POLICY 2.21

COUNCIL GOVERNANCE

Accessibility and Accommodations

POLICY INTENT

AUSU recognizes that it serves disabled, chronically ill, and neurodiverse AUSU Members, as well as those with accessibility needs and those requiring mental health supports, both in the short-term and long-term. This policy serves to underpin all activities carried out by the AUSU Council and the Executive Committee to ensure that the needs of these AUSU Members are acknowledged and met to the best of our organization's capacity.

Please note that the identity-first terms "disabled" and "disability community" are used throughout this policy, although AUSU acknowledges that students also use the person-first term "person with a disability," and/or may not necessarily identify as disabled and it is always best to defer to how individuals self-identify.

POLICY

Definitions

2.21.01   Ableism is defined as intentional and unintentional discrimination against disabled individuals. Specifically, ableist attitudes regard disabled individuals as inferior or "less than" to those who are non-disabled. Ableism includes, but is not limited to, assumptions and generalizations, stereotypes, microaggressions, and language that is derogatory, insulting, and/or negative when speaking of disability. Ableism also includes, but is not limited to, a lack of reasonable accommodations and exclusion from full participation.

2.21.02   Accessibility is defined as products, devices, services, or environments that are designed for disabled individuals. Examples of accessibility include, but are not limited to, text-to-speech features, closed-captioning, accessible parking ramps, resources, and access to information.

2.21.03   Accommodations are defined as changes to policies, workplace culture, physical environment, and standards that create accessible spaces. Examples of accommodations include, but are not limited to, offering online and hybrid events, inclusive team-building activities, extra time to complete tasks, and sufficient and ample breaks.

2.21.04   Chronic Illness is defined as a health condition that lasts for three months or longer; many can be life-long, while some can go into remission.

2.21.05   Disability is a complex and wide-ranging term that can be defined as limitations that significantly affect an individual's life. Types of disabilities include, but are not limited to, mobility, psychiatric, auditory, cognitive/developmental/intellectual, speech,

environmental, and medical. Disabilities can be both visible and invisible, and disabled individuals may or may not identify as disabled, or may refer to themselves as a person with a disability, making it important for AUSU to defer to how individuals self identify.

2.21.06   Disability Justice is defined as the way in which disability cannot be separated from other parts of an individual's identities, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious/faith-based beliefs, age, size, and/or class. These identities often intersect and overlap. For example, the ableism experienced by disabled individuals cannot be separated from other forms of experienced oppression including, but are not limited to, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, faithism, sizeism, ageism, and classism.

2.21.07   Intersectionality is defined as a social justice theory that recognizes overlapping identities, oppressions, and privileges and can include race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability. In many ways, a disabled individual's experience can be linked to other forms of oppression or discrimination.

2.21.08   Neurodiversity is defined as the different ways that individuals' brains operate, which are considered a natural part of human diversity, as opposed to a disease or a disorder. Some examples of neurodiversity include, but are not limited to, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Autism.

2.21.09   Oppression is defined as prejudice combined with institutional power that creates a system that benefits certains groups to the disadvantage of others. Some examples of forms of oppression include, but are not limited to, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, faithism, sizeism, ageism, and classism. Often, these forms of oppression overlap and intersect.

2.21.10   Plain Language and Plain Design refer to the strategy of ensuring that communications and design, including text and imagery adheres to principles of accessibility, meaning that they can be understood easily by all AUSU Members, including Members with low vision, cognitive disabilities, low literacy, and those whose first language is not English.

Applications and Objectives

2.21.11   AUSU will respect how AUSU Members self-identify, including those not formally registered with AU's Accessibility Services.

2.21.12   AUSU will ensure that AUSU Members do not feel obligated to disclose any personal or medical information when requesting accommodations within AUSU.

2.21.13   AUSU will provide an Accessibility Officer (Executive Director or delegated AUSU Staff) during all Council and Committee meetings and events, including internal retreats.

2.21.14   AUSU will strive to make all AUSU meetings and events as accessible as possible, through accommodations provided by the Executive Committee, the Accessibility Officer, and AUSU Staff, when feasible. This includes, but is not limited to:
   a.   ensuring that when Council or the Executive Committee meet in-person, a hybrid (virtual) option will be made available for all participants;

b. requesting accessibility and accommodation requirements from AUSU Members prior to Council events;

c. requesting food accommodation requirements from AUSU Members that take into account food allergies, restrictions, and/or religious observances, prior to AUSU-catered events;

d. opting for lodging and event spaces that include accessible public washrooms, gender neutral washrooms, ramps, street-level entrances, elevators, ample seating, and accessible parking, when planning Council events, and choosing accessible transportation options—when feasible;

e. providing closed-captioning and incorporating child-friendly virtual events—when feasible;

f. providing accessible team-building activities that eliminate barriers to participation at all AUSU events;

g. preferring participation through video during virtual meetings and events but acknowledging that there may be instances in which this is unfeasible (In these instances, no disclosure or reasoning behind this decision is required);

h. providing content warnings before discussing potentially distressing subject matter and respecting the individual needs of AUSU Members; and

i. advocating that all external events and suggested lodging attended by individuals representing AUSU are as accessible as possible and that these accommodations are explicitly stated in communications to AUSU.

2.21.15   AUSU will take into account principles of Plain Language, which ensures that communication is understood easily by all AUSU Members, including, but not limited to, students with low vision, cognitive disabilities, and those whose first language is not English, as well as elements of Plain Design, which ensures the accessibility of web page and content design, such as contrast levels and appropriate typefaces. In addition, ensure the use of Alt Text for images and graphics, Pascal case for hashtags (ex: ThisIsAPascalCase), and closed-captions for videos, when feasible.

2.21.16   AUSU will ensure that disabled, chronically ill, and neurodiverse AUSU Members, as well as those with accessibility needs and those requiring mental health supports, are involved in, and or provide consultation for, initiatives and events for these communities at AUSU, when feasible.

2.21.17   AUSU will apply an intersectional Disability Justice lens when developing and editing policies relating to accessibility and accommodations. In this policy, this approach is defined as the way in which disability cannot be separated from other parts of an individual's identities, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious/faith-based beliefs, age, size, and/or class.

2.21.18   AUSU will remain mindful that the ableism experienced by disabled individuals cannot be separated from other forms of experienced oppression, which often overlap and have their impact compounded.

2.21.19   AUSU will seek out opportunities for AUSU Members and Staff in education and professional development training, as per AUSU's Policy 4.04 Professional Development and Policy 5.07 Staff Professional Development, on topics relating to accessibility and accommodations. Ideally, this training will be delivered by topic experts and individuals

from these communities.

2.21.20　AUSU will actively communicate and promote student governance opportunities within AUSU to Members to ensure that they are reflective of Athabasca University's (AU) diverse disability, chronically ill, and neurodiverse communities, as well as those with accessibility needs and those requiring mental health supports.

2.21.21　AUSU will actively create accessibility awareness and safe spaces through policy development, AUSU Committee consultations, and professional development.

Accountability

2.21.22　AUSU Executive Committee and Staff shall administer and implement this policy.

RELATED REFERENCES, POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND FORMS

This Policy References
Policy 2.12 Respect in the Workplace Policy
Policy 2.18 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
Policy 4.04 Professional Development
Policy 5.07 Staff Professional Development

This Policy is Referenced by
None

POLICY RESPONSIBILITY
Council

POLICY HISTORY
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