# utmsu

**UTM STUDENTS' UNION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR**

# THE NOTE-TAKING PROGRAM

**UTMSU LOBBY WEEK**

# *table of contents*

# *introduction*

Note-taking is a necessity,
not a privilege.

The University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union (UTMSU) is committed to "providing a barrier-free environment for our members" in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) **(1)**. This document aims to create awareness regarding areas for improvement in Accessibility Services, namely through the introduction of a paid note-taking program.

This report provides student testimonials, feedback and advice from several academic departments, research from various universities across North America, results from a survey conducted by the UTMSU, and recommendations and opportunities for implementation.

The insights from student feedback and comparative research highlight significant gaps in the current note-taking system at the University of Toronto Mississauga. The lack of incentive for volunteer note-takers and the resulting issues with the quality and consistency of notes provided are critical concerns. Implementing a paid note-taking program would address these issues by compensating note-takers for their time and effort, thereby enhancing the reliability and quality of notes. Additionally, this program would allow Accessibility Services to establish clear quality guidelines and hold note-takers accountable.

The recommendations outlined in this document are supported by evidence indicating that compensation would boost participation rates among students, leading to improved support for those with accessibility needs.

This change aims to align UTM's note-taking services with best practices observed at other leading institutions, fostering a more equitable and effective learning environment for students with disabilities.

1 utmsu.ca/about-us/accessibility

# summary of recommendations

**1** Creation of paid note-taker positions for students

**2** Increased communication between students, instructors, and accessibility services

**3** Implementing a mid-semester quality assurance check and ensuring that note takers follow established guidelines

# *necessity*

The Accessibility Campaign is necessary
due to several pressing reasons:

## 01

### GOOD NOTES TAKE TIME & EFFORT

*Note-taking is a skill—it requires considerable effort, dedication, and time from volunteers to provide this essential service to students with accessibility needs.*

*Due to a lack of incentive to join the program and continue providing notes throughout the semester, students are unlikely to be willing to spend the necessary time and effort to commit fully while balancing all the other responsibilities of being a student.*

## 02

### FINANCIAL ACCESSIBILITY

*The University of Toronto is ranked first in Canada, yet it is one of the few universities that does not provide any sort of monetary compensation to note-takers. Other high-rated universities on the QS rankings list, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2), Cambridge University (3), University of Oxford (4), Stanford University (5), and University of California Berkeley (6), as well as other highly ranked Canadian universities such as the University of British Columbia (7), provide either an hourly compensation, a gift card, or a stipend in recognition of note-takers' valuable service to students with disabilities.*

## 03

### INADEQUATE NOTES & STRUCTURE

*Students with accommodations rely heavily on note-takers to support their academic journey, and they deserve high-quality notes to support their learning. Yet, numerous students stated that note-takers either did not provide adequate notes (with some uploading lecture slides without additional notes, incomplete notes, or missing notes), or failed to provide notes throughout the entire semester.*

*The creation of a paid position will allow Accessibility Services to regulate/enforce certain quality guidelines and expectations for uploading notes, and hold note-takers accountable for the quality of notes submitted.*

There is a clear correlation between the lack of incentive and the quality and consistency of uploaded notes. The UTMSU recommends the implementation of a paid note-taking program to ensure that a) students that volunteer for the program are compensated for their time and efforts, and b) Accessibility Services can establish quality guidelines, hold note-takers accountable for their work, and ensure that students will have access to notes throughout the semester by providing an incentive to note-takers to remain with the program until the end of the semester.

Furthermore, offering compensation will significantly increase the participation of students in the program, resulting in more opportunities for students registered with accessibility services to receive notes as part of their accommodations.

The implementation of a paid note-taking program would be a step in the right direction in ensuring that UTM Accessibility Services can provide a high-quality, comprehensive service to students with disabilities.

2 studentlife.mit.edu/das/accommodation-procedures/students/information-specific-accommodations
3 disability.admin.cam.ac.uk/study-and-exams-support/human-supportdisability.admin.cam.ac.uk/job-opportunities
4 ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/Note%20taker_0.pdf
5 oae.stanford.edu/students/academic-accommodations/notetaker-services
6 dsp.berkeley.edu/auxiliary-service-units/note-taking
7 facultystaff.students.ubc.ca/student-engagement/centre-accessibility/student-assistants/notetakers

# *policies at*
## UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO MISSISSAUGA

The current note taker program that is maintained by Accessibility Services does not provide monetary compensation to the volunteers. Instead, volunteers are offered Co-Curricular Credit and an optional letter of reference from Accessibility Services.

A survey conducted by the UTMSU in December 2024 found that many students who are registered with Accessibility Services had been left stranded without notes mid-semester as volunteer note takers dropped out of the program.

Likewise, students stated that there was a clear lack of communication between faculty, the department, and themselves, which made it difficult to coordinate and ensure that there would be a note taker for the course, as well as communicate when a note taker dropped out of the program mid-semester.



**Gradual increase in students reporting inaccessible notes from 2022 and 2024**
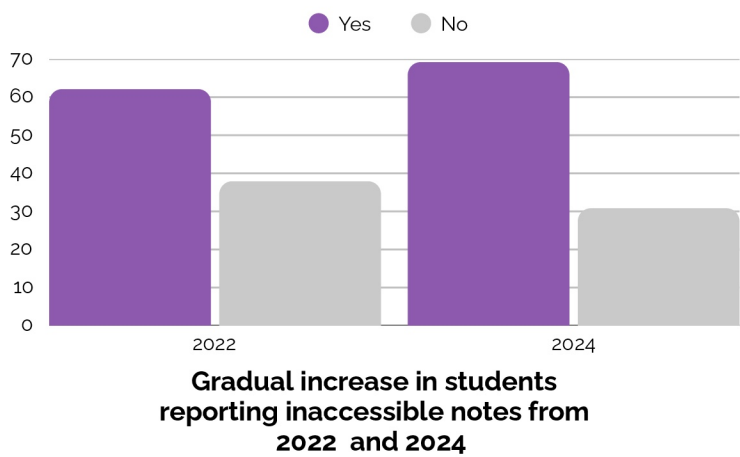
*Asynchronous Lecture & Notetakers Feedback Form, 2024 and Education for All Survey, 2022.*

There is also the issue of lack of incentive for students to join the program. According to our survey, students spent an average of 3-4 hours per week on completing and uploading notes, per course.

For many, this is a significant commitment in addition to classes, assignments, and extracurriculars, etc. Volunteer note takers should be compensated for the time spent on completing and submitting notes.

The UTMSU believes that implementing a paid note-taking program will increase incentive to join the program, thus decreasing the likelihood that students will be unable to find a note take for a course, as well as the likelihood of note takers dropping out of the program mid-semester.

In conversation with academic departments, the UTMSU was made aware of a distinct lack of communication between the instructors and Accessibility Services. Likewise, there is no system for clear communication between instructors, students, and accessibility services to ensure that students registered with accessibility services are provided with high-quality notes throughout the semester.

The UTMSU found that students registered with Accessibility Services have had several experiences where they either received incomplete, or inadequate notes through the program, or the note-taker they relied on dropped out of the program midway through the semester, and they were unable to find another.

This lack of communication coincides with students' claim that, while note-takers volunteer at the beginning of the semester, they tend to a) drop off towards the middle of the semester, or b) upload mediocre notes throughout the semester.

Ultimately, though the UTM Accessibility Services note-taking program provides students with an essential service, there are several areas for improvement.

# the state of affairs
## IN OTHER INSTITUTIONS

**UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

The Centre for Accessibility at the University of British Columbia has provided compensation to their note takers since 1991 **(8)**. Note takers are paid a set stipend depending on the amount of courses they have registered to take notes in, and are paid twice a month for their work including "time spent outside of class proofreading and editing the notes" for clarity, and in recognition of the valuable service they provide **(9)**. Note takers are hired throughout the year, and the application process includes the submission of a resume, cover letter, unofficial transcripts, and a sample of their notes from the course.

**TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

The TMU Academic Accommodation Support (AAS) Peer Note-taking program provides notes to students registered with AAS for lecture-based courses. Note takers are required are paid $200 per course.

**MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

MIT Disability and Access Services (DAS) employs note takers as part of its peer note-taking program and offers hourly compensation to note takers. According to the DAS site, there is a clear line of communication between the student, instructor, and the Services coordinators—students are expected to provide feedback and notify DAS if there is an issue with the note taker, instructors are expected to make a "good faithful effort" to assist students who may be finding it difficult to find a note taker, and DAS provides students with "tips on selecting an appropriate note taker" **(10)**.

---

8   facultystaff.students.ubc.ca/sites/facultystaff.students.ubc.ca/files/Notetaking%20Training%20Manual%202021%20-%202022.pdf
9   students.ok.ubc.ca/academic-success/disability-resources/become-a-notetaker
10  studentlife.mit.edu/das/accommodation-procedures/students/information-specific-accommodations
11  dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/accessibility/accommodations-/classroom-accommodation.html

## DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Dalhousie University offers note taking accommodations to students through their accessibility services. They offer volunteer peer-note taking positions and also hire a single note-taker for each class every term. The selected student is provided with a minimum honorarium of $75 per course at the end of each term and also receives recognition on their Co-Curricular Record (CCR). Their responsibilities include meeting with note-taking coordinators and regularly uploading electronic copies of notes to the student accommodation software Accommodate, as well as scanning hard copy notes using the Student Accessibility Centre scanner if necessary **(11)**.

## ONTARIO COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

The Wellness Centre of OCAD University provides hourly compensation for note takers ($15.68) **(12)**. The Centre for Students with Disabilities hires note takers and compensates students up to $1000 **(13)**. The roles and responsibilities of note takers listed on the site include submitting "legible and detailed notes" in a timely manner for all assigned courses "in order to receive payment on a bi-weekly basis" **(14)**.

## BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Disability and Access Services at Boston University maintains a note-taking program to provide notes to students registered with a qualifying disability. Students are required to select their student at the beginning of the semester—if students are unable to confirm a note taker, they are able to request their professor's support in either recommending a student or announcing in class. Students are likewise expected to inform their note takers of incomplete paperwork, ensure that notes are uploaded in a timely manner, and have a strong working relationship with their note taker. The site also states that the "note taker is receiving payment to provide [the student] with legible, comprehensive in-class notes, and it is up to [the student] to tell them how to make these notes the best for [them]" **(15)**.

**12** www2.ocadu.ca/news/ocad-u-student-wellness-centre-is-hiring-note-takers
**13** www2.ocadu.ca/news/csd-faa-note-taking-pilot-program
**14** www2.ocadu.ca/news/ocad-u-student-wellness-centre-is-hiring-note-takers
**15** www.bu.edu/disability/accommodations/procedures/specific/notetaker-service

# STUDENT
# *testimonials*

The following pages entail student experiences related to housing costs and impacts on life.

A reliable note-taking service would ensure that students never fall behind, even when circumstances prevent them from attending a lecture. This is especially **important for those with disabilities or chronic illnesses**, who often struggle to meet traditional attendance requirements.

Students giving their notes should be compensated for helping students access notes due to their inability to do so on their own. Their service to the community should be compensated fairly. Also it might encourage more students to engage as a volunteer note taker, creating more accessible notes for students who need it.

[The] note taking process takes a large amount of time, depending on the amount of courses or the program the note taker is. Moreover the notes can take as little as 2-3 hours to almost 2 days to complete, approximately which tends to be relatively time consuming, and also put a strain on the students effort to focus their attention on other courses, or other modes of activity....

I believe that providing note takers with compensation would encourage them to take effective notes and upload the notes regularly. … Note taking takes a lot of time to write and perfect, especially for classes with two or more hours of lecture.

If I were paid, I would dedicate much more time to writing quality content, [even adding] charts and diagrams that could potentially [enhance] the explanation provided in my writing, which could make it easier for the notes readers to understand concepts.

Paying note-takers is fair and recognizes their contribution to the academic community. It would also help students financially, of which many have multiple responsibilities. Introducing a paid note-taking service would improve the quality of notes and show that the university supports its students, making UTM [a] more inclusive and fair place to study.

A paid note-taking service would provide a reliable resource for students, ensuring that they have access to well-organized, accurate notes, which would reduce stress and improve our ability to study effectively.

"

Taking effective and comprehensive notes is a time-consuming and demanding task. Not only do I have to attend all of my lectures, but I must also ensure that I capture every important detail while trying to keep up with the pace of the class. It requires significant effort and focus to ensure that nothing essential is missed.

In addition, after the lecture, I spend extra time uploading and organizing the notes, which adds to the workload.
The responsibility of note-taking is substantial, as these notes become a vital resource for studying and future reference.

The pressure to maintain accuracy and completeness can be overwhelming at times, especially when trying to balance it with other academic and personal obligations. Every lecture brings the challenge of absorbing, processing, and recording information efficiently, making note-taking a crucial yet often underestimated responsibility.

"

# RECOMMENDATIONS &
## *implementation*

Based on research, discussions with students and faculty, the following suggestions would improve access to education for students.

*RECOMMENDATION* **1**

## *CREATION OF PAID NOTE-TAKER POSITIONS FOR STUDENTS*

Compensation would demonstrate the value placed on the service provided by note takers, and ensure the consistent uploading of notes.

The UTMSU believes that volunteer note takers deserve more compensation than a CCR notation and the possibility of a recommendation letter at the end of the semester. Therefore, we are advocating that UTM implement a paid note taking program and join other high-ranking universities in providing paid positions for students while improving essential Accessibility Services on campus.

RECOMMENDATION **2**

## INCREASED COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STUDENTS, INSTRUCTORS, AND ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

In our conversations with department chairs, we were made aware of the lack of communication between Accessibility Services and faculty. Implementing a system whereby instructors and accessibility services can easily communicate the requirements of students registered with accessibility services will ensure that notes are uploaded consistently throughout the semester.

RECOMMENDATION **3**

## IMPLEMENTING A MID-SEMESTER QUALITY ASSURANCE CHECK AND ENSURING THAT NOTE TAKERS FOLLOW ESTABLISHED GUIDELINES

We are not advocating for more work for instructors/faculty. However, there is a clear need for implementing systems to ensure that uploaded notes maintain a certain quality and level of clarity and detail. As the Disability and Access Services at Boston University states, if note takers were paid, they would be required to ensure that notes meet a certain standard, particularly those set by the student.

UTMSU LOBBY DOCUMENT
2024/2025