Ben Poynton

00:00:12

Hi, folks, thanks for joining us. We're just gonna let everyone get into the space. We have quite a few participants. so thank you for joining us, and we'll get started in a couple of minutes as everyone gets into this place. But thank you for joining us. You have made it to our national accessibility week session and thank you for joining us.

Okay, hello to those of you joining us. Thank you for coming to the space we're just gonna give another couple of minutes for everyone to get the opportunity to join us. and we'll get started in a minute. Thank you.

Okay, I think we'll get going. We're a few minutes past the hour, but we're gonna get going. So thank you very much for joining us. You have entered into the space for our session this week. which will be looking at addressing ableism, disability and accessibility, progress and continued action plans which is hosted by University.

So my name is Ben. I'm going to be the Mc. For today, and the University's accessibility for on terms of Disabilities Act officer, at least he can pronounce, identifies Cisco and a white set of this land. Having moved it quite freely from the UK. And I have a history of personal lived experience with mental health, related disabilities. Just to describe myself. for those who, for the benefit of those with vision loss.

I'm a white skinned middleized ish male with a dog beard. wearing glasses. I have a dark blue shirt with stars on in the background. I have a heart shaped light hopefully to inspire and send love to everybody. And I also have some cycling art that is inspiring to me.

that's a bit about me and my personal background is, I have an interest in international human rights and particularly interested in inclusive policy making and remaking at the university.

So just as a brief introduction to today and the purpose for it following last year, successful national dialogue and action. We're hoping today this event will showcase the remarkable accessibility work that has been accomplished across the university, and we really want to invite you to join us in engaging in a discussion where you can share your thoughts and suggestions on next steps and actions and concrete actions that will help us move forward towards really a truly achieving inclusive and accessible environment for students, faculty staff and librarians.

So moving on to our session today. I'll just introduce myself. But as a reminder the event will be recorded and has been live captioned. We're still waiting on our live captions to come and provide the service for us. But and in the meantime, unfortunately, we will be using the Zoom captions.

The events being recorded, and we will be posting this on right afterwards, and we'll make sure that the captions are accurate with a transcript provided, and but as the event goes on, we'll let you know as in when the live caption is at but we will make sure that the zoom. Automatic captions are turned on, a little bit more about that, to turn them on. Please select the closed caption button. Normally, it's closed caption button at the bottom. All the more button within your Zoom menu and select a live transcript.

I also want to begin our session with a brief an important access check. So we do understand access to be a shared responsibility between everybody in this space. we will strive to create an accessible space that proactively eliminates barriers to accessibility. At the same time we do welcome disability and our identities in us, and the changes that it brings into our spaces.

So please let us know if there is anything about the virtual space that we should address now or are there any other access needs that might affect your participation in a virtual space. please let us know. So you can do so by seeing a direct message to me, or you can also send something to the group if you feel it something we all need to know. And this supplies now, and as we move to the different parts of the session.

I'm just going to give a few seconds to let that. So you have time, chance to type in something.

Okay.

Just a brief overview of our agenda. I've done the welcome so welcome. Thank you for taking the time and energy to spend with us this morning. The session will go on for about 2 h. and we hope that we provided you with that sort of rich dialogue and opportunity to engage in what we learned last December, but also what we want to do. Going forwards.

I'm going to invite Allison Berger to provide opening remark and a land acknowledgment in a moment. Then we'll have 4 community presentations where we'll learn Led by myself, we'll learn about some of the work that's been going on. We haven't been able to cover everything. I will share the universities, IOD report, which gives a flavor of what other stuff that has been happening across the campus, across the campuses. But we've tried our best to bring some really interesting projects and initiative to that really seek to try to take an anti-ableist. You even really think about structural ableism and how we can try to embed accessibility, inclusivity, universal design into a system, structures and processes.

Then we'll have the opportunity to spend about 10 min with those presenters, asking them about the specific projects, if any, and has any questions they want to to ask, and we'll give details about how to do that at the time.

Then we'll have a 10 min health break. I'll just give folks the chance to do what you need to do to take care, and then we'll engage in a group discussion with I moderated

by myself and Amanda. Who I will introduce at that time to ready just try to engage in a dialogue with you about what some of the things we've learned throughout the presentations, we'll have a brief overview of the national dialogue and what they let us know. What do we feel? We've learned? What, what, what do we need to know more about and also one of the things that we can discuss as a group collaboratively and what are some things we need to do to come together to take concrete actions and next steps and also what are some of the things we can think about to embed our shared responsibility in embedding accessibility and inclusivity. And the Cherilyn Scobie Edwards will provide us with some closing remarks

So as we are going to be engaging in dialogue. We do want to sort of set the scene and set some community expectations. In the spirit of community and collectivity that we really want to think about today, this session has been open to faculty staff students and external community looking to engage in community connections dialogue about topics of accessibility and anti-ableism.

We are mindful of some of the security concerns with this platform. so if there are any major disruptions that interrupt our ability to keep control of the platform. A member of our organizing team, will ask everyone to log off and we will adjourn the session and hopefully find a way following up with the participants and the event host to try to meet again.

individual may or will be removed immediately from the platform if there are any inappropriate verbal, or written communication.

So in summary for these expectations, we are really asking that as a community, we hold each other accountable for maintaining a space of learning, dialogue, and action. And we really do encourage a respectful delight between everybody today.

So with that, I'm going to hand over to Allison Burgess, who's the acting Executive Director Institutional Equity, Diversity and Inclusion to provide us with some introductory opening remarks. Thank you.

Allison Burgess

00:08:52

Thank you so much, Ben. It's so wonderful to be here with all of you. for today's accessibility, week session. My name is Allison Burgess, and my pronouns are she and her, and, as Ben mentioned, I am currently acting as the executive Director of Equity, diversity and inclusion in the Institutional Equity Office at the University of Toronto.

I'm a white woman Cis woman with short brown hair. I'm wearing a headset on my head. And I'm wearing a V-neck top that with a black and white pattern on my shirt, and

my background is blurred mostly, so that you don't see the entire mess behind me in my home.

I'm honored to be delivering today's land acknowledgment.

I wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron, Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

I was born and raised not far from here in Hamilton, Ontario, the land of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. from parents who are 3 and 4 generations in Canada via Montreal and Winnipeg. I also wish to acknowledge the responsibility that I hold both as a leader in the Institutional Equity Office and as a member of UofT's broader community to drive, change and to support truth and reconciliation efforts.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work in partnership with the office of indigenous initiatives. an office that guides our community in this ongoing work.

Today, as we engage in this space of learning and dialogue, I find myself thinking about the impacts of colonialism on Indigenous ways of knowing, thinking, and doing and how this connects to accessibility.

We recently hosted Sean Cancella, the director of the Eighth Fire at Centennial College and they were a panelist at the Angela Hilliard leadership symposium, and something they said about the relationship between ableism and settler colonialism really struck or stuck with me, rather, Sean noted that the concept of disability did not exist prior to colonization in colonialism. Instead, to put it in Shawn's words, everyone had a place. Everyone had a purpose.

Different ways of thinking and doing enhance the community. Colonial thinking erased and invalidated a broad range of identities and experiences that had long been understood by indigenous peoples, including diversabilities, genders, sexualities, and more.

The binary systems imposed by colonialism continue to shape, and in many cases restrict our environments, our lives, and our understandings of the world. This is the context within which we are striving to create more equitable and inclusive post-secondary education.

Turning to today's event, when we came together in December 2022, for the national dialogues and action for inclusive higher education and communities, our shared focus was on addressing ableism, disability and accessibility. nearly a thousand participants explored barriers to learning and working in the post-secondary education sector for

persons with disabilities together we examined how institutions across Canada can dismantle structural ableism.

Pardon me. Excuse me, my voice just dropped out.

and together we examine how institutions across Canada can dismantle structural ableism and build inclusivity and an intersectional perspective into everything we do from teaching research and curriculum planning to infrastructure communications and design.

The day-long event emphasized the need for ongoing dialogue around how to create environments, practices and policies that meet everyone's needs.

At the same time, it underscored the benefits of creating learning and working environments where all members of the community can feel a sense of belonging in a place where they can do their best work, be their most creative, and make their greatest contributions. The events, conversations will be captured in an upcoming report that provides support and direction to institutions as they make necessary changes across the full range of their activities.

Today, we're honored to share some of the amazing work happening across UofT as a result, and in response to ideas and concerns raised during the national dialogues. In the division of people, strategy, equity, and culture, we have begun development of an employee, peer group for members of the university community with lived experience of disability.

We've collaborated with operations and real estate partnerships on a new facility accessibility, design standard which our AODA officer, Ben Poynton, will tell you more about this morning. and we have introduced new universal design. 101 training that explores how staff faculty, and librarians can embed a universal design into our work, and in turn the university's policies, processes, and services.

These are important steps, and yet there is so much more to be done.

Today we will hear presentations about key initiatives taking place across the tri-campus, followed by a Q&A. Then we'll engage in a group discussion about next step actions that will continue moving us forward, and we'll wrap up, as has been said, with a session of closing remarks from Cherilyn Scobie Edwards, Director of Equity, diversity and inclusion at UofT Scarborough.

I'm really excited to dig deeper into the work of our community that our community has done since the national dialogues and exchange ideas about what comes next. I hope you're you are as well. It's now my pleasure to introduce our next speakers. Please welcome Ben Poynton, AODA Officer and Mladen Pejic Senior Project Manager, Facilities and Services, and Mladen, I hope I pronounced your name correctly my apologies if I didn't.

Ben Poynton

00:14:51

Thank you very much, Alison, for those I remarks, and thank you very much for bringing us into the conversation in the right way, going over what we land last year, and also going over a really powerful land acknowledgment.

So we're going to hear from myself and Mladen first off to talk about the facility access to design standards. I'm just going to share the slides with you that we that we put together to help us sort of understand the purpose of what those design standards were, what they hope to achieve. And ultimately, what has become of them. coming up in the next short while after Mladen and I speak. We'll have opportunity to hear from Catherine Dume, the president of the Accessibility Awareness Club at University of Toronto. Dr. Mahadiyo Sukai, Vice President and Accessibility Officer, and then Chloe Atkins Associate professor at UTSC, and I'll make sure that I introduced the bio appropriately before each of the presentations. So without further ado, I will pull up Mladen and mine presentation.

Okay.

Hopefully. You can see, that's okay. So let me know if you have any issues seeing my screen.

So we have 5, about 7 min. So we're gonna be brief. I definitely want to give you time and chance to get to the other great speakers. So I just wanted to get straight to the purpose of why we needed to do this. And we have a way of thinking about accessibility. And in my role with AODA officer I'm interested in, how do others university respond to add legal requirement under that AODA and its standards, and also the Ontario human rights code.

But also, how can we really meaningfully find ways of going over and above compliance, I would regard compliance as being a beginning of the dialogue, not the end, and we do need to find ways and think about ways in which we can go beyond that compliance. And really.

I think, use AODA in the code as an opportunity to start that dialogue as a way in, but we do have much more to go, and that's really it. a sort of the floor or the basis of compliance. So in thinking about that, we look at different spaces on one area that, like the kind of interest was our institutional accessibility, design standards, and we had noticed that the ones that we did have needed to be rethought, and in many cases they either once in line with current legislation or what was sort of confusing in relationship to them. And also we wanted to really find a way of, can we acknowledge that although the building code in other places have good or relatively okay, standards and

accessibility, how can we go over and above it and really meaningfully address accessibility.

So we started from the principle of seeing accessibility as a shared responsibility. So more than compliance we want to think about, how can we find accessibility in meaningful dialogue. So I offer a quote here from Madeline, a law student who participated in reframing difference podcasts at Hart House did a number of years ago. He said to the Podcast that accessibility is a dialogue, not just a legal application. So what does that dialogue mean when we think about new standards, and how and how we embed them within our processes at the university.

And also, how can we think about knowing that we always can do better. So an approach for mindset to ensuring accessibility is fully considered in all we do is that aspect of always doing better, and also find it in that dialogue and the Human Rights Commission has said, in policies like the policy on Ableism and policy, on an accessible education, that organizations that, knowingly create new barriers for people with disabilities, or take steps that perpetuates existing barriers may violate the code.

So we also wanted to find ways of making sure we were achieving at any future potential requirements under that code that I think that presumes, but also taking our responsibility seriously to look at. How can we really design our spaces? the new spaces that we design and renovate to be as accessible as possible?

So Mladen is going to spend a few, a few months talking through the facility access, but to design standards that that have been proposed, and are almost in the process of being made available and will start to be embedded in our processes. And these are based on universal design and a lot happened during the dialogue about thinking about universal design, how it applies in multiple spaces. how it applies in learning, how it applies in web design, also, how it applies in built environments.

So there are 7 principles. But the 3 key things that I take from universal design are thinking about having The thing that we're designing be used in a way that is the most natural for somebody. So We're thinking about our spaces and places that can be used to the greatest extent possible as many as possible and I think that universe design is the sort of goal. So we do need to think about how we can embed this into our processes. But also, how is the space, flexible in a way that maybe folks who we haven't always anticipated can use that. It anticipates the widest possible range of situations. So there's that adaptability and flexibility again. So we're thinking about how the multiplicity of different people who come through our spaces, and how can we provide for them in a way that has the spaces that are adaptable and flexible.

And also can we think about without need for adaptation of the person instead, How can the environment adapt to them? So the environment can be used without individual adaptation to it or it allows for them to move and have this place be flexible for them.

So with that, I'm going to hand over to Mladen for a few slides on the what is within those design standards.

Mladen Pejic

00:21:15

Oh, thank you. And so I just describe myself quickly. I'm a white male. I have a dark brown hair. I'm wearing a headset. I have a grayish blue shirt on, and my background is blurred.

So the FADS are The principals making up the fads are largely dimensional criteria for accessibility. So This is found in a lot of existing standards like AODA, OBC, CSA, and even CNIB's recommendations this is what largely informs the standards the mostly physical criteria physical dimensions but it, as Ben mentioned, it's also based on the universal design principles. And the facility accessibility, the accessibility design standard that we're that we developed.

Oh, sorry.

That we developed is an adoption of the OCAD universities fads. So we took an existing document and basically edited it for U of T's purposes. But it was heavily edited to suit the particular needs of our campuses and on this slide. There are just 2 pages from the document. So the first one on the left is showing. you know, the typical kind of page that kind of describes the rationale of what this chapters is describing in in this instance, it's access and circulation. So it's a physical criteria for or physical dimensions, for like turning radius or turning spaces, and on the right I'm showing some of the other standards like, we're also going into like signage. And even like the symbols used for that signage. And on the top you can see like. it's showing like the location for accessible tactile signage for rooms and below is the symbol that we're proceeding with for or that we're recommending to be used for access. And it's kind of a blend of the dynamic symbol and the more traditional international symbol of access.

So the next slide and

and the content it's broken up into, I would say 9 major or 9 major sections or the categories. there's the first 4. Just the introductions definitions. scope and kind of just defining what the stand with the tent of the standard is. But the bulk of the content is in the final 5 sections which deal with access to circulation, washroom facilities, other amenities. So those would be like, drinking fountains. changing rooms those kinds of facilities or amenities you find in any building. the fourth major chapter is systems and controls which deals with like signage. heights for controls, like you know, push buttons or alarms and then the last one is facility, specific requirements which deals with things you would find in universities like labs, teaching spaces, residences. So it's very

specific to the university and on the right again, there are 2 pages just showing content from this from these 5 major chapters.

So on the left is a typical ramp and you know, You've probably seen this image and other standards. But it, it is tailored more to. you know this, this, this particular standard, because, you know, we're proposing like larger landings, and we're noting things like the strips at the tops and bottoms of the ramps, you know the railings, the handrails, the you know. Just kind of suited more to universe to a U of Ts needs. And then on the right is something that I developed with Tina Doyle. It's a push button locations for doors. So this isn't in a lot of standards, and it it isn't because it you would think it's kind of a fairly straightforward, you know locate, push buttons, you know, at locations which are fairly accessible but we decided to show this because for a variety of scenarios, because it often is incorrectly applied on projects.

So I work with Tina to think up of a few scenarios for doors. you know whether they are double doors, or whether you know vestibules or doors located, you know, for classrooms. where to locate the push buttons. And these diagrams kind of very clearly illustrate where the ideal locations would be. So we're hoping this will guide architects when they're designing spaces today to, you know, locate things properly as opposed to, or or just like make them aware of how we want things to be done as opposed to just writing it in text and saying, You know, provide a that's what the code typically says. Provide a push button for this door, and it gives you the height and maybe a distance from the door. But it doesn't really show you all the scenarios.

next slide and delving a bit deeper. Ben asked me to show this slide kind of going into a bit more detail about some of the topics in the in the in the Standard, and there's a quite a large chapter on washrooms and again working with Tina. We proposed a kind of a preferred washroom layout So for a multi stall washroom the preference would be to have the accessible washroom at the end. So you use up the full width of the of the washroom space and to have a and for that washroom to have its own lavatory. we're also proposing to have ambulatory stalls, so ambulatory stalls are. They're like regular narrow to toilet stalls, but slightly wider, so you can have a grab-bars on the side. So this is kind of like in between kind of stalls for someone that may be able to walk, but still needs to grab onto something to steady themselves and we did a lot of work on the universal washrooms. So this the standard goes up above and beyond the Ontario building code by requiring them on every floor. again. A lot of these recommendations came from a Tina Doyle. she has a lot of experience working with students. So one requirement was also to have a full down grab bars in every washroom.

We clarified like toilet backrest dimensions. This was something that I was surprised wasn't in any standard. these are typically just you know, blocks behind the toilet to allow someone to rest their back when they're using it there's also a clarification of a tactile signage, and I made sure to align this with our other standards. So you have to actually has a caretaking standard out door hardware standard. So there's alignment with all of those standards to ensure that You know what we're saying. Stating in this standard is not contravening something in in another standard, and again on the right 2

pages from the FADS. So on the left is a typical multi-stall washroom layout, and on the right is a universal washroom layout.

Okay, next slide, and once we had a fairly complete draft of this documents once we you know I I did once we had our meetings. you know I, spent a several meetings with Tina. you know, going into, you know, these issues, making sure that we had enough content in there. We published the document online for a community consultation which lasted roughly 2 months and there was a lot of feedback. There were actually 90 plus responses. And a third of those actually had written comments.

There were a lot of complaints that the standard did not go far enough in terms of like environmental sensitivities, or, you know, even signage and other things that are very specific But we will eventually get to that. It's just that for the time being, because we adopted it from the OCAD U fads It was kind of difficult to shoehorning that into those standards. And again, we were also kind of pressed for time. To just editing. The document itself was a was a quite a task and many of the comments that were made I have incorporated into the fats. So I actually just sent it to a few weeks ago to the consultant to make the final revisions but the next iterations of the standard which we have to update them every 3 years, or that's what we've written into the standard that they would be updated every 3 years. I will definitely incorporate more of these comments about like a indoor air quality lighting signage. even things for you know. neural diverse kind of Considerations like for autism. We would definitely want to incorporate them into the standard for the future.

Okay.

Ben Poynton

00:30:44

Okay, thank you very much. Mladen. So that comes to the end of our presentation just as a quick couple of notes. the standard well, when it's adopted applied as it says on the consultation to tri campus, and I think I hope that we can start to anticipate that more of the buildings that are renovated or built or will all start to reflect these standards.

Both Mladen and myself, and, as you mentioned Tina, I've already been doing work to try to make sure that we are aware of these standards where we need to be, and already starting to build it into systems and processes. So thank you very much. And I really hope that this is again the beginning. As Mladen says, there's been a lot of feedback, but we always want to be consultative and try to make sure that we're reflecting our community and the standards that we do design.

So I just want to introduce our next speaker. which I, if I'm correct in the order is going to be Catherine Dume. I'm just going to give you the chance to learn a bit more about Catherine and the great work that she's doing at the University. So Catherine is present, I think maybe outgoing president of the U of T's Accessibility. Awareness Club. Catherine is a 4th year Student, majoring in political science, and has a double minor in history and writing and rhetoric. She is very busy. She's a co-founder and the former president of the University of Toronto Accessibility Awareness Club also did an accessibility feature correspondent staff for the Varsity paper, and I encourage everybody to look up the piece that Catherine wrote. It was a really great, fair, and detailed piece on the accessibility of certain spaces at the St. George campus, and also Catherine is now the new student co-chair for the accessibility Services Advisory Committee and a member of the Student Life Advisory Council and Catherine, says that as a student with the disability she is dedicated to spreading awareness, and advocating better for accessibility, for better accessibility at the university, and to continuous studies in accessibility policy. So with that, I invite Catherine to to the virtual stage, and to present to us on your work. Thank you very much, Catherine.

Catherine Dume

00:33:05

Thank you Ben for that wonderful introduction. Let me just quickly share my screen.

Awesome. So Today I will be talking a little bit about what U-TAAC is, which is the University of Toronto Accessibility Awareness Club or just UTAAC. and we are going to just talk a little bit about a conference that we hosted back in March that was about ableism in the classroom and the main takeaways that were brought in from that conference. And what a lot of not only students, faculty, and staff have been sort of like suggesting, in terms of like next steps to run the University to do

So just for you to have a little sense of what UTAAC is in case you are unfamiliar. the University of Toronto, the awareness club. essentially is a community of students with disabilities that aim to spread awareness about disability issues and creative safe space for students to connect with each other, as well as offering a lot of disability perspectives on several projects, such as renovation projects that are happening at UofT, just for example, and just overall trying to keep the University accountable to its commitments.

So the Ableism in the Classroom Conference happened on March 29th of this past year, and it was a very successful event that brought together students, faculty, and staff. on the screen We do have some wonderful pictures from the events. Some of our speakers and panelists, as well as one of our sponsors, is this accessibility services which were very important in terms of who was there. We had 50 people in person, 60 virtual, so that about 120 people attended this event. we had different attendees from different campuses as well as colleges, such as University of York, TMU, George Brown and Queens.

We have 14 speakers that basically represented the accessibility services staff we had faculty members as well as students, from different to both undergrad and graduate students who were able to speak about their experiences, and we also had important speakers. Such as the faculty of arts and science vice dean, Bill Ju, the UofT AODA Officer Ben Poynton and the director of accessibility services. to not only attend the event, but also to speak about their expertise.

So let me just take go through a couple of the different takeaways from that event.

One of the biggest ones that came out from the very beginning was this issue of disability, disclosure, and stigma. Now, as a student with disability, I'm sure it's very familiar to many of you where disability disclosure is an issue where students feel like they have the amount of pressure to disclose their disability, provide a lot of personal details in order to justify an extension in this class, or meeting open and form the participation and other accommodations to professors. because we feel like, if we don't tell them that about our medical history, they're not going to believe us that we need our accommodations, and so on and so forth.

This, of course, can make things very stressful for students. and once student, disclose. There's always a stigmatization where, as their peers in the classroom might treat them differently, or the TA or the professor might also treat them differently. And so, if there's always a gamble of whether to disclose or not disclose when talking about getting accommodation.

To sort of talk about that issue, or the other big topic that came up was the training of faculty. Now at U of T. Every Ta and professor are expected to be trained and complete. Basic AODA training at UofT to work there.

However, there seemed to be a bit of a discrepancy between the different groups when discussing accessibility training. For instance, we had a student who felt that their professors or TA, was not adequately equipped to address their accessibility crises, or requests. One. Ta admitted that you didn't receive any training, and I just want to put that in air quotes because we're not really sure when he became a TA, and that might have changed in regards to that.

But even though he did admit that during the conference, I just wanted to acknowledge that. However, at the same time, though we had the AODA office and accessibility services clarify that you UofT as recently as 2021 has Updated their training modules and does have like regular training every month for the professors and TA's to complete.

At the same time, though we have professors. one professor said that she received AODA training, but it was not consistent, and would have like more in depth, training that was not exclusive to her discipline in disability studies, because, you know, she does disability studies. Of course she's going to take more in-depth training and so on. But you know not every single professor is going to be in that field. There's going to be

people who do political science or medical science and other disciplines that is not specifically disability related, and would have preferred more in depth in regards to that.

At the same time though we had according to Ben Poynton. And of course Ben you can always correct me on this. But you said that there's within the past 5 years we've had 20 to 30,000 training completion, and just to give you a little of a scale in 2020 we had about 15,000 faculty members. Now, I don't know about you, but if every 5 years we have 15,000 roughly faculty members having 20 to 30 thousand accessibility training, completion seems a bit low. According to, I mean, it might change a little bit. But within the past 5 years, my, we might need to step that up in my opinion.

Now, another thing, that kind of came up. was the topic of updating syllabus and course delivery, especially within a post COVID-19 world, where we had a lot of push for more accessibility in that space.

There have been 2 professors who have been through with that I know personally who've been experimenting with trying to find new ways of making their classrooms more accessible for their students stuff such as providing multiple course delivery methods in person online, asynchronous, perhaps hybrid, and even recorded and captioned lectures. removing late penalties or providing a fighting deadlines where within a 2 week period, students are free to hand in their assignments. without any penalty or having group no taking. Instead of having to basically force students to request volunteers to the note takers since most students don't really like to do that. In the first place, or just offering different forms of participation, so that students don't always have to feel pressured to participate in class and just overall. It's making sure to students know, and they don't have to disclose the disability in a way to get an accommodation, because, again, a lot of students have this understanding that they have to do that in order to get an accommodation when really they don't need to, and a lot of professors may not understand that connection, or the students cannot understand that connection.

Now, this is something a bit brand new to me, and I feel like we might need to do a bit more research into it. But one thing that a professor mentioned when doing a little bit of a debrief was that when it comes to professor evaluations there seems to be a bit of ableist tactics that are through underlying that now for those who are unfamiliar. Professor evaluations or yearly reports are just like a point system where it rewards professors for doing publications, talks, committee work and other programming things that are connected to their program, and so on. And the more points that they could accrue for doing all of this work. in the past year. Sort of it tied to their salary. However, the Professor noted that there seems to be an any attention that is connected to accessibility both in and out of the classroom, is not quote on quote legible in the report or evaluation.

Now I'm not sure about the report, but in when I searched up the evaluation that a lot of students fill out for their professors at the end of the term.

A lot of the questions don't seem to address accessibility, and don't really have a lot of room where students can just sort of like, say, Hey, this class was not accessible to me if they wanted to. They have to write a paragraph into the filling out a quantitative form. And again, a lot of people don't like to fill out those forms. It's exhausting and they wouldn't want to do it. So it's really there's a little bit of Ableism going on in that particular evaluation. And so it's really just something to consider for that.

So overall the able in the classroom conference demonstrated that in order for UofT address able them in university again, everyone like this conference event. We should have students, faculty and staff to be involved and have continuous conversation to integrate next steps.

Another thing to do, not only to improve on the existing accessibility structure, but also to have the opportunity to think of big and have imaginations of what accessibility at UofT look like, and not just the typical stuff. When I think about that, I mean, not just only in academics and accessibility services and professors and teams, but also in student life. You know, creating a permanent space for connection and celebration of disability and advocacy within the disability community at UofT and ultimately recognizing that accessibility issues are not just affecting students with disabilities, but also everyone can benefit from having accessibility in their university.

Thank you.

Ben Poynton

00:44:50

Thank you so much, Catherine, for providing a really deep analysis of what happened in your Ableism in the Classroom conference, and for such a succinct but clear sort of overview of what themes came out of it.

On training, the numbers are a bit different in terms of like. How many people we try and how many people started. However, the point is taken that we can always be doing more to make sure folks are aware of the needs, necessity to take that training that they have to. And also it may be worth referring to, and I'm going to share some links, maybe towards the end of referring to the new post-secondary Standards Development Committee's recommendations on post-secondary accessibility. And what they add in around training is far more thorough than the existing AODA requirements. But we'll have more chance to discuss those things, I think, in the Q. And A and the group discussion. But thank you so much, Catherine, I really appreciate you taking the time and energy to provide such a great presentation to us.

So next we're going to move on to Dr. Mahadeo Sukhai who is going to give us a presentation looking into some of the research work that he's been doing and support.

He's been providing to researchers at the University, but also to give us a bit more have a bit more time to talk through some of the procurement work he's been doing, which is outside the university, but definitely will have applicability to what we're doing. And I think hopefully, we'll speak to the importance of thinking about procurement because it does actually impact everybody impact students, faculty staff librarians. If we don't buy things that are accessible.

So, as a quick introduction to Mahadeo, Dr. Mahadeo is the world's first congenitively blind geneticists. He is Vice President, research and international affairs and Chief Accessibility Officer at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, or CNIB. Having previously served as a researcher at the University Health network in Toronto.

Dr. Sukhai also has adjunct faculty appointments at Queens University, OCAD University and Ontario Tech University. He's a chair of the employment Technical Committee for accessibility done of Canada as well as an external co-chair of the CAHR. Expert Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Systemic Abelism. The of the Canada Institute for Health Research.

In his role at CNIB, Mahdeo leads significant research program focused on social determinants of health and inclusion for people living with sight loss in Canada as chief Accessibility officer. Mahadeo also leads organizational culture change initiatives on accessibility and inclusion for CNIB. And I'm delighted to welcome to the space. And I'm really looking forward to your presentation today. Thank you.

Mahadeo Sukhai

00:47:39

Thank you very much, Ben. Good morning, everybody. I'm going to share my screen. and hopefully, this will work effectively right there we are. So everyone should be able to interact with a really bright yellow background with the CNIB logo that, says CNIB foundation quality of life for blind and low vision persons.

Along with my name, my title, and actually, what's tomorrow's date? But that should be today's date. minor typographical error what Ben didn't mention in in the Bio is that I'm a 3 time alumnus of the University of Toronto, having gotten my bachelors. My master's my Ph. D. From the university and having been deeply involved in a lot of the accessibility work at the University more or less continuously over the past 20 years. so I'm really pleased to be able to spend some time with you today and have this conversation.

With respect to the work that's ongoing within CNIB research and focusing specifically on the work that we're doing around accessible procurement as a research and idea conversation. First of all, I am going to start by acknowledging that understanding the

quality of life of blind and low vision persons is a transdisciplinary science. There is an image on the left of the slide, and it's a series of concentric circles. And in the interest of time, what I will. What I will say about this is that what we've called out is that there is an interaction between the person and their physiology, their neurology and their access to functional rehabilitation and health care. And the systems that surround that person in terms of education employment physical access, access to information, access to technology, access to social services, access to health care, and that that interaction between the person and their environment really helps to define both the social inclusion, conversation, and the well-being conversation of that person. This is a model that was created by Dr. Lisa Ham, at the University of Auckland, and myself.

In, sort of thinking about thinking about the interaction between the person and the system. And so this interaction between the individual and their environment really, leads them to this notion of well-being and social inclusion.

That's the fundamental research premise that the CNIB Research team undertakes as CNIB research is and will be in the future an international center of excellence for person centered in systems focused accessibility research. And we're building it into a world class leader in knowledge, sharing about the quality of life and lived experience the persons who are blind, deaf, blind, low vision, and visually impaired around the world.

We recognize the power of the interaction between the person and the systems they live in, and fostering accessibility, inclusion, and participation in society, as well as the synergy, and both understanding and action that comes from asking the same questions, using the same research methods in many different parts of the world.

The Department has 5 very specific objectives. First, is to collaborate with the research community and understanding the intersection between blindness on social determinants of health. through an intersectional accessibility, lens to develop a longitudinal understanding of the impact of rehabilitation and programmatic interventions on social determinants of health. For persons who are blind, deaf, blind, low vision are visually impaired to carry out systems, level research, to understand and propose solutions to prevent and or remove barriers to participation in society experienced by persons who are blind, deaf mind, low vision, or visually impaired to compile and curate a global encyclopedia of blindness and to educate relevant stakeholders about key findings arising from our research endeavors.

We operate as a grant funded academic research department in a non-profit space. a number of the pieces of work that were grant funded. that are completed or in progress, and I will reference 2 of them in this conversation. So we've done work on building an evidence basis for universal design in the workplace which I will reference. in this conversation we've just completed a project on guide dog access barriers in Canada, which was the first of its kind anywhere and we've also done work on inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility in the consent process. work in progress includes work on accessible procurement that Ben referenced, that will come back up in this

conversation. accessible and explainable artificial intelligence, responsible conduct of research. around accessibility and inclusion, principles, accessibility, competencies in the workplace and digital literacy in early childhood.

A lot of this is work funded by accessibility standards Canada with some funding received from the office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada and the employment and social development Canada as well.

In terms of our person, centered research. We're focused on a generational, longitudinal study that is currently under development as well as a number of cross-sectional studies on levels of employment. K to 12 and post-secondary education outcomes technology utilization COVID-19 impact the accessibility of online learning, various, to participation in society access to information in the workplace and access to health care. We've also engaged as active research partners, and co-knowledge generators.

With the partnership for inclusive research and learning that was actually a housed within rehabilitation sciences at the University of Toronto. The idea Social Innovation Laboratory, which is led by McMaster University, but a number of the leads are also cross-appointed to the Institute of Work and Health at the University of Toronto, The Canadian disability participation projects to one of the leads of which is also at the University of Toronto, and a collective on accessible and inclusive technology for citizenship that we're building with folks at Ontario tech University.

In terms of capacity building, we will take in and mentor trainee researchers with disabilities and we will provide an accessible inclusive research training program to the about 2 dozen trainees that we get who come through our space annually, and I will just acknowledge that 70% of the researchers, myself included are researchers with disabilities on the team.

I am going to talk a little bit about accessible procurement and reference, both the employment project and the procurement project as I do this because the first question that usually comes off is, Why do we care about accessible procurement and then establishing a rationale for this, I think I think we really need to take a systems level approach to what goes on in organizations today. First of all, the employment rate for persons with disabilities is significantly lower than the overall population, and this is a number that is influenced by type of disability and severity of disability, as well as whether one identifies as living with multiple disabilities. Accessible employment is often considered in what I would call a transactional mode, and Catherine did a really good job highlighting and talking about the barriers that exist and the ableism that exist in in classroom practice.

A lot of that actually translates into the employment setting as well. and what ends up happening is when we negotiate the conversation around accessibility supports. I loath the word accommodation, and therefore I refuse to use it. Accessibility supports are really negotiated between the employer and the employee as a as a one-on-one kind of

conversation, absolutely neglecting the fact that this person, this worker with lived experience, doesn't actually operate in a vacuum. The successful use of accessibility supports does not correlate, does not translate to success. And worker satisfaction in their in their employment role. A lot of that comes down to ableism and attitudes and also to technology, and so one of the things that we cultivated was this notion of the ecosystem of employment, which effectively says something that we all understand. But we don't really apply in the conversation around accessibility. First of all, a worker interacts with a whole bunch of people in the organization. They interact with their manager. They interact with their teammates, their peers, their collaborators inside the organization, their collaborators outside the organization, the stakeholders that they work with and their customers and clients.

But in addition to that, a worker uses a bunch of things within the context of the work that they do. They use internal business systems. They use third party digital tools. They use virtual meeting platforms. They use software specifically required for their job. They use online learning management systems. They use training material. They use a built environment, including furniture and signage. They use information technology, including phones, laptops, desktops, and so on, and unfortunately, what ends up happening is when we talk about accessibility supports. We focus on what the worker needs to do their job. We don't really focus on the ecosystem in which the worker inhabits. And so there is this interactional barrier. Then that is often not considered in the provision of accessibility supports, and that is the how of the interaction among the worker and their support, and the ecosystem of employment. And again, that gets down to interacting with people interacting with technology interacting with space, interacting with resources. And within the first year of doing the Universal Design and the Workplace project.

Having come to this conclusion, we decided we need to do something about it, and that got us to the accessible procurement project and so coming back to why accessible procurement? the procurement of products and goods and services that are out of the blocks accessible in air quotes, or can be made accessible with effort and time, then really helps to address the interaction barriers within the ecosystem of employment that I just identified to you.

So in, in in doing work on accessible procurement, the question really becomes, Is there a model? And the answer is yes and no And so, so historically, we could lean on things like green and sustainable procurement as a model. We could lean on social, socially responsible, or broader outcomes procurement as a model, we could talk about Indigenous procurement. We can talk about inclusive procurement.

The challenge with inclusive procurement is the concept of inclusive procurement focuses much more on gender and much less about disability, inclusion. And also, when we think about procurement, we, we're, we're thinking, not just in terms of supply chain diversity, not just in terms of people with lived experience who happen to be vendors or business owners. But we're also talking about the people who are actually, and I'm going to use the euphemism going shopping right? So, so very much. This is

about who's going shopping, and what are you going shopping for? And is accessibility, part and parcel of the going shopping process.

Today, the answer is, well, no. Most places wouldn't dream of thinking about accessibility in the going shopping process, or, if you're thinking about it, who does to you? But you're thinking about it from that perspective of. I've got one person with a visual impairment in my classroom, or, you know, there's maybe 2 people who are using a wheelchair, or a scooter, or a walker or a cane who might need that ramp. And so at some point, it becomes this numbers game thing. It becomes this, add on and it's the first thing to get cut when money gets tight.

Right? And so one of the things that we evolved in the work that we're doing on the accessible procurement project today is this notion of the accessible procurement life cycle, and it's illustrated by a bit of a zig-zaggy flow chart on the slide, and so we've conceived of accessible procurement as starting in the upper left here with planning and budgeting, moving down the first column.

From planning and budgeting, we move into requirements and specifications and ensuring that accessibility is embedded in the requirements and specifications. That's a bit of an iterative process, because as we develop specifications, the budget changes as the budget changes, the specifications will change. And so, we need to make sure that accessibility is embedded so that we're able to pay for it.

Moving on from requirements and specifications, we go to sourcing and solicitation. And we say, all right. So let's go out and see who's able to get us. The thing that we want in and out of the box way, or who's willing to work with us and build a relationship around making something that is iteratively accessible. and is anti-ableist in its construction and its application.

Moving from solicitation on to evaluation. we, we start to talk about who's giving us the right information? Who's allowing us to evaluate the product to service that we want to. that that we want to consider purchasing through that lens of accessibility.

Once we've identified who the who the right vendors are going to be. We've evaluated the product. We've evaluated the solicitation the bid We've said this is the person we want to work with. We start to talk about contracting and contract management. Then we come back around to implementation testing, which is different from different from, but related to, the testing that we would have done earlier. Where we know we've evaluated the base accessibility of the product, and we've set to vendors. Are you willing to work with us to make it more accessible? Or can we build a relationship around how to identify accessibility workarounds for this thing going forward, the vendor says, yes, we move into contract and contract management, but then when it's time to implement this thing now, they've hopefully done some work to make it more accessible, we need to go back in. We need to continue to re-evaluate the product in order to make sure that we understand. These are all the use cases that everyone's gonna have.

This is how we put this thing into service, and then from that point, we start talking about relationship manage with management with the vendor performance management of the product. We start talking about training documentation and learning but then we also have to talk about quality assurance and ongoing evaluation of the product to service. And we have to talk about risk assessments. And so this 10 step cycle comprises the accessible procurement life cycle.

Some of the key findings from the work that we've done so far. During our research we found that inclusive procurement addresses more to gender and rationalized minorities, doesn't really talk about disability in the supply chain. There's a general lack of awareness, tools, training and support on accessible procurement. There's very few people who do it well. There is very few standards that we can point to, and the standards that we can point to. Don't talk about the process, but rather talk about the product.

There is a lack of consistent standards and regulation not just in this country, but internationally, there are significant gaps in implementing accessible procurement due to public sector structure and attitudes behind decision making and current accountability frameworks.

There's also a need to set the mindset from buying for accessibility to buying with accessibility throughout the procurement process by making persons with lived experience a part of that process. A one. Science fits all approach, does not work as procured good services and facilities should consider consumer perspectives. there's strong evidence that smaller enterprises in particular micro enterprises for your face more constraints in this space than medium enterprises or large enterprises? Do they also show a greater lack of knowledge of procurement, principles, and opportunities, and the public procurement process itself is not accessible.

And so when we actually talk about public procurement and bidding from the supply chain perspective that becomes a problem. There's a lack of procurement policies and accountability frameworks that would ensure that relevant goods and services acquired or accessible or do not create new barriers. We couldn't find any effective accessibility and inclusion strategy which address the need to consider the entire value chain from procurement to product design and production all the way to sales and marketing, and there is a need to revamp contract language, evaluation and risk assessment frameworks and the content of accessibility and inclusion and procurement, all of that to say, there are no good models.

And so for the purpose of the research that we're doing. We've actually had to evolve models. and I've offered you a bit of a framework with respect to accessible procurement lifecycle. I'm happy to talk more during the question and answer period. My email address is Mahadeo.sukhai@cnib.ca, and I can also be found on LinkedIn. So, I'm happy to continue the conversation digitally as well.

Back to you, Ben.

Ben Poynton

01:04:11

Thank you so much, Mahadeo for providing us with such a thorough appreciation. We're behind. So I'm just going to move straight on. We can ask Mahadeo questions in the Q. A. But again, thank you. That was a really thorough presentation. So our next presenter is Professor Chloe Atkins. I'm going to read their bio really, quickly, and we can look for a really great presentation.

So, Chloe Atkins is an associate professor and primary investigator of the proud project on under Employment and disability which is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Department of National Defense Research Council of Canada, Tech Nation. Catherine Frederick Eaton, Family Foundation, UofT. Global teaching grant and private donors.

Chloe writes about disability, bioethics, health, equity, management of and difficulty, diagnosed illness, vulnerable identities human rights, phenomenological, and narrative scholarships. Chloe offered my imaginary illness, Cornell 2010, receiving 3 prizes: the American Journal of Nursing Book of the year 2011, and May Co. and lecture in Women's Health Faculties, Health Science, McMaster University and the fifth annual Sue McCray lecture on ethics and Patient-centered care at UofT.

Please join me in welcoming A to the virtual stage, and I'm really looking forward to your presentation. Thank you.

Chloë Atkins

01:05:40

Thanks so much, and I will try. Thank you. The everybody else as well. I will try to be brief, because we are behind. I provided quite a detailed slide show so. But what I'll do is talk more generally, and those who are interested can go back and have a look at the slides. in in more detail. What I'm going to do quickly is I'm going to share my screen.

I should probably introduce myself a little bit. I am, I identify as queer as a queer, disabled, academic and author and I'm wearing, I'm a middle-aged woman, wearing, with short hair, I'm often mistaken for a man. So maybe in my age I'm what is called androgenous. If I was young now, I might identify as non-binary. But my pronouns, or she and her and I think that's enough for the moment and now I'm just going to do the slideshow.

Okay. So, I've run something, called the proud project. phenomenological basically talks about experience, so it's called, it stands for phenomenological research of underrepresented or under employed disabled adults. And I've been looking at 5 countries, Canada, the US. England, France, and Belgium. And what I'm doing here today is just I wanted to talk about some of the things I've learned and how they work, perhaps in the, at UofT and in the university environment. So, one of the things and Mahadeo made reference to this was that despite that fact, we have lots of law that is meant to encourage the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce.

Those laws and their adoption have not increased the rates of people with disabilities and their employment in actually almost all the countries that I that I looked at. So, what I did was this, actually let me go back, I don't know. I I'll go back one. So, one of the things I should say is, this comes out of my own experience as a person with a disability. I have a chronic illness that is episodic, and it affects all sorts of things. I can. I have very wide, wide range of functions, so I can lose my eyesight, I can lose my respiration. I can become a total card. And yet another days I can pass this totally normal. It's a very rare illness. As a result. What I discovered is that when I appeared disabled, when I used crutches when I was using a wheelchair I couldn't really get employment, or the employment environment became very difficult if I did have a job, whereas with the exact same CV when I appeared normal or an able bodied, I received multiple offers, some of them, from the very same firms who had not looked at me when I was disabled was when I was seemingly disabled, so that really raised the issue for me, that if people with apparent and evident disabilities really have much greater barriers than at least in getting into the workforce than people with it invisible ones. I'm not saying, people's invisible or non-evident disabilities have it easier. I'm just saying that the issues are different.

So I wanted to speak to individuals. who succeeded in the workforce despite the fact that they had evident disabilities. So that They couldn't mask or hide their disabilities the way I can sometimes. And I wanted to speak to them in 5 different democracy. So I chose Canada, The US, UK. France and Belgium, and I did that largely because I can speak French and English, and the 2 official languages in Canada are French and English and these were in depth interviews. We also, tried to speak to employers about their experience of employing people with disabilities. We had a harder slog of that, employers were less willing to speak to us.

But I just, these slides here, there are 2 slides on this 2 graphs on this slide. One of them shows the percentages of where I've interviewed. I'm just completing the interviews in the UK. As you can see, we're a little bit lower than the rest at 13%, whereas the other countries have around it, between 17 and 19% of our interviews. There's a whoppingly large amount in in Canada 33%. That's because I started the the project there. And we really were getting our feet wet. We really wanted to understand how we were going to run this project in both languages. And also I was training disabled research is some disabled graduate students as well.

In terms of gender, we are pretty lucky. We basically split about half and half with about 3% were non-binary. With regard to the types of disabilities I started to talk about traits and disability, in part because the work I done across these 3 years doing this project I learned a very good phrase that is used in French, which I quite like which is the in French you refer to as 'personne en situation aux handicappe' which means person in a disabling context which makes the focus on the environment rather than on what the individual is.

It's, I find, quite interesting. anyway. So I'm referring the types of plates here at the different people had. So we had a large larger percentage of vision impaired, and those with cerebral policy. And it starts to get smaller little bits, neuro, muscular diseases, and spinal cord diseases. We're a little bit lower than that. But at the same level we had a number of people with hearing impairments in general bone disease, limb deformities and amputations. We'd brain injury only 2 people. And then, finally, we had one with juvenile arthritis month. I wanted to share this part of sort of our demographics, because it's really quite remarkable is that across all 5 countries. This level of education.

That level of educational attainment in all 5 countries, was extraordinary. Was it outstripped each of their sort of the standard for that country. So this slide demonstrates that it shows that if I look at this, I think sort of 90% of the people we interviewed have post-secondary education. as you can see, many, many had a graduate or professional degrees, and those who did not have her secondary or elementary education. It was largely because their jurisdictions in their region did not provide accessible education. But when there was education that people could access, they actually outswept the standard in their region. So if we look at Canada, which has the highest rate of post-secondary degrees in in these 5 nations, it hovers around 76, and we had 100% of people we interviewed who had post-secondary education, and it goes down from there. All the other countries have lower rates of general, the general population of educational attainment and the UK, the US. And Canada. We're at a hundred percent of all people we interviewed with disabilities. We're in the workforce at Post-secondary and in France and Belgium they were both above 80%.

So what were the lessons We learned about working people. What about working people living in disabling context? One we learned how resilient and adaptive and flexible and creative individuals with disabilities where one of my comments. My graduate students early on, was said, I'm not a psychologist, that we're not trading psychological research. But, my God, these individuals are extraordinary. And I said, Well, I'm a political scientist. They are extraordinary, I mean, really was quite remarkable along with their very high levels of educational attainment. Was that they just showed a capacity to find to problem solve, to find their way around things to be persistent and I said our interest was in in trying to figure out what in their environments had supported, that resilience and persistence.

The other main thing that we found was that really the concentration, the effort that needs to go forward in terms of trying to establish things was that established more

inclusive workplaces was that able-bodied people in the workplace needed mentorship, or what the French called, 'sensibilization' and it was they that who stood in the way of actually truly in inclusive making things inclusive.

So the other aspect that I'm going to talk about quickly, which really was remarkable, was that we discovered that if you actually have laws and all of, as I said, all of these jurisdictions have laws with regard to employment, equity, and inclusion in the workforce, but only one country was enforcing them, and that was France, and as a result there was far more effort being made as a result, to include people in the workforce, and there were. They're audited annually. A company of over 20 salary employees is audited annually, and they pay a fine if they do not have 6% of the workforce. That is, that that qualifies as disabled. Now there are all sorts of issues around that. But one thing we found was that employers were far more interested in speaking to us about what they were working on in order to meet this metric and They were the ones who had identified. These were very large international firms that, in fact, they needed to address middle management, and they needed to address attitude, change of able-bodied coworkers and middle managers.

Also at a more sort of micro level, going back to the individuals with disabilities or in the workforce. What they require is financial stability. They need to make sure that they are able to launch themselves into the workforce and take the risk of the adequate supports have to be in place, and not punitive ones. A lot of disability pensions penalize people for working, or some, in fact, just presume that in fact. they will. People will not work, and therefore don't set them up to work. another big factor and Mahadeo was talking about. This is the heavy reliance and the use of it and technology tools and the importance of actually maintaining these tools. it and technology have made the workforce far more accessible. And it allows people to be far more productive. But if employers don't step up and maintain those resources, then the products and video those individuals starts to falter. Who really lean on that work. Lean on those tools.

So one of the things I think we can all do is support government disability supports because they help people launch themselves into the workforce. we also should be supporting accessible transport and accessible housing. It is not just up to employers to do this. We, as a community, need to encourage more universally designed communities.

Again, we found very high educational attainment. And the other final thing is that your policies all have to align. So you may have an Hr. Policy that you want to hire more people with disabilities, but that has to go along with a communications policy, not one that's just facing the public. I, as is in the AODA, which requires that public facing interactions need to be accessible, but internal communications need to be accessible. And actually, we very quickly adopted that ethos on our team. We are still learning is that all of our internal communications, emails, everything we share within ourselves. As a team, or everything is made, we, we make sure that it's accessible, so that someone who uses any tools, IT tools that require that if they come on board that there's no there's no issues. All of our documentation everything we've done has been

accessible from the from the start. It's an accessible and accommodated environment in that sense, and also procurement. needs to be so. Everything that we buy or thinking about buying or integrating has to be universally designed and fit. What we've already, what we're all what's already being done with regard to access. And this was true. for these, these employers as well, this employee environment.

So finally, what, how can you support disability inclusion workplaces? We did also note that leadership comes from above. There has to be a drive from above that wants to do this. You need to then work on changing workplace culture. And that's the middle management enable bodied people's is just the inherent ableism trying to address it across the board, in, in your, in your culture, and in your physical and your all sorts of aspects of your environment. Sorry I'm not being so clear today. you need to maintain your it. And technological resource investment needs to be ongoing in order to make people, allow people, to continue to be protected. You again need to make for your policies align. You're hiring policy align. You're inclusive, hiring policy aligns with an inclusive IT policy which aligns with an inclusive internal communications policy which aligns with an internal procurement policy.

And in the end, when we spoke to these firms, what was apparent that when they made accommodations in the end they benefited everyone. I can think of one example, which is at one TV station. They finally put on an automated door for a quadriplegic, who was a receptionist and it was constantly being used by Staff, who are moving equipment around and made things a lot better.

The other thing we found is that it's important that we enforce the laws that we have, and currently most jurisdictions. We don't. They're made that there's really no oversight. And where there's oversight it seems to be changing things fundamentally. So we as members as citizens of our communities and our workplaces. We need to encourage the enforcement of public regulations, the external ones as well as internal ones as well, not in a in a sort of draconian manner, but in a way that we adopted these laws or policies, and that therefore we should actually make sure that we follow through with it. All these firms have learned a great deal from the flexibility that they'd had to adopt during Covid and they had also discovered in large part actually a couple of French firms since they were being fined, and they'd re they'd sort of re-focus their energies. a couple of them and these. These are people who work all over the world, these very large firms, they said. You know that they felt that the disabled workers that they had hired were extraordinarily well qualified, worked very hard, were highly adaptive, and were high value, and that they saw that the future of the workforce this was an untapped labor pool that they really wanted to incorporate into their future.

Finally, we, as members of any community. I think we really need to support universally design communities. so we can talk about the university. But if it if there isn't good transportation coming to the University. That's accessible all the time, not it. Just specific hours. And if we don't encourage universally designed housing, both in private and public builds. Then people have no place to live. If they can't leave their house, they can't get to a job and they can't work.

Finally, I just wanted to say, Thank you for listening. And we have a podcast. Called broadcastability, the first season it's bilingual. We have a couple of sessions in French and some in English, and there we've talked to people with disabilities who are employed in Canada season. 2 is being recorded this this summer, and we'll be speaking to people in all these other countries, and they will also be in French and English.

Thank you very much.

Ben Poynton

01:20:54

Thank you very much for that. Some really amazing research that you've been doing some really key tools and tips that I think we can all learn from, especially the university. And so we're way over time, which is probably a pitfall of asking amazing people to speak for 5 to 7 min, which is obviously not going to work, but that's okay. That's on us.

So we have time now for Q. A. I think I'm going go rogue and suggest that we hold Q. A. For 12, until 12:30 have a break, and then see how we do then, and use the group discussion time to continue the dialogue if we wish, with the panelists but then also really try to find some time to engage in a in a deeper conversation about our next steps.

So I'm going to. Delighted to introduce Amanda Weaver, who is going to be handing the Q. A. For us over the next 5 min before our break, and then we'll help again afterwards. So Amanda is the inaugural Director of Equity. Diversity, and inclusion at the school of continuing studies on the St. George campus her has been heavily focused on human resources, respect in the workplace, human rights, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.

She's gained experience working in multiple sectors, such as health care, manufacturing, government services and now education. Amanda is a graduate of Wilfrid Laurier University, with his honor, honors, bachelor of business administration, and certified human resource, leader and hold executive certificate and conflict management from Windsor University School of law.

In all aspects of her life. Amanda is a strong proponent of the importance of inclusive language, respect, and dignity for all understanding, the layers of intersectionality, and advocating and or being an ally for those experiencing injustice or an inequities in our communities. And so thank you for joining us today, Amanda, and good luck with the Q&A, and I think we have some prepared but feel free to as an audience use Q&A we

have some already come in and we have some prepared as well, but feel free to get your questions enough for the panelists about their amazing work.

Amanda Weaver

01:23:03

Excellent! Thank you very much, Ben. Hello, everyone a pleasure to be here today. as Ben mentioned, my name is Amanda Weaver. My pronouns are she her I am a white woman with long brown hair. Today I'm wearing a blue, black and white polk-a-dot shirt. My background is blurred. And I just like to say, Thank you. A big global. Thank you to all of the presenters today for your excellent comments and info sharing and the research that you're doing In progressing further in this in this space being here today, just extremely briefly. But being here today is very meaningful for me, as I have a son who has a rare genetic condition and multiple disabilities related to that genetic condition. So, any opportunity that I have to participate in these discussions and learn is really meaningful for me. So to kick off the question and answer kind of global discussion period has been said, you are welcome to include some questions for the presenters in the chat.

To kick off the Q&A, I'd like to start with Catherine if I can and just going back to the December 2022 session that we had where there was a a strong conversation about disability culture being essential about ensuring that disability as an identity is interwoven and a lot of what you've talked about today is that many students, faculty and staff still have concerns about disclosing their disability or requesting accommodations. Mahadeo, I pause on that word just because they reflect on what you shared about the use of that word but disclosing their disability because it perceived, and or real negative repercussions that come with the culture of academic ableism.

What immediate steps. Can colleagues and institutional leaders take to address the negative impact that this culture has on the health, well-being and career development of these members in our community?

Catherine Dume

01:25:07

Okay, thank you for that. And I just noticed that I did not properly reintroduce myself in terms of description. So, for those who would like it. I am in Black student with short bob hair and an a wearing a yellow shirt And I have a white boring background.

To answer your question about disability disclosure, I think what the next steps, or if any student who is trying to navigate that situation in terms of an academic situation. Well, 1 one first thing is to sort of recognize that it's really up to your discretion in terms of how much you want to share, or if you want to share it all, because there are students who, like myself, who are completely fine with disclosing their disability. If they want to get that. At the same time, we also know that there are students who don't really want that. So, it really to recognize, how much do you really want to share. You can just say that hey, I would like to get this accommodation because I am registered with accessibility services. For instance, if you are registered with disability services. You can just simply say that accessibility services provides like a bunch of resources and a booklet on just the particular words on what you can use to sort of send to professors and TAs in that particular context and so that students don't have to feel like they have to come up with something on the spot. there is.

There are a template that you can use in that particular academic context but usually it's just really basic in the sense of like, Hey, I would like to according to my accommodation letters. I would like to get an extension for my assignment. For instance, you know what I mean. So it's just really that simple. You can always add more detail if you want but it can just be that just that. You know. You don't need to provide any specifics about your disability. if it's something connected to your disabilities that says, Hey, I've put like some accommodation captions, because I have hearing loss you might want to. You can add that context if you want, but it's again. It's really up to you in terms of like navigating, with your employers, you know, again, you do not need to disclose. What disability you have, or if you have a disability, you can sort of navigate that at UofT.

We have a career and exploration career exploration, service that is connected to accessibility services. That sort of can help you. And they do a bunch of session just all about this disclosure. And how can you navigate that situation on How to go into the workplace and how to Avoid that if you don't want to do is that. But most of the time a lot of profess lot of employees are generally quite understanding, speaking from my own personal experience, of course. but it's just really that matter of just trying to see What resources. Can you get a hand of and using those templates and just overall you don't need to disclose and it is totally up to your description.

Amanda Weaver

01:28:44

Thank you so much, Catherine. I know that even just sort of that first step in that, you know, one line request, or that one line statement can require a lot of you know, preparation and support and comfort and doing that. And just as a quick follow up. Are you seeing in your work with students? Are you seeing? you know, a positive

progression towards improved comfort in at least that first note, or that first question requiring accessibility, supports or otherwise

Catherine Dume

01:29:16

In terms of like, you know what we're paying with such as food services and just regular students who are not registered with disability services. I've noticed that there are a bit of a better improvement, especially in the academic sense, where there are professors who are just generally just like you do not to tell me anything just like, if you need like, as long as you have like that accommodation letter. But if you have that accommodation letter you can, you know, just send it. They just attach it to your email and just say, Hey, according to this document, I would like this accommodation, please. And a lot of students just end up doing that. it takes a little bit of practice to get used to it. you know, it's not the most natural thing in the world to just simply request things from professors. But, The more practice people have is really kind of I'm seeing a lot more flexibility in that sense that students are getting more comfortable, and a lot of professors are getting better at communicating that

Amanda Weaver

01:30:29

Wonderful. And the more we have that the more that promotes and makes space for disability culture. thank you very much, Catherine, and I think we're going to pause here for a 5 min break. We'll come back to the Q. A. There are some questions in the Q. & A. Related to approaching employers and employment workplaces.

So when we come back, I am going to have a a question for Chloe. So just heads up, and so we'll be back in in 5 min. And so maybe to make it even Ben if it's. Okay, we'll say 12:40 to come back, and we'll jump into the questions and answers and great discussion. Thanks everyone.

5 MINUTE BREAK

Hello, everyone. We're back and ready to continue the question and answer period, and some ongoing conversations. For awareness. Ben has put some links and comments in the chat related to some resources, reports, upcoming learning events. And so I encourage you to check those out. And we're also watching the chat and Q & A. for questions. So thank you for those.

Chloe. first of all, thank you very much for your research and your leadership related to the proud project. I'm personally going to be looking into and learning more on that. So thank you very much for it.

Based on your research and your discussions with employers. And I I think I mentioned, but we've had some questions in the Q. A. About approaching employers. for persons with evident and non-evident disabilities and sort of how to type questions. What do you think is critical for employers to better understand and align with the need for opportunities for those with disabilities?

You shared information related to some employers. success stories and seeing and recognizing that there's quite an untapped labor pool. So how do we? And maybe that's the collective We expand our this awareness and share these successes? Kind of a 2 part question.

Chloë Atkins

01:38:29

Okay, I'll try to do it. As you know, we ask the very same question, what do you do? How do you approach employers? And I will. I'll be honest. One of the things that we struck us. when we were talking to the people who had actually got jobs with evident disabilities was that some of them had done 70 or 80 interviews. That's not applications. That's interviews.

So what it really spoke to was their ability to just keep going back. But what it also spoke to is that very problem was that they had qualifications. They were getting in the door, but the individuals who are interviewing them were becoming the barriers right? Because they could not get past that that barrier so that that you would get maybe you should get depressed by that, but in fact, I'm not sure you should. I think things are changing, and we spoke to more. You know, people cross generations. one of the things we asked is about disclosure. How do you deal with? How do you deal with employees or employer? How do you do with prospective employer? And I think if I think about it now, we're at the end of the study. The vast majority were successful with evident a disability. Says you go in, you tell them you are you disclose what you're comfortable with, but you then demonstrate to them how you do things, so that you know. Let's say you come in and you're quad, and you're going to be a receptionist. You show them your tappers. You showed them that you can type, even though it looks like your hands can't do anything you tell them what types of IT programs that you use in order to facilitate your work or things that you've McGuyvered yourself, that actually get done, that you it may seem like you can't do something, but actually you can. And you only demonstrate what do you do versus what you can't do.

That seems to be the Approach that works for everybody else. And I didn't know at the beginning of this that blind people were great, IT coders. I had no idea that people who are blind worked in IT but they can just do it by voice. So again, I just needed that explain to me. And then it became obvious. So again, it's just really about trying to be upfront with employers. And you are going to some employers who simply aren't interested, and I'm not sure you're going to change them.

Amanda Weaver

01:40:38

Yeah. And I mean, you know, that's unfortunate. But hopefully, that becomes a much smaller sort of pool, if you will, as we as we continue there is. Oh, go ahead.

Chloë Atkins

01:40:50

Yeah. The second part of that question is about, how do you encourage that. And I think what's really important is the environment. We are all part of a community that really we are not making enough accessible housing. We simply aren't. And a lot of the accessible housing is conditional on people not having an income. So that those I mean, I got a phone call in the middle of this from a lawyer gotten a very high big power job and had to refuse it because they would lose their housing because they got nursing care. They and they were going to have an income that excluded them from that housing. They would be evicted. Then there would be no place for them to go. That's really destructive. We're losing the talents of those individuals when we have policies like that, and we have policies like that because we don't have enough a universally-designed housing, and we don't have enough our communities, aren't well planned out that way.

Amanda Weaver

01:41:38

thank you very much, Chloe. So basic, you know, demonstrating the skills that you do have is what's important when approaching employers and also for employers just focusing on making sure that that environment and all aspects of environment is, is there?

So thank you for that. I did. Oh, go ahead.

Chloë Atkins

01:41:56

Yeah. It's just gonna say, Mahadeo actually made this obvious when he. He talked about the bidders for public contracts. If you don't make your interface accessible, then you're immediately not allowing certain people to actually be even part of the pool. So it's also about making your offers your postings accessible, anyway. Now I'll be quiet

Amanda Weaver

01:42:19

And So I put this to you. considering that accessibility is often held as the responsibility of one particular role, or office or department. What strategies, would you say can be utilized to integrate that responsibility into all units and all aspects of in institutional life, organizational life, even the broader sense.

Mahadeo Sukhai

01:42:45

So, I think I think it's a great question. I think I think ownership of inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility. All elements of the AODA framework needs to be something that that that you you've got. You've got leadership responsible for it, because that level of visibility is important. but the danger in having leadership responsible for it is. Then there's a specific department in in my case, at CNIB. It's the idea team, but in somewhere else it could be the people in culture team, or it could be accessibility services, or it could be. Whatever the way that the ownership is distributed, is through collaboration, through going to other business units, other departments and saying, Hey, how can we work together on this and through a little bit of coaching to say, All right, we're working together on this now.

Why don't you perhaps take the lead, and I will help you, and then I can slowly withdraw from the foreground into the background, while this this becomes something that's fully fronted by you. So we've taken this approach at CNIB with our Multi Year

Accessibility Plan. The first plan that we wrote in 2018 was actually led by my office and in that plan we basically told everybody what they needed to do. And we said, Okay, people in culture will do this, and marketing will do that. And you know, this body will do this other thing, and this other body will do this fourth thing with the with the plan that we built for 2023, through 2028. we set it up rather more as a co-creation exercise. And so we said to people, what would you like to do in support of this plan? These are the pillars. What fits in in this for you? And we did some really brilliant co-creation with a bunch of people and came up with some really cool things. And they came up with those things, and we said, All right. How can we support you?

The next plan I've already said to people come 2027, as we're planning for 2028 to 2033. You're the ones telling us what to do. Right? You're the ones who are going to say, all right. So it's time for the next plan. What am I going to do about it? So so to some degree, there is that there is that sort of coaching to word ownership, because a lot of people do have that preconceived notion that well, there's an accessibility to department. Therefore they're the ones who have to do it and look, I'm not an IT Guy. I have a visual impairment, but I'm not an it guy right? I'm a geneticist. And I, you know, my job isn't to make every computer at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind fully accessible to somebody who is a jaws user.

My job is to get the Vice President of Technology to understand that from a universal design in the workplace perspective, it's better to have every machine jaws enabled Zoom text enabled and to be set up to be able to do that rather than have a caudry of 13 inch. You know, laptops, that a blind or partially sighted worker can't use when they come onto the organization. So there's a lot of, there's a lot of leadership coaching. There's a lot of encouragement of ownership and of responsibility, and of actually thinking things through. I've said often and I will say it again here. That accessibility is a way of thinking. It's not just a checklist. You actually have to embed this thought process in your mind. And it's a universal design thought process that it. It's an inclusive thought process. It's an anti-ableism thought process. And you incorporate this into how you do your professional practice, because you're thinking about it all the time.

I do want to say one thing in in response to some of the employer and accommodation questions because I think that Chloe and Catherine are absolutely right, except that there's a principle here that actually bugs me and I'll tell you what it is. The majority of persons with disabilities don't have a visible disability, and, in fact, the whole concept of visible disability is something that that we really need to rethink, because disability is not static. It's situation when it's temporary. It's episodic, it's progressive. It's permanent, and so I use a white cane under certain circumstances, unless you knew I had a visual disability, which now all of you do. But unless you knew that and you didn't see me use that white cane, you would actually have no idea that I have a visual disability and so I think we want to be a little bit mindful of when we, when we make the disability visible, what does that actually mean? versus. What does human rights actually say? We need to do, which is make the accessibility support need visible. And

again, I refuse to use the word accommodation and I'm waiting for somebody to ask me why I refuse to use the word to use the word accommodation, and so far nobody has.

Amanda Weaver

01:47:39

Is that a queue for me to ask you Mahadeo? Why, why don't you use that word? It's good to have the discussion.

Mahadeo Sukhai

01:47:48

I was in a situation once where I was working, and it was with my partner with respect to getting accessibility support in place for a hospital stay for my partner. and the accessibility lead at the hospital in question when we asked for accommodations gave us a hotel.

I'm not kidding the person was a member of the community and they gave us a hotel. The word is easily misunderstandable, right? And so it's ambiguous, like a lot of words in the English language. That's one challenge with it. the other challenge with is, it sets up a fundamentally reactive system. And that is that that we, as persons with disabilities, always have to ask for that help, which also means that we then have to legitimize. Why, we're asking for that help And in in legitimizing why, we're asking for the help. There's that that puts us at the center of Hey control this conversation, except we can't actually control the conversation, because the employer has this thing called duty to accommodate and they're thinking about it from the legal framework. We're thinking about it from the framework of you know, I need this to help me do my job. But then, also, there's the issue of the performance of job tasks versus the ecosystem of employment. Everything else that goes on in the workplace that we need to be a part of that. Most of those accessibility supports aren't coded to help us do. And so I think the conversation around accommodation has been long running, and it's been happening for years. And we're all indoctrinated into a system that was invented by somebody who never had to use it right.

And so I want us to be really careful when we buy into the premise of accommodations work because they will. For some they won't for many others. And there's actually really good, really interesting data that that suggests that only about one third of persons with disabilities who need an accessibility support in the workplace actually get it right? And

the proportion of students with disabilities needing and a needing and accessibility support and actually getting it is a little bit higher right? But still not everybody, not everybody, succeeds in this accommodation conversation. And how much would that change if the employer says, maybe I don't have to buy 19 inch monitors. I can buy 24 inch monitors

Amanda Weaver

01:50:19

Absolutely. Thank you so much for that. And you touch on a couple of important points there about. You know, the legislative framework being very important, but at the end of the day it does come down to requiring a human centered, you know, approach individual needs and not just sort of a set sort of framework, or one fit. One size fits all approach. Thank you for your comments as well. on how we sort of expand and cascade the responsibility for accessibility through the different organizations. And I I like your phased approach in terms of, you know, starting with it, and, you know, being sort of prescriptive or directive in approach then bringing people on focusing on co-creation, and then kind of flipping the table and saying, Now you, you know, own this, embody this and tell us what you need for the next multi-year plan. So, thank you for that.

Mahadeo Sukhai

01:51:13

It will take time.

Amanda Weaver

01:51:20

Yeah. Oh, absolutely you. You describe that.

Amanda Weaver

01:51:21

And then in speaking of time. I'm mindful of it. I didn't want to leave out not asking Mladen a question. I I also don't want to miss Cherylin's closing remarks, but I just kind of wanted to end by saying that for Mladen and there's been a lot of conversation around approaching things from, of course, a very meaningful and human centered way, not focused on checklist approaches. Because, you know, you really lose the effective importance. So beyond it a checklist response to meeting those AODA legislative requirements. What do you think there's concrete actions for people as part of our collective responsibility and addressing any of the systemic barriers that still exist and preventing ableism?

Mladen Pejic

01:52:11

Well, just, I think, awareness like even though I might not. I don't have the lived experience of this ability. But I can read enough about it. And just like I guess also, as a as an architect, I can put myself. I can. I have. I think, of good imagination. So I can just imagine what it's like for someone like Mahadeo when he was talking about. you know the situation he's in? I asked that often in in reviews. I'm in like I do design reviews and I ask well, if this student wanted to use the space, what would what would the process be for them? Right? And that's when the architecture, the design team starts really thinking about it. Well, actually, no, we haven't accounted for that. And I constantly ask those questions. I I'm very critical of everything that's put before me because, you have to. You have to do that kind of vetting at the very start of, like the project, and it goes back to also like procurement, like everything you purchase to you should always think like, well, how somebody actually going to use this equipment, or this device, or whatever product.

So I just, I think putting oneself in, you know, and this is like an ableist term, but putting themselves in someone else's shoes, I think. I think we can all have be more critical and have more. just ask those questions more often. I and I asked it all the time. I ask, you know, how does somebody use this? If you know if they're blind, if they have a mobility disability? So that's the way I approach it.

Amanda Weaver

01:53:40

Thank you very much, Mladen. Importance of asking questions constantly, and being curious. so thank you very much for that. again. Thank you to the presenters and the

questions. It is just as we've said, ongoing conversation and dialogue that doesn't end today. But for our time being. I'm gonna pass it back over to Ben. Thank you very much. Everyone.

Ben Poynton

01:54:02

Thank you very much. Amanda and panelist great Q. And A. I'm just gonna briefly introduce Cherilyn. Cherilyn deserves a proper bio read. So I'm going to go ahead and do it. Cherilyn is a leader with extensive knowledge with respect to EDI within the education community and policing sectors. The current director of the Equity Diversity and Inclusion Office at UTSC, She held leadership positions in the Toronto District School Board as Vice principal, principal, and centrally assigned principle for equity and school improvement. Cherilyn's leadership in the area of EDI is best evident through her consultant work as a director and co-founder of equity connection she supports organizations in building an increase in environment for all. Thank you for leading our closing remarks.

Cherilyn Scobie Edwards

01:54:44

Hello! Thank you so much for that. It's always different when you're when your bio is being read. And you think is, am I that person my name is Cherilyn Scobie Edwards, and my pronouns are she and her. I am the director of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion office at University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus. I'm a Black Cis woman with long braids. I'm wearing wireframes, square glasses, a red colored shirt with a red silk head band and shorter length, gold. Tri hoop earrings. My background is blurred.

I would like to first to thank today's participants for leading deep and reflective conversations. I thank you for prompting us to think about our own actions and commitments towards creating authentically inclusive higher education communities. Today is a call for us to go above and beyond compliance. And today I have to admit that I continue to ask myself, what am I doing, and what am I not doing? Noting that the time for changes now, and noting my own power and privilege, calling myself to account in the EDIO, I will share that we are thinking about the tension between equity and accessibility, and notice that both must work together not exclusively. There must be commitment to work together, and the introduction that Jodie Glean gave during the national dialogue's events. She talked about the fact that they have to work together, because if they're working separately, nothing will be done.

Well, I think about Allison, who called us to note that everyone has a place, and in this place we must collaborate and work together to dismantle the structural ableism and build inclusivity in all that we do together in the EDIO we're thinking about and going above beyond. And what that means for us. And next year we're going to position one coordinator to focus on the synergies between equity and accessibility work and identify the opportunities for collaboration and conversations that will turn into successful, sustainable actions. There are so many Aha! Moments that I had today so many things that push me and prompt me, and really, I would say, almost felt like a gut punch, as I thought. Oh, goodness gracious! And really prompted me to think you know what there's so much work to be done, and that work has to start with me, and I cannot rely on others. Today I was impacted by the call to go above and beyond compliance. I was thinking about the impact of environments that can be used without individual adaptation. I thought about the needs to engage individuals in procurement processes which center those with lived experience.

At every stage of the process I was struck by the fact that individuals are indoctrinated into a system that was created by persons who never had to use them. So many Aha! Moments To me. the national Dialogue summary report which will capture the conversations held during the event, and today, and many of the concerns shared today will be available soon, and once it's complete we will share it with all of you.

I'm excited to revisit the event and conversations, but most excited about the summary section which is going to talk about actions, all actions that all of us can engage in, and things that we can do that are tangible and sustainable. I want to thank you for your time today. I thank you for the many Aha! Moments that hit me today. I thank you for sharing space with all of us, and I wish all of you a brilliant week.

Thank you for an incredible event, and my mind is blown.

Take care, everybody.