Guide to Experiential Learning Accommodations

For Faculty, Staff, and Supervisors

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INTRODUCTION

In 2020 the [Government of Ontario](#) added experiential learning as a performance metric for publicly funded universities. Part of the government's rationale is to ensure students graduate with the skills and experience to secure employment after graduation. With an increase in experiential learning opportunities, we need to ensure students with disabilities have equitable access to all aspects of their education.

The *Guide to Experiential Learning Accommodations for Faculty, Staff, and Supervisors* is intended to be used as a guideline for faculty, staff, and external partners working with post-secondary students engaged in experiential learning. This guide was created in 2024 and therefore, does not reflect any changes in legislation after this date. Current proposed post secondary education standards for accessibility can be reviewed on the [Government of Ontario's website](#); however, at present there is no indication of when or if the proposed standards will be adopted in full or in part.

This guide contains links to resources external to the University of Toronto. While they are helpful resources, their contents may not align perfectly with the University's practices in all instances. In addition, external links and resources are not owned or maintained by the University of Toronto. When you enter external websites, you may be subject to different user terms and privacy policies

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Experiential Learning (EL) is the process of learning from experience or learning by doing. EL opportunities incorporate disciplinary outcomes, engage students in authentic experiential practices, provide opportunities for competency development and are supported by structured critical reflection. Below are the various forms of EL as outlined on the University of Toronto's EL Hub:

- Academic Internship
- Advanced Design
- Advanced Laboratory
- Co-op/ Professional Work Term
- Community-Engaged Learning
- Entrepreneurship
- Faculty-Led Research
- Field Experience
- International Experiences
- Land-Based Education
- Organization Partnered Project
- Performance and Artistic Production
- Professional Practicum
- Research-Intensive (Student Led Research)
- Simulated Work Experience
- Work Study

Adapted from: University of Toronto Experiential Learning Hub

EL opportunities can be partnership-based (i.e., students engage with a third-party external to the University) or University-based (i.e., students engage with other students and/or a university faculty or staff member), they can be curricular (for course or program credit) or co-curricular (not for course or program credit) and they can be paid or unpaid. The below chart defines and differentiates types of experiential learning and the University's involvement.

	Curricular EL	Co-op/Professional Work Term	Co-Curricular EL
Embedded in the Academic Program?	Yes	Yes	Compliments formal curriculum
On the Academic Transcript?	Yes	Yes	No — may be on co-curricular record
Student needs to be registered with Accessibility Services to access accommodations?	Yes	Consult as needed	Consult as needed
Accessibility Services involvement	High	Medium/as needed	Low/as needed
Paid?	No	Yes	Sometimes
Type of Agreement	None or U of T Placement Agreement	Employment Contract	None

In keeping with the Ontario Human Rights Code, the University of Toronto has a commitment to an equitable learning environment for people with disabilities:

> *"…the University will strive to provide support for, and facilitate the accommodation of individuals with disabilities so that all may share the same level of access to opportunities, participate in the full range of activities that the University offers, and achieve their full potential as members of the University community." (Statement of Commitment to Persons with Disabilities, 2021)*

Accommodations are considered when individuals experience or anticipate experiencing disability-related barriers in demonstrating their knowledge and skills to meet the academic standards of their program.

> *"Accommodation means making adjustments to policies, rules, requirements and/or the built environment to ensure that people with Code-related needs have equal opportunities, access and benefits. Accommodation is necessary to address barriers in society that would otherwise prevent people from fully taking part in, and contributing to, the community. Accommodation does not mean lowering essential qualification standards." (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018)*

Deciding on reasonable disability-related accommodations in EL settings can be a more complex task than determining accommodations in a classroom. A balance must be found to ensure students with disabilities receive appropriate accommodations while also meeting essential requirements. Demonstrated efforts to consider and implement accommodations need to be made and documented.

At the University of Toronto, disability accommodations generally have different procedures than accommodations for acute illness (e.g., the flu) and religious accommodations. Students who need accommodations in the course of their employment (e.g., teaching assistants) will need to follow processes for staff accommodations.

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE ACCOMMODATIONS PROCESS

Flexibility in Design

When designing EL opportunities, it is essential to consider that students bring a range of abilities and life experiences. Flexible design as well as learning to problem solve and adapt learning experiences will be important to respond to individual differences that arise in the moment. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework often used to design more inclusive and accessible learning environments for all students. UDL guidelines recommend allowing multiple means

Flexible design respond[s] to individual differences...

of engagement, representation, action and expression. This might include flexible deadlines, allowing participation to be verbal or written, and allowing different options for students to demonstrate knowledge (e.g., presentation, essay, test, etc.). For curricular EL opportunities within the University of Toronto, the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation (CTSI) is a resource available to support faculty with flexibility in design. They have shared further considerations on their Accessibility Guidelines page. For more information about creating inclusive EL opportunities, please review Advancing Equitable & Inclusive Experiential Learning Opportunities: A Five-Stage Framework for Change.

When planning events, potential accessibility needs of those participating should be considered from the beginning. This is not only more cost effective but also prevents complicated changes after details have been finalized. For events, there are online resources available to assist with effective planning. The Inclusive Design Guide is another resource that provides tools and practices for creating inclusive services, products, workshops, meetings and conferences.

Evaluating Accommodations

Evaluating accommodations for curricular and course based EL opportunities is the responsibility of each campus' Accessibility Office. Faculty determine essential competencies and explore accommodation solutions in partnership with Accessibility Offices as needed. In exploring accommodations, the following are key questions to consider:

- Will the proposed accommodations result in a failure to meet any essential requirements of the course or program?

- Will the accommodations legitimately jeopardize the safety of others?

- Would the accommodations fundamentally alter the mission, values, objectives, and/or core competencies of the EL opportunity or program?

Documenting the Process

Having a fair process for determining accommodations can be just as important as providing and implementing an accommodation. The accommodation process should be respectful and individualized. Those involved in recommending and determining accommodations should document the options considered and recommended, any problems that arise in implementing recommended accommodations, and who was consulted throughout the process.

It is not sufficient to indicate that an accommodation cannot be implemented because it has never been tried before, or that it is inconsistent with how the program/EL learning opportunity currently operates. For curricular EL, Accessibility Services should be consulted in any decision where a recommended accommodation is not being implemented.

CURRICULAR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Curricular EL consists of a structured learning experience that is for course or program credit. This includes course-based EL opportunities such as a professional practicum, academic internship, community engaged learning project, international opportunity or organization-partnered project.

Curricular EL accommodations require collaboration between faculty, external partners (if applicable), the student and Accessibility Services. Students with disabilities who require accommodations for curricular EL opportunities should meet with their Accessibility Advisor before it begins.

Roles and Responsibilities

Students

- Register with their campus Accessibility Office (UTSG, UTM, or UTSC) and meet with their Accessibility Advisor as early as possible before to discuss possible accommodations. The Accessibility Services' Student Handbooks have more information about accommodations for practicums, clinical exams, and other EL settings

- Make reasonable efforts to familiarize themselves with the characteristics and expectations of the EL opportunity

Students should contact their Accessibility Advisor well in advance of the EL opportunity to start the accommodations process. Some students may not be aware of the EL opportunity until the course begins (e.g., a field trip is happening that was not previously stated). In this situation students should contact their Accessibility Advisor as soon as they find out about the EL opportunity.

- Provide the faculty or staff member coordinating the EL opportunity (e.g., Instructor, Practicum Coordinator, etc.) with a letter of accommodation. If they need support with this step, they can ask their Accessibility Advisor to share the letter instead. This letter will be different from the classroom letter of accommodation

- Keep Accessibility Services updated if there are any concerns such as a change in disability-related circumstances, challenges with accommodation implementation, etc.

Accessibility Services

- Verify the need for disability-related accommodations through reviewing medical documentation and meeting with the student to learn more about their lived experience, disability, strengths, challenges, etc.

- Recommend appropriate accommodations in collaboration with the student and the EL program

- Modify and revise accommodations as needed

- Provide a specific letter of accommodation tailored to the EL experience

- Act as a resource for students and the EL program for solving accommodation-related problems

- Takes the lead in determining financial resources that may be available to support the student. The Accessibility Office should be involved when there are requests for necessary accommodations that involve additional costs (i.e., adaptive furniture, equipment, software, and service provision)

Program Staff and Faculty

- Communicate the essential requirements, learning outcomes and specifics of the EL opportunity to the student and Accessibility Advisor as needed. It can be helpful to provide this information on relevant websites and student handbooks

- Collaborate with the student and the Accessibility Advisor to develop appropriate accommodations

- Inform the Accessibility Advisor as soon as possible when an accommodation plan may not be working

- Provide information about Accessibility Services to all students

- If applicable, act as the liaison with the external site to communicate accommodations as needed
- For more information about practicums and placements specifically, review [Information for Faculty and Academic Staff on Effective Accommodations for Placements, and Practicums](#)

Supervisors and External Partners

- Implement accommodations based on recommendations from the Accessibility Advisor
- Inform the staff or faculty member coordinating the EL opportunity if there are any questions or concerns regarding accommodations

Additional information about roles and responsibilities can be found in section 8.6 of the OHRC's [Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities (2018)](#).

Roles and Responsibilities

Communicating Openness

A statement about disability and the willingness to accommodate should be included on the syllabus of each course, on department websites, and the description for each EL opportunity. Links to Accessibility Services ([UTSG](#), [UTM](#), or [UTSC](#)) should be included in letters of offer, outreach and welcome events, and during the first day of class. For example:

> *"The University provides academic accommodations for students through a collaborative process that both meets the needs of students and preserves the essential academic requirements of the University's courses and programs. Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Accessibility Services office."*

Further examples of syllabus statements can be reviewed on the CTSI's [website](#).

Competing Needs

In rare circumstances, the provision of accommodations for one student may have an unanticipated impact on the experience of others. For example, if a student with a disability requires a service animal, but another individual in the

space has a severe allergy to the animal. When there are concerns about this, please contact the Accessibility Advisor for assistance in navigating next steps.

Talking to Students about Disability-Related Barriers

While some students are willing to talk about their disability, others might be reluctant to do so. They may fear being denied opportunities or creating unwanted curiosity or concern. Students can be encouraged to discuss impacts of their disability on their learning without disclosing diagnosis or further medical information. Under no circumstances should you ask a student to disclose any medical information. At the University of Toronto, Accessibility Services follows the Freedom and Protection of Privacy legislation (FIPPA) and shares [information about accommodations on a need-to-know basis](#).

Example

A student with generalized anxiety disorder has a mandatory two-week intensive fieldwork course that involves sharing cabins with classmates. The student and Accessibility Advisor meet with the Course Coordinator and learn that students will each be in bunk beds, work in partners for several hours a day, and need to write tests and a final paper. Possible accommodations may include: the student choosing their partner and bunkmate, breaks as needed throughout the day, separate space to write tests, and a final paper extension.

CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION (CO-OP) AND PROFESSIONAL WORK TERMS

Student co-op and professional work terms are EL opportunities where students are employees of an external organization. Students with disabilities may require accommodations during preparatory courses and/or in the workplace. Students registered with Accessibility Services may meet with their Accessibility Advisor to discuss possible accommodations, however, during the work term, the employer is ultimately responsible for providing accommodations. If the organization does not have a procedure for disability-related accommodations, they should contact the co-op office at the University.

Roles and Responsibilities

Students

Students seeking disability-related accommodations when they are an employee of an external organization should follow the organization's procedure for accommodation requests. The Disclosure and Accommodation Guide for the Workplace has helpful information for how and when to disclose the need for disability-related accommodations. While not required, students can connect with the co-op office or Accessibility Services if they need support with this process.

Accessibility Services

- Provide contact information for sign language interpreters, computerized notetaking and real time captioning
- Provide information about adaptive furniture and equipment
- Provide high-level information on best practices, research, resources, etc. for accommodations

- Suggest templates and statements when applicable
- Provide support to the co-op office when an employer does not have an accommodation procedure

Staff, Faculty, and External Partners

- Provide information about how to request accommodations
- Implement accommodations as appropriate (e.g., in prep courses, online modules, interviews)
- If the student is registered with Accessibility Services and provides consent, liaise with Accessibility Services for further support if needed
- More information about responsibilities can be reviewed in the OHRC's Workplace roles and responsibilities (fact sheet)
- More information about accommodations for employees can be found in the OHRC's Meeting accommodation needs of employees on the job and more about disability-related accommodation

Considerations for Co-op/Professional Work Terms

Employment Contract

- Many policies and procedures the student needs to follow will be listed on the employment contract

Preparation Courses

- Some students may need accommodations for preparation courses prior to their co-op or professional work term
- Facilitators of theses courses should ensure students know how to request accommodations and provide an opportunity for students to request accommodations on registration and booking forms
- Facilitators of these courses should make every effort to implement these accommodations in courses, during appointments, and during events

Interviews and Onboarding

- Some students may need accommodations for the interview. Email offers for interviews should provide information and a contact person for requesting

accommodations. If an interview offer does not provide information about requesting accommodations, students can connect with the co-op office for support

- More information about appropriate vs. inappropriate interview questions can be reviewed on the University of Guelph's Website

- The David C. Onley Initiative has an Employer's Guide to Workplace Accommodations

- Hiring & Engaging Diverse Student Talent: Employer Toolkit has three modules where employers can learn more about supporting diverse student staff

Example

An Engineering student is completing their co-op at an organization with less than 10 employees. The student requests disability-related accommodations including: a distraction reduced space, flexible hours, and written instructions whenever possible. The on-site supervisor is supportive but has not navigated accommodations before. They discuss the request with the co-op office at the University, who provides resources on accommodations in the workplace. The student is registered with Accessibility Services and provides a letter to their employer confirming the accommodations they have in place at the University. (If students need support with this office, they can connect with the co-op or internship office at the University) The University has confirmed there is medical documentation on file, so the supervisor is comfortable implementing the accommodations requested without further documentation.

CO-CURRICULAR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Co-curricular EL consists of a structured learning experience that takes place outside of a course such as student clubs. This type of EL is not for academic credit.

Roles and Responsibilities

Students

• Students seeking disability-related accommodation for co-curricular EL should approach the person coordinating the opportunity to make their request for accommodations. The Disclosure and Accommodation Guide for the Workplace has helpful information for how and when to disclose the need for disability-related accommodations.

Accessibility Services

• Provide contact information for sign language interpreters, computerized notetaking and real time captioning

• Provide information about adaptive furniture and equipment

• Provide high level information on best practices, research, resources, etc. for accommodations

• Suggest templates and statements when applicable

Staff, Faculty, and External Partners

- Provide information about how to request accommodations
- Implement accommodations as appropriate
- Hiring & Engaging Diverse Student Talent: Employer Toolkit has three modules where employers can learn more about supporting diverse student staff

Considerations for Co-Curricular Experiential Learning

Budgeting and costs

Funding for Accessibility Services is primarily designated for the provision of accommodations for students in degree granting programs. Consequently, those organizing co-curricular learning opportunities are responsible for providing accommodations. For example, a student may require materials in an alternate format (e.g., a hard copy of presenter's slides) for a meeting or event. Where possible, organizers should consider these potential additional costs when budgeting.

Ensure that students with disabilities are genuinely welcomed...

Ensure both in the design and the budgeting for your program that students with disabilities are genuinely welcomed and included and that their needs, the same as any other student needs, are planned for and expected. When this does not occur, students with disabilities can be unfairly 'problematized' for their accommodation needs.

Suggested Statement

It is important to provide promotional materials far enough in advance to allow any requested accommodations to be implemented. Including a statement on promotional materials regarding disability-related accommodations can direct individuals in how to make requests. For example:

This presentation will include closed captioning and will take place in a barrier free building/space with 10-minute breaks every hour. If you have any additional access needs to ensure your full participation in this event (examples might include sign language interpretation, accessible parking, etc.), please contact [enter contact information] as soon as possible and we will work with you to make appropriate arrangements.

Example

A student who is d/Deaf or hard of hearing notifies organizers that they require an ASL interpreter to attend an event. The organizers connect with Accessibility Services, who provide a list of organizations where an ASL interpreter can be hired. The organizers are responsible for hiring the ASL interpreter and the associated costs.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Students

How do I approach disability-related accommodations for curricular EL?

- Register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible to discuss accommodation needs:
    - University of Toronto St. George Accessibility Services
    - University of Toronto Mississauga Accessibility Services
    - University of Toronto Scarborough AccessAbility Services
- Familiarize yourself with the EL setting in anyway you can (e.g., websites, site visits, etc.). This may include asking the faculty or staff member coordinating this opportunity for information about what to expect and what specific tasks will be expected of you

How do I approach accommodations for co-op/professional work term?

- Talk to your supervisor at your employment site to request accommodations under the Ontario Human Rights Code

- Review [The Disclosure and Accommodation Guide for the Workplace](#), which provides tools and information for how to disclose accommodation needs to your employer

- For further career support (e.g., resume, cover letter, interviewing, etc.), you can schedule an appointment with your Career Centre:
  - [University of Toronto St George Career Exploration & Education](#)
  - [University of Toronto Mississauga Career Centre](#)
  - [University of Toronto Scarborough Academic Advising & Career Centre](#)

How do I approach accommodations for co-curricular EL?

- Approach the University of Toronto staff member coordinating the co-curricular learning opportunity to make your request as early as possible

Staff/Faculty

How do I respond to student requests for disability-related accommodations for curricular EL?

- Ask the student to register with Accessibility Services. Students who are already registered should be encouraged to contact their Accessibility Advisor to discuss EL accommodations

- Talk to the student about what to expect in the EL opportunity or direct them to the right person to obtain this information

- Collaborate with the student, the Accessibility Advisor, and other key staff to determine effective accommodations

- Make and document demonstrated efforts to accommodate a student

How do I talk to a student who might benefit from disability-related accommodations?

1. While you cannot ask students to disclose any medical information, you could talk to the student privately and outline directly what you have observed. For example:

   - "I notice that you have excellent skills in talking to a wide range of people. When it comes to writing reports, I observe that key information is missing or incorrect and that your reports have come in several days late for the past three weeks. I wanted to let you know there are resources to support you such as Health and Wellness, the Centre for Learning Strategy & Support, and Accessibility Services."

2. Inform students that if they have a disability-related barrier, Accessibility Services is there to support them. Remember:

   - Students may be unaware of the service

   - Because the word disability is often culturally associated with physical and sensory disabilities, students may not know that they could be eligible for support

   - Students may be afraid that their disability-related accommodations will appear on their transcript. This is not the case.

3. If the student is reluctant and you feel disability-related supports could benefit them, contact the Accessibility Services Intake Coordinator for assistance

External Partners

How do I respond to student requests for disability-related accommodations for curricular EL?

- Encourage the student to connect with Accessibility Services for an individualized letter of accommodation. If the student is a paid employee, you should follow the accommodations process outlined by your organization

What do I do if I think a disability-related accommodation request cannot be met within my setting for curricular EL?

- Talk to the staff/faculty member coordinating the opportunity about your concerns. If you have alternative suggestions about how to address the disability-related barrier, this can be very helpful. The staff/faculty member will work with you, the student, and the Accessibility Advisor to problem solve any accommodation-related issues

How do I respond to student requests for disability-related accommodations for co-op/professional work term?

- For the workplace, follow the accommodations process outlined by your organization. If the student is registered, Accessibility Services may be able to provide support if there is not an established accommodations process

- The David C. Onley Initiative has an [Employer's Guide to Workplace Accommodations](#)

- [Hiring & Engaging Diverse Student Talent: Employer Toolkit](#) has three modules where employers can learn more about supporting diverse student staff.

- For events, there are [online resources](#) that provide information on making events more accessible

- The [Job Accommodation Service](#) can be accessed for advice and supports on workplace accommodation

What types of accommodations do students request?

Students may request many different accommodations or no accommodations, depending on the situation and the disability-related impacts. The Job Accommodation Network has a [searchable database](#) for examples of accommodations based on the type of job and the disability-related impact. Examples may include:

Flexible Hours*	Sign Language Interpreting	Flexible Deadlines
Alternate Format (e.g., resources in large text, digital, etc.)	Adaptive Furniture	Closed Captioning
Support Animal	EL Placement Close to Home	Adaptive Technology (e.g., text to speech)
Noise-Cancelling Headphones	Access to Elevators	Written Instructions

Cannot compromise essential requirements

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO GUIDELINES

The University of Toronto complies with its obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code. Specific guidelines and policies that relate to human rights protection include:

- Academic Accommodation
- Religious Observance
- Sexual Violence and Harassment
- Equity and Diversity

RESOURCES

- Demystifying Academic Accommodations
- Information for Faculty and Academic Staff on Effective Accommodations for Placements, and Practicums
- Accessibility Services Student Handbooks
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN): provides information on equipment, methods and modifications for people with disabilities to improve their work environment
- University of Guelph: Resources for co-op students with disabilities
- Discover Ability Network: a job-matching online portal and resource that connects people with disabilities directly to Ontario employers
- Brock University: Myths about hiring people with disabilities
- Advancing Equitable & Inclusive Experiential Learning Opportunities: A Five-Stage Framework for Change
- Conference Board of Canada's Employer Toolkit: Making Ontario Workplaces Accessible to People with Disabilities
- Hiring & Engaging Diverse Student Talent: Employer Toolkit
- Job Accommodation Service: provides advice and supports on workplace accommodation
- David C. Onley Initiative: Employer's Guide to Workplace Accommodations

Not all of these resources are conformant with WCAG 2.0 standards, accessible versions should be requested from the external entity.