U-TAAC: Ableism in the Classroom

March 29, 2023

About U-TAAC

The University of Toronto's Accessibility Awareness Club (U-TAAC) is an inclusive club that welcomes students (undergraduate and graduate), both registered and non-registered with Accessibility Services, which discusses various topics on disabilities, and aims to serve its students.

About the Event

Ableism in the Classroom is an event held by U-TAAC to hear the distinct perspectives and experiences of students with disabilities, professors/TAs, and Accessibility Services staff. With that, we can address the concerns of all parties to create a better environment within the classroom.

Itinerary

10 a.m. Opening speeches

- Club Presidential Welcome - Catherine Dumé (5 mins)
- U of T's AODA Officer - Ben Poynton (5 mins)
- Key Speaker: Professor Brigid Burke (10 mins)

10:30 a.m. Accessibility Services Panel (40 mins - 10 question period)

Panelists:

- Director of Accessibility Services - Michael Nicholson
- Accessibility Advisor - Sezgi Ozel
- Student Learning Team Lead - Reginald Oey

11 a.m. Professors Panel (50 mins, 10-min question period)

Panelists:

- Medical Science - Professor Leanne de Soza
- Computer Science - Acting Principal Karen Reid
- Political Science - PhD Candiate - Chengmin Xu
- Disability Studies - Director of Critical Studies in Equity and Solidarity - Anne McGuire

12 p.m. Lunch (20 mins)

Mid-Remarks: Vice-Dean William (Bill) Ju (5 Mins)

12:30 p.m. Keynote Research Presentation (20 mins, 10-min question period)

Ghofran Alyass

1 p.m. Students Panel (50 mins, 10-min question period)

Panelists:

- Political Science Undergraduate - Alicia Abbott
- English Undergraduate - Aria Lorenz
- OSIE PhD Candidate - Erin Anderson
- UTSC Undergraduate - Radika 'Rads' Gupta

2 p.m. Closing Remarks

Vice President Marissa Bangyay

Speakers

Ben Poynton

Ben Poynton, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Officer, provides tremendous support to the University's senior leadership on Accessibility, EDI and Universal Design. He has been instrumental in advancing the University's AODA commitments through the application of an intersectional lens and a community-based approach. Much of the great work Ben has led or coordinated can be found in our most recent [2021 AODA Annual Report](#). Moreover, Ben was a member of the Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee that worked towards developing the new proposed postsecondary education standards.

Bridgid Burke

Brigid Burke is a PhD Candidate in Sociology at the University in Toronto. Their research applies an intersectional lens to explore how norms around violence and emotional intensity are negotiated through embodied micro-interactions. They hold a blue belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and have conducted ethnographic field work at Mixed

Martial Arts and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu gyms in both Toronto, Canada and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Since 2017 they have been teaching undergraduate classes at the University of Toronto in the areas of sociology of health, gender, and social inequality. As a disabled scholar, Brigid is committed to fostering accessible and inclusive learning environments and, has published work examining ableism in education and sustainable development.

Accessibility Services

Mike Nicholson

Mike Nicholson is the Director for Accessibility Services on the St. George Campus, a role he has served in for 4 years, having served previously as Assistant Director. Mike is particularly committed to ensuring intersectionality, the elimination of institutional/attitudinal/societal barriers and student learning are at the heart of the work Accessibility Services undertakes, and in doing so ensuring the realities of each unique student are reflective in the supports the office provides. Mike holds Bachelor of Arts, Masters of Social Work and Masters of Education Degrees from the University of Toronto.

Sezgi Ozel

Sezgi Ozel (she/her) is the Lead of the On-Location Graduate and Professional Faculties team at Accessibility Services on the St. George Campus, having previously worked as an Accessibility Advisor for three years. Sezgi is an advocate for and strives to work towards accessibility, inclusivity, and universal design, especially in higher education. She holds an Honours Bachelor of Health Sciences from McMaster University and a Master of Science in Occupational Therapy from the University of Toronto. When she's not working, Sezgi enjoys sewing, bouldering and spending time with her dog, Meia.

Reggie Oey

Reginald (Reggie) Oey is the Lead of the Accessible, Inclusive, and Experiential Learning Team at Accessibility Services on the St. George Campus, where he previously served as an Accessibility Advisor and a Learning Strategist. Reggie is passionate about supporting the academic and personal development of students with disabilities through programming and community building. Reggie's work has also involved partnering with various departments, faculties, and external organizations to foster change and inclusivity. Reggie holds an Honours Bachelor of Arts & Science in Cognitive Science from McGill University and a Master of Education in Counseling and Psychotherapy from the University of Toronto.

Professors

Professor Leanne De Soza

Dr. Leanne De Souza-Kenney earned her Ph.D. from the Institute of Medical Science and her MSc from the Department of Nutritional Sciences at U of T. She is an Assistant Professor in the Human Biology program, Health Studies Program and at University College. In addition, she is cross-appointed to the Institute for Life Course and Aging at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at U of T, as well as a Distinguished Fellow in Child Nutrition and Health at the Joannah & Brian Lawson Centre for Child Nutrition.

Moreover, she is a public health scientist that holds the inaugural Fulbright Research Chair in Race and Health Policy at the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law, University of Memphis, Tennessee. Her research focuses on the impact of structural inequities and health disparities in the underserved through chronic disease prevention. She has received many rewards and grants through her research and her teaching approach to experiential learning (EL).

Acting Principal Karen Reid

Karen Reid is a Professor, Teaching Stream in Computer Science and is currently serving as Acting Principal at Innis College. Karen is honoured to have received several teaching awards, most notably the President's Teaching Award (2012), and the Joan E. Foley award for student experience (2011).

In addition to her regular teaching, Karen has worked with many students to develop software tools for teaching. These projects serve a dual purpose: to build useful tools for the classroom, and to provide students with the opportunity to learn software development skills as they work on a large open-source software systems.

Chengmin Xu

Cheng Xu is a former Canadian Armed Forces infantry officer and paratrooper with the Third Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. In 2014 he deployed on Roto 0 of Operation Reassurance in Central and Eastern Europe. As a PhD Candidate in the Department of Political Science, he specializes in Comparative Politics, International Relations, and Development Studies. His doctoral thesis aims to develop a theory of the impacts of social relations on insurgent mobilization and civil war outcomes with a focus on the Philippines and Southeast Asia. Cheng is a Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholar and a Junior Fellow at Massey College. He was a Research Fellow and Senior Policy Analyst with Global Affairs Canada under the Department's Strategic Policy Branch. Cheng is also an Ambassador for the International Institute of Genocide and Human Rights. His works have appeared in academic journals such as the Third World Quarterly, the Journal of Civil Wars, the International Journal, and Genocide Studies International..

Anne McGuire

Anne McGuire is an associate professor and director of the program for Critical Studies in Equity and Solidarity at U of T, where she teaches courses in critical disability studies. She is the author of *War on Autism: On the Cultural Logic of Normative Violence* (2016, University of Michigan Press), which received the 2016 Tobin Siebers Prize for Disability Studies in the Humanities. She is the co-author of an award-winning picture book about disability justice and collective access, *We Move Together* (AK Press, 2021). Anne received the 2016 June Larkin Pedagogy Award and the 2018-2019 U of T Early Career Teaching Award for her work advancing collective access in the university classroom".

William "Bill" Ju

Professor William (Bill) Ju is the current Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science. He received his PhD in Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology at U of T and became a lecturer in the Human Biology Program in the Faculty of Arts & Science in 2009.

Ju's doctoral and postdoctoral research focused on the cellular and molecular pathways underlying motivation, learning and memory, neurodegeneration, stroke and Alzheimer's disease.

In 2014, Ju became a Senior Lecturer, and by January 2016, he received awards for both Continuing Status and the rank of Associate Professor, Teaching Stream.

The ASSU Ranjini (Rini) Ghosh Excellence in Teaching Award in 2013–14 and the Faculty of Arts & Science Outstanding Teaching Award in 2015 recognized his efforts in creating a student-focused approach in teaching.

Currently, he is involved within various teaching and research communities at the University of Toronto and beyond, with an active status as a U of T Teaching Fellow and an Open Education Fellow with eCampusOntario. Additionally, he is a present member of the Academic Board of Governing Council, the University of Toronto Library Advisory Committee and the Presidential Task Force on Student Mental Health. He was previously a member of the New College Council, the advisory committee for the First Year Learning Community (FLC), the Committee on Standing within the Faculty of Arts & Science.

Ghofran Alyass

Ghofran Alyass is a second-year master's candidate in the Department of Social Justice Education at OISE, University of Toronto. In addition to her MA in Social Justice Education, she is completing her collaborative specialization in Educational Policy and is working on her final thesis. She explores meaningful access and reasonable accommodation as two bureaucratic policy terms in the 2018 Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities Policy. Moreover, she studies the correlation of her thesis to post-secondary students with disabilities and their perception of these terms. As an emerging researcher in the Disability Studies field, focusing on Social Justice Education and Educational Policy, Ghofran continues to make changes in policy and advocate for an education system that fosters equity, diversity, and inclusion of diverse learners, particularly within higher education settings.

Students

Alicia Abbot

Alicia is a third-year student majoring in political science and minoring in philosophy and gender studies. Her goal is to be able to attend law school in 2024. In her spare time, she enjoys volunteering for organizations such as Epilepsy Toronto and helping her friends advocate for students with disabilities at University of Toronto. Alicia deeply cares about disability issues because she struggled with her mental health throughout her schooling experience. She felt disadvantaged compared to her peers as the education system never provided the support she needed. She advocates for accommodations and representation for the disability community because she believes everyone should have an equal opportunity to achieve academic success. Alicia works to promote this mentality for U of T to have the best accessibility support, and an informed student body.

Aria Lorenz

Aria Lorenz is a third-year student specializing in English & minoring in Political Science at the University of Toronto St. George campus. She primarily focuses on utilizing Critical Disability and Queer theories in her studies and research. As a queer disabled

student, Aria is passionate about presenting her research and lived experience with disability to advance accessibility and inclusion. She is especially interested in the intersections of disability with other systems of marginalization, and challenging perceptions/prejudices about who/what disabled people look like.

Erin Anderson

Erin Anderson is a PhD student at OISE, University of Toronto, who identifies as neurodivergent. Before beginning her doctoral work, Erin worked in student affairs in higher education, where she used her lived experience to guide her practice of supporting students. Her research interests center on issues of equity and access to higher education, including barriers to inclusion and marginalization within the postsecondary environment; identity development and belonging; mentorship; student development and engagement; mental health literacy and holistic wellness promotion; and designing inclusive and accessible learning environments.

Radhika "Rads" Gupta

Radhika "Rads" Gupta (they/she) is an international undergraduate student at the U of T Scarborough campus. Rads describes herself as a lifelong student and full-time friend. She is a class and caste-privileged, queer, disabled and (negatively) racialized woman

who was born and raised in the Bay Area of California. Rads is passionate about creating community, resourcing herself and others, and justice for us all.

Rads is an activist, creator, educator and speaker who works in harm reduction and prevention pertained to gendered violence, mental health education and de-stigmatization, menstrual justice and equity, and open, accessible movements and information. In the past five years, Rads' work has focused primarily on harm reduction, advocacy, and education with organizations like Courage to Act, UTSC Womens & Trans Centre, Sexual Education Centre, Bleed the North, and The PEARS Project.