

Petition: https://www.change.org/access_4_all

Image:



DUC Members Calista Ng (Left) and Lorelei McEwen gather signatures for the petition

DUC quote: ‘Education is a fundamental right. Yet, post-secondary institutions across Canada have made higher education inaccessible to a variety of marginalised groups through punitive attendance policies, inflexible delivery methods and overly complex Accommodation processes. It is imperative that UBC implement our 9 demands to ensure #AccessForAll, thereby putting into action the values of equity and inclusion they espouse. Any other action would continue and increase the suffering of marginalised groups across the University.’ - Josh Bradbury, Vice President: Internal

DAG quote: Post-secondary students deserve to study in an accessible, inclusive, collaborative and non-adversarial environment. UBC claims a reputation for equity and inclusion but fails to live up to these ideals for the 25% of its students who identify as Disabled. UBC must implement Universal Design in Learning (UDL) frameworks. As they have done with other equity-owed groups, they must also create a Disability Task Force, to identify shortfalls in Disability equity and formalize recommendations to create the inclusive environment UBC aspires to.

DGSA quote:

Here's a quote from the DGSA: "From the graduate student perspective as both learners and instructors, the demands of the #Access4All campaign just make sense. As Teaching Assistants, we are often caught between carceral classroom policies and undergraduates' lived realities. We see how inaccessibility harms undergraduates, and we experience similar harm ourselves in graduate courses. Other universities have already embraced accessible practices such as recorded lectures, and it is unclear why UBC is fighting to stay behind the curve by upholding barriers that impact marginalized students in particular. A university that prioritizes student learning prioritizes accessibility."

Corin quote:

"My most upsetting experience as a TA was when a student emailed me a picture of herself at the bedside of a dying relative because she was worried about being penalized for missing class and 'falling behind'. I am furious that common pedagogical practices at this university would put a student in the position of spending any of her precious final moments with a loved one in this way." "My proudest classroom achievement came when teaching my own course; I received an email from a student informing me that, because I had structured the course in such an accessible way, he would not need to use his accommodations. This is how it can be -- how it should be! Universities should foster practices that enable students to focus on learning, and currently the opposite is happening at UBC."

You're welcome to mention me by name (Corin Parsons) in the piece. My many roles are: President, Disabled Grad Students Association Director of Student Relations, Disability Affinity Group Member at Large, UBC Accessibility Committee

What is Access4All about?

Led by campus groups from UVic, UBC, SFU, and ECU, the #Access4All campaign advocates for more accessible education at Canadian post-secondary institutions. While many institutions claim to uphold values of equity and inclusivity, the current reliance on in-person-only lectures, restrictive learning designs, and outdated policies still disproportionately disadvantages populations including d/Disabled, neurodivergent, parenting, international, and low-income students. We are calling on institutions to adopt accessible learning practices and embrace #Access4All.

What do we want?

1. Accessible Course Formats

- Promoting online, hybrid and multi-access course options
- Integrating UDL into course curricula
- Increasing technological and TA support for professors
- Hosting faculty training opportunities for accessible learning formats

2. Disability-Friendly Policy

- Creation of a Disability Task Force
- Allowing flexible attendance
- Improving the disability accommodation process for students, staff, and faculty

Why is accessible learning necessary?

Despite UBC's commitment to equity and inclusion, as promised via the Inclusion Action Plan 2018-2028 (UBC, 2020), our university is not meeting its commitments to disabled students and to those who require additional support. The rigid nature of postsecondary education – such as in-person-only lectures, inflexible attendance policies, inappropriate and ineffective accommodations, and lack of inclusive teaching supports – disproportionately affects vulnerable populations across

campuses. Amongst the most affected groups are disabled students, neurodivergent students, parenting students, international students and low-income students.

Moreover, UBC's policy for accommodating students with disabilities, called policy LR7, demonstrates a significant need for the input and voices of disabled students. The procedures involved in LR7 for allocating accommodations to students are far from adequate and fail to provide adequate support to disabled students. First, the subjectivity of 'reasonable accommodation' allows too much room for individual interpretation and thus subjects students to being denied fair accommodations on the sole basis of non-concrete language. Second, the policy disregards autonomy of disabled students by giving them no knowledge of the accommodations available and gives the role of allocating accommodations solely to the Centre for Accessibility. Additionally, the policy makes no mention of the role and responsibilities of accessibility advisors and those who directly assign accommodations and does not specify the training they receive upon recruitment.

With 22% of UBC's student population identifying as disabled, UBC has a responsibility to provide adequate support for its disabled students. This responsibility becomes even more prominent by the concerns raised by disabled students of the inadequate accessibility on campuses, as mentioned in recommendation #49 in the AMS Academic Experience Survey Report (Burham et al., 2019). In 2023 over half of students emphasized that "they would prefer if courses provided more flexibility in terms of assessment with weighting of assessments, variety of methods and flexibility of due dates being the most pertinent types" (Kanji et al. 2023). Indeed, embracing learning formats made to accommodate unique student's needs can benefit everyone.

Accessible learning formats benefit a wide variety of students. For example, lecture recordings are shown to support disabled students' learning (Nightingale et al., 2019) and help to "attenuate the challenging aspects of lecture environments" (Hall & Ivaldi, 2017). Students with disabilities report that they prefer the greater control granted by online lectures (Kotera et al., 2019). Aside from disability status, many students would benefit from accessible learning. A systematic literature review of 71 journal articles found that students "almost unanimously voice their support in favour of lecture capture" (Banerjee, 2021). In particular, students with English as an additional language are likely to find recorded lectures extremely valuable (Leadbeater et al., 2013). Students currently struggling through the BC housing crisis would also benefit from these accessible learning formats.

In order to ensure true accessibility in classrooms, lecture recordings should be implemented in combination with Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a widely-accepted and empirically-backed approach to education, emphasising the importance of fostering multiple forms of engagement and facilitating learning on an individual level (CAST, 2018). This approach has been shown to aid in the education of students while also demonstrating long-term positive outcomes for

educators (Xie & Rice, 2021). While UBC has engaged in some pilot UDL initiatives, such as the UDL Fellows program, the implementation of UDL at UBC is far from comprehensive or satisfactory.

UBC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that adaptations to the delivery of education for the well-being, health, and safety of all students is achievable (Ono, 2020). This has proved that creating and implementing accessible learning methods and materials is a feasible and worthwhile process. The BC government's and UBC's strict adherence to in-person courses is counter-productive, erasing recent progress towards accessible education (Kang, 2021). UBC can and should provide accessible learning formats. It is an essential step towards embodying the inclusive values of our school.

Overall, it is clear that students at UBC, both disabled and non-disabled, are dissatisfied with UBC current quality of learning and are in need of more accessible learning options. Yet despite these prevalent concerns among UBC students and faculty alike, UBC has not responded to feedback from the disabled community members. We call on UBC to prioritize accessible learning formats: it is a necessary step towards inclusivity and equitable access to higher education.

References

- Banerjee, S. (2021). To capture the research landscape of lecture capture in University Education. *Computers & Education*, 160, 104032. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.104032>
- Burham, J., Stolba, V., Goddard, G., Tadepalli, N., Rosales, G. (2019). *2019 Academic Experience Survey Report*. Alma Mater Society (AMS). <https://www.ams.ubc.ca/>
- CAST (2018). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2*. <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>
- Hall, G., & Ivaldi, A. (2017). A qualitative approach to understanding the role of lecture capture in student learning experiences. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 26(4), 383–394. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939x.2016.1263805>
- Kanji, K., Onyemordi, C., Chow, A. (2023). 2023 AMS academic Experience Survey Report. Alma Mater Society (AMS). <https://www.ams.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/2023-AMS-Academic-Experience-Survey-Report-v2-1.pdf>
- Kang, A. (2021, June 1) *Anne Kang to Nancy McKenzie* [Letter]. Government of British Columbia. https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/post-secondary-education/institution-resources-administration/mandate-letters/docs/mandate-university-of-british-columbia.pdf&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1695407970964265&usg=AOvVaw3KPpLRDKNI_nRN053zg5Fr

- Kotera, Y., Cockerill, V., Green, P., Hutchinson, L., Shaw, P., & Bowskill, N. (2019). Towards another kind of borderlessness: Online students with disabilities. *Distance Education*, 40(2), 170–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2019.1600369>
- Leadbeater, W., Shuttleworth, T., Couperthwaite, J., & Nightingale, K. P. (2013). Evaluating the use and impact of lecture recording in undergraduates: Evidence for distinct approaches by different groups of students. *Computers & Education*, 61, 185–192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2012.09.011>
- Nightingale, K. P., Anderson, V., Onens, S., Fazil, Q., & Davies, H. (2019). Developing the inclusive curriculum: Is supplementary lecture recording an effective approach in supporting students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs)? *Computers & Education*, 130, 13–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2018.11.006>
- Ono, S. J. (2020, March 13). Transition to online classes at UBC. *Office of the President*. <https://president.ubc.ca/homepage-feature/2020/03/13/transition-to-online-classes-at-ubc/>
- Xie, J., and Rice, M. F. (2021) Professional and social investment in universal design for learning in higher education: insights from a faculty development programme, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 45(7), 886-900. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2020.1827372>