Ryerson University Accessibility Plan 2010-2011

Prepared by the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee – August, 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In accordance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA, 2001), universities are required annually to publicly release an Accessibility Plan in consultation with persons with disabilities and others in the community.

This report has been developed by 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 list). The report summarizes information from consultations with the Ryerson community, provides an update on efforts and initiatives by Ryerson to address the priorities in last year's accessibility report and on Ryerson's continued preparations and implementation activities for the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Based on input from the Ryerson community, progress is being made towards Ryerson's ultimate goal of universal accessibility. Interestingly, as Ryerson University expands its graduate programs, more issues are emerging from the growing contingent of graduate students on campus. It is clear that graduate and undergraduate students are experiencing different challenges and barriers, and just as the approach to learning and teaching differs between graduate and undergraduate students, ensuring accessibility for each will require a unique approach. Furthermore, while Ryerson continues to achieve much progress in remedying tangible and physical barriers, more thought needs to be given to services, systems and supports in order to address intangible barriers, including challenges inside and outside of the classroom.

RAAC Priorities for 2010-2011

1. Recommend the University take action to identify a new accessible location for the Access Centre exam centre, even if on a temporary basis until a more permanent plan can be implemented.

2. Encourage existing student supports and services (including the Tri-Mentoring Program to be more inclusive of students with disabilities.

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

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

5. Ensure that policies and practices are in place to address the barriers encountered by graduate students with disabilities.

6. Identify expanded initiatives designed to address attitudinal barriers.

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

8. Develop more forums that allow for more sustained input from the disability community at Ryerson

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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:

- 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' (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 work for everyone. These conversations have created an atmosphere of constructive cooperation, which has undoubtedly led to better solutions for the entire Ryerson community. Furthermore, these conversations are an invaluable source of feedback for solution implementers, helping them to understand how solutions are working, and what further steps can be taken.

This Accessibility Plan was developed in conjunction with the community through dialogue with individuals who approached the committee, regular discussions with campus community organizations, and through a community roundtable discussion. Participants at this community event included full and part time undergraduate and graduate students, older learners, student supporters/assistants, faculty and instructors, pedagogical support staff, representatives from the Ryerson library, campus community groups that provide services to the disabled, organized labour groups, members of Ryerson's senior management, and administrative staff representatives.

In order to establish a framework for the discussion and to ensure the RAAC was provided with invaluable feedback on accessibility at Ryerson University, the diverse group of participants at the community roundtable discussion was asked to provide insight from their differing perspectives, by answering the following questions:

- How accessible is our university?
- What improvements have there been over the past year?
- What challenges remain?
- What do you see as priorities for improving accessibility?

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 often encounter significant barriers during these placements. The students expressed that they often have great difficulty getting work placement employers to implement solutions, and noted that Ryerson's assistance could be very valuable towards removing barriers and/or introducing accommodations. Ryerson should remind work placement employers that they are required by law to comply with the AODA. Furthermore, placement offices within programs which have work placement as a part of the curriculum should review what assistance they can lend to disabled students in this regard.

Priority 5: Ensure that policies and practices are in place to address the barriers encountered by graduate students with disabilities.

Discussion: As the graduate student population at Ryerson University continues to grow, so too are the voices of graduate students with disabilities. It is clear from the community consultations that took place this year that graduate students often encounter additional barriers, sometimes requiring unique solutions that differ from their undergraduate counterparts. While undergraduate education is largely delivered inside Ryerson's classroom and labs, the graduate student experience expands beyond these facilities and sees graduate students also fulfilling the roles of researchers and teaching assistants. This often means that the solutions and accommodations developed for undergraduate students with disabilities do not address the barriers that graduate students with disabilities face. Additionally, the unique role of graduate students and the newness of these programs at Ryerson mean that new barriers are also being encountered and discovered.

As Ryerson's graduate programs continue to develop, these programs should be reviewed with an eye to identifying and resolving barriers. Since the graduate student experience and curriculum can differ for each student, in many cases this will mean working with graduate

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 near elevators and other accessibility infrastructure, as part of its ongoing review of the campus signage standard.

Priority 8: Develop forums that allow for more sustained input from the disability community.

Discussion: Members of the Ryerson community, especially students with disabilities, have expressed a desire to see greater discussion opportunities related to barriers and accessibility at Ryerson University. As the University introduces more comprehensive feedback mechanisms in order to comply with the AODA's Customer Service Standard, such opportunities should be investigated. Additionally, with the anticipated end of the ODA – the requirements of which the RAAC was created to address – the continued role of this committee will need to be reexamined. Since the RAAC is currently Ryerson's primary conduit of discussion on accessibility issues, the University should identify what forums will be necessary to continue, and even extend, these conversations within the Ryerson community.

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 Accessibility Plan indicated that further progress could and should be made on previously identified issues. Progress made in the 2009-2010 academic year to address these priorities is described below:

B.1	***Most classrooms lack dedicated space for wheelchairs, scooters, and other assistive mobility devices.***
B.2	***Moving through the interior of some buildings can be awkward for users of wheelchairs, scooters, and other assistive mobility devices.***

As older academic spaces on campus are renovated, universal design principles continue to be implemented. Furthermore, classrooms, labs, and other spaces in new buildings continue to be designed as barrier free. Ryerson has also begun in recent years to renovate hallway areas, which while previously viewed as "dead space" between useable areas are now frequently repurposed into student lounges and study spaces. The removal of lockers and interiors walls, such as the project currently underway in Kerr Hall North, mean the corridors are expanded in size. For other older buildings, there are unfortunately fewer feasible options to incorporate larger hallways and this concern will remain until such buildings are redeveloped or replaced with newer facilities. It is hoped that the AODA's Built-Form Environment Standard may bring some clarity to these issues in the coming years.

B.3	***Barriers are created by offline elevators. Not all elevators include Braille near buttons, or verbal annunciation.*** **Accessible lifts are seen as barriers.**

As older elevator equipment is refurbished, accessible features such as sound annunciation are being introduced. During the 2009-10 academic year, the heavily used Jorgenson Hall elevators were refurbished, and now include sound annunciation, Braille buttons, and more audible floor tones. Planned elevator upgrades in Pitman Hall and the International Living Learning Centre will introduce these features to Ryerson's residence buildings. Ryerson campus way-finding signage standard is currently being reviewed, a process which will see the introduction of new permanent identification signage for elevators, indicating alternative access routes in the event that an elevator is out of service.

B.5	*The placement of motorized door actuator buttons in relation to the orientation of the door swing can be problematic at some locations.*

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.

P.1	*Printed materials such as posters, business cards, menus etc. cannot be read by blind people – alternate formats are often not readily available.*
P.2	**ASL interpreters are not provided at all events on campus.**

The implementation of the AODA's Customer Service Standard has lead departments across the University to analyze and evaluate how they provide services to people with disabilities. In leading the coordination of this effort, Human Resources has developed and provided many resources to assist departments with this process – including guidelines on creating printed materials, and planning for events. These efforts should continue to greatly increase the accessibility of printed materials, and events.

P.3	*Not all athletic equipment in the Ryerson Athletics Centre is fully accessible.*

With the current redevelopment of Maple Leaf Gardens into an athletic facility for Ryerson University, Athletics and Recreation has been presented with an opportunity to evaluate the programs and services to be offered not only in this new facility, but in the existing Ryerson Athletic Centre. As previously recommended, the RAC should take this opportunity to establish a committee, perhaps with the assistance of equipment vendors and/or professional trainers, to audit equipment and programs offered to ensure a range of exercise options are available to all users with varying abilities and disabilities.

> **P.6** **Disabled students in residence are frustrated by having to request an extension to the move-out procedure at the end of the academic year.**

According to their residence contract, all students are expected to move out of residence by 9:00 p.m. on the day of their last exam. Students with disabilities have previously expressed concern with the extension process, suggesting that they should be granted an automatic extension beyond the day of their final exam. Over the past year, Student Housing Services has undertaken a thorough review of year-end check-out procedures, including the accessibility of these procedures for students with disabilities. In response, the check-out extension process was somewhat simplified, with forms and documentation also being made available electronically on the departments website - thereby eliminating the need for an in-person visit. The entire process is now being more thoroughly explained by residence life staff, available to assist all students, including those with disabilities, through the process.

> **T.3** *Overhead projectors in classrooms do not pick up closed captioning.*

Computing and Communication Services (CCS) has made progress in upgrading presentation technology equipment across the campus in recent years. In fact, of the 160 classrooms across campus with presentation technology, only 30 have older projectors that lack closed captioning capability. Ongoing upgrading and expansion of the presentation technology in classrooms will ensure that this important feature is available in a greater number of classrooms. Where projectors are not able to automatically provide close captioning, this is possible through the video source (VHS or DVD) as long as the content has closed captioning. Through the Digital Media Projects Office, and Media Service, CCS is supporting instructors to access closed captioning functions within their content and software.

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 adapted 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 released 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 counselors 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.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE: THE AODA

In 2005, the Ontario Government enacted the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This comprehensive accessibility legislation will replace the Ontarians with Disabilities 2001 as it is implemented in the coming years. The AODA strives for a barrier-free society by 2025. The AODA's new standards will introduce sweeping changes to accessibility requirements. While this new act largely reinforces the University's existing standards, Ryerson will be ready to respond to the AODA by doing what it can to improve accessibility in existing buildings, to incorporate the standards into new facilities as Ryerson grows, and to continue providing individual accessibility solutions to Ryerson community members.

Ahead of the implementation and compliance dates, Ryerson has been proactive in the development of the AODA through participation in the standards development process. Members of the RAAC currently sat on a number of standards development committees, including the Accessibility Standards Advisory Council and the Employment Standards Development Committee. As well, a design professional in the Department of Campus Planning and Facilities participated on the Built Environment Standards Development Committee representing the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) and the Ontario Association of Physical Plant Administrators (OAPPA).

On campus, Ryerson departments have implemented a number of new systems since the January 1, 2010 implementation date of the AODA's customer service standards. An AODA committee, comprised of working groups focusing on training, information gathering, communications, and policy review, worked to fully identify the impacts of these new customer service requirements, developed and implemented required training, and prepared the framework for compliance reporting and feedback mechanisms.

With the continued roll-out of the new AODA, it is anticipated that the provincial government will take steps to bring the ODA to an end. The RAAC was created in direct response to the ODA, and the committee's mandate was designed to ensure compliance with the ODA. The impending transition in the prevailing accessibility legislation means the future role of the RAAC will need to be examined to determine if it will meet the new requirements of the AODA, and whether it will continue to be the best avenue for facilitating Ryerson's commitment to accessibility. Consideration should be given to keeping the committee together in some form as a problem solving body given the broad expertise of the group in accessibility issues.

CONCLUSION

With the obvious progress towards improving accessibility in recent years, it is evident that there is momentum being felt 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 2009-2010 academic year and through their participation contributed to the development of this accessibility plan:

Restiani Andriati	Staff
Judy Britnell	Staff
Laurie Clune	Faculty
Deborah Fels	Faculty
David Fourney	Student
Ian Hamilton (Co-Chair)	Staff
Ellen Hibbard	Student
Imre Juurlink	Staff
Stefanie Marinich-Lee	Staff
Bobbi Moore	Student
Sburah Murdoch	Student
Jule Mycan	Staff
Frank Nitray	Student
Sri Pathmanathan	Staff
Maureen Reed	Faculty
Judith Sandys (Co-Chair)	Staff
Ann Whiteside	Staff
Cheryl Wilson	Staff
Kathryn Woodcock	Faculty