



REPORT

From the office of the...

Associate Vice President: Services

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Simranjeet Singh, Associate Vice President: Services
Christina Devarapalli, Vice President (Administration)
SUBJECT: Maccess Review
DATE: Tuesday, March 29th, 2022

INTRODUCTION

To the esteemed members of the Executive Board of the McMaster Students' Union,

The following report is a review of the McMaster Students' Union (MSU) service known as Maccess. The aim of this review is to give an overview of how successful the service is in fulfilling its purpose and mandate. Surveys were conducted of the general student body as well as volunteers and employees of the service to gain an understanding of how the service functions, how it is perceived, and what programming/services it delivers to the student body. This review contains an analysis of those results, as well as a summary of external research that has been done. The external research took a focus on other university student unions in Ontario to understand if they offer clubs or services with strategies which can be adopted by Spark. The result of this internal and external research is summarized to give a series of recommendations made in concert by the Services Committee, VP Administration, and AVP Services.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

Service Purpose and Mandate

The purpose of Maccess is defined below:

- Work with various University departments and relevant stakeholders to ensure the safety of students within the University
- Provide structured social events to create a sense of community and inclusion among those that self-identify as having a disability or as being disabled
- Provide formal support services and resources regarding disabilities
- Advocate to work towards ensuring the safety and equitable treatment of all people on campus and in the community
- Prioritize diversity and considerations of intersectionality in all service operations

Service Structure

- The Maccess director, who shall:
 - o oversee all activities of the service
 - o Attend PACBIC Disability Inclusion, Madness, Accessibility, Neurodiversity (DIMAND) Working Group meetings and receive consultation about programming and events
 - o Perform duties as outlined in the Maccess Director job description
- The Maccess Assistant Director
 - o Assist the Director in the oversight of all activities of the Service
 - o Perform duties as outlined in the Maccess Assistant Director job description
- The Community Outreach Coordinator, who shall:

- Be responsible for organizing and facilitating community building and small group events that cater to specific communities within MSU Maccess Service Users/Community Members
- Work closely with the Promotions Executive to promote social events
- Perform duties as outlined in the Maccess Community Outreach Coordinator job description
- The Social & Political Advocacy Executive, who shall:
 - Be responsible for building awareness on and off-campus about social and political issues relevant to those who identify as having disabilities or being disabled and other members of the McMaster community
 - Perform duties as outlined in the Maccess Social & Political Advocacy Executive job description
- The Logistics Executive, who shall:
 - Be responsible for planning and ensuring the accessibility of all Maccess events
 - Create transition documents to ease in the accessible planning of future Maccess events
 - Perform duties as outlined in the Maccess Logistics Executive job description
- The Resources Executive, who shall:
 - Be responsible for the creation and maintenance of an online and in-centre resource library for the McMaster community
 - Connect with clubs, services, and groups on campus and in Hamilton
 - Coordinate articles in the Silhouette
 - Perform duties as outlined in the Maccess Resource Executive job description
- The training & development coordinator, who shall:
 - Work with the Maccess Director and Assistant Director in the development of volunteer training
 - Perform duties as outlined in the Maccess Training & Development Coordinator job description
- The Promotion Executive, who shall:
 - Be responsible for creating and sharing promotional materials for all MSU Maccess events, programs, and advocacy projects
 - Perform duties as outlined in the Maccess Promotions Executive job description
- The Peer-Support Volunteers, who shall:
 - Provide confidential and anonymous peer-support to MSU Maccess space users
 - Perform duties outline in the Maccess Peer-Support Volunteer job description
- The Safe(r) Space Volunteers, who shall:
 - Be responsible for assisting in the maintenance of an anti-ableist space within the McMaster campus
 - Perform duties as outlined in the Maccess Safe(r)-Space Volunteers

INTERNAL RESEARCH

General Student Body Survey

The general student body survey consisted of 47 questions to gauge how effectively Maccess delivers its services to the student body. This allows for reviewers to understand how the student body perceives the service and will allow us to gain an understanding of where there exist areas to make service delivery or communication with the student body more efficient. There were 157 responses to the survey, with the plurality from first year students. As this represents only about 0.6% of the student body, this is not a highly representative sample.

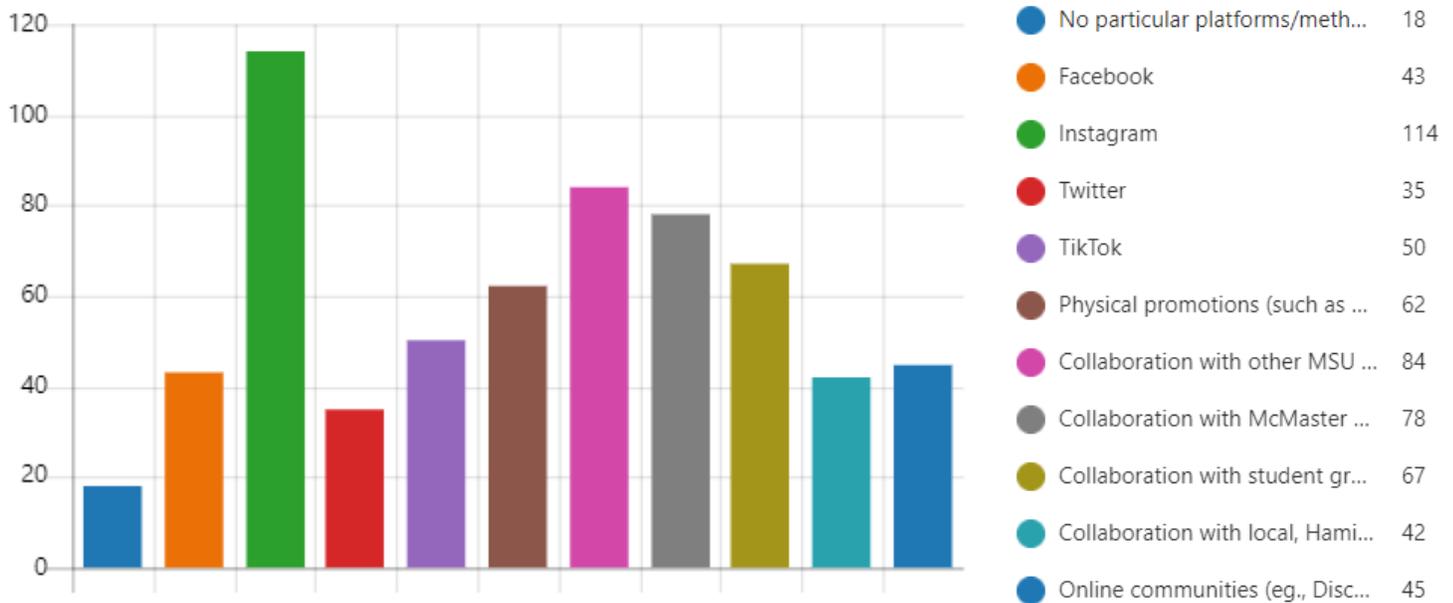
The greatest number of responses came from Science students (34%) followed by Social Science students (18%). Approximately 90% of respondents were domestic students from Ontario, with those from out of province and international students making up the remainder.

In order of greatest to least number of respondents, the three largest ethno-racial groups were White/European (34%), East or Southeast Asian (24%), and South Asian (21%). Cisgender women made up the supermajority of respondents (76%) with most of the remainder made up of cisgender men, and about 10% made up of individuals of various non-cisgender identities. About 77% of respondents were heterosexual, with the remaining 23% comprising various homosexual, asexual, and bi/poly/pansexual identities.

Each of the three options of residence (those who live in McMaster residences, students who live in off-campus housing, and students who commute) were selected by approximately 1/3 of respondents. Average annual family income appeared to be within the range of \$100,000 to \$150,000 though likely at the lower end. Most respondents originated from family units composed of four to five individuals.

Generally, respondents felt that the role of Maccess (from the definition provided) was appropriate and should be expanded. Most stated they had first learned of Maccess through either the Maccess Instagram or the MSU Instagram. These two methods of communication, as well as informational emails, friends/acquaintances, and professors/teaching assistances were also the main means by which respondents continued to hear of or interact with Maccess after having already learned of the service. About 37% of respondents had no knowledge of Maccess before the survey. Use of Instagram and collaboration with both MSU and McMaster services were generally described as the most impactful means by which respondents felt Maccess can increase its profile. Physical promotions and collaborations with student groups/clubs were also noted as areas where respondents felt Maccess should invest future resources.

Figure 1. A figure to show platforms/methods which general student body survey respondents believe should be used to expand awareness of the service.

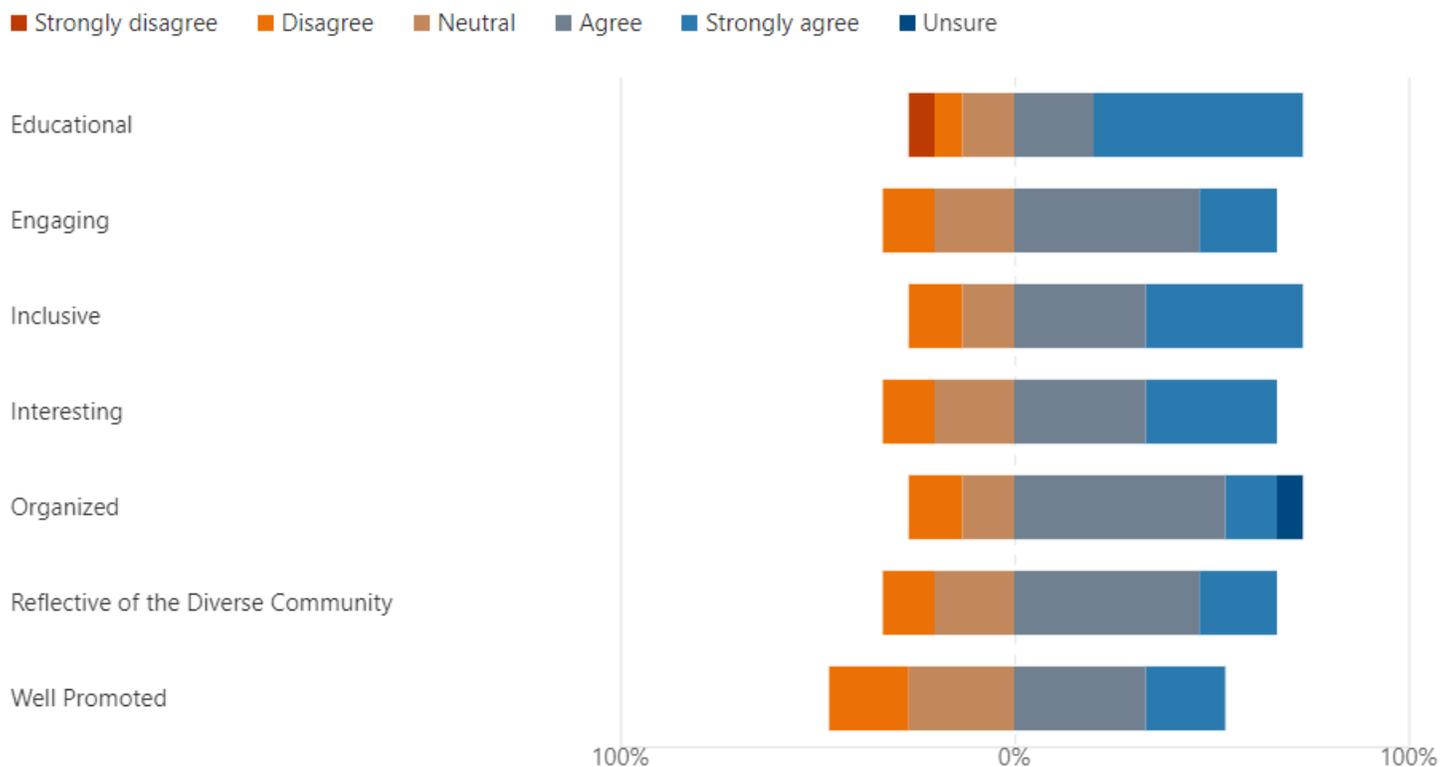


Only about 6% of respondents had visited the Maccess Online Space in the past year, and 10% in their entire time at McMaster. Most stated they visited only about once per week on average, and less than 10 times in an academic year. Educational resources, one-on-one text chat, and peer support were the most common reasons for individuals to enter the Maccess online space. These online spaces were generally described as welcoming, safe, friendly, and comfortable. However, respondents did raise concerns regarding organization, confidentiality, and felt the space may be overwhelming at times.

When looking at the social environment created within Maccess spaces for those who are a part of various disadvantaged communities, there was general agreement amongst respondents that spaces did qualify as an adequate safe(r) space, though the response was mildly positive at best. Therefore, potential for improvement is readily apparent. For various groups a part of the disabled community, respondents did feel Maccess offered adequate educational resources/materials, though once again, room for improvement is evident. However, when inquiring not about the direct resources offered, but whether Maccess helps celebrate those within the disabled community, respondents were much more positive in Maccess' role.

When reviewing Maccess events, they were generally seen as sufficiently educational, organized, engaging, inclusive, interesting, and reflective of the community. However, it is important to note that while this question had overall positive responses, this question and multiple others regarding the performance of Maccess events displayed responses which were markedly less positive than those of other services reviewing in the 2021-2022 cycle. While this may be a function of the small sample size of question answers of Maccess (smaller than other services), it is nonetheless an important factor to be aware of and consider when determining future paths for the service.

Figure 2. A figure to show respondent views of the quality of Maccess events.



When reviewing the programming offered by Maccess more specifically, the responses are quite positive. One-on-one peer support sessions, Discord text chats, group peer support/community, and online resources were all received quite positively, with respondents remarking positively about the supportive nature of all environments, utility of information shared, applicability of support given, and diversity of programming offered. Respondents did however feel that the degree of promotion was insufficient, and the quality of resources deserved to be promoted more thoroughly.

Volunteer and Executive Survey

The executive and volunteer survey consisted of 51 questions to gauge how effectively Maccess' executives and volunteers view its functioning and delivery of services to the student body. This allows for reviewers to understand how the leadership and volunteers of Maccess perceives the service and will allow us to gain an understanding of where areas for improvement exist. There were 10 responses to the survey which represents approximately 25% of all executives and volunteers with Maccess.

Science represents the faculty from which the greatest number of respondents originate, with 60% from that faculty. Social Science is second, with 30% of respondents from that faculty. Third year students represent the year with the greatest number of respondents, with 100% of respondents being domestic students from Ontario.

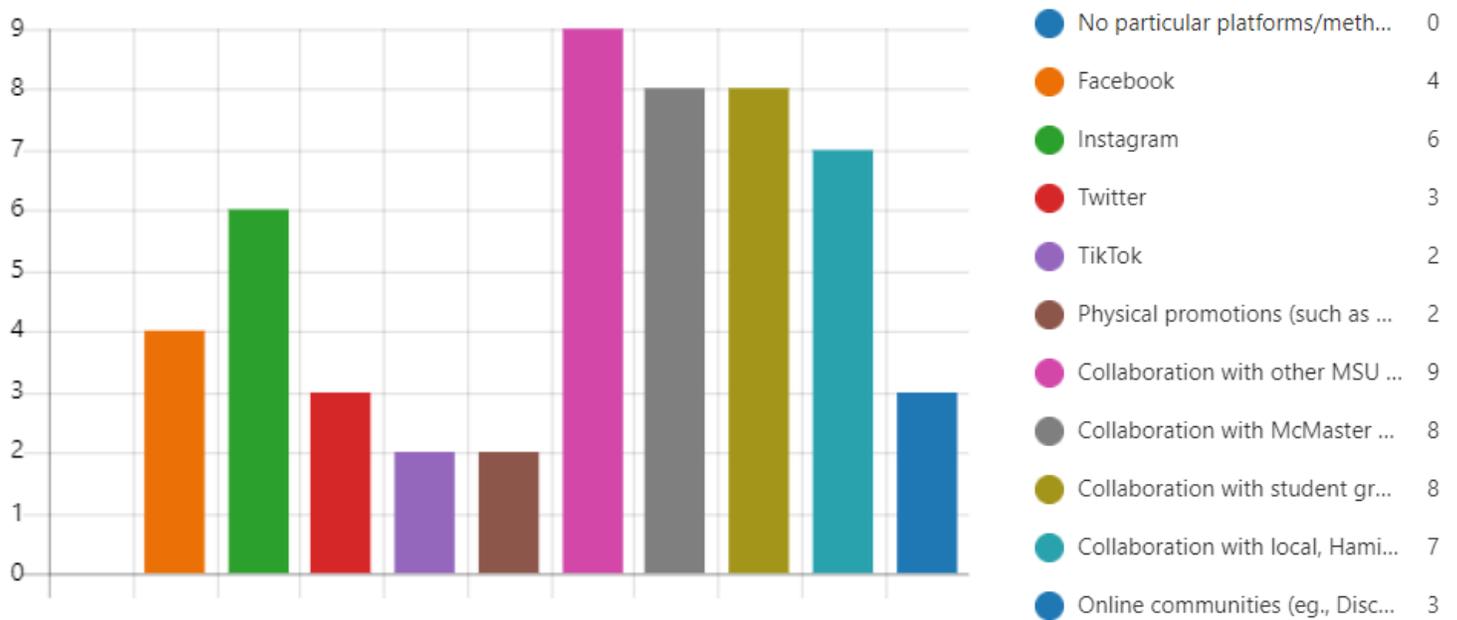
In order of greatest to least number of respondents, the four ethno-racial groups in which all respondents identified were White/European (50%), South Asian (30%), East or Southeast Asian (10%), Latinx (10%), and non-white Caucasian (10%). Cisgender women made up a clear majority of respondents (70%) with 10% identifying as cisgender men and 20% having a non-cisgender identity. 40% of respondents were heterosexual, 20% identifying as bi/pan/polysexual, 20% as asexual, and the remaining 20% identifying with a queer or questioning identity.

The majority of respondents (60%) commute, with the next largest group living in off-campus housing (30%), and one respondent living in a McMaster residence. Average annual family income appeared to be about \$100,000. Most respondents originated from family units composed of four, with both parents/guardians having an average of a Bachelor's degree in education.

Generally, respondents felt that the role of Maccess (from the definition provided) was appropriate, but unlike the general student body survey, were more cautiously supportive regarding expansion or scope of services. Most stated they had first learned of Maccess through Welcome Week Events and the Maccess Instagram. These two methods of communication, in addition to the MSU Instagram and collaboration with other MSU Services were also the main means by

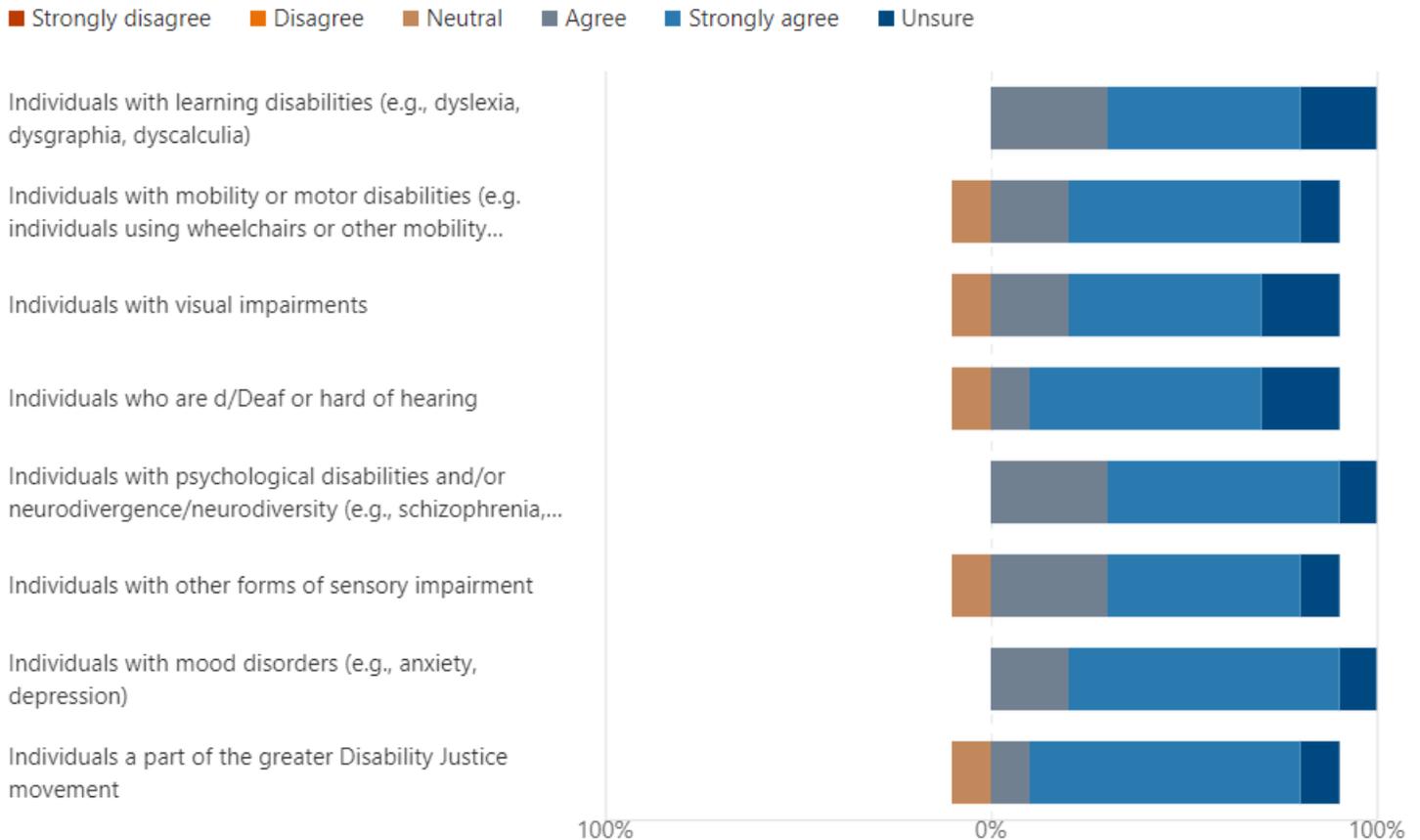
which respondents continued to hear of or interact with Maccess after having already learned of the service. Collaboration with MSU Services, McMaster University services/initiatives and student clubs/groups were the leading methods viewed by the respondents as the most effective means by which Maccess can increase its profile. Collaboration with local Hamilton community groups and further use of the Maccess Instagram were also notes as means by which the service's profile can be expanded.

Figure 3. A figure to show platforms/methods which general student body survey respondents believe should be used to expand awareness of the service.



When looking at the social environment created within Maccess spaces for those who are a part of various disadvantaged communities, there was strong agreement amongst respondents that that spaces did qualify as adequate safe(r) spaces. For various groups a part of the disabled community, respondents felt Maccess offered high quality educational resources/materials. While the student body response was mildly positive in these two metrics, the response of executives and volunteers was much more positive. This is a notable point of divergence as for other services reviewed, the general student body and executives/volunteers were in lock-step regarding quality and delivery of programming. Therefore, ensuring there is greater communication between the target community and Maccess leadership is a goal for the future, though it is important to note that the small sample size of the executive and volunteer survey may limit robustness of any final conclusions. When reviewing the programming offered by Maccess more specifically, the responses are very positive, more similar to (though still more positive than) the general student body responses. One-on-one peer support sessions, Discord text chats, group peer support/community, and online resources were all viewed quite positively, with respondents remarking positively about the supportive nature of all environments, utility of information shared, applicability of support given, and diversity of programming offered. Respondents did however feel that the degree of promotion was insufficient, and the quality of resources deserved to be promoted more thoroughly.

Figure 4. A figure to show executive/volunteer sentiments on whether they believe Maccess provides educational resources/materials for individuals a part of various communities.



Communication between Maccess and both the Marketing & Communications Department and the Underground was viewed as being quite efficient. Unlike other services, communication between Maccess and MSU Administration was also viewed quite positively. Passion Projects, an aspect specific to the Year Plan on the Director were also viewed positively by respondents and shown to have been pursued by other executives/volunteers (to whom it was applicable), indicating a positive, democratic character of leadership and decision making. Job descriptions were also generally seen as being appropriate to expected task and work. Similarly, the workload expected of individuals did not generally impede on other responsibilities had by respondents. The hiring process was viewed as being very fair and legitimate by the vast majority of respondents as well. In addition, volunteers expressed that they generally felt very comfortable during trainings, during planning of peer support groups, and during other events. They felt that they were also able to reach out to executives in the case of concerns or questions, and to receive other support during sessions, before and after sessions, during trainings, and during other events. Volunteers and executives also displayed strong trust in fellow volunteers and executives during event programming, and expressed positive sentiments regarding comfort, ease of collaboration, and success in event planning.

Furthermore, events such as team building exercises, weekly trainings, competencies, and group events were generally viewed as being very appropriate, effective, and useful. Trainings were viewed consistently as being positive, useful tools that ensured successful delivery of educational materials. This sentiment also applied to re-trainings and suicide prevention trainings. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion trainings were also viewed as highly competent. However, when looking at team building exercises, the response was quite lukewarm. Most felt there were an adequate number of such events (60%), while approximately equal proportions felt there were insufficient (20%) and excessive (20%) number of events. Overall, the workload expected of respondents based on the job descriptions was viewed as being appropriate, rarely impeding the ability of those within the Spark team from achieving their other academic and extracurricular goals.

EXTERNAL RESEARCH

As a part of the external research strategy, Services Committee embarked on a research planning aimed to review all undergraduate student unions of universities in Ontario. While this goal was not met, in total, detailed information of relevant structures at other institutions was collected from more than 10 Ontario universities. This has helped shed light on the interesting and unique arrangements which exist at other educational institutions, and important areas in which the MSU can potentially improve delivery of programming by Maccess.

Brock University community appears to lack any Maccess equivalent, though does have an accessibility advisory mechanism whereby accessibility concerns regarding either the student union or university can be brought to the student union, after which conversations can be had with relevant partners to see if methods of correcting inaccessibility concerns exist. This seems a prudent aspect to potentially incorporate in Maccess' mandate, especially as a major focus of the service is surrounding creation and delivery of advocacy to relevant community groups.

When looking at the Carleton University Community, we see that the Carleton University Student Association has a service similar to Maccess, known as the Carleton Disability Awareness Centre (CDAC). CDAC is a group offering social supports regarding disability and accessibility, mainly through speaker events and workshops regarding issues surrounding visible and non-visible disabilities. Programming aims to support disabled students on campus and has campaigns such as wheelchair rentals and disability awareness on campus. These campaigns seem for the most part, fully in line with offerings of Maccess, with the exception that they do appear to have more physical supports, though whether the CUSA page has been updated to reflect the pandemic environment is unclear.

The University of Ottawa Students' Union has a service similar to Maccess called the Centre for Students with Disabilities (CSD). It has many of the same principles and functions similarly to Maccess. Just like Maccess, the CSD also appears to possess physical spaces where individuals served by the service can spend time. Also like Maccess, the CSD leads informational campaigns regarding disability, aims to reduce stigma, and ensure inclusion of diverse voices regarding the topic. Interestingly, CSD can to some degree be described as offering a consulting service, as it openly requests that those who are holding public events reach out to CSD to ensure they can be planned while keeping accessibility in mind. Furthermore, CSD also has a braille printer, a tool that is also of use in the McMaster community. Overall, the CSD showcases useful attributes that should likely be included within Maccess to heighten not only its ability to do advocacy, but also its ability to directly deliver support to students.

The student unions of Queen's University, the University of Guelph, University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, the University of Western Ontario, and Wilfrid Laurier University all lack an equivalent service to Maccess. Some however do possess more general services which aim to generally advocate for social justice from a student-centric lens, though none from this group of universities take a focus on disability.

In summary, we see that the services offered by Maccess are generally far more specialized and developed than what is offered by most other Ontario undergraduate student unions. This is a very strong foundation from which further expansion of services to students and advocacy can be led. The University of Ottawa Students' Union service, the CSD is a notable example from which Maccess can likely improve its operations.

CONCLUSION

From the information gathered through surveying of the student body and volunteers + executives of Maccess, it is evident that Maccess makes up a very important factor of the McMaster community. Its services are vital to the safety, and security of students while also maintain key knowledge regarding disability issues. While Maccess does well in most areas, this review has unveiled a few areas in which Maccess service delivery can be improved to ensure it continues to represent a high standard.

Firstly, due to some disapproval expressed regarding Maccess programming, Maccess should continue improvement of educational resources in coming years. This should be done in direct collaboration with McMaster community members to ensure that relevant needs are met and to bolster quality of informational materials or programming that is planned.

In addition, there should be continued strong usage of Instagram due to its near ubiquity amongst the student body. Simultaneously, there should be a strong focus on potentially adding TikTok as a new platform as it was strongly expressed by the student body as an area in which Maccess should have a presence.

Increasing collaboration with other MSU services, student clubs, and community groups is a useful strategy as well. With this in place, Maccess will not only be able to enhance service delivery, but will also be able to better advocate the

McMaster University regarding various accessibility topics. This recommendation goes hand-in-hand with the fourth which is that Maccess should refocus somewhat on advocacy priorities. Specifically through more prominent disability awareness campaigns and increasing discourse through well promoted educational events, Maccess can generate greater discussion regarding accessibility topics. This will likely lead to a more informed McMaster community and higher success in advocacy goals to the university.

Aside from the above recommendations, the MSU should investigate the creation of an advisory panel composed of various individuals, namely those selected by Maccess, those from the SRA, representatives from the Equity and Inclusion Office/Student Accessibility Services of McMaster University, as well as community groups. This advisory panel can serve as a body of advisors helping inform programming, creation of resources, and give guidance to ensure Maccess' programming is of the highest quality, in line with existing research, and serving community needs. This advisory body could have a larger role in serving to ensure all the peer support and identity-focused services of the MSU are up to date with scientific literature, best practices, and have a useful knowledge base to rely on. Furthermore, this group could help bolster Maccess' ability to meet its advocacy-oriented objectives more successfully. The investigation process should entail interviewing relevant parties to first gauge more closely if a gap exists within Maccess service delivery and how closely it matches student needs, as well as the ability of mentioned parties to alleviate a potential gap if guidance is given.

Finally, the last recommendation is for the MSU to investigate the possibility of having Co-Directors and augmenting the overall leadership structure of Maccess. Essentially, as many executives and volunteers are a part of the disabled community, often health concerns or other factors prevent service delivery from occurring at its full potential. Greater support within Maccess leadership is needed to ensure effective coordination of resources and delivery of support to the student body. This recommendation is directly based on feedback from the outgoing Maccess Director. This initiative should be investigated by Vice President (Administration), Administrative Services Coordinator, Associate Vice President: Services, and the incoming Maccess Director and Assistant Director.

With these steps in place, Maccess will be able to successfully improve its service delivery and continue its role as a vital part of the McMaster Community. I would like to thank the Services Committee, Administrative Services Coordinator, Director of Marketing and Communications, the Director of Maccess, everyone on the Maccess Team who helped, and those in the student body who responded to the surveys for their help in the creation of this report.

Recommendations

1. Continue improvement of educational resources in the coming year with consultations with the community by future Maccess leadership. The end goal would be to hopefully improve the ability for educational/support resources to in fact meet the needs of service users.
2. More consistent usage of social media and other platforms to promote services and resources offered by Maccess. Keep continued focus on Instagram and look at TikTok as a secondary focus.
3. Have increased collaboration and a greater number of initiatives with other MSU services, student clubs, community groups, and advocacy to McMaster University services.
4. Refocus priorities more closely on advocacy through increased support for disability awareness campaigns and increased discourse in the McMaster community through educational events (such as hosting webinars or inviting speakers to give talks).
5. Investigation into potential creation advisory panel composed of MSU members elected by the SRA, a number of individuals appointed by Maccess, representatives from the EIO/SAS, and potentially those from the greater Hamilton community who can serve as advisors regarding programming and offer helpful resources, guidance, and increased support to ensure Maccess' programming is of the highest quality.
6. Investigate the possibility of having Co-Directors as well as the overall leadership structure of Maccess based on feedback from outgoing Maccess Director. Should be investigated by VP Admin, ASC, AVP Services, and incoming Maccess Director, and Assistant Director.

Best regards,

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