From Self-Advocacy to Collaborative Care:

Supporting Neurodivergent Wellness in Higher Education (part 1)

Territorial Acknowledgment

I am speaking to you today from Toronto which is covered under Treaty #13 and the Williams Treaties. It is the traditional territories of many First Peoples, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples.

This territory is part of ‘the Dish with One Spoon’ wampum, a Treaty made between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas, and Haudenosaunee, where nations entered into an agreement to protect the land and responsibly care for its resources in harmony together.

I am mindful of broken treaties and my responsibilities to engage in a meaningful, continuous process of truth and reconciliation with all my relations.

Securing Your Own Oxygen Mask First: *employee wellness as the foundation for student wellness*

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Outcomes for Today's Workshop

- Examine how common accessibility barriers can make getting our needs met feel impossible
- Develop concrete short- and long-term plans for self- and community-advocacy around wellness

Important Accessibility Information

- 5-minute bio break at halfway point
  - (but do as you need to do as you need to do it!)
- Mix of solo, pairs/groupwork, large group discussion
  - (please participate as you are able, and if you ever want to do the work of a group moment alone, just let us know!)
- Please keep your camera on as much as you can
  - (but, of course, turn it off if you need to!)
- Recognize diverse types of knowledge in the room
- All articles/studies referenced will be available on final slide

Poll

Go to menti.com and enter the code
4936 4284

or

Scan the QR code

Poll Responses: *first steps?*

- If a student who wasn't yet connected with accessibility services told you they needed learning accommodations, would you be able to help them take the first step?
- If you (or a colleague) needed to take the first step in seeking your own workplace accommodations, would you know how to do it?

First Steps (Saltes article)

Only 43.75% have disability accommodation policy available:

- many faculty links provided info about *student* accessibility instead
- some policies grouped disability with other human rights protections
- accommodations subject to cost analysis – clause of ‘undue hardship’

Where policies do exist:

- Include a requirement to disclose
- framed with medical, individualistic, pathologizing, & derogatory language
- lack consistency in implementation

Poll Responses: *identity and accommodation*

- Do you identify as disabled, neurodivergent or chronically ill?
- Do you have any formal, ‘on-the-record’ accommodations at your work related to your disability, neurodivergence or chronic illness?
- Do you have any informal, ‘off-the-record’ accommodations at your work related to your disability, neurodivergence or chronic illness?

Identity and Accommodation

(Lindsay and Fuentes, 2022)

- 6.7% of university faculty identify as having a disability compared with 20% of working age Canadians
- 46% of faculty with disabilities did not access accommodations because they couldn't figure out the process for how to do so
- 70% of faculty with mental illness did not access accommodations because they couldn't figure out the process for how to do so

- 43% felt that job accommodations would improve their job performance
- 78% of those who requested accommodations received them

Poll Responses: *barriers to access*

- What do you think is the most significant barrier university employees face in seeking and receiving workplace accommodations related to disability, neurodivergence and chronic illness?

Think (name)…

what are your barriers?

When it comes to putting on your own oxygen mask, can you name some logistical/institutional (e.g., don't know first steps, lack of clear process, job precarity, overwhelming paperwork) barriers you are facing and some emotional/personal (e.g., fear, exhaustion, toxic/overly collaborative culture, stigma, no support) ones?

Barriers: *attitudinal*

- Fear of job loss (especially for precariously employed)
  - *4% of faculty with a disability felt it was safe to disclose their disability in their context*
- Fear of stigma
  - *35% of faculty with a disability experienced ableism or unfair treatment*
  - *47% encountered at least one form of harassment in the past year*
- Disability remains a low priority within EDI framework
  - *Disability is the only equity-deserving identity consistently framed negatively in EDI literature*
- Medical, individualistic, pathologizing frameworks for defining disability

Barriers: *inadequate provision of reasonable adjustment*

- Various sites for support are not integrated
  - *HR, occupational health, parking department, union/faculty association, facilities, classroom assignments…*
- Difficult to figure out/fight for what's needed
  - *no standard template AND no flexibility – no recognition of different needs for approach*
  - *need to repeat process with with each management change*
- Process is isolating, humiliating, stigmatizing
  - *High risk with low guarantee for success*
- No centralized coverage for accommodations
  - *'Cost' usually comes out of department's financial and human resources*

Barriers: *excessive workload*

- Typical markers of academic work cultures mean we're already struggling to keep up:
  - Toxic
  - Hypercompetitive
  - Collaborative (!)
- Workload expectations have changed
  - More task switching creates high cognitive load (email to deep thinking, writing reports to teaching, lots of new tech…no long able to be an 'absent minded professor')
  - Shoulder a lot more student mental health than before
  - Teaching – can't just lecture anymore! Post-pandemic attention spans.
- Performance evals (student and departmental) based on ableist standards

Barriers: Ourselves! *From podcast, The Academic Imperfectionist*

- Tended to take on a lot of emotional responsibility when young
  - Self-image relies on capacity to take care of other people
  - Can't handle the idea that we might be in trouble with anyone
- Pressure to 'live up to our potential'
  - The more resources we have, the more pressure – and less capable – we feel
- Obsessive overthinkers
  - "am I weird/good enough/too much…?"
- Finds hoop jumping validating
  - this breaks down mid-career
- "Demanding and wildly unbounded profession"
  - Takes more cognitive and emotional effort to set energetic and interpersonal boundaries
  - Difficult to know when we're working and when we're not (does thinking about research while walking the dog count?)

Think (analyze)…

Are your perceived barriers more logistical/institutional or emotional/personal?

Pair (connect)…

How are your logistical/institutional and emotional/personal barriers connected to each other in your context?

Bio Break

(5 mins)

To consider:

do you need an oxygen mask, or are you still in the realm of the 'safety check'?

Share…

What emerged through your conversations?

Think…

- Where do you want to be one year from now?
- What is the first doable thing you have to do to get there?
- What deadline do you want to set for doing that first thing?

Resources for further reading

(and cited for this workshop)

- Creating an Inclusive Space for Faculty in the Academy: Identifying and Removing Systemic Barriers (report prepared by Tamar Myers for Ryerson University, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, 2015)
- Brown, Thompson & Leigh, "Making academia more accessible" in *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice* (2018)
- Natasha Saltes, "Disability Barriers in Academia: An Analysis of Disability Accommodation Policies for Faculty at Canadian Universities" in *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* (February, 2020)
- Lindsay and Fuentes, "It Is Time to Address Ableism in Academia: A Systematic Review of the Experiences of Ableism among Faculty and Staff" in *Disabilities* (2022)
- Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, "Dismantling the Supercrip Prof: Theological Education and Faculty Accessibility" in *Journal of Disability and Religion* (October 2023)
- Levitt, Thelwall & Moreira, "Identifying disability-related barriers to academic employment" in *Studies in Higher Education* (December 2023)
- Podcast, *The Academic Imperfectionist*, episode 104: "Kate Ahl on what academics talk about in therapy"

Then Securing the Mask for Our Students:

planning for collaborative care in higher education

Ready to shift from individualized accessibility to collaborative care? This workshop helps you develop practical strategies for balancing your accessibility needs with those of your students.

Come prepared with a real 'sticky situation' from your context—a moment when your accessibility needs clashed with students', or where you anticipate future challenges. Through stories and hands-on collaboration, we'll:

- Reframe relational dynamics in our situations to strategize solutions rooted in collaborative care
- Leave with one concrete strategy and a plan for how to implement it in your own context that will help ensure both you and your students' have your oxygen masks secured (or better yet, create conditions that keep the plane from going down in the first place!)