

Ryerson University Accessibility Plan 2007-2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In accordance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, universities are required annually to:

- Prepare an accessibility plan;
- Consult with persons with disabilities and others in preparing the plan; and
- Make the plan public.

This report outlines progress made towards the priorities outlined in our 2006-2007 Accessibility Plan, provides a discussion of some emerging issues and identifies the priorities for 2007-2008. The report is based on input from the members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee (a group representing all Faculties, various administrative departments, and students, see Appendix B), and from meetings with students, faculty surveys, and with Senior Directors.

This report indicates that progress has been made in promoting accessibility on the Ryerson campus. This extends to the built environment and to policies and practices affecting faculty, staff and students. Nevertheless, promoting full accessibility is a work in progress and much remains to be done.

The following priorities are recommendations of the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee.

PRIORITIES FOR 2007-2008

Priority Area A: Emergency response and safety for people with disabilities

A.1. Promote and communicate the role of community members in supporting people with disabilities in the event of an emergency

Priority Area B: Awareness, elimination, and prevention of attitudinal and systemic barriers

B.1. Promote accessibility awareness

B.2. Identify resources necessary to meet the needs of people with disabilities

B.3. Create a portal for community members to access available resources relevant to disability needs

B.4. Develop strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities participating in exchange programs and co-ops

B.5. Develop strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities accepted into graduate programs

B.6. Regularly communicate accessibility needs and issues to the larger university community.

Priority Area C: Elimination and prevention of physical barriers

C.1. Promote access by identifying and eliminating current physical barriers and prevent future physical barriers.

METHODOLOGY

The information for this report was gathered in a number of ways. The committee members shared their own experience and observations as members of the Ryerson community, identifying changes they had noted and areas where further action was required. The Accessibility Advisory Committee included representatives from most Faculties, Student Services, and Human Resource's Employment Equity group. The committee also enjoyed active participation from student members, as individuals or as representatives of student organizations. The list of members is included at the end of this report (see Appendix B).

The Accessibility Plan for the 2007-2008 Academic year was developed in consultation with the Ryerson Community through a variety of forums. The issues brought to the fore in this consultation process have helped shape the priorities targeted for 2007 – 2008.

Campus Planning and Facilities sits on the Built Environment Standards Development Committee representing the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) and the Ontario Association of Physical Plant Administrators (OAPPA).

The consultation process was expanded this year to include input from individual Ryerson Faculty Association members thr

Ryerson University endeavors to demonstrate in its marketing and communications materials the broad range and diversity of the University's student, faculty and staff population. Working with partners in the University community, the marketing team identifies and recruits members of the community to appear in information and marketing materials who visually represent student diversity, including students with disabilities.

In the past year, students and staff with disabilities appeared in promotional materials for part- and full-time programs, the Office of Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Services, and the Positive Space campaign. In addition, Warren Rupnarain, a 2006 graduate of the School of Social Work who gained national attention for lobbying federal politicians on disability issues, was one of three Ryerson students featured prominently in the University's 2006 recruiting campaign.

This year, the Employment Equity at Ryerson developed a brochure which included a new visual logo and phrase "Connect with Equity" to improve visibility and understanding of the role of the Employment Equity Office.

Priority V: Strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities participating in exchange programs and in co-ops will be explored.

Discussion of initiatives to address this priority is expanded to include student placements required by academic programs. During the past year, the relationship between the Access Centre and one department, that requires student placements to demonstrate the acquisition of professional skills, has greatly improved. The number of students with physical disabilities in placements did increase, and physical accessibility on placements was better. However, improved staff training is necessary to improve awareness of accessibility needs, both within academic units placing students and within organizations accepting students.

Priority VI: Strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities accepted into graduate programs will be explored.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee is holding discussions with the Office of Graduate Studies about strategies for recruiting students with disabilities.

Priority VII: Strategies to ensure that recruitment forums include representatives that are aware of the resources available to assist community members with disability issues.

The Employment Equity Office (EEO) has undertaken a number of initiatives that relate (directly, or indirectly) to this priority. In the past year, the Employment Equity Office has:

- 1) Implemented a staff education program to enhance managers' and leaders' knowledge of employee accommodation obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the ODA.
- 2) Developed communications tools such as fact sheets, quick tips, resource lists, and other information links on how to accommodate people with disabilities. In

addition they have developed new guidelines on how to respond to accommodation requests.

In the coming year, the EEO plans to:

- 1) Improve Employment Equity communication tools including website resources
- 2) Expand its commitment to develop an educational strategy in conjunction with other units. It is expected that these sessions will reach all levels of staff, faculty, Deans, Chairs and Directors on a yearly basis. The overall goal of the training strategy will be to increase awareness within all levels of the Ryerson community on specific issues relating to disabilities and accommodations. In the short-term, the strategy will focus on directors, managers, and supervisors as it is anticipated that this is where training initiatives will have the greatest impact.
- 3) Update the “Accommodation of Employees and Applicants with Disabilities” policy, the procedures for accessing CEAF” and the “Request for Reimbursement from CEAF” form. Revisions to the policy have been made to clarify the policy. The current priority is to develop strategies aimed at communicating the policy to the Ryerson community.
- 4) Develop promotional and educational materials, including brochures, that will assist in future educational strategies.

Priority VIII: Encourage the University to expand eligibility for the accommodation fund to include community accommodation needs.

The University continues to cost-share accommodation requirements with schools and departments as needs arise and are identified. The EEO has initiatives underway to improve usability and understanding of the Central Employee Accommodation Fund (see above).

PROGRESS ON OTHER FRONTS

In October, 2006, Academic Council approved Policy 159, outlining the responsibilities of all interested parties in the accommodation of students with disabilities in accordance with the terms of the Ontario Human Rights Code. One change that has occurred because of Policy 159 is in the area of academic awards. Academic awards are indicators of achievement, and can improve the chances of success in applying to graduate studies programs, or can distinguish a student applying for jobs or co-op placements. The nature of some disabilities preclude students from attending Ryerson full-time. Students attending Ryerson part-time due to their disabilities were previously excluded from consideration for Dean’s list honours. This situation has been rectified and these students are now eligible for consideration.

In addition to progress in Priorities identified in last year’s Accessibility Plan, we wish to highlight some initiatives undertaken in other sectors of Ryerson to improve accessibility during 2006-2007. Below, we highlight efforts by the major administrative sectors to identify and eliminate existing barriers to accessibility.

1. Access Centre –

- Promoted self-advocacy among students
- Created an online community for students registered with the Access Centre
- Created Access Centre Student Advisory Committee to facilitate monthly meetings for students interested in improving accessibility
- Advocated on behalf of students with professors, Student Financial Assistance, and for physically accessible office space.

pool of professional note-takers. Again, early self-declaration by students will help faculty and staff address existing barriers.

Many of the priority issues identified in our 2006-2007 Accessibility Plan are issues that will continue for some time to come. Promoting full accessibility will always be “a work in progress”. The University must continue to work towards increasing accessibility, responding appropriately to all its members, articulating and safeguarding rights, promoting inclusiveness in hiring and admissions and providing accommodations as required.

PRIORITIES FOR 2007-2008

Based on the state of progress relative to last year’s priorities, and the identification of needs during the consultation process, the Accessibility Plan for the current academic year (2007-2008), are divided into three priority areas; 1) Emergency Response and Safety, 2) Awareness, elimination, and prevention of attitudinal and systemic barriers, and 3) Elimination and prevention of physical barriers.

These priorities and the specific objectives proposed are recommendations of the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Priority Area A: Emergency response and safety for people with disabilities

A.1. Promote the role of community members in supporting people with disabilities in the event of an emergency

The emergency procedures relating to evacuation of people with special needs and/or disabilities posted on-line are more comprehensive than those posted in classrooms. We recognize that this is inevitable as the procedures posted in class have to cover all manner of emergency. There are some inconsistencies in procedures posted on-line and in classrooms that need clarification. There remains some confusion of the role of faculty/staff in an emergency, particularly if the faculty or staff member is disabled.

To better promote the role of community members in the event of an emergency, we recommend the following specific objectives:

- I. Information on evacuation procedures will be made available on-line in a

- c. including a brief section on emergency procedures in the course outline
- IV. Faculty or staff with special needs are encouraged to develop individualized plans and discuss them with students or designated individuals.
- V. Appropriate emergency response will be covered in faculty, staff, and student orientation

The Accessibility Advisory Committee will promote these actions by faculty and staff with reminders prior to the beginning of each semester.

Priority Area B: Awareness, elimination, and prevention of attitudinal and systemic barriers

B.1. The AAC will continue to promote accessibility awareness

Specific Objectives:

- I. Representatives of the Accessibility Advisory Committee will participate in faculty and student orientation programs to promote awareness of policies and resources related to accommodation
- II. The AAC will promote educational programming for staff, such as the efforts by Human Resources to enhance managers' and leaders' knowledge of employee accommodation obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2001) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005).
- III. The AAC will participate in educational outreach initiatives. Possibilities being considered include:
 - a. An Access to Education theme for the May faculty conference.
 - b. A panel discussion at the May faculty conference to focus on strategies for promoting academic success by students with disabilities, and the role of accommodations.
 - c. Promotion of International Day of People with Disabilities, to be hosted in Toronto on December 3, 2007.
- IV. The AAC will contribute to efforts by the Committee for Effective Learning and Teaching Environment. This committee is redesigning a classroom as a demonstration of best practices relating to learning space design. Accessibility needs will be included in the design of this room, which may serve as a template for future classroom design at Ryerson.

B.2. The AAC will identify resources necessary to meet the needs of people with disabilities

Specific Objectives:

- I. The AAC will continue to consult with the Ryerson community to identify accessibility needs. Consultation will remain inclusive (i.e. students, staff, and

- faculty). The AAC will maintain representation from the Access Centre, RyeAccess, and the EEO.
- II. The AAC will regularly meet with the university executive to communicate identified needs.
 - III. The AAC will collaborate with the Access Centre to assist students with disabilities in finding needed financial resources, through information on counseling, scholarships, and bursaries. The role of the AAC will be to make information easily found on an accessibility portal (see below).

B.3. The AAC, in collaboration with the Digital Media Projects Office, will create and promote a portal for community members to access available resources relevant to disability needs.

Currently, many campus resources exist, but recent surveys of faculty and communication with students reveal that awareness of the breadth of these resources is limited. The Accessibility Committee can work with DMP on making a relevant portal that will be available to students, staff, and faculty on RAMSS.

This portal is intended as a starting point for finding all relevant resources. It will be a place to make maintenance requests that are related to physical barriers. It will also serve as a location to find information on emergency procedures for evacuating a building in the case of an emergency. The University's annual Accessibility Plan and the composition and mission of the AAC will also be accessible through this portal.

B.4. Strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities participating in exchange programs and in co-ops will be explored in collaboration with the Ryerson Co-operative education office.

Specific Objectives:

- I. The AAC will investigate measures to facilitate placing students with disabilities on placements and practicum.
- II. The AAC will invite participation by University Advancement in looking into creating a disability network amongst Ryerson's students and alumni.

B.5. Strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities accepted into graduate programs will be explored.

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B.6. The Accessibility Advisory Committee will more effectively communicate about accessibility needs and issues to the University-wide community.

Bi-monthly meetings between the AAC co-chairs and the Executive will ensure that recommendations and identified action items of the committee receive appropriate attention.

The AAC will use forums including the May faculty conference, faculty, staff, and student orientations, and the Accessibility portal (above) to communicate about accessibility with the broader University community. The AAC will further promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in promotional material and recruiting forums.

Priority Area C: Elimination and prevention of physical barriers.

C.1. The Accessibility Advisory Committee will promote access by identifying and eliminating current physical barriers and preventing future physical barriers.

Specific Objectives:

- I. Campus Planning and Facilities will be used to rapidly address physical barriers, and for tracking the resolution of these barriers. This permits a form of continuous consulting regarding physical barriers to accessibility. The AAC endorses using the current fixit@ryerson.ca and doit@ryerson.ca options on the Campus Planning and Facilities website, which will be promoted through the accessibility portal.
- II. A review of way-finding will be undertaken to improve navigation for students with visual/spatial disabilities. Several initiatives could help remove this barrier for students.
 - a. Way-finding signage will be audited and replaced (as needed) to improve navigation.
 - b. Building plans will be made available on-line, in a printable format that highlights accessible washrooms, single-stall washrooms, elevators, and accessible entrances.
 - c. A campus map that includes accessible entrances will be posted in prominent locations.

4.2 Continue to encourage a wider inclusion of diverse community members in public relations and recruitment materials created by the University.

5. Strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities participating in exchange programs and in co-ops will be explored.

Specific objectives:

- 5.1 The AAC will investigate measures to facilitate placing students with disabilities on placements and practicum.
- 5.2 The AAC will invite participation by University Advancement in looking into creating a disability network amongst Ryerson's students and alumni.

6. Strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities accepted into graduate programs will be explored.

Specific objectives:

- 6.1 Continue evaluating candidates for grad school on fit, relationship with supervisor and areas of strength rather than just overall grade point average.
- 6.2 Look for an opportunity to promote a graduate student(s) with a disability by developing a case study around their situation i.e. should a graduate student with a disability be agreeable, create a promotion that highlights the student's success in the graduate program.

7. Recruitment forums should include representatives who are aware of the resources available to assist students with disabilities.

8. Encourage the University to expand eligibility for the accommodation fund to include student needs.

APPENDIX B

LIST OF ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Ian Hamilton, Co-Chair

Andrew Laursen, Co-Chair

NAME	TITLE	DEPARTMENT
Restiani Andriati	Instructional Designer	Digital Media Projects
Judy Britnell	Director	Learning & Teaching Office
Marion Creery	Director	Student Services
Laurie Clune	Faculty	School of Nursing
Joshua Dvorkin	Student	Journalism
Deb Fels	Director	Centre for Learning Technologies
Des Glynn	Director	Arts Program Continuing Education
Ian Hamilton	Director	Campus Planning & Facilities
Andrew Laursen	Faculty	Chemistry and Biology
Tanya Lewis	Coordinator	Access Centre For Students With Disabilities
Stephanie Marinich	Employment Equity Consultant	Human Resources
Bobbi Moore	Student	
Saburah Murdoch	Student	Co-ordinator RyeAccess
Frank Nitray	Student	Image Arts
Maureen Reed	Faculty	Psychology
Melissa Simas	Student	
Ann Whiteside	Officer	Discrimination & Harassment Prevention Services
Cheryl Wilson	Senior Equity Consultant	Human Resources
Kathryn Woodcock	Faculty	School of Public Health