**Terms of Reference – Student Disability Community Network**

This Terms of Reference is created by the Office of the Associate Provost, Campus Support and Accessibility, advised by members of the Student Disability Community Network.

# **1. Background**

The Student Disability Community Network (SDCN) is part of the Disability Affinity Program, led by the Associate Director, Campus Accessibility and the Disability Inclusion Coordinator (the Campus Accessibility team) within the Office of the Associate Provost, Campus Support and Accessibility, herein referred to as the “SDCN leads”.

# **2. Purpose**

The primary goal of the SDCN is to create meaningful space for mentorship, peer support, and knowledge exchange within the student disability community at the University of Waterloo as it pertains to navigating disability- and neurodivergence-related experiences as postsecondary students. By fostering an inclusive community network, the SDCN contributes to the University’s broader equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts per the [Provost’s Advisory Committee on Building a Resilient University of Waterloo](https://uwaterloo.ca/provost/reports/provosts-advisory-committee-building-resilient-university), the [Waterloo at 100](https://uwaterloo.ca/waterloo-100/) strategic plan, and the [Waterloo Student Experience & Engagement (WatSEE) Framework](https://uwaterloo.ca/provost/reports/waterloo-student-experience-engagement-watsee). The SDCN will support the University in meeting its institutional commitments and legislative requirements for consultation by nurturing an engaged community to invite participants for community engagement opportunities. Legislative requirements include those listed in the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11) (2005) and the [AODA Postsecondary Education Standards recommendations](https://www.ontario.ca/page/development-proposed-postsecondary-education-standards-final-recommendations-report-2022) (2022).

The primary goal of the SDCN is community building and support related to personal experiences of navigating disability and neurodivergence in school and campus environments. The SDCN does not provide educational workshops or activities to other campus partners or external groups. Should the SDCN members reach consensus for a desire to conduct these activities, the SDCN leads will determine which existing institutional pathways are most relevant and how these can be accessed.

# **3. Objectives**

* Collaboratively build a space for SDCN members to share experiences, challenges, and best practices on topics related to personal experiences of disability and neurodivergence in academic and University environments with other community members.
* Support participant engagement for institutional consultation on the advancement of campus accessibility and disability inclusion.
* Act as a consultative body on institutional policies and practices upon request by campus partners and deemed appropriate and necessary by SDCN leads.
* Promote awareness on institutional feedback pathways and support mechanisms related to navigating disability and neurodivergence student experiences.

# **4. Membership**

Membership is open to all students, inclusive of undergraduate and graduate students, of the University of Waterloo who self-identify with current lived experience of disability or neurodivergence.

The SDCN is built on the values of honoring lived experiences as expertise and the power of listening to this expertise to guide continuous evaluation. The SDCN further recognizes the sensitive nature of disclosing disability. In these ways, the SDCN supports participants in determining their own eligibility and choosing for themselves when and how to disclose personal information.

Participation is voluntary, and students may join or leave the email mailing list or attend SDCN meetings at their discretion.

# **5. Structure and Governance**

The Executive Sponsor for the SDCN is the Associate Provost, Campus Support and Accessibility. The Program Manager is the Associate Director, Campus Accessibility. The SDCN leads are the Associate Director, Campus Accessibility and the Disability Inclusion Coordinator.

The SDCN leads are responsible for setting and upholding the mandate and scope of the network, finalizing discussion topics, facilitating discussions, and coordinating meetings.

Ideas on meeting activities and discussion topics will be generated at meetings, facilitated by the SDCN leads.

Members are encouraged to provide input through regular meetings and feedback mechanisms, including a standing feedback form promoted through the email mailing list.

# **6. Meetings and Communication**

Regular community meetings will be held not more than monthly. Decisions regarding in-person or virtual meeting settings will be determined by members at least one month in advance and communicated via the email mailing list.

Guest presentations by non-members may occur during SDCN meetings, as coordinated by the SDCN leads and upon agreement of SDCN members to ensure members’ emotional safety, well-being, and confidentiality.

Communication will occur only through the email mailing list that students can elect to join or leave. This mailing list will only ever be accessed by the SDCN leads (the Office of the Associate Provost, Campus Support and Accessibility) to protect the confidentiality of members. Communication is one-way and members cannot contact other members through the mailing list.

One meeting a year of the SDCN may occur simultaneously with the Employee Disability Community Network as a joint meeting to support mentorship and networking opportunities, upon approval by members of both Networks and the SDCN leads.

# **7. Anti-Oppressive Framework**

The SDCN aims to continually develop in alignment with anti-oppressive frameworks that center intersectional equity and student voices. Should members from the SDCN or the SDCN leads feel that the SDCN has stepped away from these frameworks, the SDCN leads will discuss and reassess the program alignment and opportunities for meaningful action.

# **8. Engagement Guidelines**

***Meeting Coordination***

The SDCN leads will manage all administrative activities, including room booking, supply procurement, and resource requests.

***Meeting Facilitation***

The Disability Inclusion Coordinator will be the primary facilitator of all SDCN meetings. While the Disability Inclusion Coordinator may identify with and express shared lived experiences, this is not a requirement for facilitation. Instead, principles of trauma-informed care and an anti-oppressive lens will guide facilitation. Should the Disability Inclusion Coordinator be unable to facilitate as scheduled meeting, other members from the Office of the Associate Provost, Campus Support and Accessibility may support facilitation. All facilitators will have knowledge and understanding of the SDCN Terms of Reference and uphold these principles as part of their employment with the University.

A Memorandum of Understanding with the Student Equity, Community Leadership, and Development Team (SECLD) in the Student Success Office outlines sharing of SECLD funding to pay for one Student Facilitator and the activities in one SDCN meeting. This MOU is to be reviewed next in April 2025 and annually there in after.

As a representative of the University and SDCN lead, the SDCN facilitator is responsible for ensuring all meeting discussions are in alignment with the SDCN purpose and institutional values, policies, and procedures. As such, the SDCN facilitator will end or redirect discussions that are harmful, breaches confidentiality, is inappropriate for the SDCN, or is best held in other institutional spaces. To uphold this responsibility, the SDCN facilitator may need to remove an individual from the network if these aspects are compromised.

***Formal Feedback Pathways***

The SDCN does not have a mandate to oversee or direct response to formal institutional feedback or incidents of ableism or other forms of identity-based harms. To ensure that SDCN activities align with organizational policies and to protect the anonymity of members, all feedback, recommendations, or concerns raised by SDCN members will be considered by the SDCN leads and directed through established channels as appropriate and necessary. SDCN leads may facilitate appropriate feedback pathway/mechanisms with individual members on their specific, individual concerns.

***Scope of Engagement***

The SDCN does not function as a decision-making or advocacy body, but instead as a supportive community group related to personal experiences of navigating disability and neurodivergence in academia and the University.

SDCN activities must align with organizational values and policies and the stated scope of the network.

The SDCN values confidentiality, respect, and inclusivity in all engagements. Members will not discuss confidential organizational matters inside or outside of meetings such as specific interactions with instructors, students, staff, or others. Confidentiality may not be guaranteed should a member disclose harm to self, others, or members of the SDCN. The University has a responsibility to uphold its statutory obligations, such as the Ontario Human Rights Code, AODA, and Occupational Health and Safety Act.

As a University of Waterloo sanctioned network, all members of the SDCN are bound by applicable University policies and processes. Violations, concerns, and dispute resolutions will follow applicable standard University processes.

# **9. Evaluation and Sustainability**

The SDCN was developed under advisement of student community engagement to ensure student wants and needs related to disability community networks were reflected in the Network. Students continue to be integral partners in the SDCN. Feedback will be collected and evaluated via what is noted below, with room to add and adapt responsively:

* Continual development of the group guidelines in the first SDCN meeting of each semester
* Open feedback form linked to the bottom of SDCN mailing list emails
* Annual member surveys and organizational feedback

The Disability Inclusion Coordinator will document key metrics and feedback related to attendance, meeting accessibility, and progress towards the goals outlined in this Terms of Reference to inform future initiatives.

# **10. Amendments**

This Terms of Reference document will be reviewed annually and updated as needed.

Any proposed amendments must be approved by the Associate Director, Campus Accessibility and submitted to the Associate Provost, Campus Support and Accessibility for final review.

# **11. Acknowledgment**

By participating in the SDCN, members agree to uphold the principles outlined in this Terms of Reference and contribute to a respectful, inclusive, and constructive environment.

# **Revision History**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Change Made By | Date Change Made | Details of Change | Change Reviewed/ Approved by | Date change reviewed/ approved |
| Samantha Fowler | March 3, 2025 | Initial Draft |  |  |
| Joyce Barlow | March 5, 2025 | Edits and comments |  |  |
| Samantha Fowler | April 4, 2025 | Draft 2 |  |  |
| Joyce Barlow | April 11, 2025 | Editorial changes |  |  |
| Samantha Fowler | April 30, 2025 | Draft 3 |  |  |
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| Samantha Fowler | May 29, 2025 | Final draft |  |  |