

RYERSON UNIVERSITY

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2004-2005

September 22, 2004

Prepared by the
Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee

RYERSON UNIVERSITY ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

September 2004

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RYERSON UNIVERSITY ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2004/2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In developing its first official Accessibility Plan for 2003-2004, Ryerson undertook an extensive process to solicit feedback from the Ryerson community. This involved consultations with Ryerson's faculty, staff, students, union groups, and student associations, as well as independent consultants. Eight priorities were identified. This report provides information on the extent to which these priorities were acted upon and identifies updated priorities for 2004-2005.

To prepare this report, we again consulted with the broader community. In March all deans, chairs and senior directors were asked to indicate what progress had been made to that date, what progress they thought would be made during the remaining months of 2003-2004, and what issues they saw as still outstanding. In addition there were formal and informal meetings with administrators and with students as well as several meetings with the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

During 2003-04, some progress was made with regard to each of these original eight priorities. Though some steps are relatively easy to take (e.g., removing physical barriers), others (e.g. attitudinal barriers) will require a much more long-term, sustained effort and may indeed always be an ongoing process. A detailed list of our steps and strategies from 2003-04 is provided in the section of this document titled, "2003-2004 Accessibility Plan Priorities and Results

Based on a review of progress to date and input on outstanding issues, priorities for 2004-2005 were developed. Not surprisingly, a number of the priorities identified in 2003-2004 are once again on our priority list. However several of these have been revised somewhat and one is entirely new.

The Accessibility Plan priorities for 2004-2005 are:

1. The Accessibility Advisory Committee will continue to meet on an ongoing basis to review needs, to identify specific initiatives, to monitor progress towards established goals, and to oversee the development of future accessibility plans.
2. Activities/initiatives to increase sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of people with disabilities within the Ryerson community will be given priority.
3. Consideration of the rights and needs of persons with disabilities will be standard practice in all future policy development and in the reviews of current policy.
4. Admissions and hiring practices will continue to be reviewed with respect to barriers that may exist for students, staff and faculty.
5. A best practices model will continue to be used in the planning and design of all new construction, building rentals, and major renovations, with regular consultation from the Access Centre.
6. Plans and work completed to remove physical barriers and improve accessibility will continue to be posted on the Ryerson web site to promote increased awareness of work that is completed and is planned.
7. The implementation of the newly revised policy that addresses a centralized budget for the accommodation needs of faculty and staff with disabilities will be implemented and monitored for effectiveness.

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Purpose of the Accessibility Plan

The purpose of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act 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" (S. 1)

As 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."

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

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

Ryerson University fully endorses the purpose and intent of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act and we believe that people with disabilities have much to contribute to our society and campus. In addition to initiatives already undertaken, our goal in developing this plan, is to continue to provide accommodation to individual faculty, staff and students and to continue to improve accessibility within the Ryerson community.

Methodology

Ryerson University developed a comprehensive planning process to create an Accessibility Plan for the academic year 2003-2004. For 2004-05, the plan was reviewed, and activities, results and additional actions were updated.

- This review was done through a multi-faceted consultation process:
- Meetings were held with administrators and with students.
- Formal and informal student information meetings were held.
- Email questionnaires were sent to all academic and administrative units.
- Discussions at meetings of the Accessibility Committee

These mechanisms provided an opportunity for all interested parties to provide feedback, provided much information about developments over the past year, and played a key role in identifying outstanding issues that need to be addressed.

Accessibility Plan Priorities and Results for 2003-2004

The 2003-2004 plan identified, eight strategic priorities that would provide a foundation for future plans. These included the following (For the complete, detailed list, please see the document titled, "Ryerson Accessibility Plan 2003-2004.")

1. An Accessibility Advisory Committee with adequate resources will be established as an ongoing committee with the purpose of reviewing needs, refining specific annual objectives, monitoring progress towards established goals and overseeing completion of future accessibility plans.

Initiatives taken:

- a. While the Accessibility Advisory Committee was established somewhat later than expected, it did meet several times over the course of the year. To ensure that both academic and administrative issues were given full consideration, the committee was co-chaired by
 - Ian Hamilton, Director of Campus Planning.
 - Judith Sandys, Associate Vice President, Academic.

Members of the committee were drawn from across Ryerson. While it is not possible to include representation from all units, efforts were made to ensure that the membership reflects the various constituencies that comprise the university community. The current members are:

- Judy Britnell, Director, Learning and Teaching Office.
- Zouhair Fawaz, Associate Dean, Faculty of Engineering.
- Des Glynn, Continuing Education Program Director, Arts.
- Tanya Lewis, Director, Access Centre.
- Khoa Nguyen, student, Information Technology, Faculty of Business
- Ann Whiteside, Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Officer.
- Kathryn Woodcock, Occupational and Public Health, Faculty of Community Services
- Lisa Derencinovic, Social Work, Faculty of Community Services,
- Julia Lewis, Assistant Director, Centre for Environmental Health, Safety and Security Management

- b. The Accessibility Advisory Committee has been on the agenda of several meetings including those of the Senior Directors and the Academic Planning group.
2. The Accessibility Advisory Committee will work with departments and units to further process the information generated by the focus groups and on-line survey to identify and prioritize specific initiatives.

Initiatives taken:

- a. An Equity and Diversity committee was established within Student Services to provide support for equity initiatives within the university
- b. Preliminary meetings have taken place within the Access Centre regarding Books on Tape and the provision of materials in alternative formats.
- c. The Co-ordinator of the Access Centre met with several individual faculty and faculty groups to discuss issues and initiatives.

3. Activities to increase sensitivity and awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities among the Ryerson community and overcoming attitudinal barriers will be given priority.

Initiatives taken:

- a. An Equity and Diversity committee was established within Student Services (see item 2a). As a result, Student Services hosts brown bag lunches that explore different equity issues using films, speakers and discussions. For example, one of the films for screening is called "Vital Signs" and is about disability issues.
 - b. At the CESAR Equity Conference in March 04, a member of Ryerson's executive spoke about Ryerson equity initiatives and specifically discussed the ODA and the work of the Accessibility Planning Committee.
 - c. The Access Centre staff developed a panel for the May Faculty Conference for faculty on "The Limits of Accommodation" The panel included two faculty members, a student and representatives from the Discrimination & Harassment Office, as well as the Human Rights Commission. 29 people attended the session.
 - d. The School of Disability Studies held a number of events open to the Ryerson community that serve to increase disability awareness.
 - e. A librarian position was created and implemented with a core responsibility for liaison with various departments throughout the university, including liaison with the Access Centre, to ensure that the library is meeting accessibility/disability needs.
4. Consideration of the rights and needs of persons with disabilities will be standard practice in all future policy development and all reviews of current policy.

Initiatives taken:

- a. A proposed course management policy that takes effect in September 2004 includes the requirement that departments and schools have a statement in their student handbooks on the accommodation of students with disabilities, including use of the Access Centre. Departments/schools may opt to require such statements on all course outlines. The Guide to Course outlines includes a statement on this requirement.
 - b. The Secretary of Academic Council continues to work with the Access Centre to ensure that students and faculty are aware of the policies concerning accommodation and their use.
 - c. Work has begun on the development of an Access Centre policy that will clarify many issues and procedures for the university community.
 - d. Ryerson's Computer Support Services (CCS) has adopted a policy that all software meet industry standards for accessibility. This was a consideration in selecting Blackboard as for web based course delivery.
5. Admissions and hiring policies will be reviewed with respect to barriers that may exist for students, staff and faculty.

Initiatives taken

- a. Staff from the Access Centre and Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Services participated in the committee to review the current Human Resources Accommodation policy and to draft a new policy for consideration. The draft policy has been completed and is currently under review. Recommendations have been made in this draft policy to establish a centralized accommodation fund with clear guidelines for its use and for accommodation in hiring processes.

- b. The HR website has been made accessible to faculty and staff who are blind or visually impaired.
6. A best practice model will continue to be used in planning all new construction, building rentals and major renovations with consultation from the Access Centre.

Initiatives taken:

- a. Access Centre staff reviewed all plans for new construction on campus and collaborated with Campus Planning to ensure physical changes as required by individual students.
 - b. Accessibility is being integrated into other decision-making processes, too. For example, accessibility was a factor in site selection for the new Business building and was part of Ryerson's response to a COU draft submission on Ontario Universities' Infrastructure Requirements.
 - c. The new cashier section and traffic flow of the Hub servery were planned with improved accessibility.
 - d. The bookstore is currently planning for a new cashier area and Access Centre input is anticipated.
 - e. A priority queue for persons with disabilities has been created at the Library Circulation Desk.
 - f. New furnishings ordered for the Ronald D. Besse Information and Learning Commons (study carrels, workstations) have considered accessibility guidelines.
 - g. In the Library, plans are in place for the installation of a panic button in the 7th floor accessible washroom.
 - h. A push-button entrance is planned for the renovated entrance/exit for the Library.
 - i. Campus Planning and Facilities continues to include the Access Centre in the review of new building designs.
 - j. Ancillary Services considers the ODA committee recommendations in its planning for future renovations.
 - k. Ryerson has recently rented the use of movie theatres at the Carlton Cinemas. Again, the space has been designed for improved accessibility.
7. Plans and work completed to remove physical barriers and improve accessibility will be posted on the Ryerson web site to provide an increased awareness of work that has been completed and is planned.

Initiatives taken:

- a. Campus Planning and Facilities has created a website at www.ryerson.ca/cpandf/ to advise the community of the work performed to address barriers experienced by users of Ryerson's buildings and grounds.
8. The feasibility of a centralized budget for accommodation of the needs of faculty and staff with disabilities will be implemented and monitored.

Initiatives taken:

- a. A committee has been working for some time to address the issue of how the accommodation needs of faculty and staff with disabilities will be funded and a proposed policy will be circulated shortly.

Conclusions: Accomplishments and outstanding issues

It is apparent that while some progress has been made in all identified priorities, the greatest accomplishments were in the area of building accessibility. While much remains to be done to make all Ryerson buildings fully accessible, substantial progress has been realized. Further, while the long term goal is full accessibility, efforts are made to ensure prompt action is taken to address situations where existing barriers prevent a community member from moving around the Ryerson campus effectively.

Of course, the issue of accessibility goes beyond building accessibility and much work remains to be done. Students report frustration with the inaccessible computer software. Efforts to obtain course material in alternate formats in a timely manner are hampered, in part, by the lack of high speed scanners and printers but even more so by the fact that many faculty do not do their course planning until late in August. Web sites and distance education formats are often not designed with accessibility in mind. For example, multi-media formats that are not descriptive present barriers to students who are blind or visually impaired.

While some barriers still exist with regard to administrative policies and procedures, the commitment to address these is strong. Mechanisms are in place or are being developed to further examine Ryerson's administrative practices to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of community members with disabilities. Again by way of example, the increasing use of websites for administrative purposes creates barriers for deaf/deafened community members when the site instructs them to respond only by telephone rather than by e-mail.

For the most part, students report that faculty do willingly accommodate their disabilities when requested to do so. However, this is not always the case and students may feel constrained from requesting needed accommodations. Even when accommodations are provided, these are usually developed in response to individual situations rather than built into the structure of the course. In terms of buildings, the principles of universal design have taught us that it is to everyone's advantage to design buildings so that they meet the needs of all members of the community. In like manner, we now need to explore strategies of "universal instructional design" so that, as much as possible, courses are constructed and delivered in ways that meet the needs of all learners, disabled or not.

Accessibility Plan Priorities for 2004-2005

Priorities for 2004-2005 have been developed based on the feedback received regarding progress on 2003-2004 priorities as well as by consultations with students and others that have identified outstanding issues. Some of our identified priorities are very broad and long term. While we want very much to move ahead in this regard, it is probably not something that will ever be “done”. Therefore, for these very broad priorities, we have identified some specific objectives that will help move us further ahead.

The Priorities and Objectives for 2004-2005 are:

1. The Accessibility Advisory Committee, with adequate resources, will continue to meet on an ongoing basis to review needs, to identify specific initiatives, to monitor progress towards established goals, and to oversee the development of future accessibility plans.

Specific Objectives

- a. The Committee will meet at least bi-monthly.
 - b. The Committee will review its membership to balance the need for broad representation with a manageable committee size.
 - c. The Committee will solicit input from academic and non-academic departments on a regular basis to identify progress towards meeting identified goals.
 - d. The Committee will establish a series of consultation meetings with faculty, staff and students, to ensure that unmet needs and issues are identified.
 - e. Progress towards meeting goals will be communicated to the Ryerson community on a regular basis, through web-based communication.
2. Activities/initiatives to increase sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of people with disabilities within the Ryerson community will be given priority.

Specific Objectives

- a. A committee will be established to explore the concept of universal instructional design and to make recommendations regarding implementation.
 - b. The university will explore the feasibility of acquiring technology that promotes easier access to information for students with disabilities including, for example, high-speed scanner and adaptive technology in all computer labs.
 - c. The Director of the Access Centre will set up meetings with academic departments to discuss accommodation needs and strategies.
 - d. Enhanced opportunities for Ryerson community members to participate in activities designed to promote increased awareness of disability issues will be made available on request.
 - e. Accessibility issues will be brought to the attention of the Health and Safety Committee as appropriate (e.g. the congestion of smokers at building entrances).
 - f. Ryerson will advocate with the City for accessible intersections, as appropriate, through its representation on the BIA (Business Improvement Association)
 - g. The Digital Media Projects group will be encouraged to provide training and assistance to the Ryerson community in the development of accessible websites.
 - h. Continuing Education will explore the feasibility of establishing a learning strategies course that includes students with and without learning disabilities.
3. Consideration of the rights and needs of persons with disabilities will be standard practice in all future policy development, and in the reviews of current policy.

Specific Objectives

- a. Guidelines on accommodation of students will be developed.
4. Admission and hiring practices will continue to be reviewed with respect to systemic barriers that may exist for students, staff and faculty
Specific Objectives
 - a. All faculty Department Appointments Committees (DACs) will be provided with training around equity hiring, including the hiring of people with disabilities.
 5. A best practices model will continue to be used in planning of all new construction, building rentals and major renovations
Specific objectives:
 - a. There will be with regular consultation from the Access Centre, beginning at the pre-design stage.
 - b. State of the art technology such as talking elevators will be explored.
 6. Plans and work completed to remove physical barriers and improve accessibility will continue to be posted on the Ryerson web site to promote increased awareness of work that is completed and is planned.
 7. The pending implementation of the newly developed policy and procedure that deals with the centralized budget for the accommodation needs of faculty and staff with disabilities will be monitored for effectiveness.