

Welcome back!

The fall semester is officially underway, and what a start to the year it has been for TMAPS. September has been filled with new faces, familiar faces, opportunities to learn, opportunities to connect and plenty of reasons to get excited about the year ahead!

We kicked things off with two incredible days of Scoops & Social, where our friends at Marble Slab Creamery helped us serve up some very sweet treats - with all the toppings, of course! It was such a pleasure to spend time connecting with students, introducing them to TMAPS, and hearing about what they are looking forward to this year. We also had the opportunity to connect with students throughout the main street festivities during Orientation Week, and we brought along our Fujifilm Instax cameras to capture some of those first-semester memories.

One of the things I love most about these events is that they give us the opportunity to meet our members face to face and really get a better understanding of what's important to them. Whether someone is already familiar with TMAPS or has never heard of us before, we want every student to know that our doors are open and that there is a place for them here.

We carried that spirit of connection into our virtual programming as well. Our More Than a Degree: Unlocking the Skills for Success workshop, guest-hosted by TMAPS member Eleni, encouraged students to recognize that the university experience is about so much more than what appears on a transcript. The skills we develop through classes, volunteering, clubs, advocacy, networking and simply navigating university life can become powerful tools for our future careers and communities.

We also hosted TMAPS 101, giving students an opportunity to learn more about their students' union, our health and dental plan, the services and supports we provide, our campaigns and events and the many ways students can get involved. If you haven't had a chance to learn about what TMAPS does yet, I encourage you to join us at an upcoming session or reach out to our team. Understanding the resources available to you is an important part of making the most of your university experience.

September also marked the launch of our Community Food Resource Guide in partnership with the TMU Good Food Centre. Through the first event in our Food Security Workshop Series, we explored food sovereignty, community food systems and resources available to students experiencing barriers to food access. We know that being successful at university requires more than simply getting through your classes. Students need access to food, community, financial resources, healthcare, accommodations and so much more. Helping students find those resources is an important part of our work.

And, of course, September wouldn't be complete without a little puppy therapy! Our Pawsitive Vibes event brought therapy puppies into the TMAPS office for students to take a break, de-stress, and spend some time in good company. University can be overwhelming, and sometimes taking a moment to pause, breathe and connect is exactly what we need.

But alongside the fun, September was also a month of learning about our rights and responsibilities as students. Our Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence at TMU: Policy 60 workshops gave students an opportunity to better understand the university's expectations around generative AI, including how to determine when AI use is permitted, how to use these tools responsibly and transparently and how to properly acknowledge their use. This kind of education is incredibly important to us at TMAPS. Knowing your rights, understanding university policies, and knowing where to turn when something goes wrong are all essential parts of being an empowered student.

September also marked the beginning of our DIS-orientation programming - and this is something I am particularly excited about.

For TMAPS, DIS-orientation is about recognizing that the traditional university experience doesn't work for everyone. It is about creating opportunities for students to engage with campus and their education in ways that recognize disability, chronic illness, caregiving, accessibility and the many different circumstances that shape our student experiences. It is also about challenging the idea that students need to simply adapt themselves to systems that were not designed with them in mind.

As part of DISorientation, we launched our Pregnant, Parenting & Caregiving Student Campaign, bringing together former TMAPS student panelists to share their experiences navigating TMU as parenting and caregiving students. Their stories are an important reminder that students have lives and responsibilities outside of the classroom - and that our institutions need to recognize and support the whole student.

We also supported the Toronto Disability Pride March, proudly standing alongside our broader disability community and celebrating its 15th year. Disability advocacy doesn't stop at the boundaries of our campus, and we are proud to continue building connections between TMU students and the wider disability community.

Our advocacy work continued beyond campus as well. We hosted a Grassy Narrows Phone Zap, giving students the opportunity to contact their local MPPs and demand mercury justice for Grassy Narrows. We were also joined by Dan Mossip-Balkwil to learn more about the Grassy Narrows River Run and the ongoing fight for mercury justice. The TMAPS team also marched in solidarity on September 23 for the Grassy Narrows River Run. These opportunities are an important reminder that student advocacy can extend far beyond campus - and that our collective voices can contribute to broader movements for justice.

We also joined conversations around public transit through the TTCriders Town Hall, recognizing that access to affordable, reliable and accessible public transportation is an equity issue. For many students, particularly students with disabilities and students facing financial barriers, transportation can directly affect our ability to get to class, work, appointments and community spaces.

Looking back at September, what stands out to me most is just how much can happen when students come together. We have laughed together over ice cream, taken photos, cuddled puppies, learned about our rights, explored food security, celebrated Indigenous culture, supported disability advocacy and participated in collective action - IN OUR FIRST MONTH BACK!

That is what I hope TMAPS continues to be: a place where students can connect, learn, advocate and belong.

There are so many exciting things ahead as we move further into the semester, and I hope you will join us. Keep an eye on your email, follow our updates, come by the office, attend a workshop, bring a friend to an event, or reach out when you need support - you can even find us on Instagram @tmaps105

And if there is something you think TMAPS should be doing, TELL US!

Your ideas, experiences and voices help shape the work we do. We represent YOU!

Here's to an incredible year ahead. I can't wait to see what we accomplish together.

Warmly,

Rose