

Accessibility & Disability 101

Land acknowledgment

McGill is located on the unceded Indigenous lands of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation, known as Tiohtià:ke/Montreal. The Kanien'kehá:ka, also known as the Keepers of the Eastern Door, are one of the nations that make up the Haudenosaunee Confederacy on Turtle Island/North America. Our presence on this land contributes to the dispossession and ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples. Our goal is to promote learning and generate allyship with local Indigenous communities, by honouring and respecting the many nations removed from, as well as those still connected to this land. Consult [Native Land](#), McGill Indigenous Initiatives' [The Land and Peoples](#), and [Indigenous Education Resources](#) to learn more.

Throughout the workshop we encourage you to consider the relationship between disability and health, socioeconomic oppression, and Indigenous populations in Canada. According to Statistics Canada (2020), there is a higher disability prevalence among Indigenous peoples in Canada when compared to the non-Indigenous population. This could especially increase the vulnerability of Indigenous peoples to the disastrous long-term health and socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic ([Hahmann et al., 2019](#); [Statistics Canada, 2020](#); [Government of Canada, 2020a](#)).

Session description and outcomes

This workshop introduces participants to the ideas of accessibility, disability, and ableism both in our current context and throughout history. Learners will go over terminology related to these concepts, investigate their colonial and historical foundations and legacies, and contemporary examples of disability justice. Participants will apply these terms and examples alongside intersecting systems of oppression to unpack the present context and their position within it.

By the end of this workshop, you will have had the opportunity to:

- Understand the terminology surrounding accessibility, disability, and ableism
- Recognize the historical and colonial roots of ableism
- Reflect on our positionality within the present-day conversation

Working definitions

“Person-First” Language: Language that centers the person first instead of the disability. Example: “A person living with a disability.”

“Disability-First” Language: Language that highlights disability as an identity. Example: “A disabled person.”

Ableism: A system of oppression based on the systemic favouring of abled people. Ableism is influenced and constructed by other systems of oppression, including racism, sexism, transphobia, queerphobia, and others.

Accessibility: Refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments that allows everyone, regardless of ability, to engage fully.

Disability: What constitutes “disability” is very personal, but also defined by other systems of oppression. A disability can include physical, mental, or invisible illnesses, and it may or may not be diagnosed. A disability is any condition that impairs one’s ability to function and navigate through society, as it was constructed for abled people.

Activities

This workshop will involve personal reflections with the option to share, an interactive quiz, and group discussion.

Before the workshop, consider reflecting on different examples of interpersonal and individual levels of ableism. For example, consider what language or words you hear that perpetuate ableism, and what alternatives may be used in their place.

Your next steps

1. Write down one thing you learned.
2. Write down one thing that surprised you.
3. Write down a question you still have.
4. Write down any actions you want to take.

Space for your notes

Resources

Office for Students with Disabilities (<https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>).

Student Wellness Hub (<https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/>).

Campus Access Guides (<https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/accessibility/campus-access-guides>).

SSMU Eating Disorder Resource and Support Centre (<https://edrsc.ssmu.ca/>).

The Union for Gender Empowerment (<https://theuge.org/>).

Register for [SKILLS21](#), McGill’s workshop-based skills development program for undergraduate students.

Consult the [learning resources](#) created by Teaching and Learning Services.

Explore [Stay on Track](#), a peer-to-peer program that enhances undergraduate students' learning and wellness skills. Learn more about the three pathways available: reminders, coaching sessions, and study groups.

Visit [Learner Supports](#) from Student Accessibility & Achievement.

References

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Exley, C. (2016, April 5). *Definitions*. Accessibility Services Canada. <https://accessibilitycanada.ca/aoda/definitions/>.

Marshall, T. & Robertson, G. (2006, February 7). *Eugenics in Canada*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/eugenics>.

Vanderperre, J. (2016, February 2). *Declassified: Mind Control at McGill*. The McGill Tribune. <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/mind-control-mcgill-mk-ultra/>.

Quebec Accessible. (2021) *Quebec History*. Quebec Accessible. <http://quebec-accessible.ca/en/index.php/resources/laws/canada/quebec/>.

Contact information

For any questions about the workshop material or other related information, visit mcgill.ca/tls/students.