



ASD SUPPORT COORDINATOR IMPACT REPORT 2024

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STUDENT
LIFE

Accessibility
Services

OVERVIEW

In 2023, the Canadian federal government passed the [Federal Framework on Autism Spectrum Disorder Act](#). For the first time, the federal government enacted a comprehensive national strategy to enhance support for autistic individuals across Canada. This landmark legislation is centered on advancing inclusion and ensuring that the voices of autistic people and their families are meaningfully represented in all aspects of Canadian society. In this context, the University of Toronto has a critical leadership role to play in aligning with this national vision—by fostering an inclusive academic environment, advancing accessibility, and ensuring that autistic students are fully supported and empowered within the postsecondary system.

With an enacted framework of support, University of Toronto at the St. George campus is also seeing increasing numbers of students registering with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as their primary diagnosis. Between 2024 and 2025, registration rates for ASD increased from 5 to 8%, with over 350 students registering with a primary diagnosis of ASD. Additionally, 27% of those students identified as having more than one disability, adding to both the complexity and needs of each student.

However, research indicates that actual numbers may exceed official registrations. A 2024 study by the Conference Board of Canada (Fane et al., 2024) found that only 38% of neurodiverse postsecondary students disclosed their disability to their university, a rate lower than both colleges (47%) and polytechnics (67%).

Further research by Fane et al., (2024) suggests that supportive Accessibility

Advisors and staff play an important role in neurodivergent student experiences in postsecondary education. Transitional support from high school to university, navigating the size and scope of University of Toronto, and accessing clear pathways to peer and social support are all considered impactful for neurodivergent students and lead beyond the formalized accommodations offered to students.

Prior to the establishment of the ASD Support Coordinator in 2022, Accessibility Services supported students with ASD with an ASD-specific Accessibility Advisor. Trends and feedback quickly emerged from the work of this Accessibility Advisor, highlighting the need for a supplemental support for students. The ASD support coordinator was among the few such roles in Canada, with only 6% of postsecondary institutions offering autism-specific support in 2022 (Ames et al., 2021). Given its innovative nature, the role began through internal referrals and included system navigation, support with accommodation requests, and mentorship through programming and one-on-one guidance. Uniquely filled, this role aligns with research showing that autistic individuals benefit from working with someone who has lived experience (Crompton et al., 2022).

Since 2022, the ASD Support Coordinator role has grown to include autism-specific programming, campus-wide training on support and inclusion, and the development of resources to help autistic students navigate university services. This report outlines key deliverables, partnerships, ongoing collaborations, notable presentations, and future objectives.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Institutional

- Provided essential one-on-one support to approximately 150 students registered with Accessibility Services within the first year of the role being established, including joint intakes with Accessibility Advisors, referrals after registration, and transitional support to students querying registration with Accessibility Services
- Created the [Guide to U of T Websites](#) and *How to Create Exam Accommodation Requests*, two navigation-based resources for students; these resources are utilized during intake appointments by staff, students and campus partners across the St. George campus
- Increased attendance by 50% from 2023 to 2024 within existing autistic-specific programming at Accessibility Services including *Social Association for Students with Autism (SASA)*, *ASD Peer Connections for Women & Trans Students*, and *Dragon's Den*- a video and boardgames club for neurodivergent students created and formed by the ASD Support Coordinator
- Developed a unique program specific to ASD and supporting ASD students in the postsecondary context and presented to six campus partners on how to better support autistic students including Hart House, Family Care Office and Victoria College
- Designed and moderated the panel on [Gender Expansive Joy & Neurodivergence](#) in partnership with the Sexual Gender and Diversity Office (SGDO), highlighting the overlap between neurodivergence and 2SLGBTQ+, with 71% of students registered with Accessibility Services identifying as 2SLGBTQ+

Beyond University of Toronto

- Participated on several different panels and workshops on neurodiversity and autistic support within the postsecondary landscape, including a webinar on transitioning to postsecondary education with *Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice* in March 2024
- Connected with Accessibility Offices across Ontario for idea generation and knowledge sharing including a site visit of the Transition Support Centre for Autistic Students at Algonquin College and meeting the coordinator of the ASD Program at York University
- Member of [CANVAS \(College Autism Network\)](#), an international group to unify autism support professionals in higher education

PROJECTS

Navigating postsecondary education can be complex for autistic students for many reasons, including the challenges in navigating a wide breadth of available support. In collaboration with Accessibility Advisors and Team Leads, the ASD Support Coordinator addressed this gap by taking an individualized, collaborative approach tailored to each partner or student. The following list highlights current and past projects, reflecting the broad scope and impact of the role.

WORK WITH STUDENTS

- Established integrated workflow and referral pathway for students to ASD Support Coordinator, including joint intake appointments with Accessibility Advisors to synthesize information and next steps for students
- Designed campus and office tours, familiarizing students to accessible features (dim lighting, quiet spaces), while increasing comfort with accessing with more ‘sensory friendly’ spaces on campus
- Collaborating with students & Accessibility Advisor to write Letter of Introductions, a communication pathway directly to instructors to explain and ease understanding of student needs in classrooms, laboratories, and graduate interactions, while offering a touchpoint for instructors to further discuss how accommodations may translate within each academic setting. See [Appendix A](#) for example
- Providing 1:1 support for academic-related challenges including task initiation, class attendance and engagement, and interactions with faculty. While grounded in established learning strategies, the support was

delivered through an autistic-informed lens, establishing a centralized and consistent point of contact for students.

- Referring to campus resources within and beyond Accessibility Services, including clear introductions, explanations of roles and parameters, and appropriate communication pathways to create trusted working relationships between students and partners. This included communication support, targeted recommendations, and collaborative follow-up between students and ASD Support Coordinator to ensure seamless interactions with Accessibility Services and the university.
- Guiding students on communication strategies when interacting with faculty and instructors to foster positive relationships within academic programs

Based on anecdotal feedback from students, the benefits of fostered trust when working with an autistic professional with lived experience continued to be highlighted. This feedback goes beyond the navigational support outlined above but is a key consideration in understanding the built-in supportive nature of the role.

EXPANSION OF ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES EVENTS & RESOURCES FOR NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS

- Increased Social Association for Students with Autism (SASA) offerings to include both virtual and in-person events, and adding additional monthly offering to match student attendance and interest
- Developed ASD-specific sessions for Moving Forward and updated all transition programming through a neurodivergent lens by adding more breaks, low-stimuli spaces, and optional activities.
- Provided experiential knowledge and support regarding the transition to university at Accessibility Services' Transition Day, including first-hand strategies as an autistic person
- Increased attendance to ASD Peer Connections for Women & Trans Students by 150% from 2024 to 2025 through thoughtful referrals and presence as group facilitator

ASD-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

Given the size and scope of student-facing platforms and portals within the University of Toronto landscape, efforts were made to create the [Guide to U of T Websites](#), a resource to support incoming students with executive functioning disabilities better understand and

remember the use and purpose of student-facing platforms. In addition, a *How-to Accommodated Testing Guide* was created to ensure ASD students were registering on time for both midterms and final exams.

RELATIONSHIPS & COLLABORATION

INTERNAL TO THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Victoria College ‘Minding our Minds’ conference (2023 & 2024):

- Played a critical role in creating a space that would be inclusive of neurodiverse attendees, including defining the goals and focus of the conference and using inclusive language for autistic students.
- Designed and facilitated a diverse panel of autistic students to speak on their experience both as students at the University of Toronto and autistic people living day to day.
- Cofacilitated a faculty-facing workshop on including autistic students in all aspects of university life with colleagues from Accessibility Services

Family Care Office:

- Co-wrote and presented *Parenting a Child with a Learning Disability/ADHD/ASD* for University of Toronto employees, in collaboration with the Accommodations Specialist for Practicums, Placements and Laboratories and Family Care Office, focusing on how best to raise and support a child with ASD to a group of University of Toronto employees, many of whom are raising neurodivergent children.

Career Exploration and Education (CxED):

- Established a strong referral pathway between Accessibility Services and CxED for autistic students, querying career supports and disclosure strategies
- Collaborated with Career Educator, Accessibility within CxED to create and facilitate the *Career Pathways Series for Neurodivergent Students*, a 6-week workshop to establish career skills for students navigating workplaces as an autistic person. Given the success of the collaboration, this workshop continues in a twice-yearly format, with sessions including: *Networking, Navigating and Fitting in with Office Culture and Career Skill Building*

Sexual & Gender Diversity Office (SGDO):

- Created and moderated [Gender Expansive Joy & Neurodivergence](#), a collaborative panel with SGDO focusing on the intersection of gender expansiveness and neurodiversity while highlighting 71% of students registered with Accessibility Services identified as 2SLGBTQ+ in our Student Experience Survey in 2024

Student Crisis Response and Progress (SCRAP):

- Established a clear, two-way referral pathway with the SCRAP team to better support autistic students in crisis. This collaboration prioritized understanding the unique needs of autistic students, especially given that 79% of autistic people can have at least one co-occurring condition (Schembri-Mutch et al., 2023), which can complicate accommodations and increase the need for diverse support programs.

Hart House:

- Delivered a session titled *Working with Neurodivergent Student in Work Study Positions* for Hart House staff including ways to modify programming for neurodivergent students and prospective work study students
- Provided feedback on adapting current Hart House programming calendar to include inclusive promotions and adjustments to both the physical space and programming structure

Accommodated Testing Services (ATS):

- Collaborated with ATS staff on providing just-in-time support to neurodivergent students, including responses to questions about space, registration process, and test-writing experience
- Provided training to ATS staff on supporting autistic students writing tests and exams

T-Card Services:

- Advised on modifications to T-Card pickup including a streamlined experience for autistic and other neurodivergent students obtaining their T-Card for the first time

EXTERNAL TO THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice (YAIJ):

- Met with Founder and Chair of YAIJ to enhance touchpoints for neurodivergent students accessing community supports
- Panelist at *YAIJ School Transitions Webinar*, an event for diverse neurodivergent young professionals, focusing on the transition from high school to university as a neurodivergent person.

Spectrum Works Fair (Autism Job Fair):

- In collaboration with CxED, met with Co-founder of Spectrum Works to include the University of Toronto in future Autism Job Fairs and recruitment opportunities

York University

- Connected with the Autism Coordinator, for knowledge sharing and idea generation. Current work includes increasing support and connections with individuals in similar roles across postsecondary institutions in Ontario

University of Calgary

- Established key contact with the Neurodiversity Student Support Advisor of the University of Calgary via the Autism in Leadership conference to share insights and approaches to neurodiversity support within postsecondary landscapes, particularly within the scope of shared roles

University of British Columbia

- Met with University of British Columbia's Accessibility Services team to explain role of ASD Support Coordinator as UBC continues to note similar trends in registration and need for similar supportive role

WHAT'S NEXT?

Priorities for the 2025-2026 academic year include:

- Continued relationship building with departments, including college and registrarial staff including training on supporting autistic students within the university atmosphere, particularly in graduate departments and residence
- Expand resource library for autistic students to include resources on navigating university with multiple identities, unpacking and deciphering course syllabi, and residence supports (both staff and student-facing)
- Collaboration with Student Life Orientation Team to expand outreach to high schools/ transition programs, highlighting the breadth of resources and knowledge at University of Toronto for autistic students
- Further collaboration with partners on campus to expand autism-friendly spaces (clear identifiers for safe, quiet spaces for decompression, etc.)
- Develop a training module for faculty & staff on supporting autistic students within the ASD Working Group at Accessibility Services
- Increased outreach and connection with the autism community at the national level including presenting at autism/ neurodivergence conferences and panel membership
- Creating a network within Student Life Programs & Services of staff trained on autism support, to ensure reach and touchpoints go beyond Accessibility Services
- Consider unique needs of autistic graduate students through collaboration with Professional Faculties/ SGS On Location Accessibility Advisors to consider how supports can be expanded and improved for graduate students
- Further collaboration with University of Toronto equity offices to consider the intersectional identities of autistic students, including insights from partners on resource and support need
- Creation of a transition guide for autistic students on living in residence and navigating on campus living
- Collaborating with and building out supports for autistic students with tri-campus Accessibility Services offices

CONCLUSION

Autistic student registration within Accessibility Services continues to rise, presenting complex support needs best supported by someone positioned with lived experience. The dedicated role of the ASD Support Coordinator not only meets students' unique needs but also supports these students in thriving academically and socially. Through participation in events, programs, and conferences, the ASD Support Coordinator was able to support faculty, staff, and students on effective communication and inclusion strategies, enhancing accommodation-related work and relationship-building. To our knowledge, this role is one of only three nationwide and the only one housed within an Accessibility Services office that equally prioritizes direct student support and staff education. Sustaining this role positions the University of Toronto as a national leader in autism-inclusive higher education while upholding the university's commitment to innovative academic excellence.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION SAMPLE



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

STUDENT
LIFE

Accessibility
Services

Dear Professor:

Student Name: Student Number

The above student is registered with Accessibility Services with a documented disability that impacts how they participate in an educational setting. We are providing this letter of introduction to assist in understanding how their disability-related challenges may present in the classroom and online environment and to further explain their accommodation needs. Please note that this letter is an addition to the automated Letter of Accommodation a student may provide to you.

By sharing information about their style of communication and learning with you, it is hoped that this collaboration will help the student participate in the academic setting while providing a strong environment for learning and participation for all.

Student may not understand she is being addressed if not called on by name

- The student has trouble identifying when they are meant to be part of a conversation or not and would find it helpful to be called by name, to signal expected participation

Student would greatly appreciate being given as much detail as possible when given a task

- The student functions best in their work when they have more information on the parameters of task (e.g. length of task, due dates, etc.)

We would be happy to speak with you to clarify any of the information in this letter of introduction or to work with you to address any concerns you may have.

Thank you for your time in considering this letter and your support of the student.

Regards, Accessibility Services

