

Ryerson University Accessibility Plan 2008-2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In accordance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2001; ODA), universities are required annually to:

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

This report outlines progress made towards the priorities outlined in our 2007-2008 Accessibility Plan, provides a discussion of some emerging issues and identifies the priorities for 2008-2009. The report is based on input from the members of the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee (RAAC, a group representing all Faculties, various administrative departments, and students, see Appendix A), and from meetings with students, academic unit chairs, and with Senior Directors.

This report indicates that progress has been made in promoting accessibility on the Ryerson campus. This extends from the built environment to policies and practices affecting faculty, staff and students. Full accessibility is a goal toward which we continue to strive, although work remains to achieve this goal.

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

PRIORITIES FOR 2008-2009

Priority Area A: Evacuation of Persons 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. Ryerson will continue to promote accessibility awareness

B.2. Strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities participating in exchange and co-operative learning programs and practice placements will be explored in collaboration with the Ryerson Co-operative education office.

B.3. Strategies to promote success of students with disabilities in graduate programs will be explored.

B.4. Review policies and procedures specific to undergraduate and/or graduate students to eliminate and prevent systemic barriers.

Priority Area C: Elimination and prevention of physical barriers

C.1. Ryerson will promote access by identifying and eliminating current physical barriers and preventing future physical barriers.

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Prepared by the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee, July, 2008

identifying changes they had noted and areas where further action was required. The RAAC included representatives from most Faculties, Student Services, and the Human Resources 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

the residents of Toronto, Ontario, and Canada, and with its civic mission and the commitments of its academic community to equity, fairness, and a democratic society. Consistent with these principles, Ryerson will continue to help students with disabilities achieve their academic potential at Ryerson, by providing an accessible, barrier-free education.

New Facilities and Landscaping:

Ryerson University has recently published a Master Plan for 2008-2013 which provides a vision for future development of campus. This document suggests an increased density around the central campus, creating a highly accessible and pedestrian-friendly atmosphere, inviting to the greater city community.

The Master Plan commits Ryerson to the goals of “People First” and “Design Excellence”. Accessibility for persons with disabilities will be a guiding principle in all new construction, renovations, and landscaping plans. Ryerson’s approach to sustainable architecture and landscaping will be a model for a proactive approach to accessibility in design.

PRIORITIES FOR 2008-2009

In the 2007-2008 Accessibility Plan, we identified priorities based on extensive consultation with the Ryerson community. While progress has been made in many of these priority areas (Appendix B), consultation conducted for preparation of the 2008-2009 Accessibility Plan indicated that many of these previously identified areas remain top priority and that further progress could and should be made. The Accessibility Plan for the current academic year (2008-2009), is divided into three priority areas; A) Emergency Response and Safety, B) Awareness, elimination, and prevention of attitudinal and systemic barriers, and C) Elimination and prevention of physical barriers, and promotion of a barrier-free environment. Progress made in the 2007-2008 academic year to address these priorities is described below. These priorities and the specific objectives proposed for 2008 - 2009 are recommendations of the RAAC.

PRIORITY AREA A: EVACUATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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

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

Specific Objectives (S):

- S.1. Information on evacuation procedures will be made available on-line in a prominent location, and as part of an accessibility portal on the RAMSS homepage.
- S.2. Faculty or staff responsible for a group of students should ensure that students are aware of emergency procedures. This could be accomplished by:
 - a. discussing emergency procedures in class
 - b. encouraging anyone who may need assistance during an emergency to discuss a plan with the instructor
 - c. including a brief section on emergency procedures in the course outline
- S.3. Faculty or staff with disabilities are encouraged to develop individualized plans and discuss them with students or designated individuals.

The RAAC feels that available venues such as orientations should be used to promote these actions by faculty and staff with reminders prior to the beginning of each semester.

Progress toward achieving these objectives in 2007-2008 (P)

- P.1. Developed Accessibility website (construction ongoing) that will serve as a portal for disability and accessibility- relevant information for both the Ryerson community and the broader community of visitors to Ryerson's websites. This information on emergency procedures included on this website.
- P.2. Met with the Centre for Environmental Health, Safety & Security Management. At this meeting,h

the Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Office, the program is patterned on the Positive Space program.

Some examples of activities undertaken by the NoBarriers@Ryerson Committee during the past year include:

- a. Contributed towards Disability and Accessibility Awareness week at Ryerson during the week of March 3, 2008.
- b. Launched the first seminar on Disability and Accessibility training. The training module is intended to: 1) raise awareness of disabilities, 2) help participants understand differences among people, 3) enhance sensitivity and comfort-levels of staff working with people with disabilities, 4) provide the tools and capabilities to assist people with disabilities, and 5) help participants become allies in promoting awareness of disability and accessibility. The training module also includes a barrier identification, labeling, and logo campaign.
- c. Campaigned around a specific elevator issue of persons with disabilities.

Planned activities for the up-coming year include:

- a. Conducting a logo and poster contest.
- b. Organizing and delivering more sessions on Disability and Accessibility training.
- c. Creating a webpage for the NoBarriers@Ryerson Program, as well as increasing the awareness of more accessible websites.

P.5. Dr. Linda Campbell, Canada Research Chair (Tier II) in Aquatic Environmental Biology at Queen's University, delivered an invited lecture to the graduate seminar course in Environmental Science and Management in October 2007

P.6. A workshop was held on Academic and Educational Interpreting, sponsored by Ryerson's Centre for Learning Technologies and organized by Deaf Ph.D. student Ellen Hibbard. This workshop included presentations from three deaf academics, Dr. Linda Campbell, Dr. Jonathan Chapman, a Psychology professor (adjunct) from University of Western Ontario, and Dr. Kathryn Woodcock, an Associate Professor in the School of Occupational and Public Health, Ryerson University.

P.7. A student participating in campus tours and is working with the Access Centre to develop fully accessible tours. These tours would include routes that did not present physical barriers, but also would be led by tour guides who were knowledgeable of the campus resources available to students with disabilities.

P.8. Student orientation events provide good opportunities to promote disability and accessibility awareness. The Access Centre has worked with Student Services to ensure that student orientation events are held in accessible venues, and with the Toronto Accessible Sports Council to provide opportunities for all students to try a variety of sports, including wheelchair sports.

B.2. Strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities participating in exchange and co-operative learning programs and practice placements will be explored in collaboration with the Ryerson Co-operative education office.

Strategy 14 in the Academic Plan for 2008 – 2013 states that “Ryerson will invest in the learning and teaching environment of a twenty-first century university... This must also include improved training for staff facilitating placements to improve understanding of appropriate accommodations and successful interactions with organizations receiving our students.” To strengthen the educational benefit of placements and practica, the RAAC recommends the following specific objective:

Specific Objective:

- S.1. Academic departments will work with the Access Centre, investigating measures to facilitate placement of students with disabilities on placements and practica that are academically appropriate and not disability-driven.

Strategy 14 in the Academic Plan for 2008 – 2013 further states the University will “preserve its studio and lab cultures...(and) will work to address these gaps in skills and support so that all students can take optimum advantage of the educational opportunities Ryerson provides”. To strengthen the educational benefit of studios and laboratory courses, the RAAC recommends the following specific objective:

Specific Objective:

- S.2. Academic departments will work with university departments to ensure that studios and labs are accessible to students throughout their programs. This strategy must include enhanced opportunities for training of students with disabilities

Progress toward achieving these objective in 2007-2008

- P.1. The School of Social Work and the Ryerson Access Centre have been collaborating to ensure that students with disabilities, needing to complete job placements as part of their program of study, have appropriate accommodations. This has involved outreach to field education managers at places of employment. This collaboration is also providing information on barriers encountered in placements and the relative successes in making appropriate accommodations.
- P.2. The Ryerson University Career Centre and Access Centre co-sponsored events with Lime Connect, Inc. and other area universities. Lime connects global corporations with talented people with disabilities through post-secondary campus events, Lime is developing a Corporate Disability Standard, structured around an ISO-type framework. This project allows corporate partners to effectively and efficiently source, hire, develop and market to people with disabilities. The events included a “Fireside chat” style forum on interviewing skills and selling oneself, and second event with representatives from corporat

Specific Objective:

- S.1. Increase the services provided to graduate students via RAMSS (e.g., course registration).

Graduate students in interdisciplinary programs report experiencing difficulties determining which courses are offered in each term. This is important information both to support registration and when arranging accommodations for courses.

- b. Building maps will be made available on-line, in a printable format that highlights locations for accessible washrooms, single-stall washrooms, elevators, and accessible entrances.
- c. A campus map that includes accessible entrances will be posted in prominent locations.

Progress toward achieving specific objectives in 2007-2008

- P.1. Administrative departments continue to make physical modifications on a case by case basis to accommodate students, staff and faculty in academic spaces when barriers are encountered. Administrative funds have been used to modify classrooms, modify washrooms, widen doorways, add door actuators, etc. as required, to eliminate barriers as community members access academic and learning spaces.
- P.2. Campus Planning and Facilities worked with University Advancement to create an accessible map showing at grade entrances, barrier-free washrooms, ramps, etc. and have posted this map on the Ryerson web page.
- P.3. Campus planning and Facilities continues to consult with experts in disabilities to review work in design to ensure that no new barriers are created in the built environment.
- P.4. Through staff development, Campus Planning and Facilities is training a senior staff member in accessibility standards. This designer is auditing all major projects to make sure that they are universally accessible.

CONCLUSIONS: ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OUTSTANDING ISSUES

This year, substantial progress has been made in making Ryerson University a more accessible environment. Physical accessibility continues to improve as changes to the grounds and buildings are made with accessibility as a consideration. New construction and renovation projects in design continue to receive input from the Access Centre to ensure accessibility issues are addressed and new barriers are not inadvertently created.

Staff and faculty are building on the work of previous years to ensure that students with disabilities can participate fully in academic programming and student life. The attitudes being expressed by the academic community, for the most part, seem to indicate that accessibility is a mainstream issue now and that disability issue management is everyone's responsibility. Awareness of the services offered through the Access Centre to support students and the services offered through the Human-Resources department (such as the Central Employee Accommodation Fund) to support faculty and staff is increasing. This increasing awareness suggests that Ryerson is exhibiting momentum around accessibility awareness.

However, through the consultations with students and faculty, it is apparent that there are still some misconceptions about accessibility issues. For example, some community members remain unclear about who has responsibility for evacuating students with disabilities in the event of an emergency even though Ryerson's Emergency Response Manual describes this eventuality. The Ryerson community is not a static pool of people, with intake of new students and new hires. This highlights the need for ongoing communication about the roles of individuals in emergencies.

Accommodations for students with disabilities do foster academic success, and a recent survey administered by the Access Centre on Satisfaction finds that 78% of students enrolled with the Access Centre agree or strongly agree that accommodations have placed them on a level playing field with other students. However, Ryerson is much more than classrooms. The consultation process reveals that students with disabilities can find it difficult to connect with Ryerson, that they do not always feel fully part of the Ryerson experience. The Access Centre is working on several initiatives to help students become more engaged and comfortable at Ryerson. These initiatives include:

1. An information evening for students with disabilities and their parents to help them achieve an understanding of the resources available and a comfort level with the campus.
2. Scheduled meetings involving previous, current, and new students to improve connections and comfort levels.
3. Pre-orientation events, including workshops to strengthen self-advocacy
4. Hosting informal social events for networking
5. Online to Success, a summer transition program comprised of a series of modules that are completed online. The program provides students who have learning disabilities with coping strategies to better prepare themselves for post-secondary education. Modules focus on topics such as improving academic skills, assistive technology and self advocacy.

Beyond these initiatives, it would be worth exploring opportunities for the Access Centre to work with the existing tri-mentoring program to strengthen networking opportunities for students with disabilities, to improve the feeling of connection to the Ryerson community.

As an employer, Ryerson University is committed to equitable opportunities in the workplace. The Employment Equity Policy, mandated by the Federal Contractor's Program and hiring plan, will continue to eliminate systemic barriers that may prevent A

Students continue to advise the RAAC that they are not receiving course materials in alternative formats early enough in the term. This is an ongoing issue and seems to be tabled every year. Students also report that there is variation in the extent to which faculty are prepared to accommodate their learning needs with, for example, extensions for course work or alternate assignments. It is hard to gauge the extent to which there has been improvement in these areas. Germane to these concerns raised by students are: 1) teaching assignments are often not confirmed in time to provide material earlier, particularly for sessional faculty who only begin to plan their course outlines and select their texts and readings after receiving their teaching contracts, and 2) although students may have self-identified with the Access Centre and pre-registered for their courses, faculty members often do not know of accommodation needs until the students provide accommodation forms at the beginning of the academic term. Improvements in conveying information to faculty in a timely manner could reduce difficulties encountered by students.

Today's students have high expectations regarding the university's responsibility to provide needed accommodations, and rightfully so. It is hoped that the university's Accommodation Policy will rectify this issue over time. From the perspective of faculty, there appears to be recognition of the need to provide accommodations but a feeling that the resources needed to do this are not always available. Some faculty have identified the need for more funding to assist students with disabilities – or perhaps, more accurately, to assist faculty to assist these students. One resource need that has been identified by several survey respondents is expansion of the pool of professional note-takers. Some faculty have expressed the view that they could be more effective in removing barriers that impact students if they were informed about accessibility issues earlier. However, providing information to faculty in a timely manner requires early self-identification, and there is some sensitivity around students self-identifying and expressing accessibility needs to faculty.

There remains a strong demand for additional accessible washrooms in Ryerson buildings. Although washrooms throughout the campus are being converted slowly, this will remain an issue until all washrooms are retrofitted with accessible fixtures.

Many of the priority issues identified in our 2007-2008 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.