

# Ryerson University Accessibility Plan 2010-2011

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Prepared by the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee – August, 2010

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2( t)T

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## 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:

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

Furthermore, the Council of Ontario Universities’ (COU) 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 the AODA, 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 a physical, social, and academic environment that is accessible to all regardless of whether one is disabled or non-disabled.

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 last year’s accessibility report, and additional information on Ryerson’s initiatives to improve accessibility on campus over the past year. Finally, the report provides 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.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005), and the phased development and introduction of a new set of accessibility standards, adds a layer of complexity to the infrastructure of accessibility programs. Accordingly, in 2009 the RAAC's membership was augmented by those Ryerson community members participating on the AODA working committees developing customer service, information and technology, and built environment standards. The addition of these members has greatly benefited the RAAC, allowing the committee to remain informed on current standards, to keep ahead of standards yet to be introduced, and even to influence these standards as they are developed.

Beyond the legislative requirements of the ODA, and the RAAC's mandate of identifying barriers at Ryerson, the committee was able to triage issues brought forward by individual community members and groups and to help identify solutions to accessibility challenges. To this end, Ryerson's Access Centre, the Office of Discrimination and Harassment, the Teaching and Learning Office, Campus Planning & Facilities, Computing and Communication Services, and the Centre for Occupational Health and Safety and Security have all been very helpful in identifying issues and solving problems through their participation on the committee.

## COMMUNITY CONSULTATION & DISCUSSION

Again this year, the RAAC has created a positive and ongoing dialogue with the Ryerson community about barriers and accessibility. This invaluable discussion has helped to provide those responsible for implementing solutions with a new perspective of the challenges faced by community members with disabilities. At the same time, those encountering barriers have gained a better understanding of the complexities involved in identifying solutions that will

In past community roundtables, many of the issues raised were repeats – having already been brought forward in previous years. Last year’s report noted this pattern and expressed concern that solutions were not being adequately communicated to community members, who were bringing the same concerns forward unaware that a solution had already been implemented. It is encouraging that feedback from this year’s community roundtable seemed to indicate a better level of knowledge of the improvements and accommodations which have been introduced in response to previously identified issues.

For the most part, feedback from the community roundtable discussion focused on acknowledging the removal of barriers, and progress that has been made in recent years. In most cases, participants began their deputations at the roundtable by highlighting the successes of the past as examples of how further improvements could be made in the future. For other issues however, it is clear that adequate solutions have still not been found for some of the issues that have been raised on multiple occasions.

In an effort to focus on issue identification at the community roundtable, the discussion did not delve deeply into possible solutions for each of the concerns raised. While in some cases community input has been included, the following analysis of the barriers identified during the community roundtable discussion has been developed by the RAAC after the fact, and is intended to provide context to the issues raised:

## PRIORITIES FOR 2010-2011

Priority 1: Recommend the University take action to identify an accessible location for the Access Center exam center, even if on a temporary basis until a permanent plan can be implemented

Discussion: The location of the Ryerson Access Centre test writing facilities in the basement of the Victoria Building continues to be a source of great concern. While this issue has been identified in the past, it is clear from the tone of the concerns expressed to the RAAC that the patience of the Ryerson Community to wait for a solution is wearing thin. Having an Access Centre program that is located in an inaccessible location is embarrassingly unacceptable and gives a very strong message that the university does not have a very strong commitment to accessibility. It is essential that Ryerson arrange for this service to be relocated to an accessible location as soon as possible, even if on an interim basis until a permanent solution can be identified and implemented.

Priority 2: Encouraging existing student services and supports to be more inclusive of students with disabilities.

Discussion: Participants felt that existing student services and supports should make a greater effort to reach out to students with disabilities rather than developing such services specifically for students with disabilities. The Tri-mentoring program was cited as an example. While Tri-Mentoring does not specifically exclude students with disabilities, there was a perception that not many such students participated in it. The community expressed that much could be gained from a service that not only provided opportunities for students with disabilities

to mentor other students with disabilities, but for students with disabilities to mentor non-disabled students, and vice versa.

Priority 3: Encourage the University to make accessible notes and texts available in a timely manner, as required.

Discussion: This is ongoing concern reported through community consultations year after year. Students with disabilities explain that they do not receive adaptive notes and text books until well into, or near the end of the term. Similarly, students with disabilities expressed concern with difficulty arranging note taking services, and with arranging for other accommodations such as the recording and transcribing of lectures. With the recently introduced customer service standard of the AODA, Ryerson's responsibility to find timely solutions to these issues has only increased. From the repeated nature of these concerns, and from the perceived lack of progress on identifying and/or implementing solutions to these problems, it is clear that greater leadership from the University is required.

Priority 4: Promote the development of procedures that more effectively support students in work placements

Discussion: Students at the community roundtable expressed that those with disabilities who have work placements as a part of their program

Priority 5: Promote the development of procedures that more effectively support students in work placements

Discussion: Students at the community roundtable expressed that those with disabilities who have work placements as a part of their program

students with disabilities on a one-on-one basis to resolve the barriers that are unique to their specific situation.

Priority 6: Expand initiatives designed to identify and address attitudinal barriers

Discussion: Some students expressed concern that some professors do not exhibit an acceptable level of sensitivity or awareness with respect to disabilities, and the challenges and barriers faced by the disability community. The RAAC has heard this concern consistently since the start of the ODA consultation process. Efforts should be made to assess whether such situations are isolated or reflective of a very broad problem. Additionally, students may feel that the RAAC is the only place they can express this concern – and therefore Ryerson should investigate whether effective mechanisms are in place for students to express concern when they encounter attitudinal barriers.

Priority 7: Encourage the University to ensure timely information on alternative points of access is available when elevators are out of service.

Discussion: This is an AODA customer service standard, and one that Campus Planning & Facilities has put systems in place to meet. However, it was pointed out at the community roundtable that much of this information could be permanently posted at each elevator. Campus Planning & Facilities should investigate options for permanent information signage

## Progress on Issues Previously Identified in Past Accessibility Plans

While progress has been made in many areas, consultation conducted for preparation of the 20010-11

During the 2009-10 academic year, Campus Planning & Facilities began upgrading motorized door operator buttons with more accessible strips that extend from hand level, to just above the floor. Community members at the RAAC's roundtable indicated that these new button strips better meet universal design principles, and can be more easily activated by a greater number of people with either their hand, foot, or some other part of their body. The campus way-finding signage standard which is currently being reviewed will see the introduction of new identification signage for door operator buttons, including contact information to report out of service operators.

The implementation of the AODA's Customer Service Standard has lead departments across







## PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE: THE AODA

In 2005, the Ontario Government enacted the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This



## APPENDIX A:

### RYERSON ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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The following individuals participated on the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee during the 2009-2010 academic year and through their participation contributed to the development of this