



Implementing and evaluating a national pathway to accessibility support in fieldwork (PAS-FW)

Tal Jarus, Cori Schmitz, Karen Falcicchio, Jeff Boniface,
Laura Yvonne Bulk & Cynthia Fauteux

**Inclusive Campus research team (UBC) and the Association of
Canadian Occupational Therapy University Programs (ACOTUP)
Research on Education Committee**

Contact us: tal.jarus@ubc.ca

Background:

Studies have found a lack of clear procedures and policies for supporting students requiring accommodations in health education. Additionally, systemic ableism and biases persist within institutions, healthcare organizations and beyond.

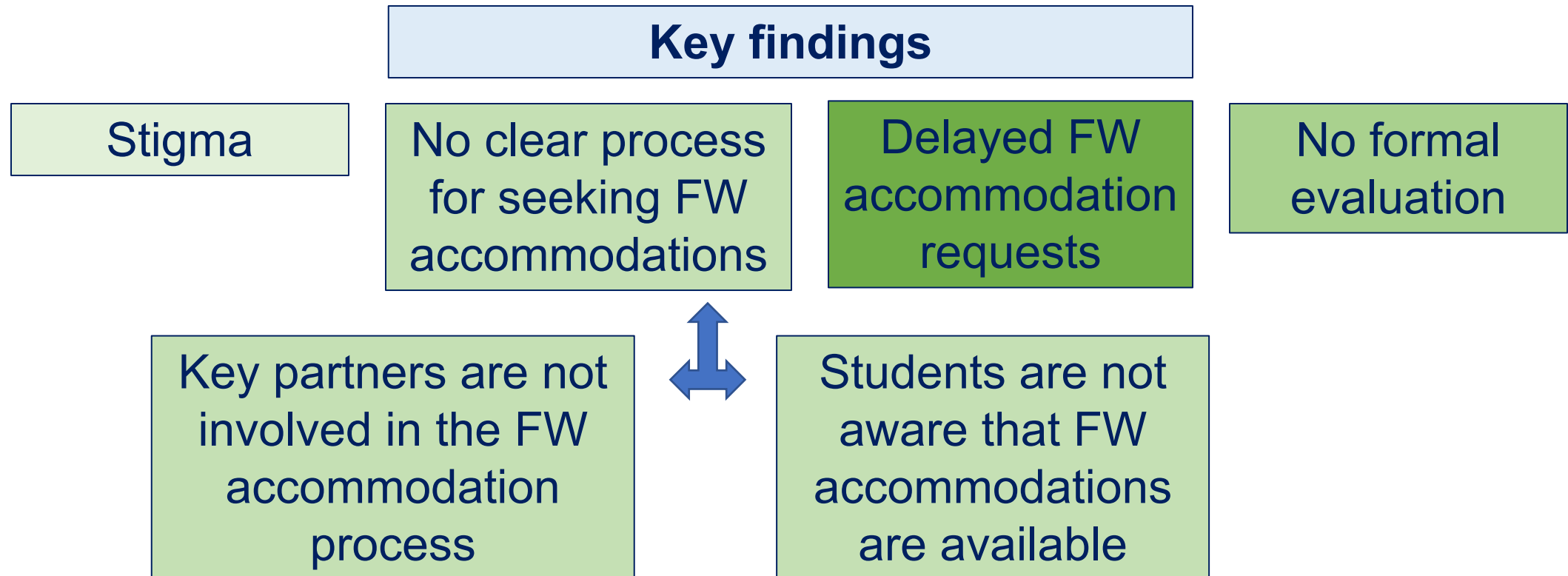


The above are particularly impacting student experiences within fieldwork (FW) contexts in health education.



Background:

Phase 1: What are the strengths and limitations of current practices in FW education?



Pathway to Accessibility Support in Fieldwork (PAS-FW)

Phase 2: Developing implementing and evaluating a national PAS-FW for navigating fieldwork accommodations

Flowchart

Checklists

Evaluation

Problem: Stigma

Solution:
University-wide education, training and awareness

Problem: Students are not aware that FW accommodations are available

Solution: Recurring announcements through multiple channels

Recommended Procedure Flowchart for Fieldwork Accommodations Promoting an Inclusive Campus

Please note:

- While this proposal is an ideal and is depicted as a linear process, we acknowledge that onground realities might dictate different trajectories. Thus, flexibility and an individualized approach is required while using this as a general framework.
- At no point will the student be pressured into following the recommended procedures. The options will be presented in an unbiased manner. The student can also say yes to some, but not all the recommended steps

Recurrent University-wide Education and Awareness

Education, training and awareness for:
Students: Availability of resources and accommodations (including examples), self advocacy, peer support groups. Promote the idea and value of accommodations for ALL students.
FE: Disability awareness, sensitivity training, how to support students that need accommodations, list of resources
AC: Disability awareness, sensitivity training, how to support students that need accommodations, list of resources
Annual reminders to all faculty and staff about accommodations and their role in the process

General Accommodation Announcements (Recurring and Iterative)

- 1) Programs to distribute information about available accommodations (academic and FW) in students' acceptance letter.
- 2) Speak to the whole class about available accommodations, resources and normalising language around disability and accommodations
- 3) AC to specify availability of FW accommodations in course outlines
- 4) Highlight the importance of registering with the university's CfA/DRC even for 'light' or minimal accommodations to prevent delays or potential challenges during FW.

Legend

- Academic Fieldwork Coordinator (AC)
- Accessibility Advisor (AA)
- Student
- Fieldwork Educator/Preceptor (FE)
- Departmental Advisor (DA)
- *Some programs may have an alternative instead of a DA e.g. Academic Advisor
- Practice Lead, also called the Destination or Site Coordinator (PL)
- Fieldwork (FW) - Alternatively clinical placement or practicum
- University's Centre for Accessibility or Disability Resource Centre (CfA/DRC)
- Health and human service (HHS)

Rationale for each Stakeholder

- Student:** Ownership over their FW experience and to communicate their needs.
AC: To provide perspective on FW aspects of the curriculum. Potentially supported by FW assistant if present.
AA: Legally required to recommend and confirm accommodations. They need to be aware of requested accommodations to be provided. They need to be aware of and involved in logistics of the accommodations
FE/PL/relevant person from site: To provide on-ground perspective and understand student needs in order to best support
DA or alternative: Departmental equity or accommodation advisor who has a broad understanding of whole program and accessibility needs

Decision

If student opts 'no' to registering at the CfA/DRC

Step 1: Intake conversation at CfA/DRC

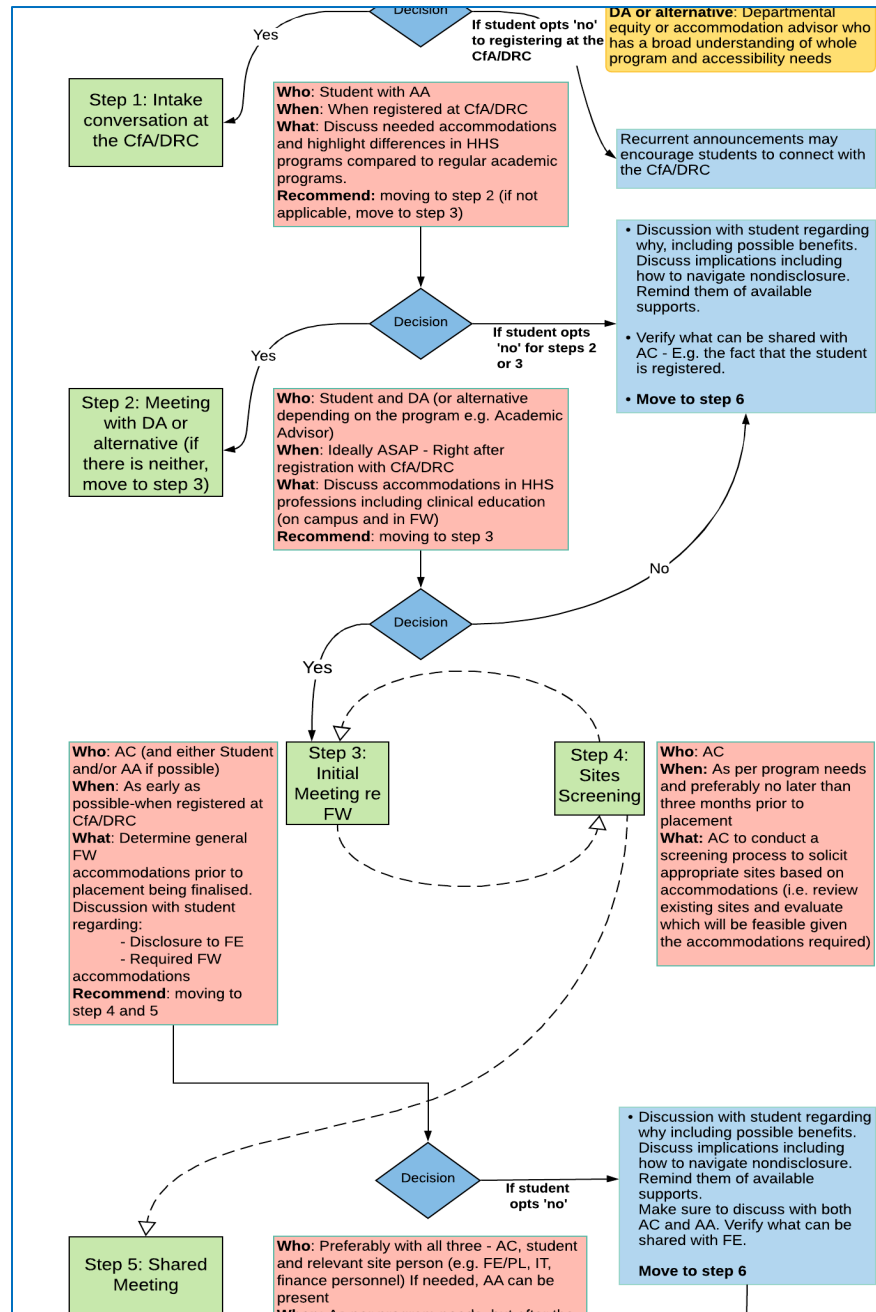
Who: Student with AA
When: When registered at CfA/DRC
What: Discuss needed accommodations

Problem: Delayed FW accommodation request

Solution: Highlight availability of FW accommodations early and specify the importance of registering ASAP. Recommended timelines for "when" to implement each step.

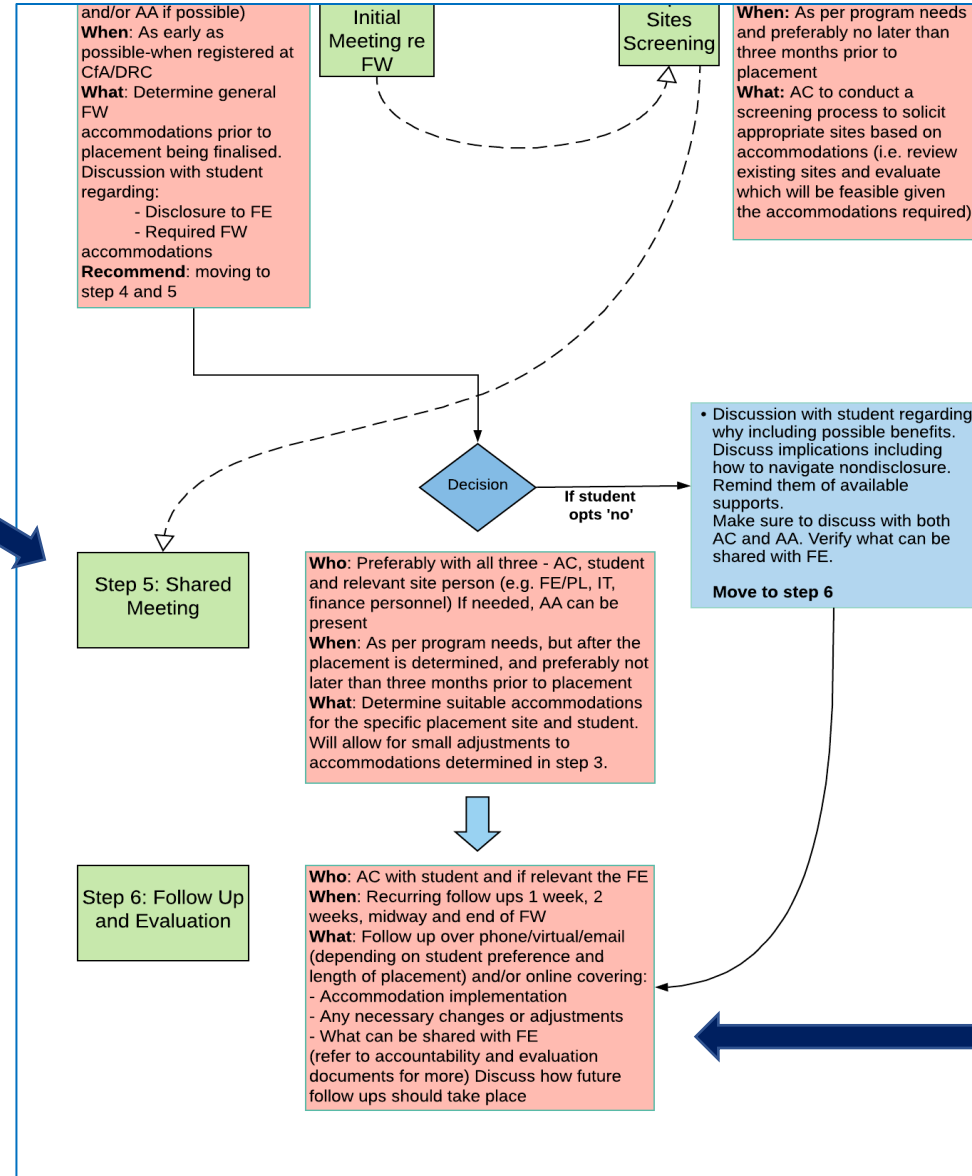
Problem: No clear process for seeking FW accommodations

Solution: Recommended flowchart and checklists for key partners



Problem: Key interested parties are not involved in the FW accommodation process

Solution: Recommended meetings with key partners – pending student consent.



Problem: No formal follow up or evaluation

Solution: Recommended follow ups and evaluation with checklist

Checklists and Evaluation Form



Review with the student:

- What do you know about the fieldwork placements and process? Possible prompts:
 - Dates, duration and levels of the practicum(s)/fieldwork
 - Where might students be placed for the practicum/fieldwork – (distance, travel expectations)
 - ‘Shift’ expectations (length of shift, day/night, times per week)
 - Number of total hours expected to be in practicum/fieldwork placement

Step 3: Initial meeting regarding FW

Overall, what would you say **did not work well** with your accommodation/s in the fieldwork placement that was just completed? Please elaborate:

Step 6: Follow up & evaluation regarding accommodation implementation, effectiveness & new learnings



Method:

Participants

- 12 out of 14 Canadian Occupational Therapy programs participated
- 7 students requiring accommodations (SRA)
- 6 academic fieldwork coordinators (AC)

Tools

- Pre and Post Surveys
- Feedback (FB) Form

Students' surveys:

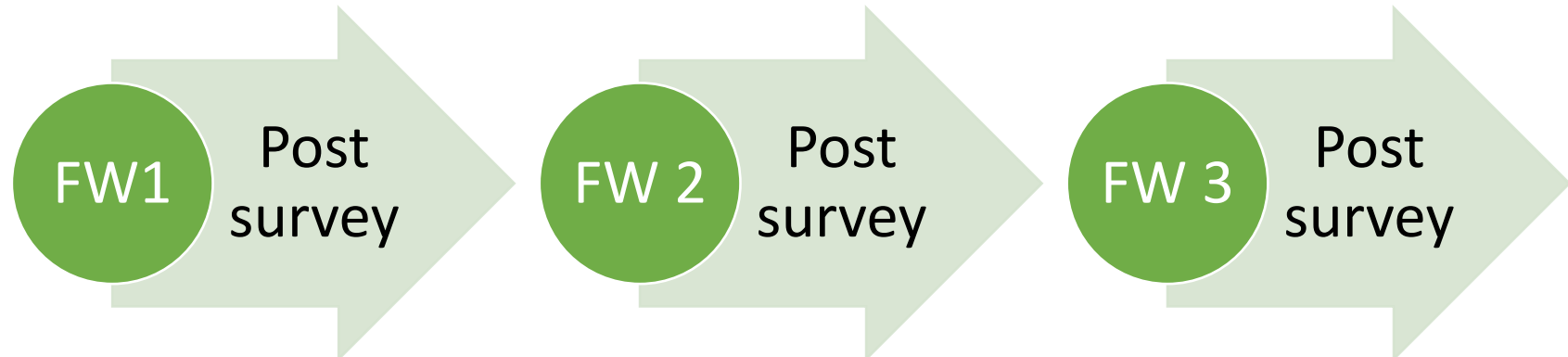
- Pre and post FW survey (N=5)
 - Pre survey - past placements prior to use of PAS-FW
 - Post surveys - post placement with PAS-FW
 - Focused on accommodations, PAS-FW implementation and learning opportunities.
- Feedback survey (N=7)
 - At the end of the placement
 - Focused on students' experience and satisfaction with PAS-FW.



AC Surveys

- Post FW survey (N=37)
 - After each FW cycle for a period of 2 years
 - Focused on number of students who received accommodations, satisfaction with implementation, and communication with sites.
- Feedback survey (N=6)
 - At the end of the project
 - Focused on AC's learnings about supporting SRA, and their experience and satisfaction with PAS-FW

Year 1



Year 2



Findings (AC)

- 0-14 students requested FW accommodations per placement per program (average 4.2 students, total 155)

Most commonly requested FW accommodations	# of students requesting
Placement setting/fieldwork location (e.g. proximity to care/service provider, avoid/alleviate extra stressors)	69
Breaks between patients/clients/families	59
Extra time allotted for specific fieldwork tasks (e.g. documentation)	48

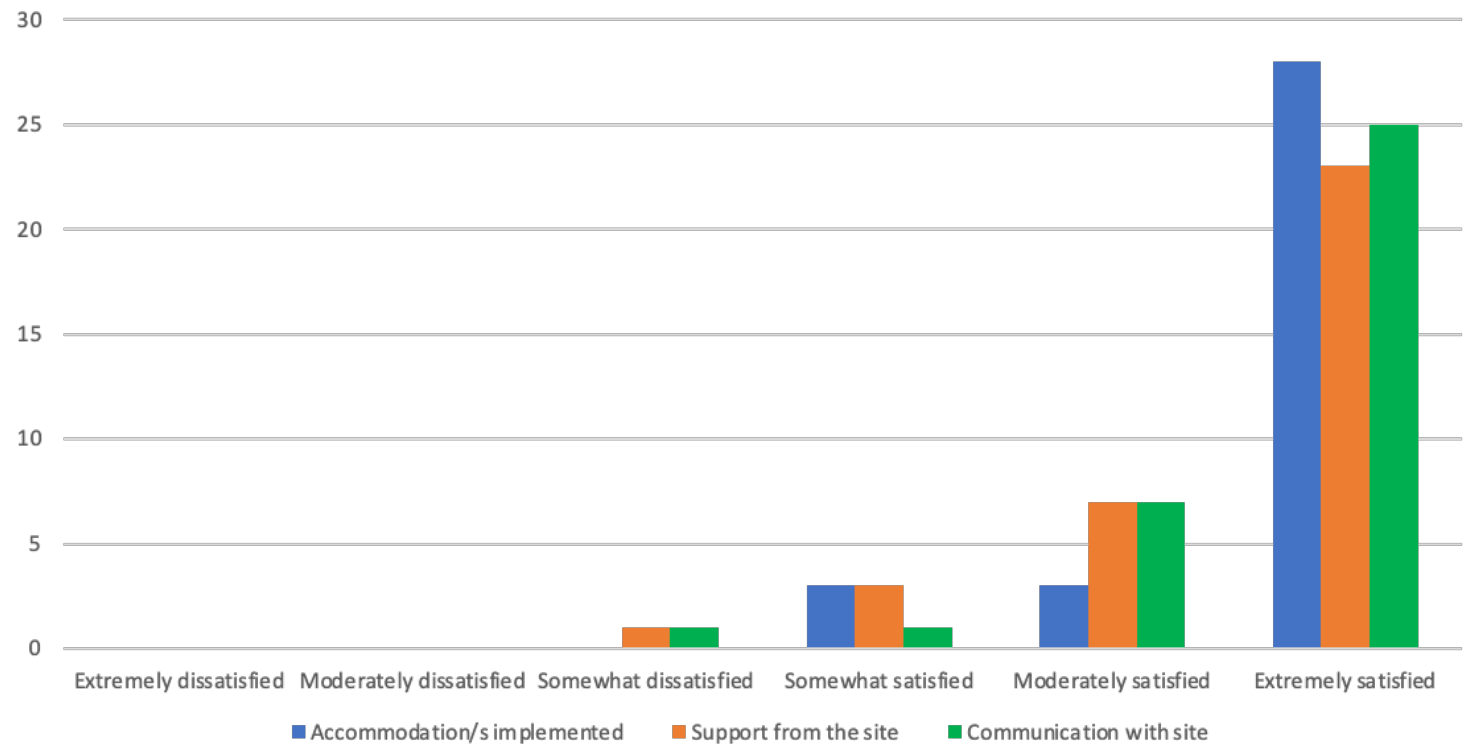
- Only rarely (5%) were accommodation needs not able to be met.
- Individualized process is necessary and valuable but time consuming = high workload for ACs.

Findings (AC)

Changes ACs would like to see in PAS-FW

- More communication and collaboration with Accessibility Advisors
- More awareness and accommodation of SRA by FW sites

Overall ACs were satisfied with:



AC Experiences with PAS-FW:

Strengths

- **Adoption of PAS-FW** by relevant parties is going well (e.g. AA)
- Improved **equity** and **confidentiality**
- *"Students and I love that we have an **outlined procedure** ... to help navigate the grey area of fieldwork and accommodation"*
- *"Students are re-empowered to self-represent their needs in their '**own voice**'"*

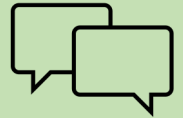
Challenges

Context within which ACs function:

- Limited resources
- Increase in number and complexity of student accommodations
- Fieldwork placement shortages (in current healthcare system)
- Pressured timelines
- Evolving student needs ...
*"... make it **challenging to complete all phases** (especially timely follow up and evaluation) for all students"*

Findings (Students)

What worked well?

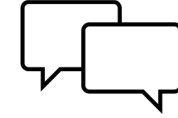


- Support from AC
- Support from preceptor/fieldwork educator (FE)
- Partnership between AC and FE

“The coordinator and FE worked closely together to support me in this placement, making sure that accommodations were met. There was open communication between the 3 parties and I was comfortable with the whole process because of it.”

“Je pense que la rencontre pré-stage a aidé, puis mes superviseurs étaient attentifs à mes besoins” (I think the pre-placement meeting helped, my supervisors were attentive to my needs)

Findings (Students)



What didn't work well (despite use of the PAS-FW)?

Knowledge and support:

"I still do not feel like I have a good grasp on what accommodations are available to me and wonder if I'm missing something that could be really helpful for my learning"

"[It was challenging] not having a place to discuss and talk to people (peers) about accommodations or how to navigate work with accommodations"

Normative expectations in workplace settings

"I think I would benefit from more breaks, but I know that it isn't practical in all placements."

"My preceptor's expectations were higher than they should've been considering my [lack of] accommodations"

Continued burden on students

"I did not want to make a big deal about it so left it as it was."

"I was expected to make sure the accommodations were fulfilled."

"[I had to] advocate for what I truly needed rather than relying on the advice of the Accessibility Advisor"

Discussion:

The PAS-FW:

- Provides needed structure and consistency to process
- Increases collaboration and improves communication
- Normalizes conversation around disability – a first step
- Increases demands and workload of ACs



Recommendations for OT Programs:

- Increase resources in relation to increased demand
- Strengthen collaboration with Accessibility Advisors (AAs)
- Provide a list of potential accommodations to SRAs
- Develop and offer education to all fieldwork educators to:
 - Reduce attitudinal barriers
 - Normalize the accommodation process
- Improve evaluation process:
 - Follow up with evaluation after each placement with SRA
 - Include accommodations as a component of all fieldwork evaluation
- Create opportunities for peer support

“I'd like to see content about student accommodations added so that all fieldwork educators are not surprised if a student has an accommodation and are prepared to support them ... it would also make disclosure easier for students if they knew that fieldwork educators had training on accommodations.”

Tips for OT Fieldwork Educators

1. **Normalize conversations about disability** with your colleagues before and during fieldwork placements.
2. Promote proactive and open communication. **Talk about accommodations in fieldwork with all students you supervise** — not just those who you know receive accommodations. Include an explicit statement in your introductory sessions, documents, and correspondence expressing your commitment to support students living with disabilities.
3. Educate yourself. **Take on an anti-ableist mindset** to avoid making assumptions about what is possible and how competencies can be demonstrated — your student can competently complete tasks differently than you do!
4. Use a **strengths-based approach** to supervising and communicating with students.
5. **Be responsive and ready to adjust** to the diverse needs of your students.
6. Acknowledge, own, and **learn from your mistakes** as you discover your biases — we all have them — it's what you do about them that matters!

Schmitz, C., Lysaght, R., Falcicchio, K., Henderson, C., Bulk, L.,
Boyd, J., Boniface, J., Fauteux, C., & Jarus, T. (2026).

**Yes, You Can! (Supervise a student living with
disabilities):**

**A pathway to accessibility support in fieldwork (PAS-
FW).**

Occupational Therapy Now, 29(1), 42-45.

<https://doi.org/10.63192/otnow.1921181>





THANK YOU



Contact us: inclusive.campus@ubc.ca

Learn more about us: <https://inclusive-campus.osot.ubc.ca/>