Prepared by the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee, July 2009

PURPOSE OF THE ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The purpose of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA, 2001) is "to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province." In accordance with the ODA, universities are required annually to:

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

Furthermore, the Council of Ontario Universities' Guidelines for the University Sector states "…universities play a crucial role in ensuring that persons with disabilities have access to education and the opportunities that it provides."

Ryerson University fully endorses the purpose and intent of the ODA, and concurs with the COU statements on accessibility. Ryerson University's academic mission statement includes an explicit commitment to accessibility and the university believes that all Ryerson community members are equally entitled to an accessible physical, social, and academic environment regardless of ability or disability.

The Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee (RAAC) – a group which includes representation from all faculties, various administrative departments, and students (see Appendix A for full membership) – helps to facilitate the university's commitment to accessibility.

This report highlights the RAAC's activities over the past year including a summary of the information gained through consultation with the Ryerson community, a discussion of issues brought forward, and the identification of priorities for removing barriers associated with these issues. The report also provides a progress update on work related to the priorities identified in the 2007-08 Accessibility Report, and additional information on Ryerson's initiatives to improve accessibility on campus over the past year. Finally, the report looks toward the future in providing an update on Ryerson's continued preparations for the AODA, including the university's ongoing participation in the development of the standards contained within the new act.

MEMBERSHIP AND METHODOLOGY

During the past year, the RAAC was able to maintain good linkages across the entire spectrum of the Ryerson community. The committee has representation from professional staff involved in developing and delivering accessible services and providing accommodations, with faculty and graduate students both directly and indirectly involved with accessibility-related research, and from members of the Ryerson community as a whole.

B.1 ***Most classrooms lack dedicated space for wheelchairs, scooters, and other assistive mobility devices.*** Providing dedicated space for wheelchairs within classrooms was the design norm in the past, when furniture elements were more commonly built-in as permanent fixtures. Today, moveable and modular furniture solutions are more frequently used to maximize flexibility in use of the space. In many cases when the space is being set-up to offer an otherwise optimized room configuration, the requirement to accommodate space for wheelchairs may be overlooked. Best practices and universal design dictate that spaces that can accommodate users with varying accessibility requirements should be made available at all elevations in a classroom or lecture theatre.

B.2 ***Moving through the interior of some buildings can be awkward for users of wheelchairs, scooters, and other assistive mobility devices7( )]TJ 0.572 Tw 0 -1.38***

actuators require constant maintenance on a large campus to maximize reliability, and ensure proper swing orientation and operation. Older door actuator technology should be identified and replaced with emerging products that better fit the intent of universal design principles. Signage should be installed to provide users with the appropriate contact information in the event a door actuator is not functioning properly.

B.6

available, and whether other media should be used to increase effectiveness and mitigate barriers. A centralized source of information in alternate formats, such as an accessible website, should perhaps be established and promoted to Ryerson community members who are blind and partially blind. The Access Centre might consider making a recommendation on effective methods for delivering print materials to blind and partially blind community members.

P.2   **ASL interpreters are not provided at all events on campus.** All large-scale public events should have ASL services available for deaf attendees with who communicate with sign language. Ryerson should consider making a policy statement that supports and facilitates ASL resources at all public meetings, and should perhaps promote awareness that such services are available as a standard at such public events, without request, unless it is clear that the service is not required. The Access Centre, in consultation with organizations that provide service and support to deaf community members, might consider making recommendations on the appropriate systems to allow those in need to inform of their accommodation needs at other events where ASL services will be provided upon request only.

P.3   *Not all athletic equipment in the Ryerson Athletics Centre is fully accessible.* Regular exercise is an important component of a healthy lifestyle for all members of the Ryerson community, and this principle is at the core of the Ryerson Athletics Centre very existence. The RAC, perhaps through a committee of members that includes disabled users and with the assistance of equipment vendors and/or professional trainers, should periodically audit equipment and programs offered to ensure a range of exercise options are available to all users with varying abilities and disabilities.

P.4   *Support staff and services for disabled stud*

Services to find resources to financially assist disabled students, and should work to promote these resources to disabled students.

<u>Technology Barriers</u>

T.1   ***Videos and other multimedia presentations that are either posted directly on the internet by prof***

S.1 ***Fundamental course components should be available in alternate formats, and courses which are core or mandatory to a program of study should be fully accessible.*** Students expressed that the core elements of many courses were not available in alternate formats, and where this was true for courses which are mandatory to a program of study, the situation made continued study in some programs difficult. Student provided a core journalism program course as an example, were students were required to study movies and television episodes. Ryerson's Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities policy states that such accommodation will be provided for core course elements, where the nature of study allows. However the policy does not comment on the inclusion of courses as a mandatory requirement to a program where the nature of study of such course does not in fact allow for alternate formats to be provided, as in the example provided. Schools should reevaluate their minimum requirements to see if core elements can be delivered in an alternate format, and should perhaps develop a policy which addresses situations where the core elements of mandatory program courses cannot be accommodated with alternate formats.

S.2 ***Course materials adapted for use by those with disabilities are not available in a timely manner.*** The issue of the timely provision of course materials in alternate formats which have been adapted for those with disabilities has been tabled regularly since the inception of the ODA consultation process. Perennially students with disabilities explain that they do not receive adaptive notes and text books until well into, or near the end of the term. The students shared that this put them at a disadvantage, and they felt they were always trying keep-up or catch-up with the rest of the class. Faculty members have frequently explained to the RAAC that they do not find out until just prior the start of their class what courses they are actually teaching, and as such the last minute selection of textbooks and course materials hinders their ability to provide alternate formats. This is an area towards which much effort has been devoted in recent years - a Coordinator of Library Services for Persons with Disabilities now provides outstanding support to roughly 80 students each semester, ensuring that course material is available in alternate format and that students with disabilities can take full advantage of all library resources. However, it is clear that systemic barriers still exist, and further improvements are necessary to resolve this issue. Forthcoming requirements contained within the soon to be release information and communications standard of the AODA are likely to place an increased degree of responsibility on Ryerson to ensure that alternate format materials are provided in a timely manner.

S.3 ***Disabled students feel educators' awareness level of disability issues is not high enough, and feel frustrated by having to do their own education and advocacy around disability services and issues.*** This issue of instructors and professors knowledge of and attitude towards disabilities is again an issue that has been tabled regularly since the inception of the ODA consultation process. Students noted particular concern with regard to 'invisible' disabilities, and a perceived inflexibility to adapt course materials to those with disabilities. Students provided the examples of instructors who are unwilling to share their notes with those whose disabilities make it difficult to follow or absorb verbal lectures, are unwilling to provide written or online material in a manner

which is most accessible to the student. Over the past few years, learning strategists and counsellors have been assigned to specific Faculties in order to provide enhanced support to any student who needs it. In the true spirit of universal design, these supports are not targeted specifically at students with disabilities but are one way for such students to access supports that can contribute significantly to their academic and personal success. An ongoing commitment to further educating professors and instructors in this area is important and training currently being developed to ensure Ryerson complies with the customer service standards of the AODA will likely assist with such effort.

S.4   ***Multiple choice exams can be particularly frustrating for students with perceptual issues, when the wording is made to be intentionally "tricky" or complicated.*** Given the trend towards multiple choice examination methods, students expressed a concern that the wording of the questions is becoming increasingly ambiguous and needlessly tricky. The questions are challenging enough on content. Disguised meanings, double negatives etc. are not seen as an appropriate test of their knowledge particularly for students who have learning disabilities.

Progress on Priorities Identified in 2008- 09 Accessibility Plan

The Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee's 2008-2009 Accessibility Plan identified priorities based on extensive consultation with the Ryerson community. While progress has been made in many of these priority areas, consultation conducted for preparation of the 2009-2010 Accessibility Plan indicated that many of these previously identified priorities remain as such, that further progress could and should be made. Progress made in the 2008-2009 academic year to address these priorities is described below.

Priority Area A: Evacuation of persons with Disabilities in the event of an Emergency

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:

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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.*

For the efficient identification and removal of physical barriers, the RAAC recommends the following specific objectives:

- 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 RAAC 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.
- A review of way-finding will be undertaken by Campus Planning and Facilities to improve navigation for students with visual/spatial disabilities. Several initiatives could help remove this barrier for students. This activity is scheduled to start in September 2009.
- Building maps have now been made available on-line, that highlight locations for accessible washrooms, single-stall washrooms, elevators, and accessible entrances.
- A campus map that includes accessible entrances will be posted in prominent locations will be included in the way-finding signage audit process.

Current Status:

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

A campus-wide washroom renewal project is ongoing - an effort which has seen the renovation and updating of barrier-free washrooms which feature hands-free access and fixtures and more room for motorized wheelchairs and scooters. Campus Planning & Facilities is in the process of upgrading all motorized door actuator activation buttons from the previous round-button design to vertical bar activators which offer greater accessibility. CPF has initiated a review of current way-finding signage on campus, a consultative process which will include many departments at Ryerson, including the Access Centre.

CONCLUSION

With the obvious progress towards improving accessibility in recent years, it is evident that there is momentum within the Ryerson community. While this is certainly positive, the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee's consultations with students, staff, and faculty reveal that there is still work to be done. Misconceptions about accessibility issues remain in the Ryerson community, and some community members remain unclear about who has responsibility for accessibility issues. The Ryerson community is not a static pool of people, and the constant intake of new students, faculty, and staff means that even well documented and promoted standards and programs require constant effort and reinforcement. While the level of knowledge around accessibility issues has greatly increased at Ryerson in recent years, there is a need for ongoing communication about the roles and responsibilities of individual community members. Additionally, mechanisms need to be established to better ensure that the personalized solutions identified and implemented in response to individual accessibility challenges can be developed into systemic solutions which will proactively mitigate or eliminate barriers in the future.

Many of the priority issues identified in this and previous Accessibility Plans are issues that will continue for some time to come. Promoting full accessibility will long be a work in progress and Ryerson's stated goal of universal accessibility will take years if not decades to achieve. In the meantime, the university must continue its efforts to articulate and safeguard rights, to promote inclusiveness in hiring and admissions, to develop systemic and personalized solutions to the individual accessibility challenges of community members, and to ensure all individuals can fully participate in the Ryerson experience regardless of disability or non-disability status.

APPENDIX A:

RYERSON ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The following individuals participated on the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee during the 2008-2009 academic year and through their participation contributed to the development of this accessibility plan:

Restiani Andriati	Staff
Judy Britnell	Staff
Laurie Clune	Faculty
Corey Davidson	Student
Joshua Dvorkin	Student
Deborah Fels	Faculty
Zouheir Fawaz	Faculty
David Fourney	Student
Des Glynn	Staff
Ian Hamilton (Co-Chair)	Staff
Ellen Hibbard	Student
Imre Juurlink	Staff
Andrew Laursen	Faculty
Stefanie Mar.04 0e/p(18(en)]TJ ET Q q	