



Nothing About Us, Without Us, Is For Us

On the 22nd of February, UBC requested applications to join UBC's Accessibility Committee. Under new provincial legislation, UBC is required to form such a committee in order to address woefully inadequate accessibility standards and ableism that pervades most organizations, including UBC.

As the only group representing disabled faculty and staff at UBC, the Disability Affinity Group (DAG) repeatedly requested the inclusion of Disabled people and experts in Disability Justice in developing the Terms of Reference for this Accessibility Committee; these requests were ignored. With the support of individual members of the administration, the DAG, given only a few hours notice, provided written feedback on a draft of the Terms of Reference before its submission to the UBC Executive; this feedback was ignored. The University never consulted with, or had any intention of including, the Disabled community this committee purports to serve. The DAG's efforts to include the perspectives of those with both lived experience of disability and professional expertise in Disability Justice went unanswered and ignored by every member of the UBC Executive and all those with responsibility for the establishment of this committee.

The resulting Terms of Reference for the proposed Accessibility Committee are a study in ableism and representative of UBC's continued legacy of prioritising power over knowledge and expertise in equity-related issues. The application process is similarly egregious, with demands for disclosure of private information that has historically been used to discriminate against Disabled employees. The language used for self-identification coerces individuals into representing themselves through the medicalized language of impairment that has been used to exclude and marginalize the disability community. Nor is this the first time UBC has disregarded Disabled people in this way; the debacle surrounding their attempt to draft an accommodations policy last year was botched for exactly the same reasons – the adamant refusal to include Disabled people and those with expertise in Disability Justice in drafting policies affecting us.

This long pattern of deliberately excluding Disabled people is further evidence that UBC urgently needs a Disability Task Force in order to address systemic ableism and discrimination against Disabled people.

The Terms of Reference for the Accessibility Committee need to be re-drafted by people who know what they're talking about, instead of those entrenched in an ableist system that has discriminated against Disabled people for decades. The invitation for membership in the committee should be halted, until such time as the TOR and the application process have been corrected.

UBC's history of failed equity initiatives is riddled with the blunders made when they prioritize power over knowledge, and in these terms of reference, they are demonstrating their unwavering commitment to "more of the same."