THE UBYSSEY MAGAZINE 2021

SYSTEM REBOOT REQUIRED

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We would like to acknowledge that this paper and the land on which we study and work is the traditional, occupied and unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and səl̓ílwətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

Cover and section cover art
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FEBRUARY 2021

EDITOR'S NOTE

The last year has been like no other.

Twelve months ago, when we left our classes, we didn't know that we wouldn't be returning. The halls of our classes, the places we studied, partied and made memories — those places are empty. We've been spaced out, distanced and masked.

While the word 'unprecedented' may feel overused, the effects of COVID-19 have brought with it a litany of seemingly unanswerable questions. *What does it mean to be safe? What does it mean to be connected? Who is essential?*

Frankly, this year has given us more time to reflect on the truths that we hold to be self-evident, not just for ourselves but the systems that we live in. But as we've held these truths up to a microscope for further examination, it hasn't been pretty. There are more than just a few glitches in our system.

This magazine will attempt to locate the bugs and attempt to answer the unanswerable. We'll go back to the past, take an uncomfortable seat in the present and even discuss what we need to create a better future.

Creating systemic change is never easy. But in a year like this one, where we've all been affected and need a break from being online... maybe it's a system reboot that's required.

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MEMORY
LEAK

RAGING AGAINST THE MACHINE

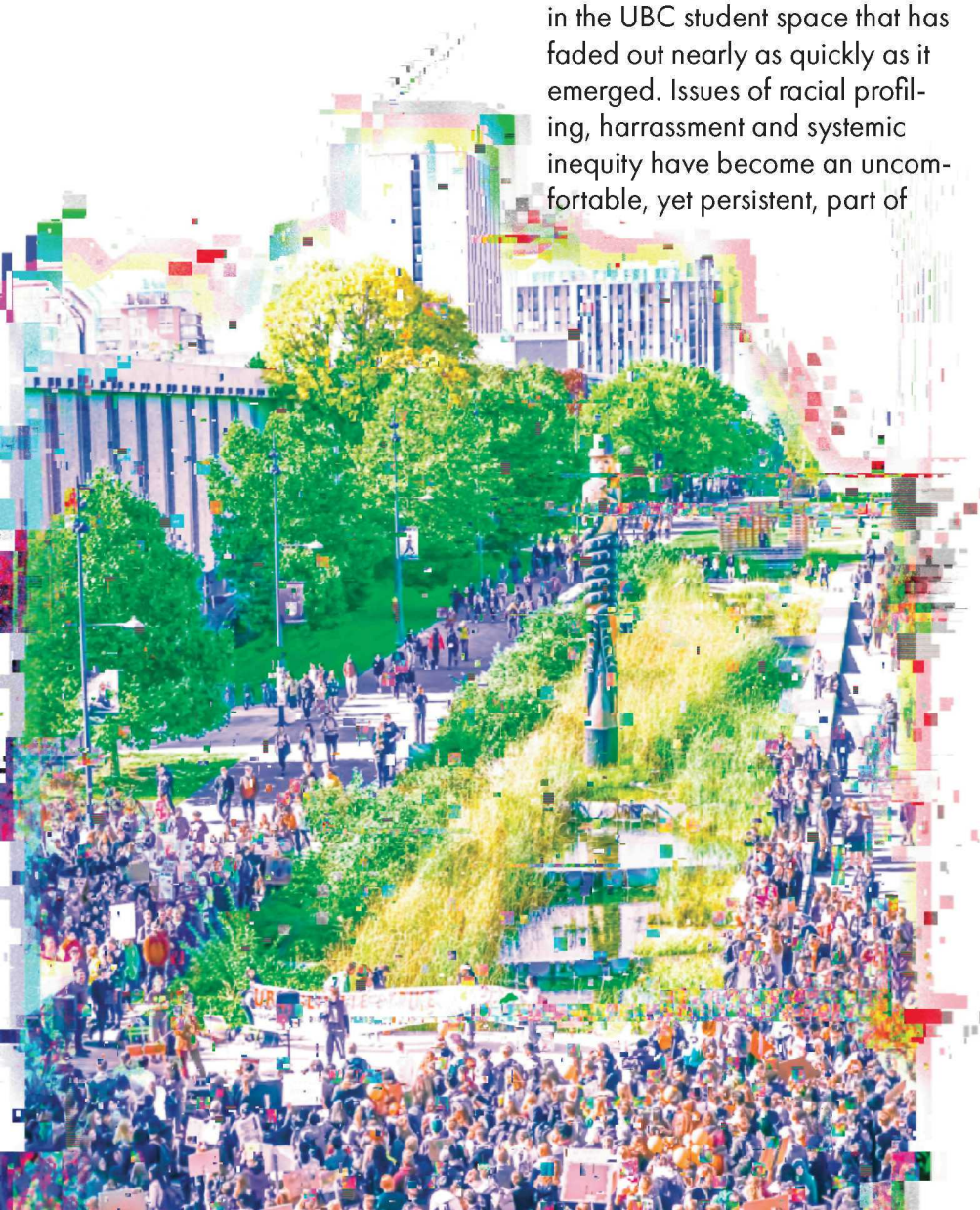
What the evolution of UBC's protests tells us about student activism's future

Words by **Shereen Lee**
Photos by **Elizabeth Wang**

The wave of activism for the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 felt like a moment in history. Over the last year, there has been a sharp burst of momentum in the UBC student space that has faded out nearly as quickly as it emerged. Issues of racial profiling, harrassment and systemic inequity have become an uncomfortable, yet persistent, part of our campus's legacy.

Large-scale protests, amplified by social media, have caught the attention of the UBC campus. But how can that attention be converted to real, lasting change?

One answer might lie in the story of how UBC's student activist initiatives developed. The evolution of 20th-century student protests at UBC tells a story of an increasingly political student body — one heavily influenced by the moral conversations of the world around it.



TREK IT OUT

The first instance of a documented UBC student protest was Alison Peeles's letter in a March 1919 edition of *The Ubyssey* claiming that UBC's relocation to Point Grey was underfunded by the provincial government. UBC's location and development were controversial issues on a student and provincial level: BC had only assigned UBC to the Point Grey area in 1910, and much of the land granted was situated on unceded Musqueam territory. Government plans for campus were vague and slow moving.

Funds diminished further after

the First World War decimated Canadian resources. Peeles's 1919 letter was the start of student organizing for more funding for UBC. Delegations continually negotiated with the BC government for money and saw success in November 1922 when the province agreed to commit $1.5 million to university construction.

According to the AMS archives, that month, in what is now known as the Great Trek, over 1,200 students held a sit-in at the unfinished Point Grey campus to lay claim to the land, dismissing the financial difficulties of the post-war Canadian situation and the fact that the Point Grey campus was on Musqueam territory. Resources like *The Ubyssey* disseminated information on how to participate in the protest, resulting in a targeted campaign that garnered the support of almost the entire student body.

However, social justice activism was not yet a part of mainstream university culture. When the province assigned 3,000 acres to the university in 1920 — the majority of which had been (and still is) claimed by the Musqueam people as their traditional and unceded territory — students were not recorded participating in the provincial conversation around Indigenous land rights.

Provincial and university administrations seldom acknowledged the historical presence of the Musqueam while the campus was being built. The province did not consider any territorial claims made by the Musqueam until the late 1990s, when the Supreme Court of Canada recognized Indigenous claims on territory with a landmark ruling.

UBC's then mostly white student body followed suit. While plans for campus development were underway, *The Ubyssey* framed the University Endowment Lands as space "which once belonged to the Indians" in 1927, largely ignoring Musqueam territorial rights.

At this time, the university didn't document any student activism throughout the '20s and '30s. This was the case even as Canada underwent significant turmoil following the Great Depression. A review of the 1935 student handbook shows no official clubs or societies dedicated to service or socio-political issues.

Instead, students continued to advocate for more building resources at UBC. This resulted in the construction of a Women's Gymnasium in 1929, Brock Hall in 1940, an armoury in 1941 and the War Memorial Gymnasium in 1951. A 'Second Great Trek' helped obtain more financial aid for students at UBC. Students also spoke out against tuition increases, administrative decisions like library closures and non-public AMS meetings.

NO STRUGGLE, NO PROGRESS

Student attitudes shifted after the Second World War to include more conversations on social issues outside UBC. Issues of race and immigration stirred by the war reached Vancouver in 1942, when 76 Japanese–Canadian UBC students were forcibly exiled following Canada's declaration of war on Japan. These actions faced near-universal student reprimand and students began to speak out against anti-Japanese racism. According to AMS archive files, in a 1948 student parliamentary vote, 99 per cent of the student voters spoke in favour of full citizenship rights for Japanese–Canadian students. Japanese–Canadians and Indigenous BC residents were granted suffrage a year later in 1949, a victory in a wider civil rights movement in Canada.

The first social justice-related campus group *The Ubyssey* could find, the Civil Liberties Union (CLU), actively discussed the issues of xenophobia during World War II. Other clubs like the Social Problems Club and Progressive-Conservative Club coalesced to discuss prominent issues in global politics as the Korean War and Civil Rights Movement shaped national conversations in the early '50s and '60s.

Political conversations happening in the United States began to influence Canadian activism in the late '40s. Minorities in Vancouver and other provinces established the Canadian League for the Advancement of Colored People, advancing professional success for Black jobseekers beginning in 1947 and 1948. Students similarly formed support groups for specific demographics and communities, including ethnic or cultural associations and international student clubs.

All of this was happening as UBC was becoming larger and

more diverse than ever before. In 1948, the Musqueam Nation offered a totem pole as a gift to UBC, with the intent of indicating an evolved relationship with UBC, "one in which the university would welcome Aboriginal students to study and succeed on the same basis as others," according to the First Nations House of Learning.

Though enrolment demographic data was limited until 2020 when UBC started collecting more detailed race-based data, the student population increased drastically over the next few decades. Around 5,000 students were enrolled at UBC in 1954. By 1968, there were 17,630 enrolled undergraduates, with marked enrolment increases in marginalized populations and international students.

STICK IT TO THE MAN(Y)

At this point, activism in the United States was reaching fever pitch with protests against the Vietnam War, which had a profound impact on campus life. Canada never entered the Vietnam War and largely acted as a UN peacekeeper in other wars at the time. However, Cold War-era issues became prominent on campus as signalled by the impact of new organizations like UBC's nuclear disarmament club. Canada would eventually achieve disarmament by 1985.

Students also participated in a close examination of university and AMS finances, especially in relation to protests against South African apartheid. These calls for divestment were part of a large wave of divestment initiatives across North America. The AMS intended to close its account with the Bank of Montreal in 1979 for loaning money to the South African government. However, when the bank threatened service charges of over $2,000, officers made the decision to maintain the account, stirring controversy among the student body.

Eventually, students began protesting the investments of the university itself as UBC revealed it had over $1 million in holdings tied to South African investments. Under pressure from groups like Students for a Free Southern Africa, UBC eventually opted for a policy of "partial divestment" in 1986, withdrawing exclusively from companies that did not adhere to Canadian business protocols.

(TUITION) HIKE? I'D RATHER WALK

When the early 1980s recession hit, many students were impacted by the economic fallout. Student protests turned inward as federal and provincial funding dwindled. For these protests, students participated in a range of smaller protests targeting specific issues, like cutbacks to Indigenous scholarships in 1987 which denied funding to nearly 40 per cent of qualified Indigenous applicants.

Five years of cutbacks to the university budget led to a 1983 province-wide strike in which students, civil servants, healthcare workers and other British Columbians participated. Undergraduates also participated in another round of protests regarding fee hikes as they rose 17 per cent in the face of government funding cuts during the recession.

Though student activism was strong, the financial difficulties of the recession made it difficult for students to enact lasting change with their protests. UBC saw millions of dollars cut as the federal and provincial governments reduced spending. As a result, they did not have the capacity to take in as many students as usual, which further exacerbated their deficit. The end of the recession eventually brought more resources back to UBC and a tuition freeze in the 1990s as the NDP took control of the BC legislature.

PASS THE SALT, HOLD THE PEPPER (SPRAY)

As life stabilized in the province, UBC students transferred their knowledge of early political protests to large-scale political activism at home. In 1997, students grew alarmed upon hearing the news that the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) was planning to hold its Economic Leaders' Meeting at UBC.

They voiced concerns that APEC, a body aiming to create free trade zones in the Asia-Pacific region, did work that would "have dire consequences for the environment and labour rights." Invited to APEC were controversial leaders such as Indonesian dictator Suharto.

Calls for UBC to cancel the conference escalated. The RCMP

arrested and pepper-sprayed some students who participated in protests. The protests culminated in a 3,000-student rally outside Koerner Library and a promise from then-UBC President Martha Piper that the student body would be consulted before the arrangement of any future conferences with APEC.

The politicization of UBC students put more attention on the specific needs of the student body. The AMS recalibrated its funding and offered more support to a diverse range of student social causes by creating the AMS Resource Groups in 1997. The groups offered a larger umbrella for AMS organizations like the Women's Centre, and committed to adding newer committees like the Social Justice Centre.

SYSTEM REBOOT (STILL) REQUIRED

Early stages of activism were focused on issues of funding for a new and undeveloped university. But as the school gained its footing as an institution, students began to look toward the issues that the rest of the world cared about. They conducted awareness campaigns and eventually began to see UBC as a place to enact change, both on a larger level and to make campus a better place for marginalized students.

Many of the issues that UBC students advocated for are no longer a part of campus discourse. Yet, the changes these students instituted through protests on nuclear disarmament or South African divestment have built frameworks that are already helping us navigate the world of campus activism today. The local resources that UBC alumni built and negotiated, from diversity policies to AMS resources, continue to give activists a foundation on which to work.

The story of UBC's student protests, their wins and losses, resources and institutional knowledge, provide a valuable lesson on the future of effective protest. The issues we fight for today, from climate change policy to race and gender equity, can learn from the strategies and institutional memories of successes in the past.

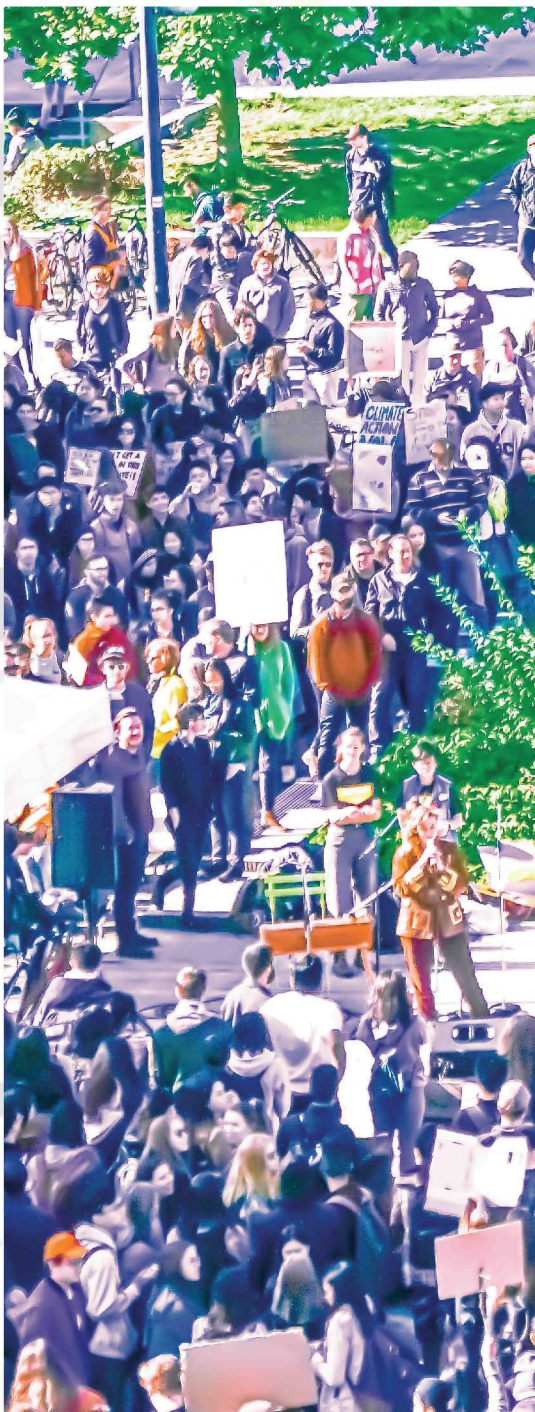
While individual protests might not turn out immediate results, the history of UBC activism shows that grassroots initiatives have the power to enact systemic changes — many of which can occur years after the protests have begun. From the Great Trek in 1922 to the anti-APEC protests in 1997, large demonstrations of student sentiment have had a record of yielding results. But behind these demonstrations are the months and years of sustained organizing efforts which unified the student body and clarified activist intentions.

Activists of the past 20 years have already been mobilizing to institute radical socio-political change, in the tradition of protesters of the past century.

From the adoption of awareness campaigns like Orange Shirt Day to a climate strike with over 4,000 participants in 2019, protest has continued on with advocating institutional support for campaigns revolving around major issues in society.

As advocacy rapidly shifts to a digital focus in the age of the pandemic, today's protesters are faced with the challenge of using media to create sustainable campaigns that extend beyond campus boundaries.

— With files from Sheldon Goldfarb and Simone Richler



BARRED FROM THE SYSTEM

Creating communities at UBC

Words by **Tianne Jensen-DesJardins**
Illustrations by **Hannah D'Souza**

Content warning: suicide

In 1986, Systems, a club in downtown Vancouver, refused entry to Chinese Varsity Club (CVC) members despite the fact that they had a partnership. The nightclub, which only survives today in memory, claimed that it was hosting a private party in order to circumvent discrimination laws. They also noted that it refused entry to the members on the grounds of the potential for 'gang-related' issues.

"The doorman was classifying us as a gang just because we were a large group [of Asian people]," then-club President Steve Ling had told *The Ubyssey* at the time.

When *The Ubyssey* followed up with Systems regarding the racist refusal of entry, the club mentioned policies that allow business owners the right to refuse service to anyone suspected of disrupting the business. Ling, along with the CVC, lodged a complaint to the BC Council of Human Rights as a way to bring awareness about racism within Vancouver. The current president of the CVC, Daniel Chen, said that the complaint had been dropped.

"Prejudice and racism looks different now from 30 years, 35 years ago, but I think this is a good reminder of how far we've come as a club," Chen added.

The CVC is not the only club to face discrimination. Five years ago, during OUTweek, a pride flag that was raised for the event was found burnt on the flagpole. While the event left members of the Pride Collective feeling shaken, there were also concerns for the future.

"We're just worried about repeat incidences or if this is not a one-time occurrence," coordinator Rachel Garrett told *The Georgia Straight* at the time.

Garrett was correct in assuming that there would be more incidences.

Two years later, a small transphobic demonstration occurred outside of the Nest. Quickly, a group of 2SLGBTQIA+ supporters came to raise pride flags in front of the hate-filled signs from protestors.

"We don't need hatred right now. If anything, we need a lot of love and support at this time so it's just saddening," Tanveer Romeo, a UBC student who took part in the counter protest, told *The Ubyssey* at the time.

Club members highlighted the need for support within the Queer community.

"Queer-specific groups are important for young adults, in this emerging transition between adolescence to adulthood to find the community when that community might not always be readily available," Andy Griffin, a sociology graduate from UBC, previously told *The Ubyssey*.

"There's a public dimension that creates safety," Griffin added.

Black students have also endured numerous racist incidents on campus. A recent incident was the racial profiling of a Black student by campus security. In June 2020, graduate student Savoy Williams was barred from entering Buchanan Tower despite providing campus security with a letter of permission from his supervisor.

Malini Romeo, current VP external of the Black Student Union (BSU), explained that in the aftermath, "it was the Black community that kickstarted the response and demanded action be taken in order to support and uplift the student."

While discrimination within the UBC community is not a thing of the past, there are now some safe spaces for members of marginalized communities to gather and find support. According to UBC Student Services, there are

more than 350 AMS clubs on campus, but in spite of this, there are still students who fall through the cracks.

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

UBC was first formed in 1908 when the legislature passed the University Act, though it wasn't until 1925 that the campus opened in Point Grey. When UBC was still operating in the 'shacks' on Tenth and Laurel, it only had three faculties: arts, applied science and agriculture.

By 1930, a UBC census reported that there were 1,904 students, only 41 of which were international. Today, UBC has a total of 69,287 students across its campuses. In addition to far larger numbers, UBC also has students coming from far more places. In 2020, UBC hosted 7,337 international students from East Asia alone.

As UBC's student base has become more diverse, its clubs have also diversified. UBC hosts many clubs, such as the Pride Collective, the BSU, the CVC, UBC Indian Students' Association, known as UTSAV, Brazilian Student Association (BRASA) and many more.

The oldest of these clubs, the CVC, was formed back in 1930 by a group of eight Chinese students to foster a sense of community between the Chinese students on campus. As years went on, the club grew in number and began branching out to other activities, such as social events and ski trips.

Today, the CVC has 11 departments, each one focusing on a different aspect of the club. In addition to parties, which are a large part of the CVC's reputation, the club also includes activities for those who are not as interested in partying.

Chen explained that the club "has definitely changed a lot" from when it started out as a club for Chinese students to play varsity sports.

One of the big changes that the club has undergone recently is its rebranding. Chen explained that the club "purposely changed [its] branding to remove the Chinese Varsity text from [the] logos to just [become] 'CVC' because we wanted to take a step towards being more inclusive."

Growth is inevitable for any of UBC's clubs that have been around for a length of time, and the Pride Collective is no exception. The Pride Collective changed names many times before settling on Pride UBC in 1997 in order to be more inclusive, modifying it a few years later to reflect its flat organizational structure. With a history of finding support through the club, the Pride Collective now acts as a resource group in order to create a more inclusive campus and community.

One of the major events that the Pride Collective hosts every year is PRIDEWeek, which is a "week-long festivity of everything from discussions and workshops to poetry and dancing." In addition to hosting yearly Pride events, the collective also holds weekly discussions. These discussions aim to provide a safer space for students to ask questions and connect with other 2SLGBTQIA+ students.

While pride events on campus today are celebratory and upbeat,

it was not always this way. Ron Dutton, founder of the BC Gay and Lesbian Archives, previously spoke to *The Ubyssey* about earlier days in the club's history when being closeted was the norm.

"The overriding fact of a young person who was Queer in those years was that you were a criminal. Under the Criminal Code of Canada, you were a criminal," Dutton said.

"The phrase we use to have was, 'You don't tell somebody that you're gay until you're willing to lose them,'" Gerald Williams, a club member from 1988 to 1991, previously told *The Ubyssey*.

Today the Pride Collective strives to provide a space for 2SLGBTQIA+ students to connect and support each other on campus.

Being able to connect to other students is also a priority for UTSAV. Founded in 1980, it aims to provide a "home away from home" for students of Indian descent. Hardika Naik, UTSAV vice-president, explained that organizing big events such as Holi and Diwali celebrations has created that sense of community.

With everything online this year, the club has turned to using breakout rooms in order to help students connect.

"In our welcome-back event, we had all students in the online event [join] breakout rooms and gave them a few questions to talk about, to [get] to know each other so that they can make new friends from their own culture," Naik said.

On top of creating spaces for Indian students to connect with each other, Naik said UTSAV "would love everyone to see [Indian] culture and enjoy it as much as [they] do."

As UTSAV represents a large portion of UBC's student population, it does its best to work with other clubs to host events specifically geared towards the vast number of cultures that fall under the umbrella of Indian identity.

In many ways, the CVC, the Pride Collective and UTSAV were all formed in order to create a support network for students. Today, these clubs hope to continue forming the bonds between students that have kept their clubs thriving for years in the wake of a campus that may not always be so welcoming.

GOING (CLUB)BING

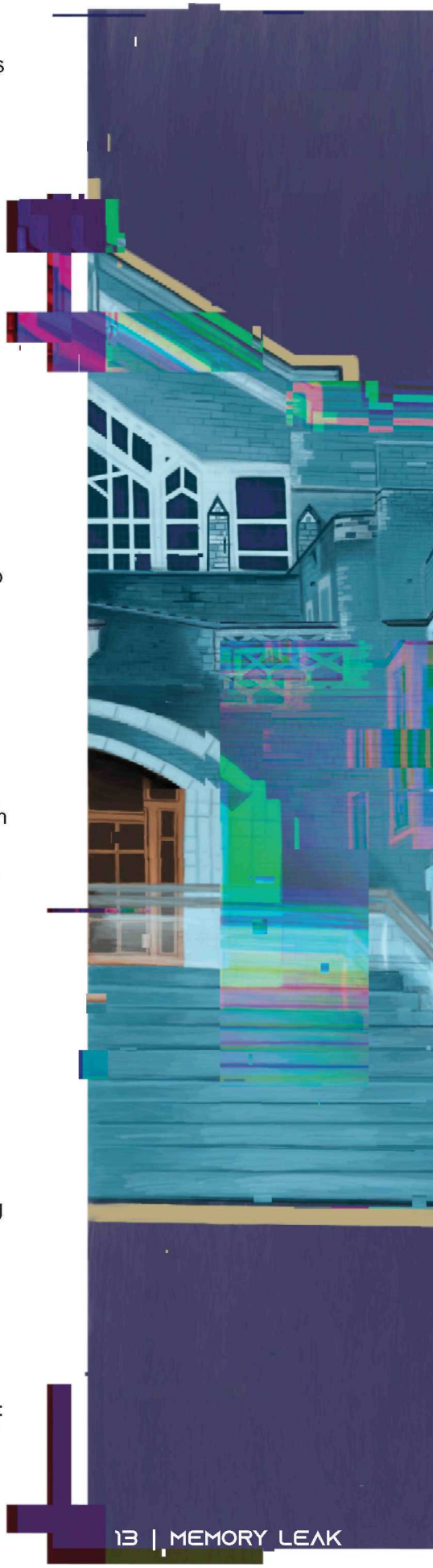
As UBC's campus works towards becoming more inclusive and welcoming to all of its students, more clubs have been created with specific roles.

One of these new groups is the First Generation Students Union (FGSU) that formed in January 2019. Jaskirat Mahil, co-president of the union, explained that the group was created out of a need for support.

"We discovered that there was really no data on first-generation students which means that you can't have a policy, and use that data [to create] policy for assisting first-generation students," Mahil said.

A physical space on campus is the next step in fostering a sense of community between first-gen students.

"Not necessarily on the scale of the Global Lounge, but something along those lines where there's



a space where first-generation low-income students can talk and help each other and mentor each other," Mahil explained.

One benefit clubs have today is updated technology. The FGSU has capitalized on this advantage by hosting the Gen One conference virtually earlier this year. Similarly, BRASA has used technology to host panel discussions and game nights on Discord to foster the sense of connection that has been lost during the pandemic.

"BRASA was created to help Brazilians feel at home and create a community here at UBC," said Julio Silva, the club's prospective student director & external director.

"Especially with the pandemic, BRASA has seen how casual events tend to be much more successful in making people feel welcomed and included."

The BSU also uses technology to bring together the Black community on campus. Romeo said that the BSU is "dedicated to furthering the representation, education and empowerment of UBC's Black community."

Achieving this sense of community can be tricky online, yet the BSU has been proactive in organizing virtual events such as movie nights and information sessions that provide opportunities for Black students.

"What makes UBC BSU special is our community and that is, and will always be, the foundation of our club," Romeo said.

'IN THE SAME BOAT'

From 41 international students in 1930 to 7,337 international students today, UBC has become more diverse than it used to be, but there is still a long way to go before everyone feels welcome and safe on campus. The last few years have seen the creation of various identity groups, such as the BSU and the FGSU, but there are still many students that cannot find support in the form of identity groups.

Many identity groups at UBC were formed because of a lack of support for students from marginalized groups. The FGSU was spurred into creation by the life-threatening consequences of having no support on campus.

"One of our fellow first-gen peers was actually considering committing suicide because they were overwhelmed and overburdened by all the issues they were facing as a first-generation student," Mahil said.

"I feel like just having that voice and helping others realize that there are other students in the same situation ... and providing guidance and advice can really go a long way," said Mahil.

"I know it would have for me."

Like the FGSU, the BSU was formed because the founders "recognized the need and opportunity for something like [the BSU] to be created," Romeo said.

However, the creation of clubs and groups alone does not create a more welcoming campus. Many of the clubs have to work hard to ensure their members are being heard by the UBC community.

"It is hard to fill the gaps and create opportunities for Black students at UBC in a range of areas and expertise," Romeo said.

As more and more clubs are formed, more students are able to find the support they need to feel included on campus. As safe spaces become more specific, more options open up for students trying to feel included in the UBC community.

"I think the benefit of clubs is that they're more niche specific, and every club has their own vibe, especially for social clubs. [Students] coming into UBC don't know exactly what they're into either, and people change a lot, right? So, I think clubs are an essential part of campus and since it's student managed, it's more personable to, and more reflective of, the current student body," Chen said.

In some ways, the diversification of the student body has also given the chance for clubs to become more inclusive spaces for their members.

"It just got so much better, it's unbelievable," Richard Summerbell, a former member of Pride UBC, previously told *The Ubyssey*. "[For] anybody who's ever thought 'I'm down at the bottom of the sociological garbage chute, and there's just no way I could ever climb up,' the miraculous is done."

The FGSU's Mahil echoed the sentiment.

"One thing that really helps our group is that everyone is in the same boat. We really bonded because of [our] similar situations." ¶

— With files from Sheldon Goldfarb and Bailey Martens

ALL A-BOARD

Words by **Nathan Bawaan**
Illustration by **Elizabeth Wang**

"Those who rise to positions of leadership have won the contest of who can seem most certain and overrule or ignore divergent opinions."

These were the words of sociology professor Dr. Jennifer Berdahl in a 2015 blog post following the surprise resignation of former UBC President Arvind Gupta. In August of the same year, Gupta had suddenly resigned from his position after serving only a year of his five-year term, setting off a storm of speculation.

In the post, Berdahl theorized that Gupta had "lost a masculinity contest" with UBC's Board of Governors over policy disagreements, resulting in his departure.

Her post was merely speculative, but nevertheless sparked backlash from then Board Chair John Montalbano. In a second blog post written shortly after the original, Berdahl detailed a phone call she received from Montalbano where he said that her post threatened the reputation of UBC's leadership and repeatedly implied that her academic credibility would be questioned.

A subsequent external review from former BC Supreme Court Justice Lynn Smith found that this interaction was in violation of Berdahl's academic freedom.

"It really opened my eyes up to the power of the Board, and the importance of having a well-trained Board that understands the academic mission of the university," Berdahl said in a recent interview with *The Ubyssey*.

Berdahl's story brings to light a critical issue with UBC's Board of Governors.

The Board is one of UBC's most powerful governing bodies, yet it is composed primarily of individuals from the corporate world who are appointed by the provincial government, not the university.

This has led to decisions that have triggered backlash from the university community.

BOARDS OF PAST AND PRESENT

Established in 1908, the Board of Governors serves as an oversight body at UBC.

Per the University Act, the Board is tasked with "the management, administration and control of the property, revenue, business and affairs of the university." This involves approving the budget and creating both the university's strategic plan and mission.

Historically, the Board has lacked faculty and student representation.

Faculty did not serve on the governing body until 1935 when the Senate began appointing them to better facilitate communication between the two bodies. Later, in 1974, these members were directly elected by other faculty.

Meanwhile, students and staff were not permitted to serve on the Board until 1975.

Today, Part VI of the University Act mandates that the 21-member Board of Governors be composed of UBC's chancellor and president, in addition to 8 students, faculty and staff elected by their peers. The remaining 11 seats are appointed by the provincial government.

While two of these members must be nominated to the province by the university's alumni association, the rest must simply be Canadian citizens or permanent residents. The Crown Agencies and Board Resourcing Office (CABRO), which oversees the recruitment of board appointees, has a public application portal on its website.

NEW MOTHERBOARD NEEDED

Currently, 10 of the 11 appointed board members are lawyers, entrepreneurs or finance professionals.

Charley Beresford, CABRO

senior executive lead, supported the province's decision to frequently appoint individuals with backgrounds in business.

"There's often a strong interest in making sure that there's people with strong experience and oversight because [UBC] is a big and complex organization," she said.

UBC is certainly a large institution, with a student population of 66,747 across 2 campuses, 17,791 faculty and staff, and an annual budget of over $2 billion.

While experience overseeing similarly large enterprises could be beneficial, some criticize the business-oriented makeup of the university's chief governing body.

Corporations and large universities like UBC have some overlap, but their aims may differ. Theoretically, the former is profit-driven while the latter is usually focused on the expansion of knowledge.

This difference has led to clashes between the Board and some of the academic faculty of the university.

Dr. Charles Menzies, an anthropology professor who served on the Board as a Vancouver faculty representative until last year, argues that including more individuals from a variety of backgrounds on the Board is in the university's best interest.

"If you come from a community-based grassroots organizing perspective where you haven't had a lot of money, the idea of making profits isn't what's motivating you, but an idea of meeting social needs," he said.

Menzies believes a more diverse Board may not change the decisions being made, but may add different perspectives.

"People might have ended up at the ... same kind of decisions. But they've actually discussed them in a different range of perspectives that actually put meaning to the notion of diversity."

Menzies does not believe that all business people should be removed from the Board. But by mainly appointing corporate individuals, he believes, the university's leadership tends to replicate a model of thinking that has historically benefitted the dominant parts of society.

"We're in a moment where everything is not normal. Having a normal thinking pattern isn't necessarily the most effective way of dealing with our institutions," he added.

BABY (STEPS) ON BOARD

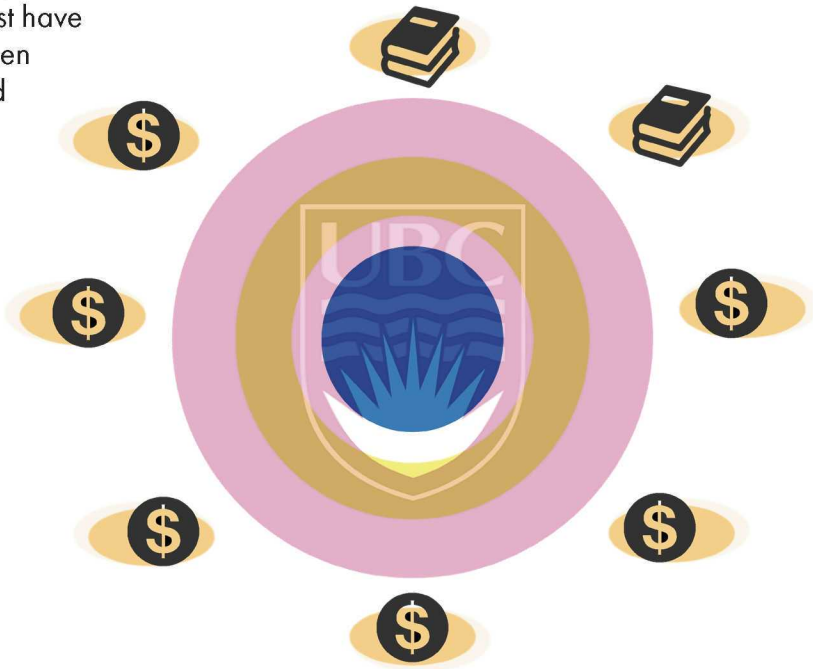
Montalbano and many of the appointed members that served on the Board in 2015 when Berdahl published her blog post have since been removed by the government or have voluntarily resigned. Still, the current makeup of the Board of Governors leans corporate.

BC's NDP government has indicated an interest in appointing people from different backgrounds to the province's public-sector boards. With three appointed members' terms expiring this summer, maybe a new type of Board will emerge.

Berdahl's opinion is that a greater balance of corporate and academic voices is necessary for UBC to be run with the best interests of students and faculty in mind.

"Having two faculty members from Vancouver on the Board and one from Okanagan, numerically, diminishes the voices of faculty on the Board," said Berdahl.

"Just having more academic representation can help."



'THE UNIVERSITY JUST WAITS US OUT'

Student senators speak out on negative treatment in Senate

Words by **Charlotte Alden**

Content warning: Sexual violence

Last summer, at the July Senate meeting, student senators were told to stop talking so much.

In the middle of a discussion of the triennium review report, Convocation Senator Lawrence Burr raised his hand to say that while the discussion was important, students were "filibustering," calling their words an "abuse of Senate's time." Burr has since apologized, writing to *The Ubyssey* that his comments were "poorly chosen" and that every senator is entitled to speak on every motion on the Senate floor.

However, some student senators say such treatment is common.

"We all make mistakes, but that outburst, the tone of that outburst and the overall underlying topic of that outburst is certainly not abnormal for the Senate," said Dante Agosti-Moro, a third-year commerce student and co-chair of the Student Senate Caucus.

Eighteen students sit on the UBC Vancouver Senate, as designated by the University Act. The Senate consists of 88 people, filled by the university's deans, top administrators, faculty members and convocation senators. For years, students have been pointing out issues within the Senate and ways in which the body's structure impedes student engagement.

A TOXIC ENVIRONMENT

Some student senators told *The Ubyssey* that they feel that they are not seen as equals on the Senate by some other members.

Agosti-Moro said that as a student on Senate, he witnesses "a consistent and constant infantilization of the student senators."

Max Holmes, a student senator serving his third term, said other senators often portray student senators as a "monolith". It's also not a new issue — Holmes said senators for the past decade have endured the same treatment.

Holmes said a student senator's one-year term — compared to faculty and convocation senators' three-year terms — makes student concerns easier to dismiss. "The university just waits us out," he said.

Julia Burnham, a student senator serving her second term, outlined the struggle to be seen as polite yet effective by other members of the Senate.

"In these spaces, you're operating under assumptions that to be polite, you must be passive," Burnham said.

"If you're being passive as a student advocate, it means you're failing students, but if you approach it any other way, you're also failing to earn the respect of your colleagues."

Eshana Bhangu, co-chair of the Student Senate Caucus and a first-term student senator, said that while she hasn't faced a lot of trouble herself, it's disheartening to see other student senators face an uphill battle.

"It can be discouraging at times, because you think, 'Okay, should I go out there and really speak what's on my mind?'" she said.

Some students say the challenges they face in the Senate body often create an unwelcoming environment around key issues students care about.

Holmes said he's run into issues in his time on Senate getting people to accept sexual violence as a serious issue.

"As a survivor, I've been in the room and people have told me, 'Sexual violence isn't a serious issue, it's not something that we need to put on the syllabus, it's not something we need to give people resources for advertising.'"

All of this comes with a caveat — all the student senators interviewed were quick to acknowledge the convocation and faculty senators that do treat them well and listen to them. But even those allies seldom stand up for students, according to Holmes. Notably, in the wake of Burr's comments this summer, no one but students publicly condemned him.

PASSED OVER

Some senators said that this culture affects the kind of opportunities that students are given — specifically committee chair appointments.

Currently three committees are chaired by students, although Holmes said each of those elections were uncontested and were for less consequential committee chairships.

"When it comes ... time to [elect] people into leadership positions for these committees, if there's ever any faculty member who is willing to take that on, there's a good chance that they are getting elected instead of the students," Burnham said.

She said it was frustrating, because students, whether they are chairs or not, spend hours behind the scenes preparing for committee, but aren't "trusted with the responsibilities" of leadership.

Holmes said he believes some senators might think students shouldn't be chairs because they might only be around for one year. But he said this shouldn't be a reason students aren't elected.

Dr. Santokh Singh, an elected faculty member in the Senate, agreed that students should be able to be chairs — although he cautioned them of the high workload.

FACING THE LEARNING CURVE

All these issues are exacerbated by the steep learning curve student senators face when they join the body.

"You're coming in as a student with a first impression of, 'Wow, this is a big body with a lot of people, many of whom have been on the Senate for ... decades," Agosti-Moro said.

"It's a large group of people with a wealth of knowledge, so to come in as a student ... it's a daunting task."

Students spoke of the limits of the Senate's orientations. Bhangu called the orientation informative, but "a bit outdated."

Holmes called most of it "just not relevant."

"If you as a student didn't receive any good orientations and you don't know how things were done, that can be an extremely frustrating thing to quickly be like, 'This is a problem. Let's try this,' and then be told, 'No, no, we do it this way.' And you're like, 'Well, I didn't know. No one told me anything,'" said former student senator Jeanie Malone.

This lack of proper orientations isn't new — almost two years ago Malone brought up the problem on the Senate floor.

She was on one of the two appeals committees and said she felt very unprepared going into adjudicating student appeals with the little training and orientation available.

She worked with the ombudsperson and other student senators sitting on appeals committees and ended up reading out a list of her concerns on the Senate floor, proposing ways to diversify the committees and better prepare senators for the hearings.

Reading out her concerns on the Senate floor was unconventional, but Malone believes it was the only option she had at the time.

"The challenge of a slow moving organization and a one-year student term is you often end up feeling a little bit trapped by the structure," Malone said. "So you can spend months and years talking to each individual committee, or you can ask the chair of the Senate to let you read something aloud on the floor."

Following prompting from a triennial review report and heated discussion about mandatory training for the committees last summer, in January, the Senate established an ad-hoc committee to review student appeals proce-

dures and structures. But training has still not been formally implemented for any committee.

Singh said the Senate should do more to prepare students to participate in all committees, not just appeals committees.

"A lot of time [students] come into the Senate subcommittees ... without having much understanding about how the committee structures work," Singh said.

The Student Senate Caucus works to bridge that knowledge gap by providing students with institutional knowledge from more experienced senators and sharing what's happening in each of their committees, but students are limited by the fleeting one-year term, according to Agosti-Moro.

"It's tricky when our existence within the Senate is so temporary compared to the standard three-year terms for everyone else there," Burnham said.

RESHAPE 'FROM THE GROUND UP'

Students want change now. Agosti-Moro said that the way students are treated in the Senate is no secret.

"The president is aware, the Senate secretariat is aware, individual members are aware but ... how do you fix such an issue?" Agosti-Moro said. "The only way for it to be solved is to reshape how the Senate functions from the ground up, and that's something that doesn't happen overnight."

In a statement, Christopher Eaton, associate registrar and clerk to the Senate, confirmed that the university and Senate staff are aware of the frustrations and are committed to addressing them.

"Good governance requires that all members of the Senate feel engaged and able to lend their unique perspectives around matters under consideration," Eaton wrote. He said the external review commissioned by the Senate in December 2020 will be "an important and necessary first step to supporting best practices around governance."

The external review, Eaton wrote, will work to address the question of whether the structure and policies of the Vancouver Senate allow it to be an effective part of UBC governance, adding that it would address the internal organization of Senate resourcing, among other things.

However, Holmes said the external review is not meant to be a blanket solution to all of the Senate's problems. He said the Senate should start now to make it a more accessible body for students to engage with.

The Student Senate Caucus's triennial review submission is a good place to start, Holmes said. While some of their suggestions were accepted for the formal triennial review, others weren't. Holmes said some of those could help address the Senate's lack of student engagement.

"If we know there are good solutions out there to a lot of the different issues that we face in Senate, why wait three years to address them or have somebody outside the university to tell us we need to address them?" he asked.

Eaton acknowledged that there is work to be done in the short term.

"The university is working to improve understanding among senators to help solve some of the more pressing challenges around cooperation, collaboration and communications to support best practices in governance," he wrote.

The student senators that spoke with *The Ubyssey* understand that the Senate is a slow-moving body and that this kind of systemic change would be a full-team effort.

Singh said he's pleased with how students have stepped up, despite the challenges they face. "I think they have been instrumental in contributing a lot to the Senate," he said. Burr wrote that he "fully supports" student participation in the Senate.

Burnham noted that it was reassuring that people are willing to listen to their concerns, something that she isn't sure would have happened a few years ago.

"[Senate] is not wholly bad or toxic. We have allies. I'm so grateful for the compassion and care that they put in this work, and the real recognition of the student experience and the value of bringing student voices into the conversation," she said.

'BUT WHO ARE YOU REALLY?'

Inside UBC's broad-based admissions system

Words by **Elif Kayali**

UBC's admissions system is complex and dynamic. One major goal of the process is to make admissions fair for everyone, but how can existing societal biases be acknowledged and mitigated in decision-making?

Each year, UBC Admissions receives thousands of applications from high school seniors all around the world. To be admitted, an applicant needs to meet both the general and specific requirements of the program they're applying for.

Since 2012, applicants for direct-entry undergraduate programs have needed to submit a personal profile through a process called broad-based admissions (BBA).

The personal profiles consist of long-form answers to questions concerning topics such as leadership and community engagement. Each profile is read by two 'trained readers' who assess them according to four criteria: engagement and accomplishment, leadership, substance and voice.

The motivation to switch from a grade-based system to BBA comes from the idea that transcripts can't reflect certain valuable experiences when showing whether an applicant is a good fit for that university.

Sam Saini, the associate registrar of the Undergraduate Admissions Office, explained the university's decision to shift to a broad-based admissions system. "UBC implemented broad-based admissions ... to broaden the student access and enhance the range of student backgrounds, preparations [and] academic motivations that can potentially participate here at the university."

But just like any other system, BBA also comes with some caveats. For example, what happens when the readers themselves are biased?

Dr. William E. Sedlacek, a professor emeritus at the University of Maryland College of Education has worked on creating measures to include non-cognitive variables in admissions systems for decades now.

Sedlacek began developing these measurements when he saw that "traditional admissions measures" such as standardized tests tended to favour "upper class white males" and didn't work as well for historically marginalized groups such as women or BIPOC. He believes that including new variables in the admissions process can help universities better predict students' success.

"The function of your admission system is ideally ... to be fair to everybody. But you have to get into the idea that diversity doesn't necessarily mean that you all show your ability the same way," said Sedlacek.

"So, if you have fairness of outcome, you want to make good predictions about everybody and you wouldn't necessarily have to use exactly the same measure to make those predictions."

The BBA system is promising to make wherein it can make UBC and universities in general more inclusive. Dr. Jillianne Code, an assistant professor in the UBC Faculty of Education in curriculum and pedagogy, thinks including noncognitive variables in admissions allows UBC to get a fuller picture of who an applicant is.

She explained that grades don't necessarily reflect who the individual is beyond academics.

"The grades and numbers are only a snapshot, ... [they] don't capture in any great way who you are as a person and whether or not you're going to be able to succeed at UBC or in higher education," Code said.

According to Dr. Anna M. Kin-

dler, an elected member of the Board of Governors and former vice provost and associate VP academic at UBC, "This certainly is a very important issue and I think one of the first steps in trying to counter bias is the admission of the existence of the potential of bias."

She noted that her comments represent her personal views as a member of the faculty and UBC community and do not represent the position of the university or the Board.

Kindler thinks the system should continue improving itself.

"Whether essays as such are ... the optimal way to adjudicate those other [noncognitive] qualities, certainly is an open question and there are possibilities of a bias which might be introduced consciously by the candidate ... or [it] might be a bias that can be introduced by the evaluators in subconscious ways as well," she said.

There's a process in place for evaluators to send a personal profile back to admissions if they feel evaluators are prone to show favouritism or to simply show a lack of awareness in terms of what a student has disclosed, according to Saini. There is also mandatory bias training that evaluators must take before scoring applications.

The mechanism works to "be able to share that material back to provide an opportunity for that to be discussed or disclosed and then taken care of in a way that doesn't necessarily diminish the student's score on the profile," said Saini.

Saini said it also allows that specific experience "to be dealt with in a way that's professional and respectful of the student's experience."

Additionally, the four criteria UBC is looks for in the profiles might mean different things all around the world.

"The challenge with that is ... to ensure that everyone has a broad awareness of the cultural context that exists in our applicant pool and not to use a narrow lens to evaluate student experience," Saini said.

CHEATING THE SYSTEM: THE CASE FOR TRANSPARENCY

In 2013, *The Ubyssey* filed a freedom of information request to see the rubric used to score applicants' personal profiles. After a lengthy legal battle, the rubric reached the public, but questions remained about the system's transparency.

Looking at "the profiles of successful candidates, the combination of skills, attitudes and academic achievement that has resulted in admission and success" can be more beneficial than releasing the rubric, according to Kindler.

"The transparency that is helpful is the one that can allow the candidate [to] understand what kind of a person or what kind of aggregate of experiences and learning that happened as a result of these experiences, has demonstrated the success not only in admission, but also during the student's time at UBC."

Saini thinks sharing the rubric would actually make the process less fair by possibly heightening the socioeconomic differences that exist across applicants, explaining that the rubrics are designed to take the differences in opportunities into consideration.

"[There are] students who are really trying to make the most of maybe even a few opportunities that are afforded in a variety of ways. So when you kind of make the rubric public, you can't really make these distinctions as much, " he explained.

According to Saini, making the rubrics public could give applicants from more affluent economic backgrounds an advantage. as they could potentially use the criteria to improve their application, on top of being able to afford services like private admissions consultancy, they could potentially use the criteria to improve their application.

"Much like other kinds of assessments, releasing some of these particular elements of it does make the process less authentic. And when we're trying to uncover particular elements, it is a bit of a challenge," Saini said.

"So that's why we maintain a little bit of ownership over these particular rubrics, because they do allow us to provide more authenticity in the actual process."

Sedlacek thinks letting students know what the university is looking for would lead to applicants changing their behaviour rather than just their answers.

"You start to have people to act like they're better and these dimensions, and by trying to act like they're better, they actually end up being better."

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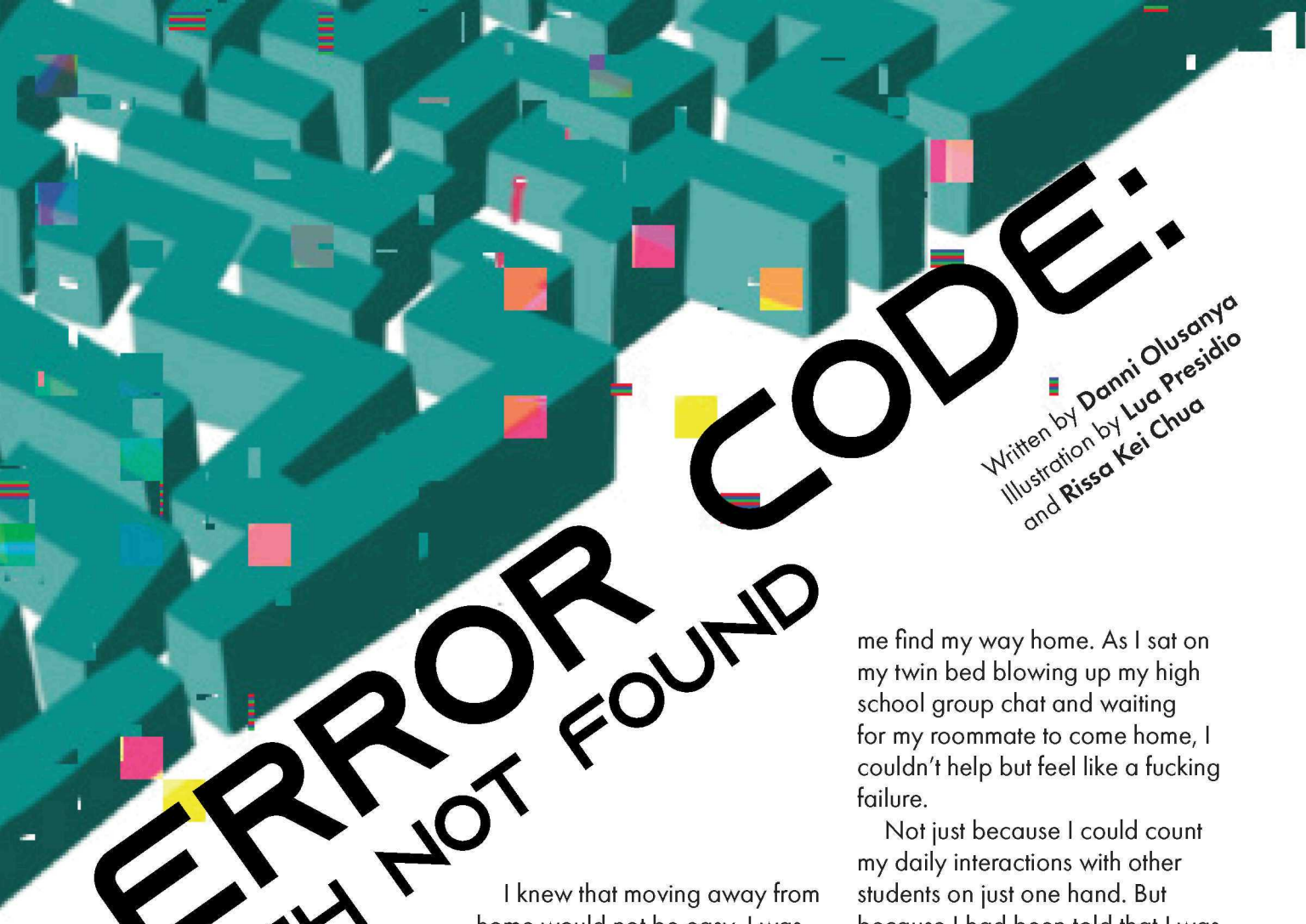

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Written by **Danni Olusanya**
Illustration by **Lua Presidio**
and **Rissa Kei Chua**

Content warning: Suicide

My first month at UBC did not go the way I expected.

I was finding it hard to make friends and even harder to find where my classes were. On Imagine Day, it took me 45 minutes to get from Totem Park to Main Mall. A week later, it took me an hour and a half to navigate my way from Buchanan Tower to Great Dane. As the first weeks passed, it was becoming increasingly clear that my navigation skills weren't getting much better.

I knew that moving away from home would not be easy. I was navigating a new city and living on my own for the first time. But it was beginning to make me anxious. As I sat in the dining hall, eating chicken strips for the fourth day in a row, I couldn't help but feel like I was standing on the periphery of the coveted university experience. While people were hooking up, falling in love and making memories, I was spending my Saturday nights highlighting and colour-coding my copy of *Oedipus Rex* (a play that I had already read three times) by theme. Too scared to put myself out there and even more fearful of getting on a bus, I found myself simply walking in circles with nothing but my withering sense of pride and Google Maps to help me find my way home. As I sat on my twin bed blowing up my high school group chat and waiting for my roommate to come home, I couldn't help but feel like a fucking failure.

Not just because I could count my daily interactions with other students on just one hand. But because I had been told that I was a failure by a professor.

The first class of my degree was an Economics class with over 100 students, and while I had always struggled with math, I thought the class could be a fresh start for me. I had spent my days off from my summer job studying for the class, pre-covering all the subject matter for both micro- and macroeconomics. When the class ended, I introduced myself to my professor stating that while I hadn't taken math in Grade 12, I had been studying for the class over the past few months and as a result, wanted to know which areas to focus on. He gave me a disgusted look before telling me to drop the class.

"You're going to fail," he told me.

While for him, it may have been just a throwaway comment to another overzealous first-year, for me it was more reassurance that I had academically and socially peaked.

I felt my shoulders sink as I Google Mapped my way back from Swing Space to Totem Park. None of my preparation was paying off. It was at that moment that I went into overdrive. While I ended up dropping Econ a few days later, I doubled down on my other classes. Doing well in university was no longer the objective, winning was.

I had been warned about the dangerous consequences of living my life on overdrive before. I'm competitive and perfectionistic by nature, but I will be the first to admit that I have a tendency to take it too far. When I found out in Grade 12 that I had finished my Philosophy class with an average of 84 per cent — my lowest mark of my first semester — I told my teacher that he would find me swinging from a rope. I have no idea why I said that, it just felt true in that moment.

The next semester, when I got the second-highest mark in another class rather than the top mark, I loudly cursed at everyone in my immediate vicinity before storming out. I was desperately trying not to angry cry and held back the urge to rip my exam into shreds.

As I walked home from my economics class that day, my feelings of not being enough were greatly triggered as I began to feel my coveted university experience slip from my grasp.

But I know that this is rooted in more than just a desire to do well.

For a person who is so terrible at failing, I've had a lot of experience with it. I know what it's like to get a zero on a test, to get a mark so low on a quiz that it's returned ungraded. But I also know what it's like to be unfairly criticized and held to a high standard by people who have never met me.

There is an adage that is frequently mentioned within the Black community: "You have to be twice as good to get half as far." While my parents never said that phrase to me directly, living at the confluence of Blackness and being the daughter of Nigerian immigrants, the mantra is pretty much a given. But, it took me a second to realize that going to UBC, one of the top universities in the country, had not solved the problem — I still had to be twice as good to be noticed, twice as good to be seen.

This was made especially clear when I finally attended my first college frat party on my 18th birthday. I tagged along with a group of stunning white women. While they had all previously decided to colour-coordinate by wearing white, they had forgotten either intentionally or unintentionally to inform me. I sat awkwardly in one of their dorm rooms as I tried to laugh along at their inside jokes even though I had no idea what they were talking about.

Even though they were trying to be kind and include me, it was clear I wasn't one of them – hell, I wasn't even in their group chat. They nicely poured me a shot of vodka which (due to feeling so anxious I wanted the floor to swallow me whole) I immediately puked up. With nothing but the taste vodka-puke in my mouth, I found myself trying to catch up with them as they walked confidently to the party.

Typical of me, I had absolutely no idea where I was going. As we meandered the dark, unforgiving roads between Totem Park and the Greek Village, I wondered if I would finally be able to find myself. But when we arrived, it was incredibly quiet. I didn't know at the time that we had entered the Village during fraternity rush, when all the parties are closed and invite-only. As the group approached the door, the security guards scanned us for physical attractiveness, deciding if we were worthy of standing around in a nearly empty frat house with other freshmen. The security guard let my friend in instantly and after scanning me confusedly, he hesitated. But when he saw the look of panic in my eyes, his face softened before saying, "I guess you can go in too."

As humiliating as that had been, at least I was in. *Happy birthday to me?*

Quiet trap music played as I stood by the wall, unseen in the half-empty room. As I slinked further into the corner of the room, a man came down the stairs with a group of friends. He pointed directly at me, and said loudly in a mocking tone — to no one in particular — "Oh! She's Black." As if I didn't know about the colour of my own skin. The group with him

sputtered into bouts of awkward laughter, and I felt my Black skin redden in embarrassment. And though I had never been so keenly aware of my difference, I was determined to transcend it. If I was going to be the only one, I was going to be the best one.

After this, I powered through my insecurities and tried to be the best, most extroverted version of me possible. It felt fake, like I was playing a caricature of myself. As a baseline, I found myself overextending, overpromising and overworking. And while I was silently suffering, I was living the life of a main character. I had made a solid group of friends while maintaining a busy social life and almost perfect grades. I was topping classes, so why was I left wanting more?

I learned the hard way that this life was impossible to keep up. As I forced myself to embark on a litany of impossible tasks, I started to become sloppy. Cutting corners and pushing up against deadlines with reckless abandon became my norm — until my body started to give up on me. Tasks that were supposed to take 30 minutes started taking hours and on top of that, I was acting out. I had a foul temper and took my anger out on those around me and on myself. Late one night, as I was hastily trying to finish a paper, I poured a kettle full of boiling hot water straight onto my keyboard because I could no longer see the mug. But that was not my breaking point.

Years later, I don't know if I can say that I've reached breaking point. On paper, I know I'm accomplished. In many ways, I've had the full UBC experience. *Tuum* fucking *Est* and all that. But at what cost? Inside, I'm really tired. I want a nap. But when I try to stop, I think about all the moments I've failed and desire to push harder. It's a cycle, but I know I'm not the only Black woman in it. When I look at other Black women on this campus, I think of all the work they have done, all the systems they have helped build and will continue to build on this campus. And yet, I don't find myself feeling happy. In many ways, I still feel lost.

FROZEN ON THE SKYTRAIN

Words by **Tianne Jensen-DesJardins**
Illustration by **Lua Presidio**

The man wore baggy basketball shorts, an oversized zip-up hoodie and his hands were full of shopping bags. Nestled in the crook of his elbow sat a well-used basketball threatening to topple onto the SkyTrain floor at any moment. Despite having woken up at five that morning and attending a full day of classes, I offered up my seat to the struggling man. He nodded his thanks and dropped into the chair. A few moments of silence went by before he began to gesture to the overcrowded SkyTrain car.

"It's those damn Natives. They just had to choose a work day to protest a pipeline or something."

I froze.

"They already get handouts from the government. I don't get why they can't just get over their issues and move on."

I readjusted my backpack and began fiddling with the cord of my earbuds. Maybe if I stay quiet, he'll stop, I thought.

A new voice spoke up, somewhere to my left.

"Yeah, just because they don't have to work for a living doesn't mean we can all afford to miss work when they block the West Coast Express."

The addition of this man's voice brought about more people who just wanted to complain about

how inconvenient the protest was for them. Many false stereotypes were brought up about "those Natives" but to this day, I still can't remember any of them as clearly as the first man's comment. A moment of shame burned into my memory.

I wasn't always a coward. Back in elementary school, being Indigenous was a prize I felt I hadn't earned, but that didn't stop me from enjoying the bannock I learned to make while the rest of my class worked on multiplication. It didn't stop me from picking out a prize at the end of every month when I had perfect attendance. It didn't stop me from being lulled into the sense that it would always be this way.

In high school, I learned that being Indigenous wasn't always seen as a prize. I learned about Louis Riel, and many more important Indigenous figures who had to fight for their rights. But I also accepted the free trips to local colleges from the Aborginal education departments, where I ate the free lunches provided and blushed at the free condoms offered to us.

I'd heard about anti-Indigenous incidents, but as someone who wears the white skin of my mother's side of the family, I had never witnessed the hatred for myself. It wasn't until starting university that I began to delve deeper into my own culture. Even calling it "my culture" feels like fraud. I hadn't grown up on a reserve and I'd only ever eaten bannock at school. Yes, I had ancestors who'd been forced into to residential schools, but in my memories, the old school was simply the place I went on Saturdays for soccer games. The remnants of the earlier school, wiped out by flooding, are now remembered by plaques along a popular walking trail that circles a park where I sledded as a kid. The distance between what I imagined to be 'Indigenous culture' and my own lived experience was staggering.

Being unable to confront that man on the SkyTrain was embarrassing, but being unable to reconcile my identity with myself was so much more harmful. I had avoided digging too deeply into my family's history because I felt like I hadn't suffered enough to be proud of my Indigeneity, unlike those who had and spoke about resilience. It wasn't until I came to UBC that I realized feeling guilty about not personally suffering enough to claim Indigeneity was also trauma. In order to start healing and stop being a coward, I needed to learn more about my history and culture.

The first step to claiming my Indigeneity began with a book. In Arts One, we read a different book every week and wrote a paper about the books once every two weeks. Right around Halloween, we were set to start discussing Thomas King's *The Inconvenient Indian* and I couldn't wait to get writing. After a rushed late-night ambulance ride for appendicitis on Halloween night, my professor assumed I was going to simply skip that essay. I'll never forget the look on her face when I gingerly walked into the seminar room and dropped my paperclipped essay off in front of her. I wasn't going to let a minor surgery get in the way of learning more about who I am.

After that exciting beginning to my search, I did a little digging on the internet and learned about the historic places in my hometown that had Indigenous connections. One night, when I brought up an interesting fact about the foundations of the old residential school in town, my grandmother stopped me and began telling me how my family had its own stories from that place. For the next few months, I repeatedly found myself drifting downstairs to her basement suite to ask more questions about our family.

Now, I'm a few years into my research and I'm far from done. It's a little easier to bring up my Indigeneity in conversation now, but I'm far from feeling truly comfortable with my identity as a Cree-Métis individual. If I could tell the slightly younger version of myself standing on that SkyTrain one thing, I would tell her to speak up, if not for herself, then for her ancestors who fought too damn hard to be silenced by a white man on the SkyTrain. ❦

ONE DEGREE OF SEPARATION

Words by **Kaila Johnson**
Illustration by **Elizabeth Wang**

The summer before ninth grade, I went to my first high school Christian summer camp. Around 200 students were crammed onto four charter buses which left the church at 5 a.m. to get to our destination. As the sun hid behind the clouds, I watched the church shrink as the bus drove away. Faced with seven hours ahead, a small group of us played 'Never Have I Ever' to pass the time.

"Never have I ever had a crush on a boy," the only boy present said. The rest of us put our fingers down.

"Never have I ever had a crush on a girl," one girl proudly stated and the boy put his finger down.

"It's okay if you guys have. I won't judge," he said to break the silence. Someone else said another 'Never have I ever...' while I fixed my hair before putting a finger down. A couple rounds passed before someone noticed and I mouthed, "It's fine." It would be another two years before I officially came out to my small group as "pretty gay."

I left the church after high school because I felt like I had to pick between being gay and following Jesus. But leaving the church meant leaving behind more than just religion. I ended up having trouble making long-lasting friendships in my first year and only left my dorm when absolutely necessary. By winter semester in my second year, I was missing the sense of community I gained through church. After a quick Google search, I decided to try out University Christian Ministries (UCM), which one Reddit user described as "chill." Due to the timing, I was worried that I would be forcing myself into already-formed social groups. And so, my only concerns walking into my first service were related to meeting new people and making small talk. But then the lights dimmed and the worship band started playing. I knew the words to every song. My love of worship music grounded me and I closed my eyes to forget about all the new faces around me. It didn't take long before I started to build the community I was missing.

A few months passed before I started to question how much I belonged. At one service, there was a guest speaker at UCM who left space for a question and answer at the end of a sermon and a couple of people asked how to "deal with the LGBTQ community."

When he paused before giving his response, I wanted to shrink and hide under my chair. He was worried about getting the wrong message across and clarified that 2SLGBTQIA+ people are "not the enemy." I felt relieved to not hear the words "abomination" or "going to hell." But I didn't know if others in the room felt the same.

The church tends to claim to be a safe space but does not always follow through on that promise. There are many churches who do not clarify on their website whether they are affirming. Some churches or Christian organizations do not recognize that they need to. I recently went to a conference whose founder claimed their spaces to be affirming. However, during one of the conference's afternoon workshops, a speaker said that Christianity was not oppressive. He claimed that the postmodern culture had shifted how people view

Christian texts and that their newfound perspective was, in his eyes, incorrect. I closed the browser when I saw him use a quote that denounced affirming theology.

Apparently the idea that God loves everyone has limitations. It can be hard to feel truly grounded when there might be some people in the church who don't want to associate with me just for being gay. I once closed my eyes in a prayer circle and the TikTok sound of "nobody knows I'm a lesbian" played on loop until someone said "amen." At the early stages of the pandemic and the switch to online church services, I would check my camera placement on Photo Booth before clicking on a Zoom link. My laptop sat diagonally on my desk so the giant pride flag that hung over my bed was out of frame.

As a kid, churches were a place where I ate handfuls of Goldfish Crackers and sang hymns from red binders, but Zoom services did not have that pleasure. My desire to be a perfect Christian to this group of people was centered around the myth that a perfect Christian is a cisgender heterosexual. If God wanted me to be straight, then I would be. Once I recognized this, I realized that I would rather be open about who I am than try to piece together a facade of someone that God never intended to create. By June, I had casually come out to some people over Zoom and, as Reddit predicted, they were super chill about it. I still attend UCM and play games with them over Discord. It's really special to know I have people there who will stick up for me.

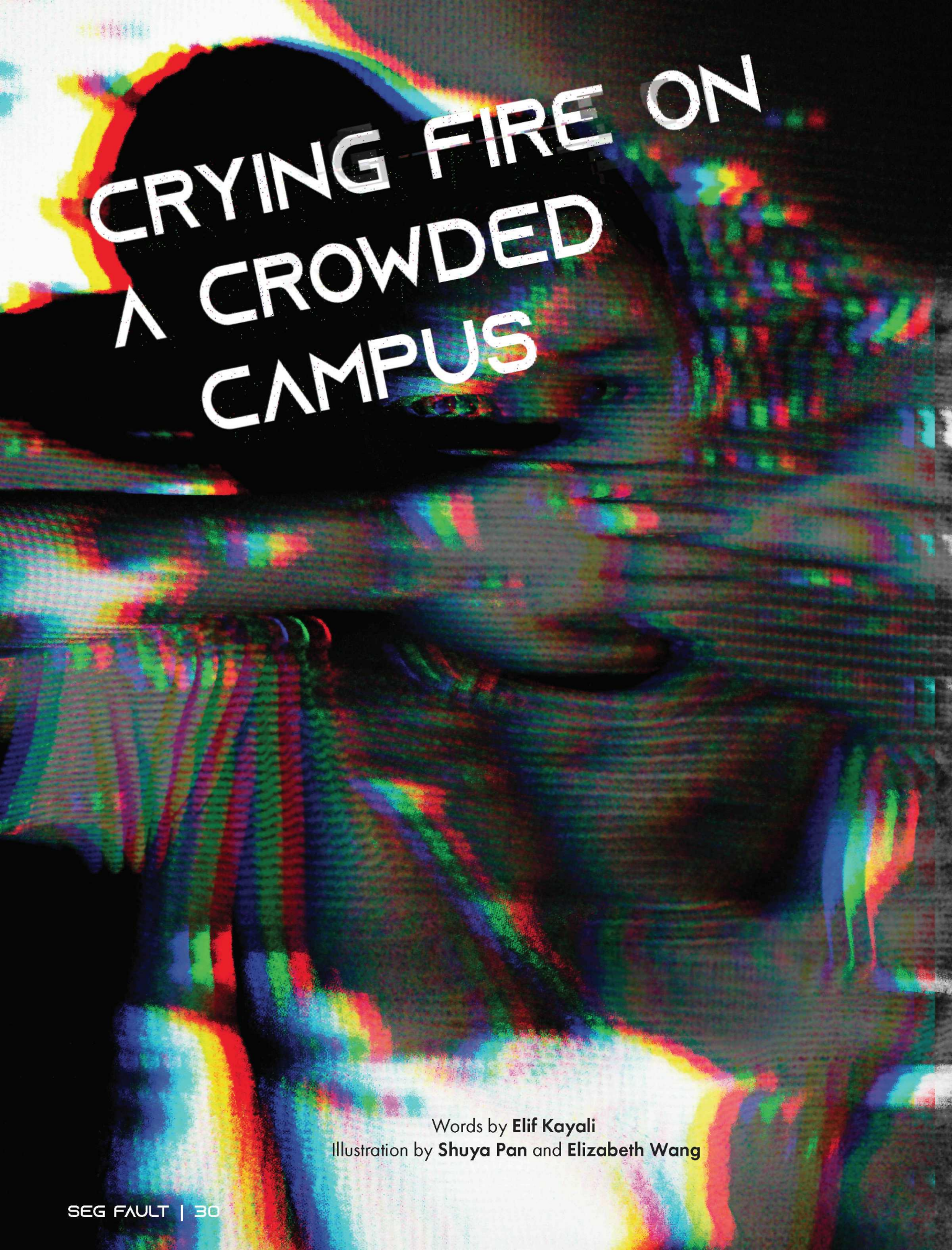
I am working on not having to officially come out because of how emotionally and mentally exhausting it can be sometimes. It is not a big deal for someone to be 2SLGBTQIA+, so it should be treated as such.

Every January, UCM chapters within BC go to Hope for a weekend. The day before the retreat, I went to a King Princess concert and was not concerned about fitting in.

On the way to Hope, I felt out of place. But this feeling faded once arriving at the camp and meeting new people. I mentioned to some strangers that I wanted to work on building a bridge between the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and Christians to at least put it out there that I was an ally.

On the journey back to campus, I sat next to one of my friends. I don't remember how we got on the topic of Christian culture but I casually mentioned my experience as a Queer person. As a straight person, she resonated with what I said and responded by mentioning she has some other 2SLGBTQIA+ Christian friends. I heard a snippet of their stories. When we pulled into the stop, I was bursting with energy by the idea of being one degree of separation away from more people like me.

A few months after this conversation, I learned that there was another person who was out in UCM before I came along. While I am unaware of whom my friend was referring to, the weight of trying to be a perfect Christian finally lifted.



CRYING FIRE ON A CROWDED CAMPUS

Words by **Elif Kayali**
Illustration by **Shuya Pan** and **Elizabeth Wang**

In October 2019, UBC Students for Freedom of Expression (SFE) organized an event on campus featuring two far-right speakers, Ricardo Duchesne and Mark Hecht. Tensions rose as protestors of the event clashed with attendees.

"We were outside that event on campus protesting and people who were attending the event came outside and started harassing and assaulting us physically," a member of Students Against Bigotry (SAB) said. The SAB member requested to remain anonymous due to concerns about retaliation from far-right groups.

Cst. Kevin Ray with UBC RCMP verified the SAB member's claims in an interview with CBC on October 10, 2019.

"There was some pushing and shoving."

Campus events don't usually end in physical violence, but the Duchesne incident highlighted the disagreement around the limits of freedom of expression at UBC.

While campus is divided on the limits of freedom of expression, most people agree that you can't cry fire in a crowded theatre, meaning your speech can't cause imminent harm to others. The centre of the UBC debate, however, is who gets a platform at UBC as an invited speaker.

The intersection of academic freedom and freedom of expression is hard to articulate but their divergence is critical in the context of UBC.

DIVIDED CAMPUS

The divide on freedom of expression on campus manifests itself through student groups. Two student groups specifically, the Free Speech Club (FSC) and SFE, have come under fire because of the speakers they have invited to campus.

The FSC said that its goal in inviting speakers is to create dialogue. The group's president Jarryd Jäger said they define free speech as partaking "in rational discourse with other people in order to flesh out the best ideas," but that excludes "any speech that directly could lead to imminent danger to anybody, whether it be mental or physical."

While open discussion lies at the heart of FSC, the majority of past speakers featured on their website come from various right-wing ideologies.

Freedom of expression is a right ensured under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and subject to limits that "can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society," whereas UBC's Strategic Plan defines academic freedom as "a scholar's freedom to express ideas through respectful discourse and the pursuit of open discussion, without risk of censure."

In the context of UBC, when trying to decide whether or not the speech is harmful, Professor Margot Young, a law professor focusing on constitutional and social justice law, said, "You [should] listen to those people whose interests and whose issues are most at stake."

Young was also a panelist at SAB's event "Academic Freedom: Under Threat at UBC" in February 2020.

SAB works to "build community solidarity and collective resistance to far right organizing" on campus and aims "to defend [UBC] community from foreign violence." They see the events hosted by the FSC and SFE as "the most visible tip of the iceberg of far right recruitment and indoctrination."

However, Tate Kaufman, SFE's vice president, argued that by deplatforming far-right viewpoints, they don't get eliminated. "You just allow them to sort of fester in their own little corner of the world without ever really challenging them and that's how you create radicalist enclaves."

Tillman Dierkes, a member of the UBC Social Justice Centre, pushed back on this argument by challenging the notion that the platforming of bad ideas will be publicly exposed in a negative light ."Bad ideas can be convincing, and will not appear obviously bad to everyone and actually do need to be challenged in a kind of more thor-

ough way," Dierkes said.

"I think it's important that we don't conflate discussions of ideas with uncritical support for those ideas and having to listen to that," Dierkes added.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The UBC Senate's 1976 statement on academic freedom outlines the university's "primary functions" as "instruction and the pursuit of knowledge."

Academic freedom allows for that pursuit and education but this is differentiated from freedom of expression due to the standards that are attached to both codes of conduct.

UBC defines academic responsibility as "namely the obligation to uphold scholarly integrity and to comply with the prevailing scholarly practices within a given field of specialization."

In a June 2020 response to rising tensions on campus, President Santa Ono promised a "more thoughtful and anti-discrimination focused decision making process regarding potential speakers."

"All requests for event bookings at the UBC Vancouver and Okanagan campuses or Robson Square are being assessed through the lens of the BC Human Rights Code by an external legal expert specializing in human rights and civil liberties laws."

Today, the '76 statement still acts as UBC's compass when it comes to academic freedom. UBC defines it as the ability "to learn unhindered by external or non-academic constraints, [and] to engage in full and unrestricted consideration of any opinion." The statement extends academic freedom to all "regular members" of the university and "to all who are invited to participate in its forum."

Kaufman said, "[Academic freedom] should also be the freedom to hear opinions that maybe your professors don't share in a university context and that's what we try to do."

While academic freedom does include the students' freedom to hear uncomfortable opinions, Young believes there's a level of discomfort that isn't productive. "Really good learning makes you uncomfortable, because it forces you to reexamine your assumptions that really lie at a kind of deep, unexamined unconscious level. [But] there are some kinds of discomfort that are not okay. And discomfort that comes from disrespect, vilification [and] contempt is not healthy, productive discomfort that fuels transformative learning."

The FSC finds UBC's policy fairly robust. Jäger said "What we fear is that, for lack of a better word, the outrage mob will slowly begin to erode those robust freedom of speech regulations that we have at university. So our goal is not so much a goal of changing policies, [but of] changing norms."

Young believes the "the slippery slope" argument that restricting free expression will lead to the erosion of it is "poor philosophy."

"There [are] some kinds of speech everybody would agree [and] some kinds of expression, nobody would support. ... I don't hear anybody on campus who would say, academic freedom includes violent speech. And so you're already drawing a line."

WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE?

With the distinction between academic freedom and freedom of expression comes the question of how far these can go. There's a legal line drawn at speech that calls for physical violence for both academic freedom and freedom of expression, but there's still disagreement on whether that's good enough for UBC.

When contacted for an interview, UBC directed *The Ubyssey* to the UBC VP academic's website.

Dr. Peter Suedfeld, a professor emeritus in the department of psychology, thinks that restricting speech that's allowed under the law on campus would lead to the university failing its primary functions.

As a Holocaust survivor, Suedfeld is concerned about limitations on freedoms of expession. He believes that restricting "all information except what the authority wants" results in tyranny.

In addition, he was a member of the UBC Senate when the 1976 statement was approved.

"[For] many students, and many faculty, academic freedom is less important than not hurting people's feelings ... I think that

there is a confusion between what is meant by safety and what is meant by comfort," said Suedfeld.

Young agrees that acade freedom includes students' right to hear viewpoints that make them uncomfortable. But she belives that doesn't mean there shouldn't be limitations on academic freedom.

"As soon as the speech starts being hateful and denigrating identified groups in ways that attack their membership in the university community through its extreme notions of disrespect, or contempt ... we may have reached the limit of what academic freedom protects," she said.

When it comes to drawing that line, Young thinks context is crucial. Looking at the circumstances in which the expression takes place and the existing power imbalances on campus could lead to the university stopping short of speech that further marginalizes parts of the community.

MOVING FORWARD

Georgia Yee, the AMS VP academic and university affairs, thinks we should find room to disagree with one another while being inclusive. "It's really vital to make space for disagreement, but also have that commitment towards equity and inclusion."

She added that disagreement doesn't mean hate speech should be tolerated, which "in turn, obviously endangers somebody else's right to feel safe in that space as well."

While many groups find the '76 policy adequate, there are also those that want to see it changed.

SAB does want change but doesn't see it coming from the administration. "We have very little faith in the administration to do the right thing, and take the necessary action," they said.

But Yee has hope in policy. She sees the need for "a joint Board [of Governors] and Senate policy on equity, diversity and inclusion," because many UBC policies "don't have this commitment to equity embedded in them."

As it is right now, the policy statement is also "very much open to misinterpretation or being interpreted based on an individual's personal preferences," she added.

Similarly, Young thinks UBC needs a dynamic process to assess the context in which expression takes place.

"You need a responsive, representative, inclusive process that's transparent." She believes that this process is only possible through "making really tough decisions about which inevitably, there'll be disagreement."

'TIL CRISIS DO US PART

Are student health care workers ready to marry the frontlines?

Words by **Sophia Russo**
Illustration by **Meriwether Morris**

When the pandemic first hit, the resounding public admiration for frontline health care workers had Ilyana Voth in awe.

As a second-year medical student, Voth was proud to be working toward being a part of this community. She knew it was going to be hard, but she took comfort in her future as a doctor, believing that she too, would one day make a difference.

But a year later, the initial excitement has faded.

"[I see] the expectations of the world on physicians as a result of this pandemic, and their limitations and the stress that they're under scares me," said Voth.

As UBC attempts to address the unique anxieties of future nurses, doctors and pharmacists, the question remains whether these changes will be enough to embolden students to one day marry the frontlines — or leave their pre-pandemic aspirations with cold feet.

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

COVID-19 is a big stressor for many frontline health care workers and the threat of getting sick weighs on students too.

"If I do get COVID, that would suck," said nursing student Connie Ku, who split her first-semester clinicals between the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital and Richmond Public Health. "Not just for me, because I don't have any chronic illnesses ... but I would feel very, very guilty if I was the person who passed it from clinical setting to clinical setting."

Students with limited concern about being harmed by COVID-19 exhibit what Voth considers "an invincibility complex." For many students, getting COVID-19 themselves isn't scary — but the fear of what it can do to vulnerable people close to them and their patients is one of the many burdens for students to bear.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD (A ZOOM MEETING)

To reduce the risk of exposure to the novel coronavirus, much of the learning for first- and second-year medical and pharmacy students has moved online in accordance with physical distancing restrictions.

"It's a completely different kind of learning," said first-year entry-to-practice PharmD student Erin Yang. "It's really hard to stay motivated some days because ... it's more like you're just working on this material on your own."

This online transition has also reduced in-person clinical hours, further impacting motivation.

In the clinical setting, working with patients left Voth with a "wow" feeling that would inspire her to study for hours on end.

"I [felt] like I did something," she said." And that makes me think, 'Okay, well now I'm going to go home and study for another five hours because that was great. And next time when I walk in there I want to know more' — but I don't get that now."

Dr. Leigh Hunsinger-Chang, acting dean of student affairs for the medical program, acknowledged that the pandemic has "created some specific challenges around isolation, fatigue [and] adaptation to online learning," on top of the typical stressors students face.

For some medical students, the reduced in-person clinical experience breeds an additional fear: *What if I end up being a bad doctor?*

"There's a really common thing that a lot of departments will say around this time and it's that everyone's in the same boat," said first-year medical student Emily Gubski.

"To a degree it's true: everybody in our year is in the same boat."

There are students who have gone through the medical program without a pandemic and there will be students studying after it ends. Gubski felt that her group is at an inherent disadvantage due to "missing a lot of clinical experience."

Despite clinical instruction being more pertinent in the later years of medical school, Voth explained that first- and second-year students typically still expect to gain clinical skills training and job shadowing experience.

To address the reduced in-person shadowing opportunities, Hunsinger-Chang explained that the faculty of medicine introduced the virtual cup of coffee program, a networking resource which helps medical students connect with physicians across the province and learn more about different specialties.

Ku echoed the stress of receiving less in-person clinical experience.

"Once I graduate, I go right into the workforce, and if I don't know anything, I put myself and the patients in danger," she said.

The School of Nursing looks closely at competency, according to assistant professor of teaching in nursing Dr. Elisabeth Bailey. She described training to become a nurse as often less about the amount of in-person clinical hours students receive and more about opportunities to "demonstrate those clinical competencies."

The limited clinical opportunities that students do get, alongside online labs and simulations, are opportunities that the School uses to assess "how students are demonstrating the skills that they need to transition into practice successfully," Bailey said.

Other faculties also rely on competencies demonstrated online to promote development of skills applicable to the workforce. The faculty of medicine implemented a virtual anatomy lab and the entry-to-practice PharmD program has moved labs online.

Despite UBC's efforts, the virtual format has some students feeling left behind. "For someone who's a very tactical or hands-on learner, it's a lot more difficult to learn," said first-year entry-to-practice PharmD student Heather Brodoway.

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

Most students expressed gratitude toward their programs, acknowledging the professors who are open to extensions and compassionate towards students. The faculty of medicine has made the previous two semesters formative, ideally making it easier for students to pass.

TThe importance of health care provider mental health has been highlighted by the pandemic, making efforts to prepare students for future wellness challenges essential work. The School of Nursing, the PharmD program and the faculty of medicine have incorporated self-care discourses in their coursework.

The healer's art program, one resource available to medical students, helps them create "a firm foundation for meeting the challenging demands of contemporary medical training and practice," according to the website.

What makes this program special, according to fourth-year medical student Arielle Roberts, was its celebration of why she wanted to become a doctor in the first place.

"[We're] the type-A overachievers," she said. "We're very vulnerable to that feeling, like, 'Oh I made a mistake, therefore, I'm terrible.'"

It can be easy for medical students to get wrapped up in their desire to be the best possible doctor they can be, Roberts explained. This can make learning to treat oneself with grace after a mistake a hard but crucial task.

Roberts acknowledged that the culture of health care toward mental health needs work and the pandemic may facilitate needed changes.

"We spend so much more time talking about the mental health of health care workers and the consequences of burnout ... That in and of itself is a hugely positive change," said Roberts.

Though attitudes toward wellness are adapting, health care students have the added challenge of navigating well-being in the shadow of their frontline counterparts.

"You also feel guilty for complaining because you know that there's people on the frontlines that are still there," said Voth.

I NOW DECLARE YOU TO BE MED

When asked if they had retained a desire to commit to the health sector, most students were ready to take one day take their vows.

But before students can take care of patients, the focus is on taking care of themselves.

"We have struggles. They are not the same as the doctors and they're not the same as the nurses," said Voth.

"But they are different — and they're real." ❦

HOW TO BE MORE OPEN MINDED: A RESOURCE LIST

This is an introduction to resources available at UBC that feature educational content on race, politics and more. This short list of resources includes multiple mediums to help you become a better ally. For more resources, see the online version of this article on The Ubyssey*'s website.*

Words by **Winnie Ha, Guneet Pooni** and **Vihaan Soni**
Illustration by **Meriwether Morris**

VANCOUVER-BASED RESOURCES

ALL ACCESS PASS BY CITR'S ACCESSIBILITY COLLECTIVE

Airing from the UBC campus, hosts discuss equity, inclusion and accessibility for disabled people on campus and beyond. Listen on 101.9 FM or online at *citr.ca*.

HOGAN'S ALLEY SOCIETY

Found on Instagram @hogans.alley, this account supports the political and cultural well-being of the local Black community. In addition to raising awareness, this account promotes local Black-owned businesses to further support the economic well-being of the Black community of Vancouver.

METOO4BC

A safe space for survivors of sexual assault. This Instagram account features educational posts on the impacts of rape culture and provides assistance with counselling support. It also has information about how to be a good ally to survivors. Follow the account @metoo4bc.

THE FEED

This bi-weekly newsletter breaks down Canadian politics into short, easy-to-read explainers, with tons of puns. Join the email list at www.apathyisboring.com/thefeed.

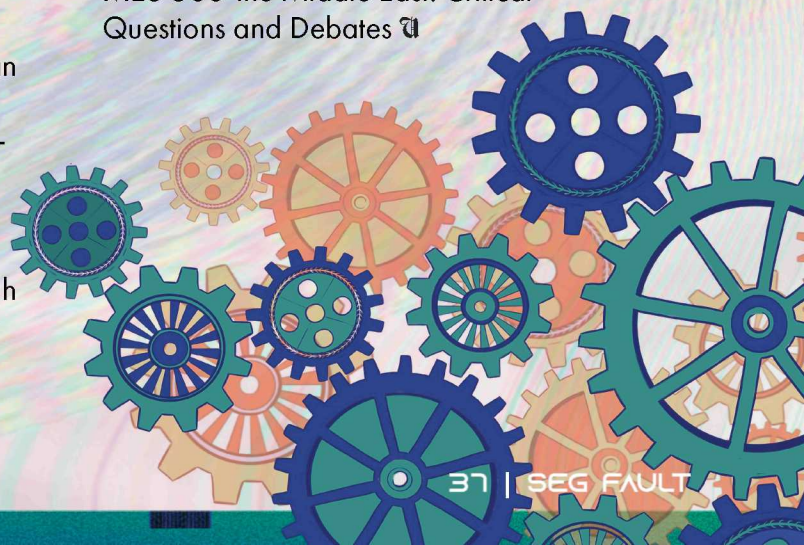
THE NAMELESS COLLECTIVE PODCAST

This podcast featuring Naveen Girn, Milan Singh and Paneet Singh delves into the hidden history of Vancouver's South Asian community.

UBC COURSES

UBC offers many courses that address social issues affecting marginalized and racialized groups. Included is a very limited list of the courses available in the First Nations and Indigenous Studies (FNIS), African Studies (AFST), Asian Canadian and Asian Migration Studies (ACAM), Middle East Studies (MES) and Gender, Race and Social Justice (GRSJ) departments. For information about the courses, check out the online version of this article.

- **ACAM 300** Dis/Orienting Asian Canada
- **AFST 250A** Introduction to African Studies
- **ENGL 371** Asian Canadian and/or Asian Transnational Studies
- **FNIS 100** Indigenous Foundations
- **FNIS 210** Indigenous Politics and Self-Determination
- **GRSJ 224** Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice in Literature
- **HIST 485** Asian Migrant Communities in Vancouver
- **MES 300** The Middle East: Critical Questions and Debates



SYSTEM
FAILURE

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Barriers to recognizing yourself in a strained wellness system

Written by **Jeevan Sangha** | Illustration by **Menghan Gao**

Content warning: Self harm, overdose, suicide ideation

After suffering a panic attack during her cultural psychology final, Viola Chao's professor told her she could retake her exam under one condition: she make an appointment with UBC Counselling Services.

Upon arrival, an assessor gauged her symptoms and Chao requested an Asian counsellor. She was told that the service did not have one.

After the assessment, it was a month before Chao could see a counsellor. In the meantime, she was left to manage symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder, depression and emotions surrounding her grandmother's illness on her own.

JUMPING THROUGH HOOPS

The long intake process at UBC Counselling Services could mean waiting up to a month for an appointment, depending on the intensity of one's symptoms, according to students interviewed by *The Ubyssey*.

Mikaela Joy, a fourth-year psychology and theatre design and production student, said the long waits and the initial paperwork required for screening felt invasive.

"When you first go into UBC Counselling, they sit you down and then all of a sudden you have pages and pages of forms ... all these questions essentially asking if you're going to hurt yourself or someone else," said Joy.

"It's very stressful sitting in this quiet room with a bunch of strangers and having to disclose if you're having suicidal ideation to a piece of paper."

Once able to see a counsellor, some racialized students often have to navigate conversations with well-intentioned white counsellors who do not always understand the nuances of being a racialized person.

For Joy, this meant being intentional with how she presents herself in white spaces like UBC Counselling. While working with a white counsellor who she described as "lovely," Joy still felt there was some level of her experience as a Black woman that the counsellor would never understand.

When seeking support, Joy had the added task of managing her emotions to circumvent stereotypes placed on Black women. "I don't want to be the overdramatic Black woman or the sassy Black [woman]," she said.

"But I also need to be honest about the help that I need."

Third-year biology student Rabiah Dhaliwal said her South Asian family plays a big role in her decision-making — which some counsellors can't culturally relate to.

"It can be really emotionally draining trying to explain the dynamic of your culture in relation to what you're going through," said Dhaliwal, "and also sort of hard to get past the fact that there will always be these intrinsic biases and stereotypes about your culture from someone who can't understand them."

Dr. Benjamin Cheung, a lecturer in the psychology department, has seen how complex accessing mental health resources as a racialized student can be. In addition to dealing with their own struggles, Cheung said students from

certain cultural backgrounds have to navigate stigma toward mental illness.

"Some of these communities can be very close knit ... so people will often talk to each other, share information about each other," he said. "That also adds an extra layer of shame avoidance and honour preservation [while] wanting to make sure the family doesn't lose face."

NOTHING REPLACES SHARED EXPERIENCE

When Renéyah Brown, a first-year bachelor of international economics student, lost a family member to an overdose, she visited UBC Counsellors in Residence but felt "weird" sharing her experiences with her older white counsellor.

"There [are] a lot of aspects of my life that are normal to me, but might not be normal to people who are not Black or people who [came] from money," she said. "I felt like there was a wall between me and the residence [counsellor]."

Chao requested an Asian counsellor, hoping that she would have an easier time fostering a connection with someone of her own ethnicity. She described a high school experience involving a counsellor who, while professional, appeared "taken aback" by cultural dynamics that were normal for Chao. Now, she feels most comfortable with an Asian counsellor.

Cultural competency training for non-racialized counsellors is important, explained Cheung, but not enough. There's a big difference between knowing about a specific experience, especially when related to race and culture, and actually identifying with it.

"I would wager that anyone who has an actual emotional connection and identification with those experiences would be better equipped and better served to help someone walk through those experiences, than someone who merely has some vague academic understanding of that experience," he said.

"We connect with people with whom we can identify," said Cheung. "We see ourselves in them."

WE'RE GONNA NEED A NEW PRESCRIPTION

Dr. Cheryl Washburn, director of Counselling Services at UBC, said in a written statement that the university is aware of the concerns regarding BIPOC health accessibility, and will be meeting with the AMS to "discuss this in more depth and consider exploring possible collaborative options."

"It's very important to me and the university that these issues are addressed holistically and with student input first and foremost."

Students and faculty interviewed for this story suggested that diversity involve having counsellors who are members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, disabled and neurodiverse to represent our student body.

"I genuinely think that we should be striving to have counsellors and support staff that are absolutely as diverse as possible," said Cheung.

Chao said we need more counsellors in general. "I remember looking at the list, and there [were] only like ...16 to 20 counsellors at UBC Counselling and I'm like, how many students do we have at UBC?"

According to the faculty and staff directory, the university 's counselling service currently has 19 members of staff consisting of psychologists, counsellors, social workers and wellness advisors.

Though racialized students have struggled to receive adequate representation while seeking support, most agreed that the service ultimately helped alleviate stress, and in some cases gave them the tools to better cope with future emotional obstacles.

Joy explained that it is important to acknowledge spaces that racialized students create for themselves as they pursue support and a sense of belonging.

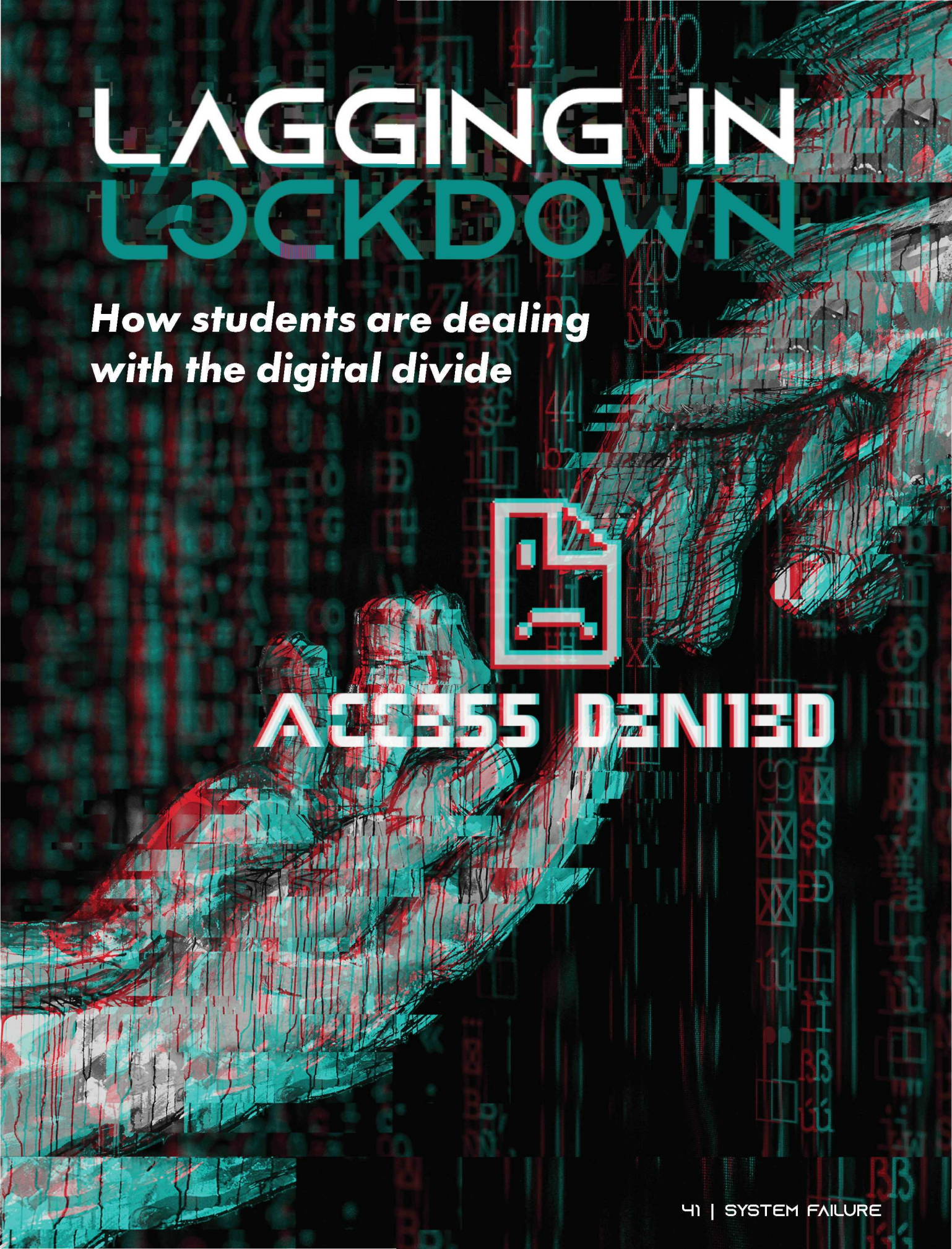
The spaces that Black students have cultivated to support their own mental wellbeing, she explained, should not be neglected from the university's wellness narrative.

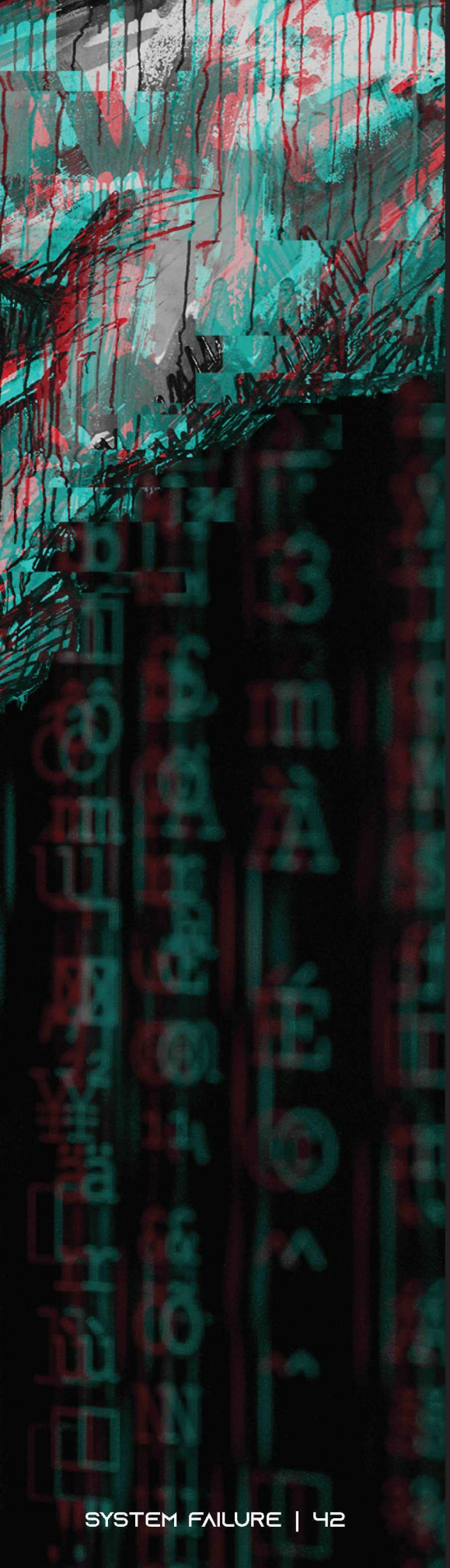
"Non-Black students love highlighting Black trauma more than they like celebrating Black joy," said Joy.

"One Black club is a good start, but everything that Black students have has been created by Black students, for Black students, and it would be great if the university could reach down and support that more." ❦

LAGGING IN LOCKDOWN

How students are dealing with the digital divide





Words by **Tina Yong**
Illustrations by **Mahin-E-Alam** and **Rissa Kei Chua**

"I don't want to keep having to divert my focus to writing emails," said Celine Juadiong.

Juadiong is a first-year student from the small, rural community of Gladstone, Manitoba. She's been fighting to make it through this online semester like so many other UBC students. But unlike many of her peers, Juadiong has been battling another enemy: her internet.

When UBC announced the switch to online learning in March 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19, many students flocked home out of concern for their safety. Classes that were squeezed into a single room were now taking place in a variety of different buildings, countries and time zones.

With many professors opting for synchronous lectures, students had to adopt a routine that has become all too familiar: walk over to the computer, log into Canvas, join the Zoom meeting.

This routine made a stable internet connection a necessity for learning and working, but for some it has been an unattainable luxury.

Students living in rural areas are more likely to be isolated from robust internet infrastructure than urban students. Even when they can sustain a connection, it is often too weak to keep up with the demands of online instruction.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission reported that currently, only 45 per cent of rural households have internet that operates at broadband speeds, defined as at least 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload, as well as access to unlimited data. The number is only 30 per cent in Indigenous communities.

Juadiong's household falls within the other 55 per cent. Her router and electricity are spotty, periodically failing. This happened when she was in the middle of a final exam, which she had to complete on her phone using a weak cellular data signal.

She noted that this has impacted her ability to learn.

"The more I had to go restart the router, my focus would definitely be affected," Juadiong said.

These problems coincide with disproportionate barriers rural students face in higher education, including lack of financial and social support, poor secondary education and inadequate transportation. All of these factors have led to higher drop-out rates from academia among rural students.

Online learning has exacerbated such disparities, as rural students must work harder than their urban counterparts just to have access to their courses.

NO STANDARD POLICY

UBC has made several accommodations available to students facing internet-related barriers, including a technology bursary that provides students with discounted internet and cellular plans, as well as loaner laptops for students in BC. However, both initiatives have been criticized by students for their lack of outreach.

According to Associate Provost Simon Bates, UBC has invested over $60,000 into the bursary, which has benefited only 240 students as of September 2020.

Bates added that the enrolment services office has offered different forms of support to students on a case-by-case basis. He acknowledged, however, that there are limits to what the office can do.

"We can't solve every problem for every student ... [Dealing with] acute connectivity issues falls to faculty members who are instructors of courses to be as flexible as they can," Bates said.

Although there's no standard policy on how professors should accommodate students with tech issues, Bates said UBC has told them to be compassionate and flexible. According to Bates, the vast majority of faculty members have gone "above and beyond" in helping students with internet difficulties.

> "The more I had to go restart the router, my focus would definitely be affected."
> - Celine Juadiong

Sauder adjunct professor Blake Hanna had to accommodate some of these problems in his class this past term.

"My sense was that students were pretty resilient and quickly figured out their own preferred way of coping with periodic network challenges," said Hanna.

One commonality between the various types of accommodations is that they often rely on the students themselves taking the initiative to either contact the enrolment services office or ask their professors for help. But since few students know that those options exist, both solutions are underused.

Juadiong said that she was unaware of the bursary but received accommodations from her professors, such as a few extra minutes to complete her exam when her router crashed. She considered appealing her mark on that exam, but decided against it.

"Because of all the accommodations [UBC has] already put out, I was worried it would be my responsibility to ensure that I had a stable internet connection," Juadiong said.

"I'm worried that my appeal isn't enough," said Juadiong.

INTERNATIONAL UNCERTAINTY

Laggy connections have also affected international students, many of whom face unique restrictions in their home countries. Some countries have blacked out telecommunications due to social unrest, such as Myanmar and Zimbabwe, while others simply have underdeveloped internet infrastructure.

Different countries have implemented different COVID-19 public health orders, sometimes restricting broadband access.

Manah Shah, a third-year Sauder student, returned to his hometown of Sura, India when BC first implemented COVID-19 restrictions to finish the semester and has remained there since. He

faced broadband problems for four months.

India implemented a three-month nationwide lockdown in March, shuttering many service sectors, including internet providers. For Shah, this meant that he was stuck with the low-speed internet that his family had been using in his absence. He had to pay for cellular data, on top of his tuition, to participate in his lectures, discussions and exams.

"None of my Canvas videos were loading, so I had to splurge on mobile data," Shah said. "I was already paying so much tuition as an international student, and now I was also paying so much for internet."

Although it became easier for Shah to do schoolwork after the lockdown was lifted, he faced issues with the internet cutting out during an exam, which made his learning experience more difficult and stressful. He had planned to fly to Vancouver in February to complete the rest of the school year, but decided against it given the mandatory quarantine costs imposed in February by the Canadian government.

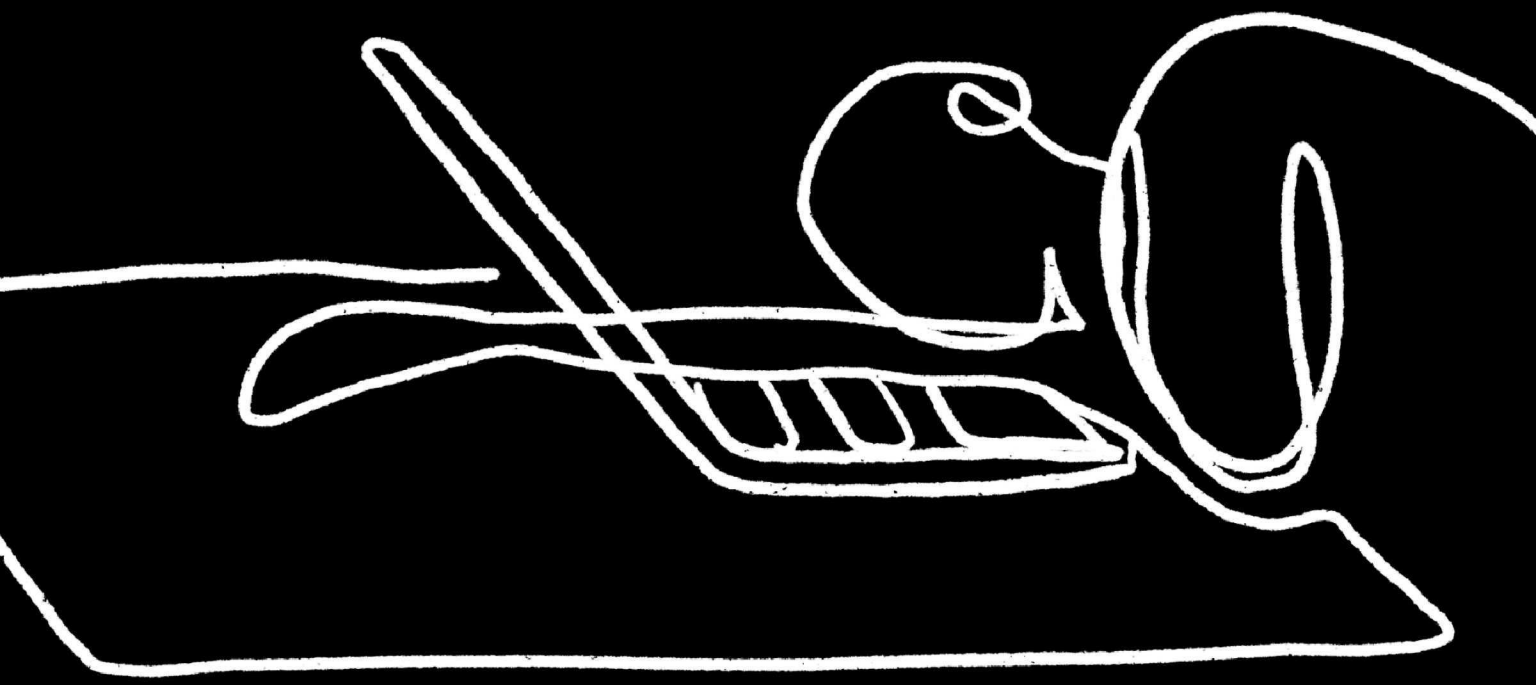
Professors also offered Shah accommodations such as waiving requirements for proctored exams or allowing retakes when he was locked out.

Like Juadiong, he was unaware of the technology bursary.

Bates said that the university will continue to offer the same services. He hopes that the experience professors now have in online instruction will assist faculty in tweaking the design of their courses to be more accommodating.

"We can't stop students from having power cuts or interrupted service to their internet," said Bates. "What we can do is work to reduce the impact in terms of students achieving their success in a course."

Students like Juadiong and Shah hope that the current accommodations will be enough. ❦



DEADNAMES IN A LIVING SYSTEM

Words by **Maheep Chawla** | Illustration by **Elizabeth Wang**

Third-year biology student Oliver McDonald dreads going to the doctor's office or any establishment that requires him to make use of his deadname.

"You have to hear your name over and over and over," said McDonald. "And you have to sign forms with your name, and you have to initial. I can understand why someone would not get those services because it's just so dysphoria-inducing."

To avoid the name mismatching chaos, McDonald said he now carries his birth certificate with him to all medical appointments.

McDonald is not alone in his complicated relationship with accessing health care services. A 2020 study by Trans PULSE Canada found that 45 per cent of transgender individuals claimed to have unmet health care needs compared to only 4 per cent of cisgender individuals.

Canadian transgender and non-binary adults are also more likely to face insurance-based discrimination than cisgender adults, according to a 2020 study from the University of Michigan. For many trans students, access to quality health insurance is a necessary step in their gender-affirming transition.

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT COVERED

UBC students are eligible for the AMS/GSS Health and Dental Plan, which is provided by Pacific

Blue Cross. This plan covers most hormone therapy including androgen blockers, estrogen, and testosterone. BC residents are also eligible for the Medical Services Plan (MSP) which covers some gender-affirming surgeries such as vaginoplasty and hysterectomy, among others.

Students who are children of faculty are covered under faculty insurance which includes some gender-affirming care.

For McDonald, switching over to the AMS/GSS health insurance plan meant no longer having nearly all of his medications covered. Now, he spends $30 to $60 monthly on testosterone. Though this is at least partially subsidized, it is still a "significant amount [to pay] per month."

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

As UBC does not have an option for legal name adjustments in the Student Service Centre, McDonald had to go through a "weird" and complicated process of changing his name in the UBC system.

After that process, McDonald still ran into trouble with his name.

"MSP, and I assume UBC's insurance, [take] forever to change it in the system," he said. "In the UBC system, I'm known as Oliver but all of my insurance information and all of my medical documents still have my old name."

A simple visit to the doctor's office or a quick blood work appointment have led to "kerfuffle[s]" when McDonald's name did not match insurance documents on file.

TO INSURE OR NOT TO INSURE

Faculty insurance, which is accessible to students who are children of faculty members, has its pros and cons as well.

"I would say [faculty insurance] is probably more generous [and] expensive than the AMS/GSS plan but it does have its own pitfalls," said Casey Broughton, a fifth-year mathematics student.

"Overall, it's been extremely helpful. I've benefited for a long time from the fact that it covers pretty much any medication that's prescribed by a doctor as long as it's prescription and that's been huge, because one of the medications I've been on for years is $400 a month."

Despite having a clinician's prescription, faculty insurance did not cover laser hair removal, Broughton explained. Some other gender-affirming procedures can be out of reach for students as well. As breast implants are considered cosmetic surgery they are not covered by faculty insurance, along with breast forms.

"I find it especially frustrating that ... [faculty insurance] covers 80 per cent [or] up to $600 of speech therapists, acupuncturists, chiropractors, naturopaths, homeopaths, podiatrists, osteopaths, dieticians, audiologists or occupational therapists," she said. "But they don't cover gender-affirming care, other than what is incidentally covered by mental health care and pharmaceuticals."

For students who are not satisfied with health insurance, The Pride Collective runs a gender-affirming store with a sliding scale of payment, explained Broughton. She recommended that students email the Pride Collective with "gender empowerment store" as the subject if they are struggling to get certain things, like binders or breast forms, covered.

The AMS did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

THIS ABOVE ALL: TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE

While the students interviewed were happy to have access to health insurance, both had experiences which aggravated feelings of dysphoria, particularly surrounding name changes and cosmetic care.

"I'm grateful to have [insurance coverage]," said Broughton.

"It's more generous than a lot of health plans, but there's a lot of room for improvement – especially around the areas of acknowledging that trans-care exists, other than just covering the medication for it." ¶

PLAYING THE CIS-TEM

Words by **Moe Kirkpatrick**
Illustration by **Ella Chan**

Content warning: Transphobia, transmisogyny

When I think about systems, I think about patterns and I think about Kris.

Three years ago, I took a summer job at a movie theatre called Envision. It was one of those bougie theaters where you could order real food — burgers and stuff — and have it served to you during the movie.

I didn't want to work as waitstaff, but my other job at a local grocery was cutting back hours, and my friend's little sister who worked there said the management was chill and people tipped well — so what did I have to lose?

A lot, it felt like. I was terrified.

Envision was the first job I got after changing my name and starting testosterone. I knew I could pass as cisgender for short periods, but I had no idea how to talk to cis men as a cis man. Looking back, I clearly was more passing than I thought, but in the moment, it felt jarringly obvious that I didn't belong. I was too short. I had too little body hair. Surely only dim lighting and a practiced slouch kept people from noticing my chest at any moment.

I was lucky to meet Kris.

Kris was funny and sharp. She doodled on my training manual and kept choosing me — to share fries with, to let in on gossip, to roll her eyes at when the managers pulled bullshit. She asked me what colour she should dye her hair next — it was a dark cherry red pixie cut, very 'I'd like to speak to your manager' — and complained about her boyfriend (who also worked there) and so on.

She was nice, basically. It was because she was nice that I knew she saw me as a cis man.

I don't remember exactly what she said or what we were talking about. We were in the kitchen. Kris was telling me about some show she'd just watched. She thought it was kind of distasteful, you know, that stuff with men wearing dresses. It wasn't like, wrong, but she thought it was *gross*. You know?

It felt like someone had slid a frozen pocket knife under the first layer of my skin. She didn't know I was trans. I knew that, and I

knew her comment wasn't transphobia against me — it was pure transmisogyny — but it still felt too close. She was standing next to me, our shoulders almost touching, and she didn't know.

I said nothing. I gave a little laugh, 'all haha yeah, I didn't hear what you said.'

Later, I texted the friend whose little sister worked at Envision to vent. That was it. I wasn't gonna bring it up to Kris. What could I tell her? How could I explain it in a way that didn't out myself? Besides, I wasn't surprised. I hadn't hoped otherwise. Assume bigoted until proven otherwise, you know? But the next morning, my friend's little sister texted me asking: Hey, do you mind if I tell the managers about this?

The obvious answer was yes. I did mind if she told them, because I hadn't told them, and I hadn't told them for a reason — it wouldn't do anything. Most of the managers were nice, but they, like Kris, were white and cis. The most it would do was come back to me. Neither United States federal law or Ohio state law prohibited discrimination based on gender identity. It wasn't like they would fire me if they thought or found out that I was trans, but they could.

I told her to go ahead with it, as long as she didn't bring up my name.

Several days later, Kris asked to talk to me. She led me to the perennially empty and dim-lit room where we kept the extra cleaning carts. The skin around her eyes was puffy.

Kris said management had talked to her. A warning, nothing serious, but someone had brought a complaint against her, verbal harassment of another employee or something. She didn't even remember saying whatever they said she had.

Her voice quivered. She blinked back tears. "I wouldn't say something like that," she said. "Like, you know I don't think you're trans, right?"

She didn't say it like that. I don't need to explain how she said it.

What I remember most clearly is how distressed she looked when she told me. Genuinely distressed. Not at the concept of me being a trans man — I don't think she even considered that possibility — or at the absurdity of thinking I might be transgender, but at the possibility that she had upset me by implying I was transgender.

Sometimes, I think I do pity her. She was so upset at having potentially hurt me. I wish that meant anything. It doesn't. She was just part of a pattern. So were the managers and my friend's little sister and driver's licenes with gender markers and me, too.

I can either perform anomaly or cis man. I can either be a bystander to hatred or elicit it — but even when I fail at performing cis-masculinity, the backlash targets transfeminine people, not me. There is no option to perform myself. I'm always performing *please don't look at me too closely.*

JUGGLING INEQUALITIES

STEM research in a pandemic

Words by **Cecilia Lee**

Late in the evening in mid-March of last year, fifth-year PhD candidate Lian Kwong found herself bustling around the laboratory in an unforeseen last day.

"[I was at the lab] until probably 11:30 at night, the day they shut down the university, because I was like, 'If I don't finish this now, I might never get to finish this.'"

Without knowing when she would be allowed back into the laboratory, Kwong made the difficult decision to cut half of the anticipated lab work from her thesis.

COVID-19 research curtailment has led to consequences for the personal well-being and productivity of graduate students like Kwong. While both institutional and student-run surveys have reported these challenges, recurring patterns of experience have brought pre-existing inequalities in academia into the spotlight.

WORK–LIFE (UN)BALANCE(D)

Trends in survey responses conducted for faculty, graduate students and individual departments showed that frequently reported symptoms of stress for researchers were general anxiety and decreased productivity.

According to one unpublished wellness survey within the Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, half of the graduate students and research staff surveyed reported worsened mental health after the onset of the pandemic.

Following her transition to working from home, Kwong noticed a steep decline in her work–life balance. Prior to the curtailment, she structured her work hours strictly and kept weekends and evenings open. Now that her workday seems less productive, she feels obligated to work into the evening.

"[I feel like] I need to work longer ... I end up standing in front of my computer until nine o'clock and then it's just a vicious cycle of [not feeling productive and pushing further]," said Kwong.

Master's student 'Alex,' who asked to remain anonymous to protect their gender identity, found it difficult to engage with institutional resources after a reimbursement issue with Aspiria and the AMS/GSS Health and Dental Plan.

"You get emails where [the university is] saying, 'take care of your mental wellness' ... and all of those things, but how much of that is actually helping you really?" they said.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

With the high cost of living in Vancouver, graduate students at UBC are particularly susceptible to financial burdens impacting their quality of life.

Kwong, who ultimately cut her lab work short to prevent extending her degree by a year and half, had also held part-time jobs throughout her PhD. As a consequence, she was ineligible for student loans.

"A lot of my friends have struggled with it, you just can't live off of [the stipend]. You need a line of credit, you need student loans or you need to have another job. It's not realistic."

An August report by the Graduate Student Society (GSS) investigated the experiences of graduate students during the pandemic, and found that 72 per cent of respondents reported concern about their graduation timelines, and 73 per cent of international respondents reported concern about receiving their stipends and payments.

The report noted that housing

and food insecurity did not appear to increase during the pandemic for graduate students.

Dr. Susan Porter, dean and vice-provost of graduate and postdoctoral studies, said in a written statement that the university "[continues] to work persistently to identify challenges brought by the pandemic and to devise and implement strategies to help in their alleviation."

The faculty of graduate and postdoctoral studies, according to Porter, has worked to support students financially by creating additional teaching assistant positions, introducing a policy to waive certain fees for course-based graduate programs, launching the President's Academic Excellence Initiative award for PhD students four months earlier than planned and establishing an enhanced emergency bursary system for graduate students.

But students described financial burdens that exist regardless of the pandemic.

While a family member completing graduate studies in Hamilton, Ontario was paying $500 in rent, Kwong was paying $1,200 to live in Vancouver.

"Your tuition is still the same price. How much you're getting paid, how much you're eligible for a student loan if you actually get it – all of those things do not account for the cost of living at all," said Kwong.

Alex explained that fewer scholarship opportunities exist for them compared to PhD students. They noted that the application process is intense, with multiple deadlines, reference requests and complex forms required.

"If I'm honest, when COVID happened, I completely lost track of any of those [deadlines], because I was very concentrated on making sure I was mentally healthy and I was doing alright – which I wasn't," they said.

DEPENDENT(S) AS A VARIABLE

While most graduate students experienced research-related challenges, students with dependents were left juggling multiple roles with few options.

"[Students with children] just have zero support right now," said Kwong, noting the parents in her cohort.

"You can't even have a parent come take care of your kid while you're trying to write a thesis."

A survey conducted on UBC tenure-track faculty revealed that 57 per cent of respondents found their role as a caregiver hindered their ability to work during the pandemic.

In a written statement, Dr. Helen Burt, former associate vice-president for research and innovation (VPRI), acknowledged the "profound impact" of the pandemic on all researchers, with those who are also "caregivers, women, racialized faculty ... postdoctoral fellows and early-career researchers" being particularly impacted.

She explined that the VPRI is dedicated to investigating trends in inequality, holding town halls and organizing working groups to address themes of concern. In addition, she noted that UBC is involved in a pilot project through the federal Dimensions program with "the goal of developing a plan to address systemic barriers faced by historically underserved, marginalized or excluded people in the UBC research community."

ACCOUNTING FOR THE INVISIBLE

As institutions continue to assess the impact of the COVID-19 research curtailment on graduate students and research staff, more information about impacts to researchers of marginalized identities are expected to emerge.

While preliminary data has identified significant challenges faced by researchers, presently available surveys, such as those conducted by the university, the AMS and the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research, have noted limitations in demographics data.

Both student-driven campus groups and institutional working groups, such as those under the VPRI portfolio, continue to work on projects supporting equity and diversity in academia.

These initiatives aim to uncover the nuances of inequality in STEM – a difficult task, according to Alex, due to an inherent quality of being marginalized.

"I just feel like for a lot of people, even when we try and get to these marginalized identities, they're still personal – these invisible, personal things that are affecting everyone [but] that can be hard to account for."

GAME OF TELEPHONE

Words by **Isaac You**
Illustration by **Shuya Pan**

Content Warning: Depression

Trying to get help for mental illness feels like an endless game of telephone. Referral after referral in this long and tedious drawn-out process that goes nowhere, sitting on the waiting list for months, maybe years. Any desire to be better just gets ground down, jumbled up and slowly fades away as you realize that admitting you have a problem is only the first step.

From there, it's an uphill battle.

After struggling through high school, I attempted to have a fresh start when I moved onto campus for university. I had hoped to reinvent myself, the way many 18 year olds do, with a new city, new friends and a new wardrobe. I became a version of myself but dialed up to the max: much louder, much funnier, much braver. I went out and charmed people at mixers and other social events. I was essentially *that bitch*.

Or so I thought I could be.

A week and a half into the term, I ended up in the waiting room at UBC Counselling.

The truth is that I was miserable. With all this newfound freedom and access to alcohol and other substances, I was really self destructive. And since I wasn't actually keen on dying young, I knew I needed to speak to a professional. A quick search on Reddit turns up countless horror stories about UBC Counselling. While I knew some of this going in, I was at the end of my rope. I needed help.

And frankly, I was ready to try anything.

Before we had to worry about COVID-19, the process of going to UBC Counselling went a little something like this: You'd walk in, make an appointment with the front desk for an assessment, then you'd come back in for the assessment, they put you on a wait list (anywhere from a few weeks to months) and finally, after all of that waiting and questioning and more waiting, you'd get assigned a counsellor.

At the time, they recommended I see a graduate student counsellor-in-training because the line was shorter, so I did. I was told that they were required to record the sessions as a part of their program, both audio and video. While I didn't like the idea, I also really struggled with asserting and respecting my own boundaries.

After two hours of arguing with the counsellor, I gave in. The camera would be turned to the wall while we recorded, and I would start going in for weekly counselling sessions.

Around the same time, my RA was also starting to notice my behaviour. So I told her about some of what I had been dealing with.

My RA was nice, but everytime I told her something, her reactions

would make me regret telling her anything. I gradually realized that she was there because it was her job to be and she felt uncomfortable having to deal with me.

So I withdrew.

My RA suggested I go speak to the Counsellor In Residence, who I then emailed. They told me the meeting would be a one-time session and was more "one-off, goal-directed," not actual long-term counselling. I never replied to their email.

I don't actually blame my RA for this, even though I felt so alone at times. After I started withdrawing inward, I would go days without speaking to anyone. I thought I was going to just die in my room. I do feel that UBC as an institution has some responsibility here. Now at the ripe old age of 19, the same age my RA was back then, I realize how unreasonable it is to expect what is essentially a child to comfort another child. In what world could she have been equipped to give me the help I so desperately needed?

The grad student counsellor I first had with UBC Counselling was actually quite good and helped me learn a lot about boundaries. Things were going well, and then she left without a notice and I was pawned off to some other counsellor, which meant I had to go through the grueling and painful process of telling my life story to a new person just to get them caught up. And then they, too, left without a notice and I was once again reassigned. Rinse and repeat.

By the third time that happened, I was so exhausted and tired of it all, the mindless platitudes mixed with the numbing discomfort of describing my traumas over and over again only to be met with incompetence and blank stares.

I was done. I stopped going to UBC Counselling.

It's not just UBC Counselling that's frustrating, it's everything mental illness related and how they choose to handle it. I ended up getting a visit from Arts Advising after one of my TAs grew worried. The advisor gave me information that contradicted the actual policies around extenuating circumstances. I've had a front desk person at Student Health Services threaten to cancel my appointment with my doctor who oversees my prescription because I had forgotten to fill out a digital form. I had to take a zero on an assignment because it was technically past the due date, despite the humiliating email to my TA begging for an accommodation.

I have come a long way since entering university. But this is only because of my own stubbornness and the support from people who made a difference by their own volition. Despite what my brain sometimes tried to tell me, I actually did want to live. So I kept going, kept calling even when people failed to call me back, kept looking up services, kept going to intakes and kept pushing.

But I imagine I'm an outlier in that regard. It's discouraging and frustrating. Being depressed makes navigating these hurdles an even bigger obstacle.

Then there were the individual people who accommodated me, allowing me to finish my first year. My first counsellor sat down on the floor with me instead of trying to force me to get up after I was having a particularly bad depressive episode that made me want to just sink into the carpet and rot. There was that one TA who kept giving me extensions, allowing me to finish the term. My doctor from Student Health Services, who I still have weekly calls with, also played a huge role. These people, whether they know it or not, were the ones that made a difference.

But as a system? I can say quite confidently that the system itself failed me, and I'm sure it has failed a lot of other students at UBC. The system offers very temporary and often useless solutions to deep and complicated issues.

All I got were mindless platitudes and reassurances that I was 'valid.' And, of course, the opportunity to fill out meaningless worksheets. This might work for someone who is 'feeling down' about having gotten a C on a quiz. This is not actually helpful for anyone with a history of mental illness that had been exacerbated by loneliness and stress encountered at UBC.

There is of course the argument that UBC Counselling is free, and so, how could we possibly demand more? But I don't think that's an excuse.

It's not my responsibility to come up with a solution to their problem.

It's theirs. ❦

BUSY LINES AND DEAD ENDS

Words by **Lindsey Palmer**
Illustration by **Bianca Santana**

Content warning: Suicide

When Sage Houston was deciding what university to attend, one of the factors she considered was the schools' mental health care options.

For Houston, UBC looked fantastic online — at least on official websites. When she looked elsewhere, she came upon Reddit threads detailing negative experiences with UBC Counselling Services but didn't believe them. They didn't line up with UBC's emphasis on mental health, so she assumed they must have been one-off situations.

"I think that a school's mental health set up, whether you struggle with mental health or not, says a lot about that school and how much they care about their students," she said.

With the onset of the pandemic, Houston, now in her second year of a history and political science degree, looked into UBC Counselling Services, but chose private counselling instead. Online claims of suicidal students being waitlisted and others who felt they received no help or support had Houston feeling like UBC Counselling was "infamous."

Houston is not alone. When fourth-year sociology student Dea Dardi accessed UBC Counselling, she felt the support was surface level.

"The main thing that they focused on was [mindfulness] exercises ... I felt like my counsellor didn't really want to get into a lot with me and didn't really want to delve into the deeper stuff," she said.

After the counsellor she was seeing ended her practicum with UBC Counselling in July, Dardi experienced the accessibility barriers of Counselling Services firsthand. She tried to see someone else but they told her no one at UBC was available — she could wait until September for group therapy, but that was the only option offered to her.

Like Houston, Dardi has since switched to private counselling outside of UBC's offerings. But for students without the financial ability to do so, facing this kind of dead end could mean giving up on professional help altogether.

Dr. Cheryl Washburn, director of UBC Counselling Services, acknowledged that the service has had wait-time issues in the past, but says the department revamped its services to address this in the 2019/20 academic year. Now, the problem is "undoing some of the information that is still out there — that there are long waits, and therefore, why bother trying to get in — because that hasn't been the case

for some while," said Washburn.

She said the transition online due to COVID-19 has been smooth for students already using the service, though this doesn't match the experience of fourth-year anthropology student Bionca Chu. After COVID-19 hit, Chu said she called in every day for two weeks but could not successfully get a hold of anyone at UBC Counselling.

Levonne Abshire, interim co-director of health promotion and education, said UBC approaches mental health services delivery as a partnership with students: providing different wellness resources and allowing users to choose. Having alternatives available may make services more accessible and allow for student agency, but it also requires an "attitude of, 'I'm going to try a few different things and see what really works for me,'" according to Abshire.

A potential issue with this approach is that it makes well-being the responsibility of the student rather than addressing systemic reasons for mental health issues within the institution. Moreover, it puts another burden on students who are already struggling: for Chu, the lack of responsiveness last spring with the switch to remote learning "almost added a stressor to my mental health, which is counterproductive to what it's trying to do."

Chu also pointed out that navigating support resources as a student who's struggling can be a stressful experience in itself.

"I have a tendency to get overwhelmed with [the lists of wellness resources]," she said. "I'm sure there are plentiful resources, [but] it's hard to get a grasp of what you actually need."

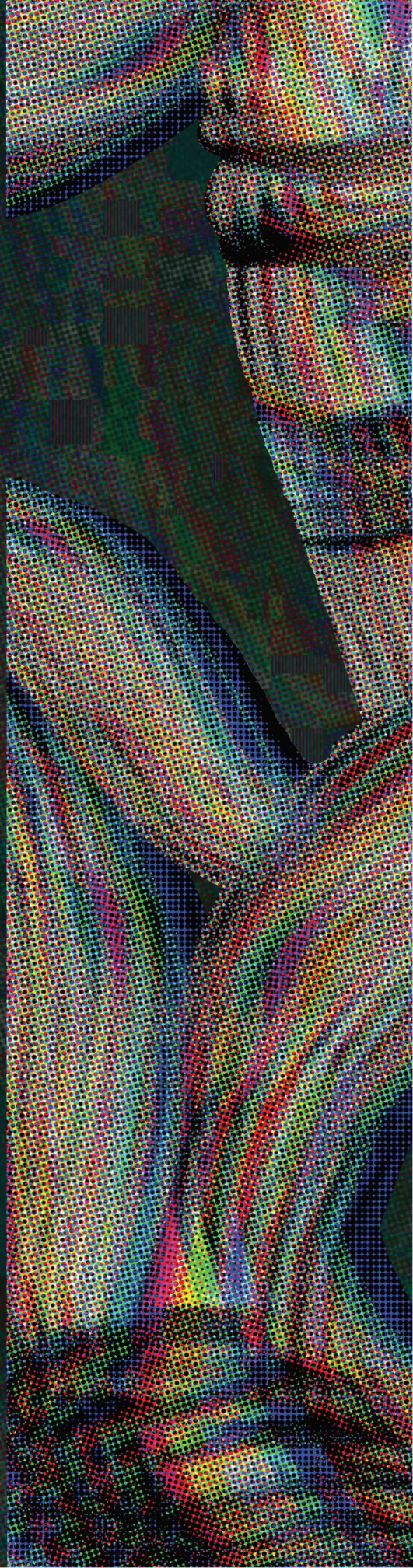
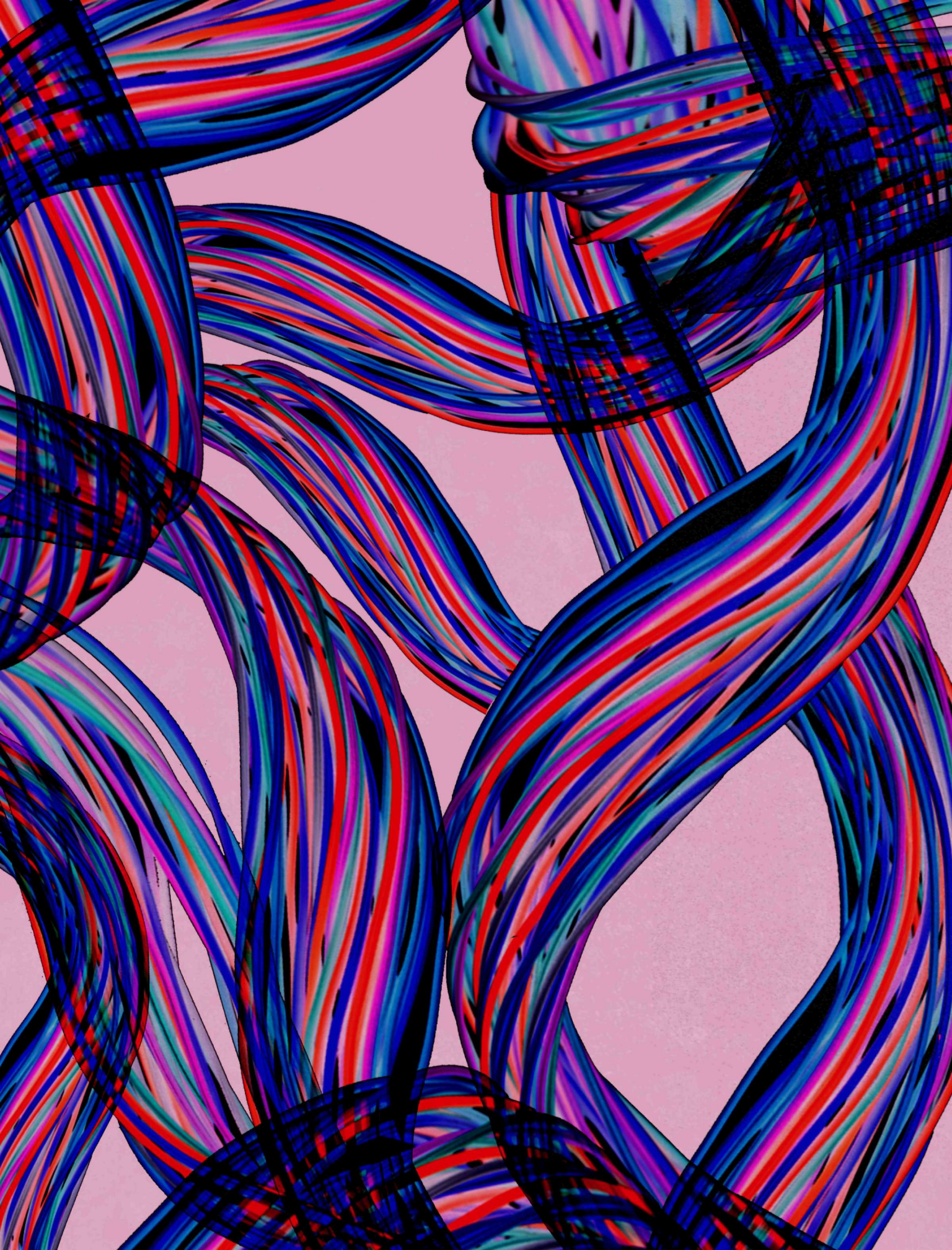
Washburn and Abshire emphasized that UBC is working to remove barriers to getting help. Abshire explained that the message that UBC Counselling aims to communicate is "that it's not just on [students] to access help and that it's okay to reach out."

But for Houston, this feels performative.

"One of the biggest shortcomings, and really disappointments, with the UBC health system is that mental health is looked at like a side note and is simultaneously really exploited in a very performative way," she said.

While UBC is focused on motivating students to ask for help, Houston argued that the onus should be on the university to listen to students and invest in infrastructure that will support them once they do seek support.

"I think there's also so many more students who have so many ideas about how we really can and should improve that system. And I know that they're saying those things — I just don't feel like we're being listened to," said Houston.

As of now, for students like Houston, disappointment in the university has led to a desire for accountability.

"I really think that UBC needs to openly admit that they have not done enough." ❦