

# **DEFINING ACCESSIBILITY PORTFOLIO**

AN ANONYMOUS DOCUMENTATION  
OF THE ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS OF  
SELF-IDENTIFYING DISABLED  
STUDENTS

**Isra Amsdr**

**MASU Disability Representative**

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# INTRODUCTION

## A little bit about me and my story

Hi friends!!

My name is Isra Amsdr and I am a disabled student in my fourth and final year at Mount Allison. A lot of people know me as the person with tubing hanging out of from under their shirt – carrying a constantly screeching pump that goes off at the most inconvenient of times. Or as the person who wobbles across campus with bedazzled crutches while recurrently popping their joints back into their sockets. I am very evidently sick, or crippled, or disabled; and, although I have gotten used to the perpetual starrng– I have not gotten used to the ways I am treated, or the ways that I am made to feel because I am sick, or crippled, or disabled. Even though people staring constantly puts me at the center of everyone’s attention, I don’t think I have ever felt more invisible. And the more visible my disability has gotten, the more invisible I have felt.

I am not okay with that feeling of invisibility because it comes as a result of trying to exist in a place that is not made for me. I came into my fourth year after spending most of my third year at home due to my health and I told myself I wasn’t going to walk away from my time here at Mount A, embodying that same feeling of invisibility. After being elected as the Disability Rep for the MASU and giving my goals some thought, I realized that the ordeal of accessibility on campus is not going to be solved within my time here. As a disabled person myself, I recurrently preach that what is accessible to me within my disability is not what is accessible to every other disabled person. Therefore, I can’t define accessibility beyond my experience of it; in fact, no one can. Attempting to tackle this ordeal – I turned to disabled students on campus, who have never been asked what their accessibility needs are. I looked to capture their individual experiences of accessibility in order to be able to collectively define accessibility, and then work towards that definition of accessibility on campus, and build that foundation that currently does not exist.

With that, I present to you the Defining Accessibility Portfolio.

# ABOUT THE PORTFOLIO

## **Problem:**

Mount Allison University notoriously lacks physical accessibility features throughout its entire campus. In total, there are only three fully accessible buildings across campus, with only one being an academic building. Thus, Mount Allison does not create the grounds to allow prospective students with physical disabilities to become Mount Allison students– not because of their capabilities or academic performance as the premise in which all other students are evaluated on, but because Mount Allison fails to meet their basic accessibility rights.

## **Objective:**

To shine a light on the needs of existing disabled students on campus, I proposed the creation of the “Defining Accessibility Portfolio”. This consisted of accumulating the stories of disabled students on campus and allowing them to define what accessibility means to them.

To accumulate these stories, disabled students can choose to fill out a Microsoft form with written responses, or submit an audio file responding to the questions. All the questions remained optional – disabled students could respond to all the questions, or just one.

The questions being asked:

- What does accessibility mean to you?
- How do you define accessibility in relation to your disability?
- If there are additional accessibility features at Mount Allison that you would add, what would they be?
- What accessibility features, regardless of what you currently have access to, are integral for your success as a student?
- What is the one take away you would want people to know about your accessibility needs?

## **Method of Action:**

When advertising the “Defining Accessibility Portfolio” through the Mount Allison Student Union, it was emphasized that this isn’t about what students do and do not have access to– it is not intended to take a negative perspective. Instead, the focus has been to generate objective findings of what accessibility features different Mount Allison students need based on their disability, regardless of what they have access to already.

# ABOUT THE PORTFOLIO

The “Defining Accessibility Portfolio” was launched on February 21st and responses were collected until March 22nd. at the start of 2023. It was advertised through university emails, social media channels, and through the help of supporting clubs (ACID and Navigate), and the Meighen Center. Responses were open to Mount Allison students who self-identify as disabled, but were not exclusive to students who have a registered disability and receive accommodations through the Meighen Center. It has been specifically chosen not to focus merely on students who have a documented disability as to acknowledge that not all students have access to the resources to formally document their disability, and imposing such criteria inherently becomes discriminatory and leverages the more privileged disabled students over disabled students who are less privileged or not able to gain access to the resources needed to document their disability for whatever reason (e.g., financial, geographical). Thus, the criteria for participation was contingent on student self-identification.

## **Outcome:**

Following the accumulating of these stories, I worked to compile them into this portfolio. The intention is for the university to listen to the stories of disabled students on campus and their definition and experience of accessibility within their realm of disability. The proceeding steps are to leverage the stories within the portfolio and to encourage their reciprocation and dire need of change on campus and within the community.

The emphasis also needs to be communicated that justifying a lack of accessibility on campus because of the preservation of historic buildings is simply inexcusable at this point. The government of New Brunswick has a Heritage Conservation Act, but they have not taken it upon themselves to produce an Accessibility Act, as other provinces have. Mount Allison has notoriously deterred a multitude of students away from attending the university because of the physical obstacles its campus produces for disabled students. It is time for Mount Allison to step up and stop waiting for the province of New Brunswick to mandate accessibility, in order to give disabled students access to education that is not dictated by the buildings they can access.

# EMERGING THEMES

What does accessibility mean to you?

## RESOURCES + SERVICES

*reported in 23% of responses*

Responses mentioned the use of adequate resources and supports regardless of the presenting disability(s), circumstance, or disadvantage students with disabilities may face. It was also emphasized in several responses that accommodations should not be gatekept or allocated to individuals with a certain “type” or “degree” of disability. Instead, all accommodations should be readily made available or made possible for all students with disabilities to access

## EQUITY

*reported in 19% of responses*

Responses mentioned reaching equity and referenced having an equal playing field as non-disabled students without enduring copious amounts of struggle or experiencing extensive stress in order to reach

## REMOVING BARRIERS

*reported in 19% of responses*

Responses mentioned acknowledging and responding to a diversity of barriers – common or uncommon, visible or non-visible, physical or mental or leaning or intellectual, large or small. The importance of responding to individual experiences of barriers was also mentioned

## INCLUSION

*reported in 15% of responses*

Responses mentioned being included in events with non-disabled students as opposed to being treated with exclusivity. “Inclusion” was also commonly identified as the state needed to be worked towards within accessibility and accommodations as opposed to the current standard is established and operates on stereotypes students with disabilities

## ACCOMODATING DIFFERENCES

*reported in 23% of responses*

Responses mentioned acknowledging and responding to differences among students with disabilities and each of their own lived narratives and circumstances

# EMERGING THEMES

What does accessibility mean to you?

## LEVELLING "IT" OUT

*reported in 54% of responses*

Responses mentioned that “leveling it out” does not include anything extra or creating any exceptional circumstances for students with disabilities, but instead is the bare minimum to allow for success with the same or with the closest possible chances as students without disabilities

# RESULTS

## What does accessibility mean to you?

"accessibility is the ability to interact with the campus and courses as much as someone who does not have a disability would be able to do"

"Accessibility means that every individual receives the resources they need to perform at their best/at the same level as others, creating a barrier-free experience, resulting in equity."

"Leveling the playing field. Providing accommodations and removing barriers for people whose abilities are not typical."

"accessibility means evening the playing field. It means equity. It means addressing both impairment symptoms, AND ableism. Accessibility is the first step in the full inclusion of disabled/chronically ill/neurodivergent folks into society. It means addressing barriers, whether interpersonal, attitudinal, or structural."

"Accessibility means that I (and everyone else) can enjoy the same things that everyone else in my class is already enjoying without having it be a fight to do so."

"Supports and accommodations being in place so that everyone, regardless of disability, has equitable access to opportunities."

"Accessibility means being provided equity in order to have maximum opportunity to succeed despite disability"

"Equal opportunity to all who wish to participate in any given activity. To me, this would include efforts to provide more consideration to physical, mental, and social disadvantages students face due to their circumstances and how to best alleviate those differences they suffer as it can be really alienating..."

"Accessibility means that there is adequate access to all resources even if people have their own personal obstacles that may prevent them from accessing resources or completing tasks the same way neurotypical people do."

"accessibility means accommodating those with a visible or non-visible condition and/or identity"



# RESULTS

"Accessibility to me means being to able to access the sources and resources I require to participate in everyday activities or tasks"

"Accessibility means that anyone regardless of disability or ability is able to partake in an event, experience or live free of barriers. This can mean ramps, accessible buildings, mental health programs, more hospitals with flexible hours etc. No one should have to miss out because of being different"

"In relation to Mount Allison, accessibility is being able to be and feel included as a student in the academic and social environment. Accessibility may mean needing certain changes or accommodations to meet these standards of inclusivity."

"Access to services and ways of being that allow me to fully function in a more stress free way."

"Being on a level playing field as others,"

"The ability for anyone regardless of personal barriers to be able to come and function as a full time/part time student and not have to try to juggle their course load, but to work through everything at a consistent rate and show their knowledge and understanding of the information they have retained in a test setting that is consistent with the applications of that knowledge in the 'workforce'."

"To me, accessibility means having extra support to help me work with my disability and achieve the things my non-disabled peers can achieve." "It means having supports or being in an environment that does not require you to have to put in extra work into being part of something like an activity."

"Having the resources that gives people with disabilities the same chance to succeed as people without."

"It means to me that I can participate in my studies to my best abilities despite my disabilities."

"Accessibility for me is the support available for me to go through an injury or a situation that I am facing both in temporary and permanent basis."

# RESULTS

"Everyone being able to enter and use something. Accessibility should be the minimum, inclusion should be the goal. Inclusion allows me to do that "something". However, the current state of accessibility is if you meet neurotypical expectations."

"Not the elimination of difference, but making it so that difference does not matter. That is, understanding that different people have different needs and abilities and accommodating accordingly."

"Providing services that are available to those who need or desire it. In which every individual has the opportunity to obtain the equipment, services or tools to function effectively"

"everyone having equitable opportunity to access the spaces (physical and intellectual), educational opportunities and belonging"

"accessibility is not an exception or anything extra, in fact it almost the opposite. it is what brings me up to the same playing ground as those around me."

# EMERGING THEMES

How do you define accessibility in relation to your disability?

## CAMPUS + PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

*reported in 38% of responses*

Responses mentioned the structure of campus and the overall physical environment in relation their ability or inability to navigate it

## DIVERSE STRUGGLES + BARRIERS

*reported in 23% of responses*

Responses mentioned some form of barrier that needs to be removed or a struggle that they encounter or that their disability produces and isn't accounted for. I want to highlight in this section that many of responses that identified individual barriers, also highlighted the rigidity of our current accommodation system in that it doesn't get tailored to individual student needs

## CLASSROOM + EDUCATIONAL MODIFICATIONS

*reported in 53% of responses*

Responses mentioned either physical/structural classroom changes, or some form of educational or learning modification in the way classes or assignments are delivered

## INDIVIDUALIZED SUCCESS ACCOMMODATIONS

*reported in 50% of responses*

Responses identified the need to establish individual success or the need or desire to work towards individualized definitions of success

## ALTERED EDUCATOR ROLES

*reported in 19% of responses*

Responses mentioned educators, professors, or some university official in the context of looking for more compassion and reducing the level of prodding students with disabilities have to face with regards to their accessibility needs not being met or being questioned

# RESULTS

## How do you define accessibility in relation to your disability?

"The ability to have resources that help with sleep, comfort, movement through campus, interaction with classes, the gym, and other people without discrimination"

"Accessibility in relation to my disability would mean permission to receive extra time for writing exams and completing labs, reduced distractions during exams and labs, recording lectures, closed captions for course videos, course loads broken down as mini assignments, scent-free room, and LED/dim lighting."

"As a person with a learning disability and ADHD accessibility to me is removing the barriers that keep me from reaching my highest potential. I spent a lot of my life thinking I was just incapable of succeeding in academics, but once academia was made assessable through accommodations and adaptation I was able to become an extremely successful student of truly enjoyed learning."

"Accessibility in relation to my disability means centering my lived experience and needs to ensure equitable participation. Ideally, this would help more folks than just me, and would not require endless amounts of energy from my end."

"My disability strongly restricts my stamina and puts a number of challenges on my daily life. Accessibility means not having to fight with every single individual in a position of power at MTA just to get basic flexibility outside of the ""standard"" accommodations. It also looks like privacy - I shouldn't need to explain or defend my rights to any of the professors or lab techs that I'm dealing with. If an accommodation is needed that doesn't automatically entitle the person providing accommodations to know why I need it. It also looks like accommodations being properly set up to actually function, rather than just paying lip-service to a concept - note-taking is a great example of where this is an issue. "

"Mental. It is a challenge everyday to do the all things one has to do and still try to take care of myself when I can hardly pluck myself from my bed or focus long enough to register what time it is."

"Same as above."

# RESULTS

"For my own disabilities, accessibility looks especially like...

- Fatigue-conscious demands (in school and work)
- Basic physical accessibility (i.e. working elevators) - invisible illness impacting mobility
- Access to/permission to use alternative communication methods (i.e. writing, text-to-speech) - even though I'm generally able to speak, speech vs effective communication via speech are two very different things"

"Support to ensure that despite my disabilities I have the tools needed for success."

"Having educators and people in leadership positions above me understand my struggles and being able to understand why things may take me longer than they would take other people.

Setting specific guidelines for me and ensuring that I have all materials available to me to succeed is very important to me."

"accessibility allows those with \*low income\*, \*mental illnesses\* and/or \*physical disabilities\*, the most \*convenient solution to their personal needs\*. Thus, providing equitable opportunities between those with disabilities and those without.

For someone like me, this means

- Off-Campus Housing: Offering more off-campus housing options that legally/regularly pass health inspections, fire safety inspections, and other tests \*before\* being listed on MASU's housing directory; with mandatory updates to the site and proof of passing inspections provided by landlords.
- Basic Needs: Continuing to provide students local food bank options and clothing swaps. Continual efforts to fulfill other basic needs like a) sex safety protection, testing, and education. b) offering warm, winter clothing through a potential ""winter"" clothing swap c) quickening the pace of the athletic centres renovation so all students can access recreational sports for basic physical and mental health needs
- Mental Health: Students are in dire need of more health professionals, and more specialized health professionals after the pandemic, and specifically for neurodivergent and/or mentally ill students. Breelove Counselling has been an excellent resource for myself and other friends of mine.
- Extra Personal Challenges: I need noise cancelling headphones for class so that I can pay attention and avoid excess stress/distractions. However, noise cancelling headphones are very expensive.

# RESULTS

- I need communal study sessions so I can body-double\* in order to complete assignments/ study for exams \*("Body doubling is a productivity aid that may help people with ADHD and other forms of neurodivergence stay focused and motivated while they're working. A body double is a person who works alongside you, either in person or virtually, as you complete a task you might otherwise neglect.")
- A sensory room or panic attack room dedicated for students who need an immediate get-away? Like the zen den, but without appointments, and also includes sensory stimuli for those who are neurodivergent. Examples include: a lava lamp, a swing chair, fidgets, soft/ fuzzy blankets and pillows, soft/dim colourful lighting, mindfulness objects like adult colouring books or authentic, mini zen gardens. "

"To me accessibility for my disability would be providing help for both hearing loss and anxiety"

"Mental health advocacy, dyslexic-friendly fonts on powerpoints, not being shamed by profs or fellow students for being mentally ill. Making sure that those with other disabilities are included when we talk about accessibility."

"In relation to my disability, accessibility is being able to succeed academically despite barriers encountered due to my disability. This means being able to access class and content through alternative means when my disability effects my ability to participate in the classroom."

"Accessibility means being able to learn and be in classes that work with my disability. Having accommodations that work with my way of learning helps me to be a better, more engaged student. Without accommodations, I struggle to stay focused."

"Having accesbilty to tools that allow for my disability not to hold me back from schooling"

"I do what I can to make up for the problems I have, so I'm not sure, my schools never took my disabilities seriously, and 1 of them can't actually be fixed."

"For me it means other people knowing how to treat me and understanding how I am different but without treating me as though I am incapable."

# RESULTS

"Accessibility for me means trauma-informed education and spaces. It also means compassionate course policies, such as forgiving attendance and late assignment policies. In a class where recorded lectures/thorough lecture slides are posted, I find myself falling behind due to my difficult pain and mental health days. Hybrid classes where the lecture is live-streamed are also very beneficial— I make it to more of my classes, even on the hardest days. Physical accessibility on campus is also important, as a person with chronic pain. Navigating buildings without elevators can be difficult for me, and I am more likely to go to classes that I don't have to walk long distances or climb stairs to."

"They are a amazing help that has allowed me to grow as a person."

"For me I felt crucial to have a recovery fulfilled with all the possible effort from every side which can ensure my physical and mental health to be sustained for future."

"Being able to do something, being able to succeed as I would be able to if I did not have my disabilities. Being able to succeed like those who don't have my disabilities. And it's still something that I cannot receive without stigma from some staff/professors. The institution of education was not designed for struggling people."

"Accessibility would mean no undue stress and no barriers to my education due to disability"

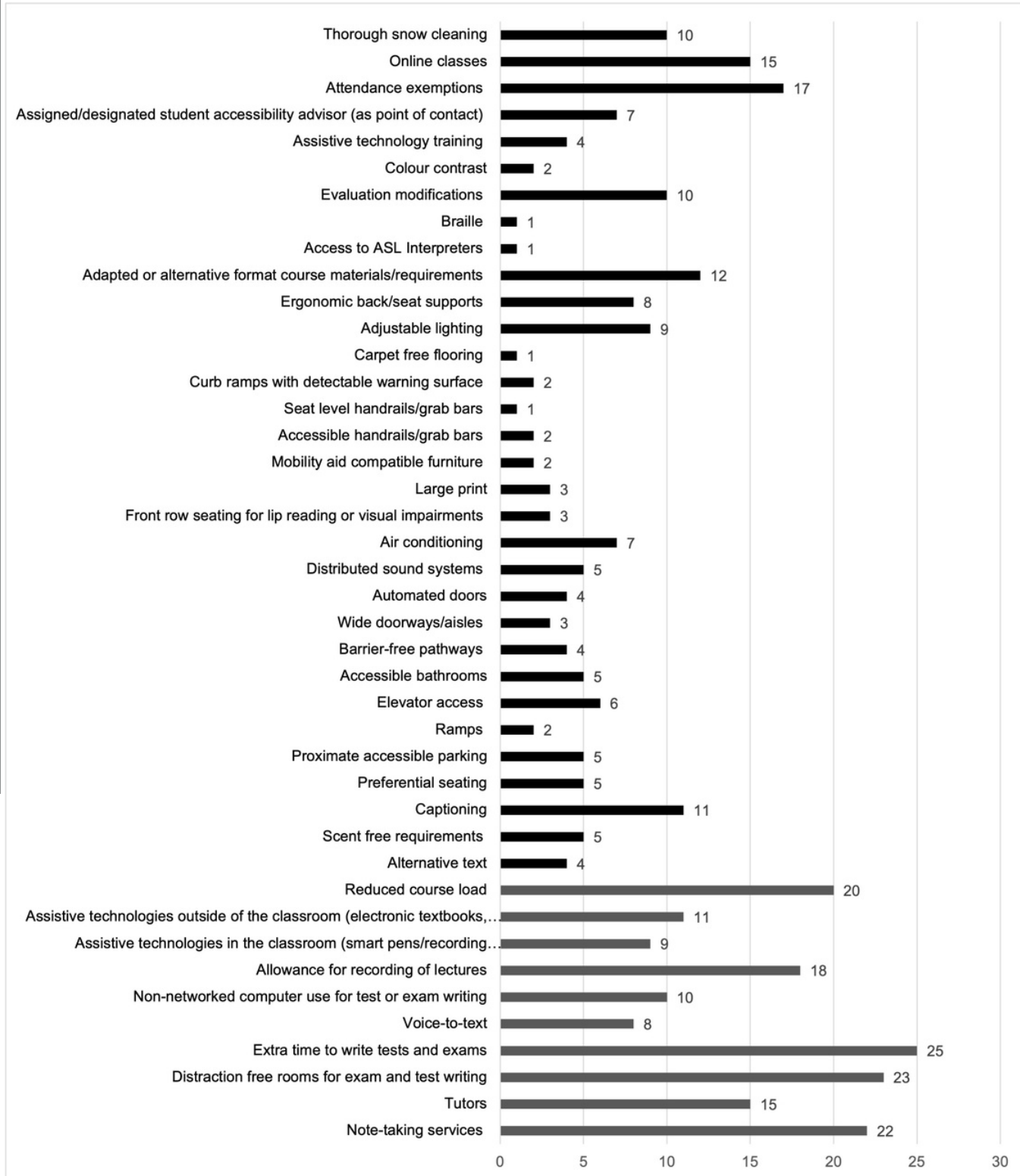
"Having tools and maintenance to help me thrive"

"flexibility and adaptable ways to navigate school"

"in relation to my disability, accessibility means that my environment doesn't make my disability any harder to live with then it already is."

# RESULTS

What accessibility features, regardless of what you currently have access to, are integral for your success as a student?



■ EXISTING FEATURES      ■ PROSPECTIVE FEATURES



# EMERGING THEMES

If there are any additional accessibility features at Mount Allison that you would add, what would they be?

## FINANCIAL + SYSTEMIC MODIFICATIONS

*reported in 24% of responses*

Responses mentioned financial and systemic modifications – specifically how students not in a full course load still pay full tuition, and how the current accommodation system operates in a way that doesn't work with students – students have to learn to work with the system. It was also mentioned more than once that students don't know how to navigate the way Meighen system works currently, or who to go to within the Meighen center for what concern or even the fact that when some students bring up some concerns, they feel like they are jumping through hoops to figure things out or to get an answer for whatever question or concern they may have

## PROFESSOR ACCOUNTABILITY

*reported in 16% of responses*

Responses mentioned professor accountability. This entailed responses stating it shouldn't be the students' job to teach professors about their accessibility features, and the fact that professors are essentially given complete leniency over whether they choose to allow students accommodations that they are legally entitled to, and the lack of intervention and mandates on the administrative side of the university. One response also identified wanting professors to know what the experience is like being a disabled student trying to navigate academia

## COURSE ASSESSMENT + SCHEDULE FLEXIBILITY

*reported in 32% of responses*

Responses mentioned modified or altered course assessment and delivery methods. This was most notably mentioned a few specific contexts: online classes were identified but not strictly in the context of just online class. Instead, having classes shift online during certain weather conditions that would make it unsafe for people to walk or drive to campus, or having professors just post their slides on Moodle to make them accessible for students who couldn't attend class for whatever reason on certain days

# EMERGING THEMES

If there are any additional accessibility features at Mount Allison that you would add, what would they be?

## CLASSROOM SETTINGS AND OPERATIONS

*reported in 40% of responses*

Responses identified desired changes in the way classes operate. In terms of the environment – multiple students commented on the lighting in classrooms being rather jarring and not fostering an environment they are comfortable to learn in, or the lack of breaks in three hour lectures, seminars, labs, or even sometimes in exams

# RESULTS

**If there are any additional accessibility features at Mount Allison that you would add, what would they be?**

"Larger bed, proximity to buildings, quiet residence accommodation, massages/physiotherapist,"

"Replace LED lightbulbs with LED or dimmer lights, the translation of speech to text in real-time lectures, extra time/distraction-free environment when doing labs, and breaking down large assignments into smaller mini-assignments."

"In regards to learning supports I just think the resources available need to be more readily advertised so people know what their options are and I think their need to be fewer steps required to access them"

"training for professors about how to use accessibility aids (vs making that my responsibility). Clear masks (in certain situations where it does not compromise safety). CART services. Breaks."

"I would add proper accommodations for illness in all classes - not just when professors and especially lab techs decide to provide it. Non-flourescent lights and getting rid of 3 hour labs or else enforcing some sort of break area / period would also help. Also sensitivity training for all of the professors and lab-techs. Finally, more flexibility in when courses run, whether it's because they can be completed without attending lectures, or more evening and weekend courses. Personally, I think both would help, and integrating more recording technology would make it possible for students who have difficulty attending classes all the time to not fall behind material. Even just posting freely available lecture recordings after classes would be a lifesaver on its own."

"More flexible schedule, evaluation modifications for participation requirements more specifically, alternative communication methods (AAC) use in class"

"Extra time on assignments, extended period to appeal failed grades, priority registration, more wheelchair accessible classrooms and bathrooms, breaks during exams, alternative coursework, pre-made study guides,"

"Offers for a student guide/mentor to aid in personal needs/obligations"

"Masks can be an inconvenience for people with sensory issues"

# RESULTS

"Online classes for snow days, as a commuting student I have had multiple panic attacks when class is not cancelled and I either take a risky drive or feel horrible the remainder of the day for not going and has sent me into a spiral every time it has happened, I also experience severe sleep problems and have missed classes worth participation and other vita information not accessible in other ways and recorded lectures for those days where I am so tired I sleep through all my alarms would make a huge difference (mania->depression it is especially bad, because I have 2 weeks of sleep to catch up on at times and 0 motivation) ; also, help with making social connections.. sometimes it's hard to do it on your own and you don't know how to start or build connections and that's so important to have to get through university..."

"Being more thorough with note takers about what is required for them to do. I have had a lot of issues with receiving notes that are written and not typed. When I bring these issues up I prefer for the person to re-upload notes that they had previously written out because I have a really hard time reading hand writing."

"I feel my disability is well accommodated" "Access to professor's PowerPoint slides or reference lists for other content. Not all professors supply their PowerPoints and it's a really useful tool to learn from."

"have subtitles to lectures, being able to be in a room with dimmable lighting. alternative criteria for students who disabilities make it harder to do certain criteria like handwrite or spell words on paper"

"Open book exams that more accurately how you would work in the workplace depending on the occupation, thus it would be on a course to course basis."

"Comfortable seating and lights and levels of background noise in rooms should all be considered for classrooms. Some classrooms are not conducive to learning because of the lighting, seating, or noises that happen."

"Students shouldn't have to pay to receive notes from note takers"

"Transportation to medical facilities if there is an emergency"

# RESULTS

"1). [10.8.5] It should be as hard as it has been for me to get extensions, it is also the professors choice whether or not to, it should NOT be a process filled with disappointment and shame from others. 2). [10.4.4] this process is harsh and the deadline is not feasible, people cannot always receive the required letter from a health professional that quickly. My disability IS serious. It shouldn't feel like I need to have the worst scenario to be granted this. 3). Course extensions should be normalized, the process/application should be less shameful 4). If I get more time during examinations I should be getting extended times for assignment deadlines too. 5). A panel, articles, questionnaires or something should be created where students can talk/write about their disabilities/difficulties and staff/professors should read them. If it is my everyday, you should at least skim a few peoples challenges/emotions once in awhile."

"Students with a reduced course load of 3-4 courses still pay full tuition, which is a massive financial barrier for those who may already be struggling financially due to disability. This must change"

"Students with a reduced course load of 3-4 courses still pay full tuition, which is a massive financial barrier for those who may already be struggling financially due to disability. This must change"

"adequate winter walkway maintenance"

"attendance exemptions!!!!!"

"not an accessibility feature specifically, but having the system operate so that accommodations are tailored to my needs instead of me having to adapt to what I am offered. having much clearer instructions on how to even become registered with the meighen centre is also really important. knowing who to go to for what concerns is also a massive question mark that I don't know how to navigate even though I am a registered meighen centre student. having accessibility advisors or an identified point of contact would be really helpful. having joint meetings between different support people would also reduce the amount of work and back and forth I have to do on my part to ensure my needs are met."

# EMERGING THEMES

"What is the one take away you would want people to know about your accessibility needs?"

**ACCESSIBILITY HELPS EVERYONE**

*reported in 28% of responses*

**INVISIBLE DISABILITIES**

*reported in 26% of responses*

**INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES OF DISABILITY**

*reported in 36% of responses*

**SYSTEMIC DISSAPOINTMENT + FALIURE**

*reported in 28% of responses*

**EXTENSIVE EFFORT + RECOVERY PERIODS**

*reported in 28% of responses*

**LISTENING TO THE DISABLED PERSPECTIVE**

*reported in 20% of responses*

**ISOLATION + LACK OF HELP ENCOUNTERED**

*reported in 36% of responses*

**DISABILITY DOES NOT DEFINE PEOPLE**

*reported in 12% of responses*

Instead of further elaborating on the group of responses behind each emerging theme for this question – I think it would be much more impactful to directly read the responses students with disabilities provided. I found this question to personally be the hardest part of the portfolio for me to get through because I understood the struggle underlying each one of these responses on a personal level (even if I hadn't experienced the same situation or occurrence).

So when asked "What is the one take away you would want people to know about your accessibility needs?"

These were the responses provided:

# RESULTS

## **"What is the one take away you would want people to know about your accessibility needs?"**

"Just because my disability isn't visible right off the bat doesn't mean that it is any less real and troublesome as one that is visible. I still need assistance so ignoring my needs because they aren't visible when it is a clear and diagnosed disability with all of the proper documentation makes me experience it harder. I have been disappointed with the lack of help I have received and how my troubles haven't been taken seriously."

"My accessibility needs allow me to learn at the same rate as neurotypical individuals; without them, it takes me triple the amount of time to learn content"

"There are a lot of steps and hoops to jump through in order to access learning accommodations and that has deterred me from using the resources available. Additionally i feel that I don't have a personal point of contact that I can go to for assistance."

"They can help others, disabled or not. Captioning, while an access need for d/Deaf/hard of hearing folks, can also be useful to others!! EVERYONE has access needs, not just disabled folks. ACCESS needs, not special needs. It doesn't help how many theoretical accessibility tools you add to the toolkit if no one is allowed to use them, or if people who are completely unqualified gatekeep exactly who gets to use what. I remember the first thing the Meighan centre director said to me was that I wouldn't be getting many of the accommodations I have been provided for most of my life because of two reasons. The first was that the school only accepts documentation from within the past 5 years. This can cost upwards of \$3000 to get redone, and like many disabilities, mine is going to be lifelong. The second reason was that no professor who was shown the very brief updated assessment I got as a teenager to reconfirm that my diagnosis was unchanged would agree to give my my full list of accommodations. Obviously, this document is not something that any professor should have access to, given its very private nature, as well as those professors lack of qualifications to even judge the fairness of my accommodations. There is no good reason for policies like this, and I was in that meeting alone, as an anxious first year student, with no idea how to advocate for myself, or just how ridiculous any of it was."

# RESULTS

"Just because I technically \*can\* do something (i.e. take the stairs rather than an elevator or speak aloud rather than use AAC), doesn't mean it's sustainable for me to do all the time. It all comes down to conserving my very limited energy so I have enough to do the things I need to do to function as a disabled university student."

"There is more to be done to meet my accessibility needs than what the school offers"

"It can look different for everyone. And when someone 'overreacts' perhaps they are overstimulated or having an episode of something you're not aware about. Don't be quick to judge why people are the way they are or that there's something wrong with them.. Everyone has unique abilities and talents and should be appreciated as such"

"That all people experience accessibility differently. Even if I am satisfied with the resources available to me, they may not be adequate for someone else and vice versa."

"It takes a lot of energy for me to build up the confidence and motivation to succeed in University. My accommodations are necessary due to my background/who I am. Without them, I don't think I'd be able to finish my Bachelor's Degree, right now. Or maybe ever."

"Take the time to listen to i idk visual needs especially with mental health because what works for one doesn't work for all"

"I am not doing this for attention, it takes me 3x longer to do the same amount of work as you, I work more because I have struggles with processing the same course information as you. it is not an excuse, I have breakdowns because I can't do things as easily as you. Making sure everyone can attend uni is just as important as you coming to mount Allison."

"Accessibility needs are unique and varying. One day someone might need very little support and another may need a lot more support. Disabilities can vary in degree of limitations."

"noises are a major distraction but sudden loud noises can take a long time to recover from"



# RESULTS

"That my accessibility needs if not provided for could turn an excellent student into a failing one"

"Making someone pay near 6k to go to a school that doesn't assist their students to the greatest degree, is wrong, and unjustifiable for a university such as Mount Allison."

"Approach accessibility with compassion and disabled perspectives first. Everyone has needs and accessibility needs should be treated like any other need as a base of respect."

"That my disability doesn't define who I am."

"As a small town, accessibility is of at most priority that we should focus on since this can ensure a safe student experience."

"That I don't feel cared for at all. I'm not being cared for because I'm not being given the chance to talk/inform that will be heard (until this) I am just seen and heard. The current "understanding" + the accommodations available is still not enough. My late withdrawal/extension should be just "considered." People may try to understand me by understanding my diagnosis but they don't know my life with it, they don't understand my paradigm. I hate this "take what I can get" "play along with the system" challenge that I'm in. It's either this or no schooling at all."

"All of the accommodations listed above should be readily available to all students without question. Large structural changes from the university are needed still, as even with something like a reduced course load you are still paying full price"

"I am not special or strong or an inspiration just because I can get through or exist in places that are not accessible to me. You simply just don't see the suffering that I endure because I have become so good at hiding it. I have become so accustomed at existing in places that are not made for me and I have stopped trying to ask people to accommodate my basic needs as a disabled person so I don't get treated as being annoying, that at this point most people would never be able to tell that I am disabled."

# RESULTS

"When things are not accessible it is a sad barrier to face as other people have access and are included but you are not"

"That they fluctuate over time, so I can't ask a week in advance for an extension."

# ANALYSIS + IMPLICATIONS

So, where do we go from here? What exactly do we do with all this information that's been generated? How do we even begin to hash this out? Where do we start?

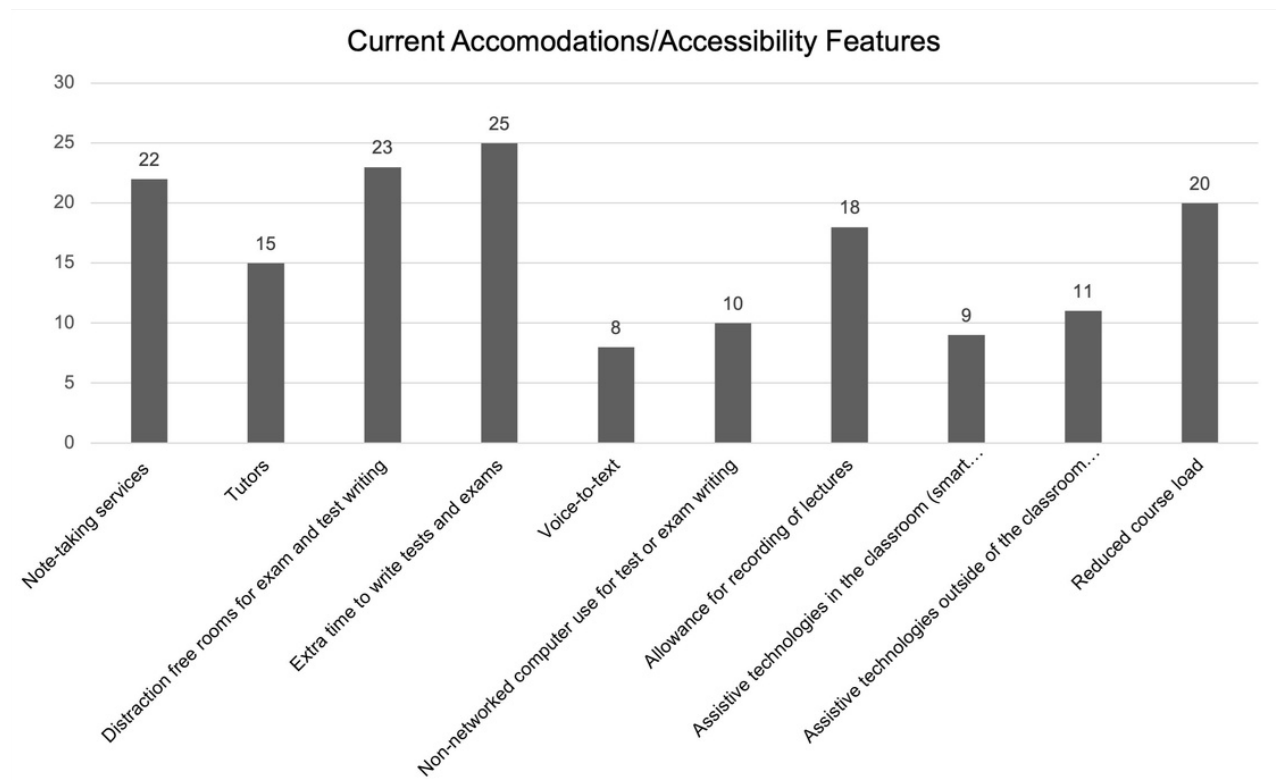
This portfolio probably seems really overwhelming, and I think that's because it has brought to the forefront how much our current system and means of accommodations and accessibility are outdated and are causing students with disabilities to suffer. I can't deny that working on this portfolio occupied a huge chunk of my emotional capacity. Many of the response to questions truthfully brought me to tears as it felt like I kept hearing my story over and over again. So this is my best attempt at being proactive and breaking down the outcomes of this portfolio into smaller parts we can more easily process.

First and foremost – it needs to be acknowledged that we certainly have a lot of work to do. In order to precipitate change, we must move past the distorted narrative that our current means of accessibility at Mount Allison are adequate. This portfolio has depicted exactly that – and it proved that they are far from adequate. But, I am forthcoming in my persistence that this portfolio is an encouraging start – one that has historically never been catalyzed at Mount Allison.

## **Quantitative Data:**

Let's start with the quantitative data – the graph from page 13 of the portfolio. Below is a graph separating the data for the question "What accessibility features, regardless of what you currently have access to, are integral for your success as a student?" into current accommodations/accessibility features. The following five features received the highest number of responses: extra time to write tests and exams (25), distraction free rooms for exam and test writing (23), note-taking services (22), reduced course load (20), and allowance for recording of lectures (18). Each of these accommodations/accessibility features are currently offered at Mount Allison. This is hard data telling us the top five features being most utilized and/or most needed by disabled students are already present at Mount Allison. However, when we look at the rest of the portfolio and read through the responses to the other open ended questions – some of the discrepancies within these services that are not meeting the needs of students are highlighted.

# ANALYSIS + IMPLICATIONS



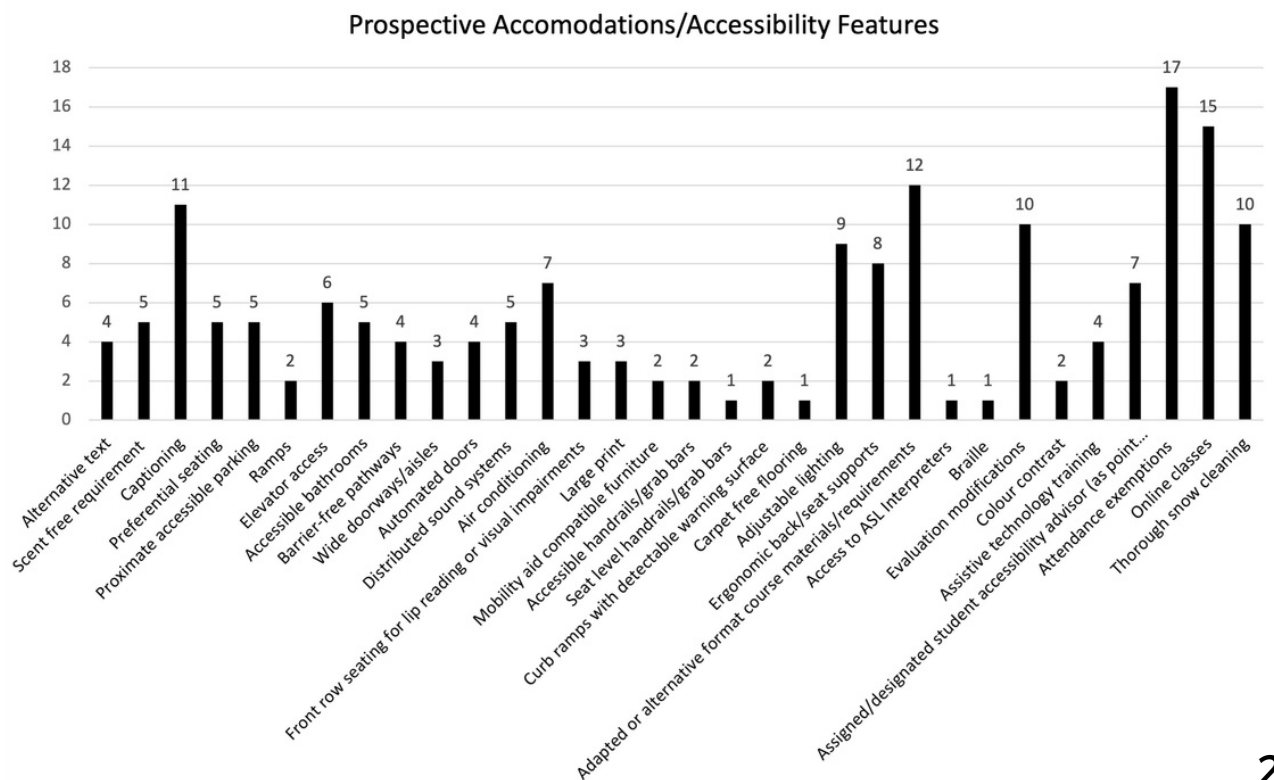
I started this portfolio acknowledging that change won't exactly be produced within my time at Mount Allison. I can't rectify an entire system within my short term as the Disability Representative, but I can create the foundation—the starting point—the premise, for whoever comes after me to pick up where I left off. To whoever that person may be: start with what we already have. And what we already have is what students with disabilities have expressed they need most. I want to think that improving what is currently offered is highly tangible and do-able. We are not tearing apart a building or asking for a multimillion-dollar renovation project. Small changes within the current accommodations/accessibility features can be as simple as clarifying how students can get access to the services, identifying single points of contacts for various concerns/requests/needs so disabled students are not playing email tag or are struggling more to navigate the accommodation system than they are struggling to navigate their disability itself.

Onwards, this can also look like establishing university policies that preclude professors and faculty members from breaching or questioning a student's accommodations.

# ANALYSIS + IMPLICATIONS

Within the rest of the portfolio, students recurrently expressed frustration with faculty members questioning the validity of their accommodations with a lack of response on the university's part. If the current operation of the Meighen Center requires students to have a documented disability (i.e., through medical documentation provided by a respective medical professional) in order to be a registered Meighen Center student and receive accommodations, then students with disabilities are legally entitled to the accommodations their respective medical professionals have outlined for them to be in need of. Even without there currently being any university policies entitling students with disabilities to their various accommodations, it is rightfully still not the place of any faculty member to instil themselves over the professional judgment of a medical practitioner who has outlined and justified the accessibility and accommodation needs of a student with a disability. This should not be interpreted as though professors or any faculty members are inferior to medical doctors because that is not the case at all – but an MD and a PhD are different accreditations, with very different clinical roles and implications.

Moving onto the prospective accommodations/accessibility features presented in the graph below, the features with the highest number of responses are: attendance exemptions (17), online classes (15), adapted or alternative format course materials/requirements (12), captioning (11), thorough snow cleaning (10), and evaluation modifications (10).



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Similar to what was discussed with the current accommodations, these are largely tangible implementations that (I want to think) are within reason to work towards – some of which we have already begun to improve on campus this past semester. Thorough snow cleaning is a perfect example of this.

Following a storm in January, the hazardous state of campus was blatantly brought to the university's attention through a student on social media. The day this occurred, campus opening was delayed until noon to allow for snow clearing and salting from the storm the previous day. By noon, campus was still not safely cleared of snow and salted, but was nonetheless, opened. Within a single week of this occurrence – I had heard over a dozen accounts from faculty, staff, and students who had slipped, fallen, and/or minorly injured themselves because of the improper clearing of snow on campus. I don't think there was a single conversation I had that week that did not include the weather and how utterly difficult it was to safely make it to campus.

# ANALYSIS + IMPLICATIONS

Each account came to me from people who did not identify as having a disability. If people without disabilities were not even able to safely navigate campus, how was it expected that people with disabilities who may of had struggles with their mobility on a regular basis, were expected to safely do so? The explicit answer is that people, with or without disabilities, should not be expected to navigate an unsafe campus. This applies to anyone – faculty, staff, students, or even community members who navigate campus.

The larger concern with this situation that we don't want to come to terms with is that our emergency room is open from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM, most days. People are on campus well beyond 4:00 PM. If we focus on students here, we are putting students in a position where they are not guaranteed medical care if injuring themselves while navigating campus, or simply need to be checked for injuries after a fall. Expecting students to get themselves to Moncton to be checked for an injury is completely unacceptable, a logistical nightmare, and should not have to happen within these circumstances to begin with. We know that we can't do anything about the state of our hospital, so why are we not being mindful of the unsafe situations students are being put in by being expected to navigate an unsafe campus? Why was campus not closed for the remainder of the day when it hadn't yet been fully cleared and salted by noon?

My injustice with this situation is that no amount of missed class time can justify breaching anyone's safety. In regard to this portfolio, several of the responses provided in this portfolio are merely asking to have equitable access to get to class in the inaccessible buildings on campus. They are not expecting every point of inaccessibility throughout campus to be hammered down and removed overnight, but instead, are pleading for there not to be additional inaccessibility's that are created with snow and ice blocking walkways or making it unsafe (this also expands into students who do not live in Sackville having to drive into town while the roads and highways have still not undergone snow removal). Closing campus until it is safely cleared and salted once again utilizes resources Mount Allison already has and does not require revolutionary gestures (although I could also argue that listening to what students with disabilities have to say and really this portfolio as a whole, is a revolutionary gesture).

# ANALYSIS + IMPLICATIONS

Comparably with online classes, the responses of most students with disabilities didn't comment on strictly wanting online classes. Instead, they asked for flexibility. They asked for things like posting slides online, or shifting online on days where it is unsafe to get to campus (which also serves as a way of managing classes while campus is being cleared). There are some profs who already engage in these practices to make learning more accessible to students with and without disabilities. However, not enough profs take on these methods in their classes. With the pandemic these past few years, many thought that the benefits of online learning experienced at the peak of the pandemic would be optimized and implemented as we shifted back into more conventional ways of learning. However, students have learned the hard way a good chunk of professors abandoned all virtual alterations and dove back into traditional methods of educating.

I think there are a few ways we can approach this situation and begin introducing some resolve. The first being expanding the list of accommodations offered at Mount Allison to include some of the virtual alteration's classes took on during the peak of the pandemic. This can include Given that students with disabilities are legally entitled to their accommodations, it becomes necessary for professors to incorporate virtual learning features into their classes. Another way of approaching this can be through "auditing" the accommodations and accessibility features that professors abide by, and/or implement into their classes. In the fall, I attended the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) and uVic's Society for Students with Disabilities (SSD): Back to School - Advocacy and Access4All event. The event was part of NEADS' Virtual Access for All Project and Back to School National Advocacy Campaign. uVic's SSD approach to managing the struggle students with disabilities encountered regarding professors' lack of adherence and acknowledgment to students' accommodations was to create a review, from the experiences of students with disabilities, on how accommodating different professors are, to what extent to they acknowledge and adhere to a student's accommodations, and what features they implement into their classrooms or ways of teaching that aid students with disabilities. Similar to this portfolio, it isn't intended to take a negative perspective and focus on all that professors don't do or how ableist their ways of teaching are. It instead was a way for disabled students to act on the lack or reciprocation from professors and their university (uVic) by giving students with disabilities a bit of a heads up around the extent of accommodations they can expect to get from different professors.



# ANALYSIS + IMPLICATIONS

From what I recall – this has been incredibly successful. Yes, it doesn't address the root cause of the issue and there undoubtedly needs to be action from the university's side, but in the interim – it enables students with disabilities to use their experiences in a proactive manner; in turn helping to ensure other students with disabilities don't share similar experiences.

## **Quantitative Data:**

Although the quantitative data is largely intertwined with the qualitative data, the thing that stands out to me the most throughout all the qualitative data (the open question responses) is frustration. Students with disabilities are frustrated. Accommodations are supposed to help students carry out their education at the same (or similar) capacity as students without disabilities. But it feels like students with disabilities often spend more time fighting for the right to use their accommodations than they actually spend time using them. I can break down and analyze every emerging theme within the portfolio – but it would largely repeat what has already been stated above within the analysis of the quantitative data. The one analysis I can add – behind each response provided for this portfolio is a human. A human who wants their basic rights met.

# CONCLUSION

As I bring this portfolio to a close, I want to emphasize that it is vital to acknowledge that this doesn't take away from the other prospective accessibility/accommodation features on the graph that had a lower number of responses. This is not an attempt to justify that we shouldn't implement the other features as many of those are related to the physical environment and the data is inherently faulty because our current state of campus doesn't exactly attract physically disabled students so we don't actually have a very accurate representation of the needs of students with physical disabilities simply within the small cohort of existing physically disabled students on campus.

With that, I would like to conclude this portfolio by reiterating that this is merely the start – it is only the foundation that I have worked on constructing and bringing to life throughout my term as the Disability Rep. There is still a lot of work to do and projects like this need to be repeated and built on as accessibility is constantly changing based off the needs of different cohorts of students with disabilities. As the structural changes that we are in dire need of in order to systemically address our accessibility crisis hopefully begin to compound and improve the experiences of students with disabilities, the cohort of students with disabilities will likely increase and entail more students specifically with physical disabilities. Therefore, projects similar to this portfolio need to be repeated and data needs to be re-collected in order to provide an updated image of the accessibility needs of students with disabilities and re-define areas of improvement. This cycle of reflecting and reacting is integral in continuously improving the experiences of students with disabilities, and even students without disabilities. I have said this before and I will say it once more to bring this portfolio to an end – accessibility does not harm people, it can only help people.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This portfolio has taken a village of people—a village of truly miraculous individuals who helped me along different points in the portfolio’s development—a village of people that this portfolio would not have been possible without.

First and foremost, thank you to the MASU Executives and the Students’ Administrative Council (SAC) for reciprocating my idea, bringing the portfolio to students, carrying out my desired message with the utmost accuracy, and ultimately helping me bring it to life.

I will forever be indebted to the Fine Arts Department and the Fine Arts Graduating Class of 2023; otherwise, the emotional turmoil this portfolio produced would have overtaken me right from the start.

I would also like to extend my acknowledgments to a list of individuals on campus who have listened to me rant and rage of my frustrations about why this portfolio is so important, comforted me as I balled my outs after reading some of the responses and realizing the re-occurring themes, all while consistently reminded me of the change this portfolio has the power to produce. You know who you are, and you know that our relationship will always be cherished.

Last but certainly not least, to the Mount Allison students with disabilities – thank you. Thank you for the courage you have exhibited in sharing your story. Thank you for taking a leap of faith and clicking that link to fill out the form for this portfolio. Thank you for trusting me with your story – for trusting me to leverage your story to instigate the change we are in dire need of. Thank you for being the driving force behind this portfolio – you are the ones who have made this portfolio possible. You are the ones behind the change this portfolio will catalyze.

I hope the Defining Accessibility Portfolio makes you feel seen and heard.

I hope you know the power your story holds.