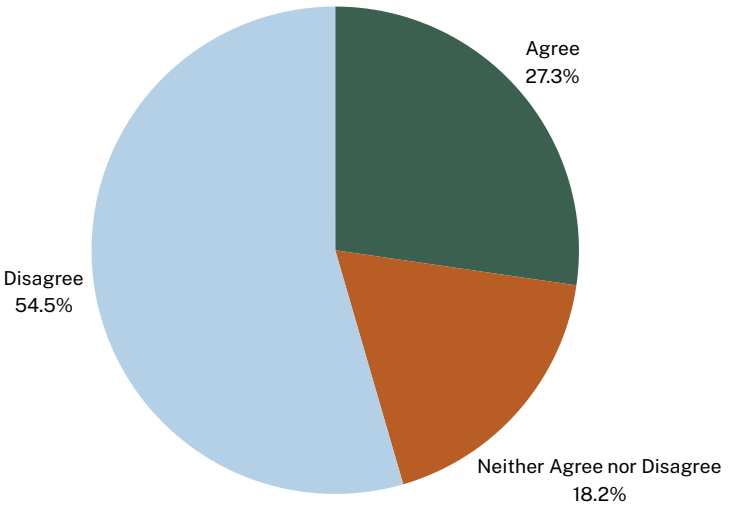
"I've heard from other students that when you do register Munk administration gives you a hard time about it and will treat you as if you're incapable of certain things."

" I have chronic back and shoulder pain, but feel like I am not taken seriously by medical professionals."

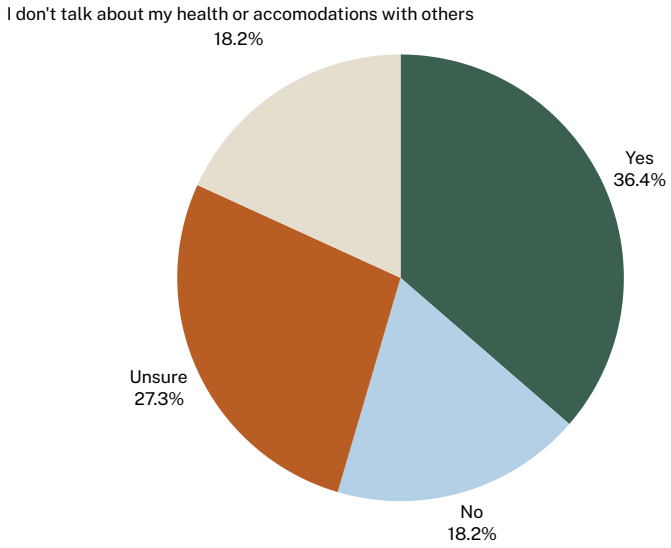
" [Registering with Accessibility Services] is a lengthy process"... I am still in the process of getting officially diagnosed by the Munk doctors"

Symptom of a Safe and Inclusive Environment

Statement: I feel comfortable talking about my disability or illness with Munk professors and have been able to use my accommodations in their classes without issues or pushback from them.



Question: Have you experienced any discrimination (including micro-aggressions) as the result of receiving Academic Accommodations/your disability?



Contextualizing These Responses

The data provided indicates that there is a varying degree of comfort felt by students who are registered with Accessibility Services on talking about using accommodations with both professors and peers. When we asked for further clarification several students cited feeling unsupported by their professors and even had to carry the responsibility of educating professors on why they need accommodations. In addition, several students noted that Accessibility Services is focused more on giving students extra time or the tools given without any support on extra training or means to learn how to grow and advocate for themselves.

"There has been ableism expressed by a professor which is very triggering for students with a learning disability or other conditions which may cause you to need accessibility services."

"Some professors at Munk do not understand the fact that an acquired brain injury is one I had no control over but I am suffering the worst of the effects of it. Educating professors of the basics and the standards would be crucial moving forward."

"Accessibility issues are not outside of Munk administration's purview and they need to be doing more to ensure students aren't being discriminated against due to decisions professors are making while claiming 'academic freedom'."

Do Students Feel Safe Talking about their Disability, Illness, or Accommodations?

Statement: I feel comfortable talking about my disability or illness with Munk professors and have been able to use my accommodations in their classes without issues or pushback from them.

- 27.3% Agreed
- 54.5% Disagreed,
- and 18.2 % Neither Agreed nor Disagreed

These findings indicate that there is a varying degree of comfort felt by students who are registered with Accessibility Services on talking about their health or accommodations.

Contextualizing These Responses

"I have never felt comfortable discussing my accommodations with professors, and have never actually used them. My experiences with accessibility services have been poor enough, and I do not want to risk facing the same thing with professors."

'A faculty member made a comment to me about how they cannot support me with my disability because that would not be fair to other students. This demonstrated to me a lack of awareness of what equity truly is and exemplifies the need for faculty to receive empathy-building training on the subject."

"Registering with accessibility services is an extensive process in itself. I come from a country where ADHD is not a recognised disability and so being an international student, getting diagnosed here and getting the accommodations is tiring and discouraging."

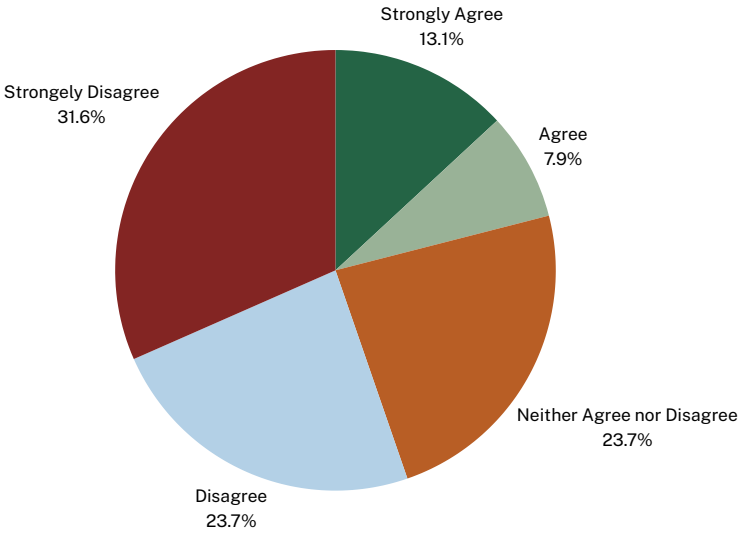
I am quite vocal about my status as an individual with a disability. I have never experienced discrimination at Munk, but I do find that some individuals don't know how to navigate the conversation."

"There are a select few professors who are very ignorant about mental health needs and have a twisted idealogy of if I can do it, you can too."

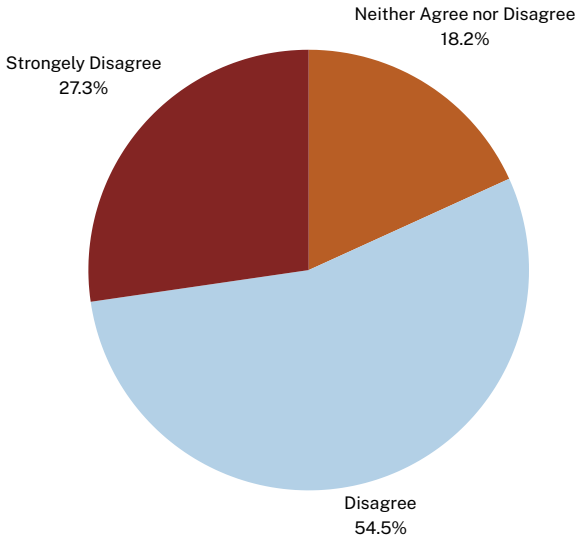
"The absence of dedicated support staff trained to assist students with accessibility needs indicates a failure to prioritize physical wellbeing. Without proper guidance and advocacy, students with disabilities may struggle to access necessary accommodations and resources to support their physical health."

Training and Awareness from Munk

Statement: I feel Munk provides **professors** an adequate level of training and education on Disability/Accessibility issues.

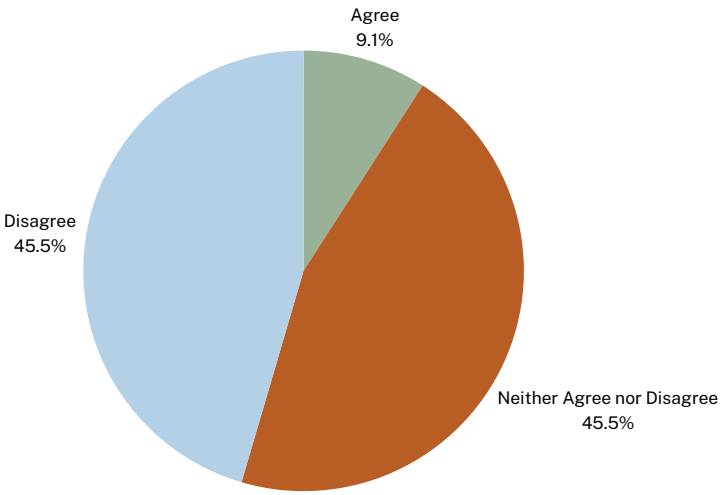


Statement: I feel Munk provides **students** an adequate level of training and education on Disability/Accessibility issues.

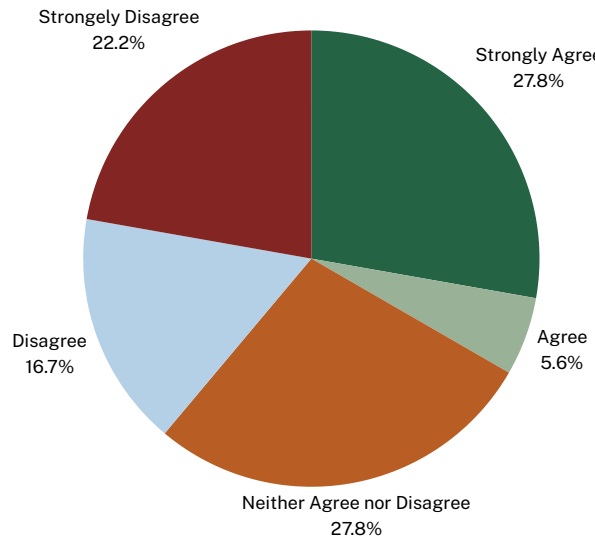


Training and Awareness from UofT Accessibility Services

Statement: I feel that UofT Accessibility Services provides an adequate level of training and education on Disability/Accessibility issues to professors.



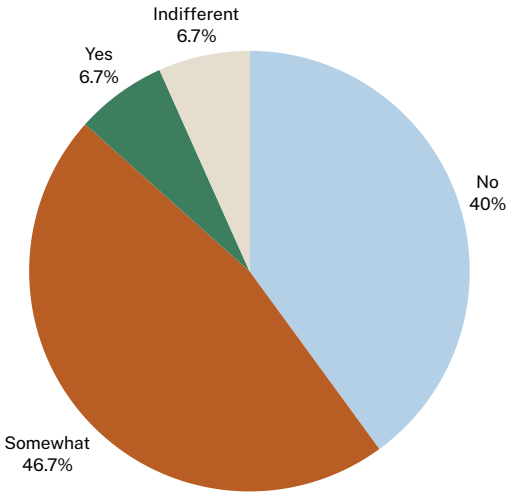
Statement: I feel that UofT Accessibility Services provides an adequate level of training and education on Disability/Accessibility issues to students.



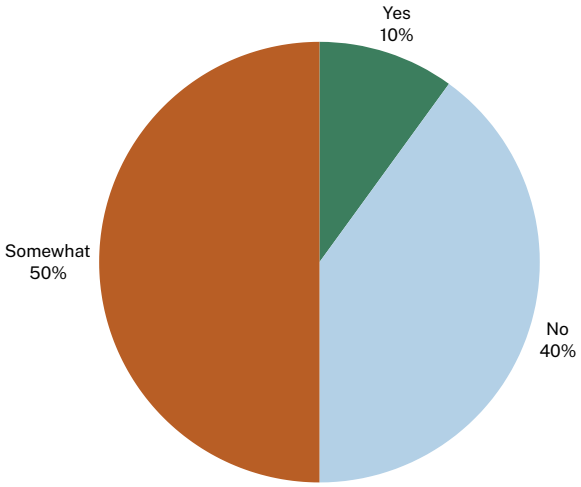
Results from All Students

Attitudes Towards Well-Being

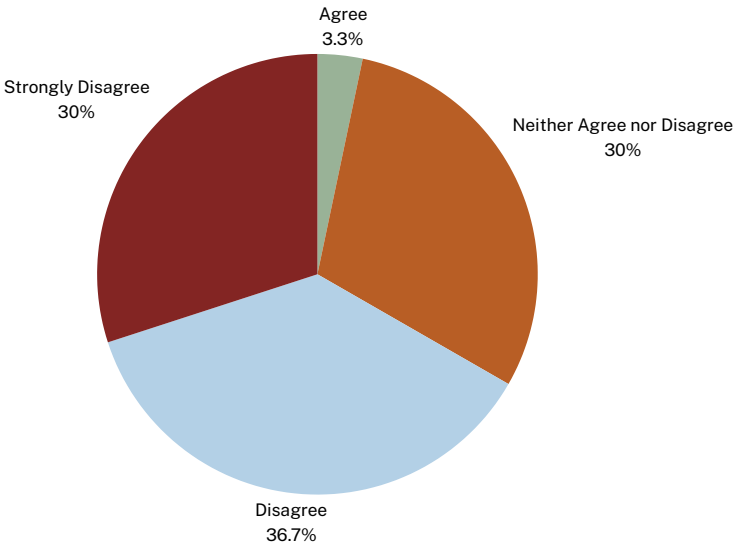
Statement: I feel like students' **physical** wellbeing is prioritized at Munk.



Statement: I feel like students' **mental** wellbeing is prioritized at Munk.



Statement: I feel Munk provides an adequate level of training and education on Disability/Accessibility issues.



What Does This Suggest?

Responses suggest varied attitudes:

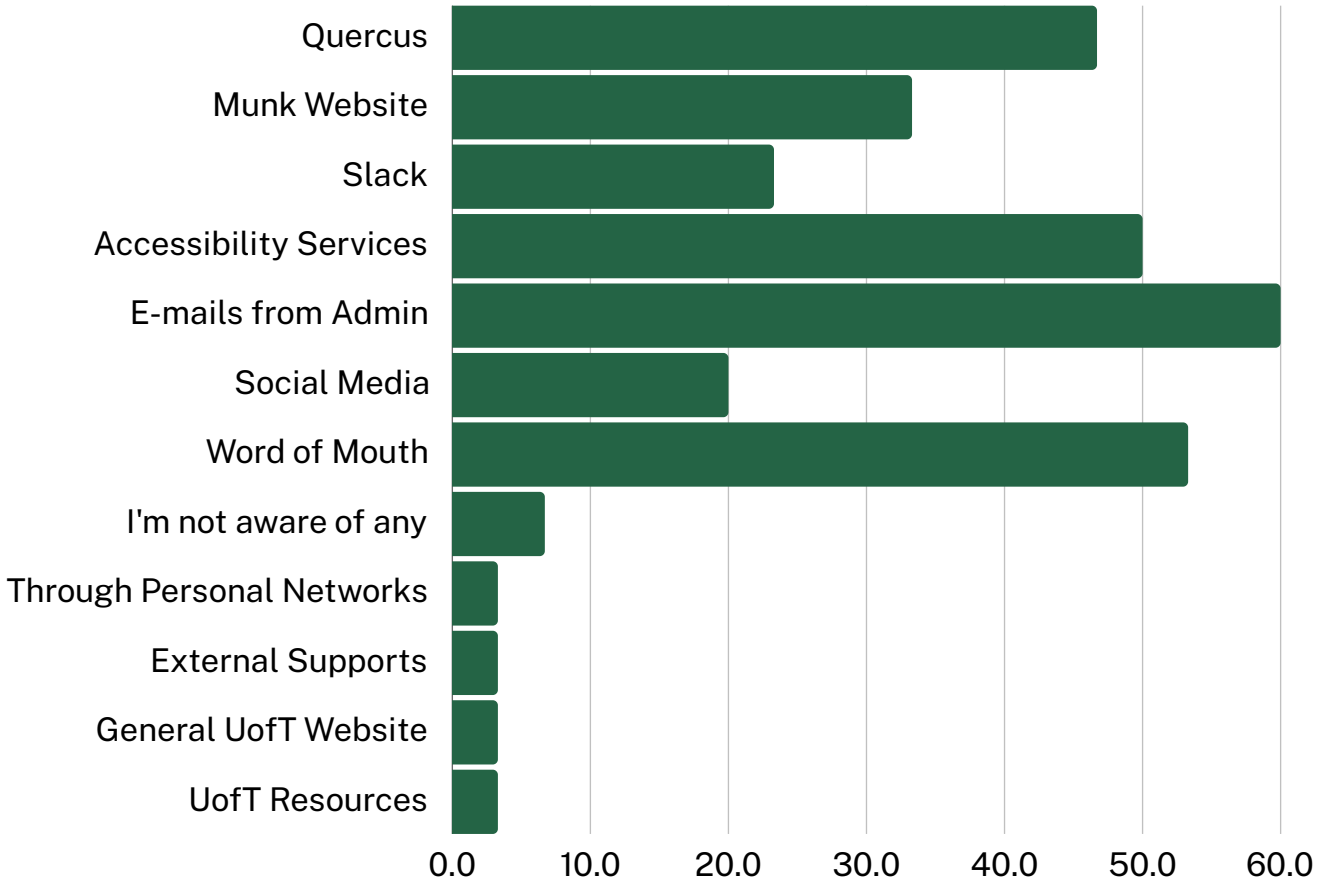
- Frustration accessing accommodations, especially for international students with unrecognized disabilities.
- Mixed support from faculty, some accommodating, others unsympathetic or dismissive.
- Disclosure Discomfort: Some uncomfortable discussing disabilities due to past negative experiences and fear of faculty reactions.

Action Required & Awareness Needed

- The lack of faculty understanding highlights the need for increased awareness and empathy training.

Are Students Using UofT or Munk Resources?

Question: Where have you looked for Health and Wellness resources or seen them posted?



- The most common place that Munk students sought out Health and Wellness resources, or saw them posted were through e-mails from the Administration or Program Teams, and Accessibility Services for those who are registered.
- Students also highlighted that while there are resources available, some have been unable to use them (due to the backlog in appointments).
- These findings highlight a need for streamlining correspondence between both Accessibility Services and Munk and lead us to recommend staff and student advisors who can advocate for students and help connect them to appropriate areas of support.

Attitudes Towards Well-Being: Faculty & Staff

Question: If you feel comfortable, please explain why you feel Munk faculty and staff either do or do not prioritize student mental well-being.

"Some professors have requirements around attendance and quizzes, without proper accommodation for physical illnesses. We are still living with COVID and other infectious diseases and that should be accounted for."

"The lack of accessibility in the buildings is disturbing."

"Most classes have participation marks or mandatory in-person assignments/quizzes that have zero flexibility if someone is sick... people are not supported in staying home when they should be."

"The scheduling of 3-hour classes pose significant challenges for students with physical disabilities. Long class durations may exacerbate existing physical discomfort or mobility issues, leading to discomfort, fatigue, or difficulty concentrating. For students who require accommodations such as frequent breaks or specialized seating arrangements, the prolonged class time may present additional barriers to participation and engagement. There should be a remote option for students with registered physical disabilities, so they do not need to miss class when they are too unwell to physically be present."

"The absence of dedicated support staff trained to assist students with accessibility needs indicates a failure to prioritize physical wellbeing. Without proper guidance and advocacy, students with disabilities may struggle to access necessary accommodations and resources to support their physical health. Moreover, the placement of staff offices in a building without an elevator poses a significant barrier to access for students with physical disabilities. This disregard for physical accessibility not only hinders students' ability to engage fully in academic activities but also sends a message that their needs are not prioritized within the program."

"Some issues brought up to them are not taken seriously enough and they are not proactive unless something extreme happens."

Attitudes Towards Well-Being: Faculty & Staff
(Continued)

Question: If you feel comfortable, please explain why you feel Munk faculty and staff either do or do not prioritize student mental well-being.

"... the inadequate provision of mental health services further exacerbates the challenges faced by students, including those with physical disabilities. Mental health struggles can significantly impact physical wellbeing, and the lack of support in this area indicates a failure to address holistic student wellness. The rigid program structure, including heavy workloads and limited flexibility in course loads and deadlines, disregards the diverse needs of students, including those with disabilities. This lack of flexibility can contribute to increased stress and negatively impact students' physical health."

"It's not really talked about."

"I would like emergency event safety training for when we are at CG."

"They're so mean and insensitive."

"We are extremely burnt out. I think I can wholeheartedly say that [the MPP 1] cohort is just so tired. Compared to the Global Affairs students, we have an endless flow of assignments or tasks and when it's not that, we are on the search for our internship or expected to go to a workshop. This is something our cohort talks about often, and how it affects our own physical health with lack of sleep, stress , etc".

"Munk faculty and staff seem unprepared to deal with students that are struggling."

- Minimal positive comments were contributed to this open-ended question. A lack of support, lack of action, and no understanding were common themes throughout these comments.
- Concerns which were both about mental and physical well-being were discussed, ranging from the lack of medical emergency/emergency event safety training, as well as the lack of understanding and kindness more broadly was brought forth.
- Overall, more negative sentiments and concerning comments were voiced, rather than positive and supportive comments. Through these open-ended questions, it can be gauged that more work and progressive changes must be made going forward.

Recommendations for the Path Forward

The Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy is known for its strong reputation, with world-class researchers, faculty members, and determined students. Given the results of this survey, Munk has the opportunity to be a leader in transforming the way Accommodations are viewed within academia and removing the barriers faced by disabled and/or chronically ill students — particularly at the graduate level.

As future policymakers, it is essential that students are knowledgeable and informed on Disability issues and legislation within a universally welcoming and supportive space for students to grow as individuals and leaders. Given the current environment, we have compiled a list of recommendations for administration faculty. Many of these ideas have been suggested by survey respondents and Munk community members.

1

Research

To strengthen findings for the future, we encourage conducting further research on Accessibility issues within the MGA and MPP program. This survey serves as only a starting point for a more in depth and widespread project on how the principles of Disability justice can be better ingrained throughout the Munk School.

2

Training

Provide more robust and intersectional Accessibility and Disability training to Munk faculty and staff. Based on survey results it is clear that the current training provided and resources available to faculty are being underutilized and are producing ineffective results. Beyond a legal obligation to ensure all students are receiving their accommodations with dignity, all students morally and ethically deserve a learning environment that is free from discrimination and full of respect. This begins with having staff and educators who consistently understand their role and responsibilities within the accommodations process.

Recommendations for the Path Forward

3

Staff Facilitator /Advisor

Establish an Accommodations facilitator or advisor position on the Munk administrative staff team to serve the specific needs of Disabled/Chronically ill MPP and MGA students. Having a staff member who s knowledgeable of the MPP/MGA programs, and can act as an intermediary between faculty and students may help to ease the burden of educating others about their need of accommodations, which was noted as a grievnace for multiple Munk students within this survey.

4

MPPSA/MGASA Facilitators

Enhancing Equity roles on student association clubs or creating new ones. Ensuring that there is a dedicated position on MPPSA and MGSA who can support the Disabled/Chronically ill community. These individuals may have lived experience as a Disabled/Chronically ill individual and/or a comprehensive background in integrating DEI frameworks into their work. This along with familiarity with one's respective program, will help these individuals effectively advocate for students' needs .

5

Core Curriculum

Better integration of an intersectional Disability studies framework within the core Munk curriculum. As future policymakers, we are taught to consider the impacts of decisions from a variety of angles, however, a large — and growing — community is currently missing from the MPP core curriculum. This leaves most students not properly equipped for the job market and unfairly places much of the educational burden on Disabled/Chronically ill members of the Munk community.

Resources

A non-exhaustive list of current resources available to Munk students. EDPP recognizes the imperfect nature of some of these resources as solutions to complex issues, however, we still want to highlight avenues of potential benefit and intermediary aid.

MPPSA Team
munkmppsa@gmail.com
Equity Advisor on MPPSA

MGASA
mgasa.munk@gmail.com

Health and Wellness
416-978-8030

Quercus

Empower Me
Students covered by the UTGSU Health Plan can access this online mental health and wellness service. For more info go to: https://www.studentcare.ca/rte/en/IHaveAPlan_RRURoyalRoadsUniversity_EmpowerMe_EmpowerMe

The Sexual Violence Prevention & Support Centre
416-978-2266
svpscentre@utoronto.ca

UofT Website & Affiliated Supports

Good2Talk
Mental health support for post-secondary Students
Call 1-866-925-5454
or text GOOD2TALKON to 686868

Accessibility Services
416-978-8060
accessibility.services@utoronto.ca

Resources

Educational Resources For Administrators

Teaching Students with Physical Disabilities

There are many teaching strategies you can use to ensure effective and productive learning environments and experiences for all students, including those with disabilities. Accessible Education[i] is the process o...

Accessible Campus

Administrator's Accessibility Toolkit

To help administrators at Ontario universities meet their obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the Council of Ontario Universities partnered with the University of Toronto...

Accessible Campus

Disability Support Organizations

The following organizations provide information and support to people with disabilities and their families. Some of these organizations have local chapters...

Easter Seals Ontario Services

Guide to Cognitive Disabilities

Cognitive disabilities are classified as clinical or functional. Clinical diagnoses include dementia, traumatic brain injury, Down syndrome..

ADA Site Compliance / May 20, 2021

Understanding Accommodations

More than ever, school personnel are responsible for providing high-quality instruction to all students. Together, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)...

IRIS /

Understanding Accommodations & its Importance

Working Together: The Code and the AODA

For students, professors, and faculty to learn about the rights and responsibilities under the Code and the AODA and how they affect individuals with disabilities at work, in services and in housing.

Financial Resource for Students

"For students who receive OSAP and/or Federal post-secondary funding and are registered with Accessibility services, additional funding for Disability associated costs may be available through the Bursary for Students with Disabilities. The BSWD is intended to help augment the additional financial burden of being a Disabled/Chronically Ill student by covering expenses such as counselling, adaptive technology, and tutoring depending on the nature of one's disability/chronic illness. Students should discuss what funding they may be eligible for with their Accessibility advisor.

EDPP remains here to help Munk students navigate accommodations and encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Please feel free to reach out if you have any additional questions.

CONTACT US

www.https://www.edppinitiative.ca/
edppinitiative@gmail.com

Thank you to all those who participated in the survey, as well as the students and faculty who helped in its creation. We hope to continue to create a safe and supportive community for students of various identities and backgrounds.

- **EDPP Team**