

# **Ryerson University Accessibility Plan 2005-2006**

Prepared by the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee, September 30, 2005

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Over the past 12 months, there have been many positive developments on the Ryerson campus. While not every specific objective identified in the 2004-2005 Accessibility Plan was addressed, there was significant progress in virtually every priority area identified. There is greater awareness of the need to promote accessibility in all its forms and a growing understanding of what this involves.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee, comprised of representatives from across the university, met seven times. During these meetings we interviewed a number of people from various academic and non-academic units. We asked each of them to share with us the accomplishments of the current year and to identify issues for the future. This report reflects their excellent input as well as extended and thoughtful discussion by the members of the committee.

The report begins with a review of last year's priorities and an identification of some of the initiatives that have addressed these priorities. This is followed by a discussion of accomplishments and issues. Finally, we provide a list of priorities (with, in many cases, accompanying objectives) for the 2005-2006 year.

## **PRIORITIES FOR 2005-2006**

1.     1.     **The Accessibility Advisory Committee will play a more active role.**
2.     2.     **Communication about the role of the AAC and about measures taken to promote accessibility and inclusion will be developed.**
3.     3.     **Standards for accessible meetings will be communicated throughout the Ryerson community.**
4.     4.     **Ryerson's public relations and recruitment materials will reflect the diverse nature of the Ryerson community, including positive portrayals of people with disabilities.**
5.     5.     **Strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities participating in exchange programs and in co-ops will be explored.**
6.     6.     **Strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities accepted into graduate programs will be explored.**
7.     7.     **The University will adhere to the principles of Universal Design, to the maximum extent possible.**
8.     8.     **Support will be provided to enable faculty to meet the needs of all students including those with disabilities.**

# **Ryerson University Accessibility Plan 2005-2006**

## **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. 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**

The information for this plan was gathered in a number of ways. The committee members shared their own experiences and observations as members of the Ryerson community identifying changes they had noted and identifying areas where further action was required. As well, issues pertaining to accessibility were discussed at a number of meetings including the Academic Planning Group (comprised of deans and other senior academic administrators) and the Senior Directors group (comprised of the Directors of non-academic units across the university). In addition, the Accessibility Advisory Committee invited a number of people from across the university to meet with the committee to provide information about initiatives undertaken to address priorities identified in the 2004-2005 plan and to identify priority areas for 2005-2006. These interviews were invariably very productive. The individuals who were interviewed included the following:

Larissa Allen, Executive Director, Human Resources

Keith Alnwick Registrar

Brian Lesser, Assistant Director, Teaching Technology Support, Computing and Communications Services (CCS) Diane Kenyon, Executive Director,

Communications (University Advancement) & Ian Marlatt, Director, Public Affairs, Marketing and Campaign Communications (University Advancement) Judy Britnell, Director, Learning and Teaching Office Catherine Matthews, Chief Librarian Marion Creery, Director, Student Services Ian Hamilton, Director, Campus Planning and Facilities Tanya Lewis, Director, Access Centre Maurice Yeates, Dean of Graduate Studies Des Glynn, Continuing Education Program Director, Arts

Another very important source of information was a consultation held with students with disabilities. Organized by the Access Centre, the group was very forthcoming in sharing with the members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee their experiences as Ryerson students and the issues that they felt most needed to be addressed.

## **PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES OUTLINED IN 2004-2005 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN**

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 Objective:

- 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.
1. 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.
  2. 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.

## **REVIEW OF INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS 2004-2005 PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES**

In this section we review each priority area and identify some of the initiatives undertaken to address the identified objectives. We do not attempt to include every single

action that occurred but to provide a representative sample that gives the reader a good sense of the nature and extent of our accomplishments. Significant progress was made in all priority areas.

Not all objectives were addressed. Further, some accomplishments closely related to a priority area may not have a direct link to a stated objective. The committee is of the opinion that identifying specific objectives is useful in focusing attention on a particular issue. However, it is more important that the developments that take place reflect the priority issue, rather than all the specific objectives.

**Priority I: 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.**

Some initiatives taken to meet objectives:

.a. While the Committee was slow in getting started and did not begin meeting until the winter semester, it did meet a total of seven times. As well, the members of the committee communicated with each other via email.

.b. The membership of the committee was reconfigured to include broad representation. The members of the committee for 2004-2005:

Judith Sandys, Associate Vice President, Academic (Co-chair)

Ian Hamilton, Director, Campus Planning and Facilities (Co-chair)

Judy Britnell, Director, Learning and Teaching Office.

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

Laurie Harrison, Computing and Communications Services

c. As noted, the Accessibility Advisory Committee held interviews with a number of people across the university to better appreciate accomplishments and priorities.

**Priority II: Activities/initiatives to increase sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of people with disabilities within the Ryerson community will be given priority.**

Some initiatives undertaken to meet objectives:

.a. While we did not strike a separate committee, information about universal course design was shared through a variety of mechanisms. For example, the Division of Continuing Education reviewed their Distance Education programming using the

Georgian College Universal Design Manual and included this topic in the instructor orientation sessions.

- .b. While the university did not acquire significant new technology, it implemented measures to enhance the use of available technology. For example, the Digital Media Projects (DMP) unit provided training in accessibility for online developers.
- .c. There was increased emphasis on making course material available in electronic format.
- .d. The Access Centre Director and Staff made 10 presentations to faculty groups and chairs meetings; conducted a day long workshop for Midwifery Preceptors on working with students with learning disabilities, and presented a session at the May Faculty Conference.
- .e. The Library, in collaboration with Students Services established a new position to ensure that the library is meeting accessibility/disability needs.
- .f. The Learning Success Centre, in collaboration with the Access Centre provided training to learning strategists so that they could more effectively meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- g. Members of the Ryerson community had the opportunity to attend various disability related events sponsored by the School of Disability Studies.
- h. The Accessibility Advisory Committee prepared a memo outlining recommendations for organizing accessible meetings, which it sent to University Advancement.
- i. The administration supported students associated with the Access Centre to attend the Breaking Down Barriers Conference 2005, held in Toronto, to increase awareness of disability issues.
- j. The Access Centre provided support to a visiting exchange student with a disability and worked to develop a plan that would enable a Ryerson student with a disability to participate in an exchange program in the 2005-2006 academic year.

**Priority III: 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.**

Some initiatives undertaken to meet objectives:

- .a. An accommodation policy for students with disabilities was drafted by a committee of key stakeholders. One of the co-chairs of the Accessibility Planning Committee assisted with negotiating the completion of the draft. The policy is currently being reviewed within the university before being considered by Academic Council.
- .b. 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.

**Priority IV: Admission and hiring practices will continue to be reviewed with respect to systemic barriers that may exist for students, staff and faculty.**

Some initiatives undertaken to meet objectives:

- .a. A Consultant has been hired to facilitate the development of a strategic plan for Employment Equity.
- .b. Thirty-seven Departmental Appointments Committees (DACs) each with a minimum of three members, received training in equity hiring, including the hiring of people with disabilities.
- .c. Human Resources staff received training in equity related areas.
- .d. Accessibility issues are referenced in admissions material and in human resources policies. Applicants are encouraged to disclose accommodation requirements for the interview process.

**Priority V: A best practices model will continue to be used in planning of all new construction, building rentals and major renovations.**

Some initiatives undertaken to meet objectives:

- .a. Campus Planning continues to work with the Access Centre to obtain input relating to accessibility issues on a number of new projects while still in the concept design phase. Projects include new labs in KHW, washroom redesigns in ENG and retrofitting a lift into KHW 177 as well as the construction of new buildings.
- .b. An accessible layer has been added to building drawings showing accessible paths of travel into and through Ryerson buildings. Specifically, architectural floor plans have been modified to show an accessible path of travel, accessible washrooms, accessible entry and egress. Future work will involve establishing a mechanism to allow public access to these records.
- .c. New way finding signage continues to be installed around campus. New signage features strong contrasting colours and letter sizes consistent with ADA guidelines.
- .d. Renovations to the Campus Planning office include a barrier free reception desk. Renovations to approximately 30 rooms have included some barrier free furniture.
- .e. Consultation with the Access Centre has led Campus Planning to alter standard specification for motion detectors to eliminate the risk of possible interference between the motion detectors and hearing aids by room users.
- .f. Campus Planning continues to work with the Access Centre on a case by case basis to remove barriers experienced by specific students.
- .g. Campus Planning has converted a washroom to card access and cards have been given to the Access centre for them to distribute. Door controls were integrated with the automatic door opener and security alarm.
- .h. Campus Planning has modified its standard specification to a lever door handle from a knob configuration, as it is an easier handle for people with reduced hand strength.

.i. Buildings with a reliance on a single elevator have been augmented with a telephone back to Security in each elevator lobby in the event the elevator is malfunctioning.

**Priority VI: 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.**

Campus Planning continues to provide information on its website  
[www.ryerson.ca/cpandf](http://www.ryerson.ca/cpandf)

**Priority VII: 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.**

A Central Accommodation Fund has been developed. Departments/units are responsible for the first \$500 of accommodation expenditures per year, with the CAF covering everything above this. Human Resources Staff are available to assist faculty and staff identify their needs. The CAF has funded extensive accommodations for a small number of faculty and staff.

**CONCLUSIONS: ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OUTSTANDING ISSUES**

Substantial progress was made this year in promoting a more accessible community. Ongoing efforts to improve the physical environment have continued and the overall level of accessibility is most certainly improved. Given that many of the buildings at Ryerson are old and in need of repair, this is a significant improvement. All new construction exceeds accessibility standards currently in the Building Code.

Along with physical accessibility, there have been efforts to ensure that students with disabilities can take full advantage of access to needed learning resources, as evidenced by the new position in the Library, the attention being paid to accessible web sites, the training provided to learning strategists.

Despite the progress that has been made, our students tell us that there is still more work to be done. While students do report many positive experiences with faculty, they also report some that are negative. Students report that, on occasion, some faculty provide needed accommodations rather grudgingly; students may be made to feel that they are being demanding or unreasonable when they request a particular accommodation. At the other end of the spectrum, students report, are those faculty who, in their efforts to be "helpful", come across as patronizing. Students who are blind or visually impaired are disadvantaged when they do not have sufficient lead time to get textbooks and readings put on tape until the semester is half over. Students with disabilities tell us that many university-events do not take account of accessibility needs, so that they are left feeling unwelcome and excluded.

While we have made substantial progress in articulating appropriate policies, these have not always translated into major change "on the ground". Human resources policies not

withstanding, it is the committee's perception that few people with disabilities are hired. Participation in student exchange programs and co-op programs is still very rare. Despite the improvements that have been made, students with some disabilities are still significantly disadvantaged, a fact that is likely to be reflected in their final academic achievement. The University will have to consider whether or not this should be taken into account when students with disabilities apply to graduate programs.

To some extent, it seems that we are still in a reactive mode. The university works hard to be sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities and to respond appropriately and effectively to these needs whenever it becomes aware of them. However, this reactive mode risks creating the impression that the defining characteristics of people with disabilities are their "needs". People with disabilities are not simply a bundle of needs; they are a valued part of our very diverse university community. As much as possible, we need to create the structures that enable staff, students and faculty with disabilities to be full, participating members of the community, without the need to provide special accommodations. The Accessibility Advisory Committee advises that buildings and academic programs would benefit from adherence to the principles of Universal Design. At the program level this translates into learning materials that are, ideally, accessible to all and pedagogical approaches that, as much as possible, take into account diverse ways of learning and diverse ways of demonstrating competency.

Many of the priority issues identified in our 2004-2005 Accessibility Plan are issues that will continue for some time to come. Promoting full accessibility is "a work in progress". Even though we have not met every objective outlined in our previous plan, we have chosen not to repeat each and every one in our 2005-2006 plan. We take it as given that the university will 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 2005-2006**

### **1. The Accessibility Advisory Committee will play a more active role.**

Specific objectives:

1. 1.1. The AAC will meet on a regularly scheduled basis, at least once per month.
2. 1.2. The AAC will review its terms of reference to ensure compliance with the AODA.
3. 1.3. The AAC will begin a broad consultation with the Ryerson community in January 2006 to identify priority issues for 2006-2007.
4. 1.4. The AAC will solicit reports from various departments at least once per year.
5. 1.5. The AAC will secure the resources required to effectively carry out the functions noted above.

### **2. Communication about the role of the AAC and about measures taken to**

**promote accessibility and inclusion will be developed.**

Specific objectives:

1. 2.1 The Accessibility Plan will be circulated to the Ryerson community and information provided as to how to access it on the web.
2. 2.2. Steps taken to promote physical accessibility will be posted on the web in a way that can easily be accessed by the community.
3. 2.3 Periodic updates will be provided to the Ryerson community regarding other accessibility initiatives being undertaken or completed.
4. 2.4 The Ryerson community will be invited to communicate with the AAC regarding issues it feels the committee should be aware of.

**1. 3. Standards for accessible meetings will be communicated throughout the Ryerson community.**

**2. 4. Ryerson's public relations and recruitment materials will reflect the diverse nature of the Ryerson community, including positive portrayals of people with disabilities.**

Specific objectives:

1. 4.1 The AAC will work with the Ryerson's office of Public Affairs and with departments that create recruitment material to explore ways to include positive portrayals of people with disabilities.
2. 4.2 The AAC will suggest guidelines regarding the portrayal of people with disabilities in university material.

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

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

**3. 7. The University will adhere to the principles of Universal Design, to the maximum extent possible.**

**4. 8. Support will be provided to enable faculty to meet the needs of all students including those with disabilities.**

Specific objectives:

1. 8.1 The Director and staff of the Access Centre will be available to meet with faculty groups as required.
2. 8.2 The Learning and Teaching Office will provide workshops and/or orientations on Universal Course Design.
3. 8.3 The DMP will provide workshops/consultations regarding the development of accessible on-line course material.