

Ryerson University Accessibility Plan 2009-2010

Prepared by the Ryerson Accessibility Advisory Committee - July, 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In accordance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA, 2001), universities are required annually to prepare and 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 consultation with the Ryerson community, provides an update on efforts and initiatives by Ryerson to address the priorities identified in the 2008-09 Accessibility Report, and provides an update on Ryerson's continued preparations for the AODA.

Based on input from committee members and from meetings with the Ryerson community, this report indicates that progress has been made towards Ryerson's ultimate goal of universal accessibility. While barriers still exist, Ryerson's past achievements and current progress should bolster the university's confidence that the long-term goal of universal accessibility can be achieved through a continued commitment to increasing awareness on accessibility issues.

PRIORITIES FOR 2009-2010

1. Increase awareness of existing accommodations and services available for community members with disabilities.
2. Review and revise the terms of reference for the RAAC in view of the implementation of the AODA and the likely ending of the ODA.
3. Monitor advances in accessibility related to the areas covered by the AODA and report these to the Ryerson community.
4. Continue to promote physical accessibility by identifying and eliminating existing physical barriers and preventing future physical barriers.
5. Promote the development and implementation of policies which will better ensure that public meetings are universally accessible.
6. Develop a mechanism for ongoing community input regarding barriers that have been identified, but not yet effectively addressed.
7. Request that all policy development and review processes include an explicit examination of the potential impact of said policy on persons with disabilities, to ensure that barriers are not inadvertently created.

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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’ 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.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005), and the phased development and introduction of a new set of accessibility standards, added a layer of complexity to the infrastructure of accessibility programs. Accordingly, the RAAC's membership was augmented this past year by those Ryerson community members who are participating on the AODA working committees which are 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 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

Perhaps most importantly, 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, while 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.

The benefits of this collaborative approach between the RAAC and the Ryerson community to identifying campus accessibility issues and solutions is perhaps best illustrated by the dialogue concerning Ryerson's convocation ceremonies for Masters of Social Work program. Students in the graduating class for this program, which included a number of students who use wheelchairs, expressed concern that not all graduates could participate in the same traditional procession which led to being presented with their degrees on stage at the Ryerson Theatre, since the stage is only accessible from the main seating area via stairs. Considerable discussion between students and the RAAC revealed challenges to a number of identified solutions. Unfortunately the design of the Ryerson Theatre, constructed in 1963, would not allow for an engineered solution through installation of a ramp or lift. Providing graduates who use wheelchairs with space to sit on-stage for the entire ceremony was not seen as an attractive solution to students, who expressed that being alongside the friends and classmates with whom they had studied was an important part of the convocation process. An alternative venue for the convocation ceremonies was not viewed as acceptable, since this would once again set graduates of the program apart from their fellow Ryerson students. It was only through in-depth analysis of the concern and possible solutions that an acceptable compromise was eventually identified: for the Masters of Social Work program all students would sit together on stage for the entire ceremony, thereby eliminating the need to use

the stairs as part of the procession. This situation clearly indicates the successes that can be achieved when the community comes together to discuss concerns and collaborates on finding solutions.

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 robustly attended 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 executive, 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?

For the most part, the majority of the issues raised at the community roundtable discussion have been previously identified in past years at other forums. It was evident in the discussion that not all community members were fully aware of changes that Ryerson has made and improvements that the university has introduced to address some of these previously identified barriers. In many cases, when the actions taken by the university in response to an identified barrier were explained to the community member expressing concern, it was clear that many in the community were not aware of the emerging solutions. These instances were an indication to the RAAC that the university needs to develop more effective ways of ensuring the community is aware of Ryerson's accessibility initiatives and services, and the sources of information that are available now.

Of course, lack of awareness of available accommodations and accessibility initiatives is not the only problem. The roundtable discussion helped to identify a number of barriers that are not being effectively addressed, or not addressed at all, including a few that most of the RAAC members were unaware of. All too often policies and practices are developed without any explicit consideration of what the impact of this procedure might have on a person with a disability.

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:

Built Environment Barriers

- 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 devices.*** Some older and repurposed buildings on campus have less than optimal circulation patterns for all building users, but especially those who use wheelchairs. At a minimum, at least one accessible path of travel, in accordance with the building code, exists through almost all of Ryerson's buildings. New building standards and codes better accommodate wheelchair and scooter movement, and ensuring these spaces are reviewed by accessibility experts will eliminate the creation of new barriers in new buildings.
- B.3 ***Barriers are created by offline elevators. Not all elevators include Braille near buttons, or verbal announcement. Accessible lifts are seen as barriers.*** Any discussion with the community in regards to elevators and lifts quickly reveals the vital importance of reliable vertical transportation to disabled people. Effective communication on elevator issues to those who rely on them is essential, and signage which communicates the operational status of elevators and lifts, the closest available alternative in the event of an outage should be incorporated as best practice. Elevator maintenance contracts should be written to provide a level of service and reliability reflective of the importance of the elevator to those with disabilities. Elevators should be modernized as a capital maintenance priority and audited regularly for compliance with emerging standards and codes on accessibility.
- B.4 ***Accessible lifts are seen as barriers.*** Students expressed that the process of having to locate an authorized operator with a key to be able to use an accessible lift is both time consuming, frustrating, and degrades a sense of independence. Ryerson favours the use of elevators over accessible lifts, which have only been used in the past in situations where the physical environment does not allow for the installation of a new elevator. New buildings and spaces are designed to eliminate the need for accessible lifts by minimizing grade separations, and employing elevators rather than lifts where necessary.
- B.5 ***The placement of motorized door actuator buttons in relation to the orientation of the door swing can be problematic at some locations.*** Doors and motorized

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 ***Acoustics in some classrooms are poor in older buildings.*** Classrooms in older buildings often have hard surface finishes which provide poor acoustics within the space. Many of Ryerson's classrooms have not been modernized for many decades. While improved acoustics are incorporated into the design of newly constructed and renovated spaces, amplification or other forms of accommodation should be employed in older classrooms until the spaces are upgraded.
- B.7 ***Retrofitted ramping solutions are sometimes awkward and can cause barriers.*** While universal design principles employed in new buildings eliminate the need to add ramps after the fact, unfortunately, this is not true of many old buildings, and those which have been repurposed for educational uses. All too often, adding a ramp may solve one problem while creating another – for example, at one location on campus where the addition of a ramp blocked an existing door. Good design in new buildings will minimize grade separations and maintain travel paths on the same vertical plan where ever possible.
- B.8 ***Some students expressed that newer buildings seem to only meet minimum accessibility standards.*** Some students felt that Ryerson should seek to maximize universal accessibility beyond the bare minimum required by code. Further discussion on this point revealed that generally the concern was not rooted in a detailed understanding of code requirements, but rather a degree of surprise amongst some students that newly constructed building could contain barriers to accessibility. Ryerson has, as a matter of course, consulted with the Access Centre and accessibility professionals on the designs for new facilities in an attempt to identify all potential barriers, even those beyond code requirements. As such, Ryerson's new facilities do exceed minimum standards, but, regrettably, some barriers will emerge that will have to be addressed after the facility is open. The consultation process with the Access Centre should perhaps extend to a review of new facilities, once they are open and operating, to identify previously unseen barriers.

Policy Barriers

- P.1 ***Printed materials such as posters, business cards, menus etc. cannot be read by blind people – alternate formats are often not readily available.*** Despite the increased use of new technologies, it would seem that a large degree of promotional and information efforts – both by university departments and other campus community organizations – rely on printed materials as the primary means of expressing their message. A review of printed materials should be considered to determine which print materials should include a Braille message, how alternate formats can be easily made

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 students are located in many buildings across campus, not in a single centralized location.*** Students expressed that the current geographical separation of support services for students with disabilities is frustrating and inconvenient, and expressed a desire to see such services optimally located in one place on campus. While it would seem that providing physically adjacent spaces for these functions would only improve the student experience, such a solution could pose as many challenges as it would resolve. In some cases, the services are located alongside the departments that they are functionally related to therefore shifting their location could serve to separate students with disabilities from other students receiving similar services. As much as possible, Ryerson has tried to integrate accessible or accommodated service as close to where all other students will receive such service – functionally and physically.
- P.5 ***Accessibility issues should be given greater profile in strategic documents such as Ryerson's Master Plan, and Academic Plan.*** Ryerson's strategic and planning documents are not structured to isolate and confine statements concerning accessibility to their own specific section, but rather the university's commitment to accessibility is a common theme that is articulated throughout the documents. This reflects Ryerson's approach of weaving accessibility into all of the university's functions to ensure that the

entire community views accessibility as their constant responsibility, rather than segregating it as a separate issue only to be addressed by a single department or authority. Since the stated support of Ryerson's leadership in public forums and documents directly impacts on the culture of the campus community, and sets the direction for the university, accessibility issues should continue to receive strong profile in the Ryerson's strategic documents.

- 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. An extension process is in place, whereby students with extenuating circumstances can request to stay longer. Disabled students in residence expressed that they should not be subject to the same procedure, but rather should be granted an automatic extension beyond the day of their final exam. While it is important that the process is not overly onerous, some sort of procedure may be necessary to inform housing staff of when students intend to leave. By simply extending the check-out date for all disabled students to the final day, some would take advantage of the extension, while others would leave much sooner. At a time of year when students are constantly coming and going, it is important for the housing staff to know accurately who is supposed to be in the buildings at any time, so that they can best ensure the safety and security of all residents. However, student housing services could perhaps take steps to be sure that disabled students understand the process is as much about informing staff of when students will be leaving, as it is about requesting permission to stay longer. Student Housing Services should also review the move-out extension request procedure to ascertain whether it is as convenient as possible for all students, and to ensure it utilizes available forms of communication so as to not require an in-person request.
- P.7 ***Some of Ryerson's policies do not fully fit the needs of students with disabilities, and may create some barriers.*** In addition, students noted that some policies – and specifically the Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities policy – seem to assume that a disability and its effects are identified in advance, and do not address disabilities that are discovered after the fact. Ryerson reviews all academic and administrative policies on a regular basis and policies are assigned a review date upon being approved. Specific concerns could be brought to light as part of these reviews, and changes could perhaps be made if deemed necessary by the Board of Governors or Senate. The policies working group of Ryerson's AODA Committee is also currently undertaking a review of university policy, to identify those areas which may need attention in order to comply with this new legislation.
- P.8 ***Minimum course-load requirements often prevent disabled students, who may be unable to take a full course-load due to their disability, from accessing needed financial assistance.*** Disabled students expressed that taking a full course can be difficult in some circumstances, yet a less than a full course load may disqualify them from some types of financial assistance. The Access Centre should work with Student

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

Technology Barriers

- T.1 ***Videos and other multimedia presentations that are either posted directly on the internet by professors, or others that are referred to in course work, most often do not include captioning, creating challenges for deaf and hard of hearing students.*** As use of such internet technologies increases, the accompanying use of captioning services or written transcripts should be pursued. Ryerson's Computing & Communications Services department, the Learning and Teaching Office, and/or the Access Centre should be asked to review this issue and identify possible solutions.
- T.2 ***Some frequently used software and online systems are not useful to blind students.*** Students expressing this concern referred specifically to turnitin.com, RefWorks, and BlackBoard. Ryerson's Computing & Communications Services department and the Access Centre should review this issue to identify possible solutions. Soon to be released standards for information and communications within the AODA will also place new demands on the accessibility features and accommodations that must be included in such software systems.
- T.3 ***Overhead projectors in classrooms do not pick up closed captioning.*** Students felt that watching the same video on a standard television would not pose the same challenge, since televisions are able to interpret and display close captioning. While the technical details of this issue are generally beyond the knowledge of the RAAC, it is believed that typically such technology is not a function of the projector or television being used to display the program but rather is built into the DVD player or cable converter from which the video originates. Ryerson's Computing & Communications Services department should be asked to review this issue to ensure that all equipment is properly configured to take advantage of the technology that is inherent in the equipment (i.e. this may simply be an option or setting that needs to be turned on) and that users are trained, or proper documentation is provided, on its use.
- T.4 ***Deaf and hard of hearing students expressed that they find email communication very effective, but are often frustrated by the difficulties in the lack of dialogue possible with staff and instructors from this method of communication.*** Students felt that while the chosen form of communication for many deaf students in many situations, that many staff and instructors remain reluctant to use email as a comprehensive form of communication, and often describe it as nothing more than an annoyance. Training and awareness for staff and instructors during their orientation should, over time, create the expectation that email is the expected and accepted method of communication with deaf and hard of hearing students.

Pedagogy and Student Success Barriers

- 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, where 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:

- Information on evacuation procedures will be made available on-line in a prominent location, and as part of an accessibility portal on the RAMSS homepage.
- Faculty or staff responsible for a group of students should ensure that students are aware of emergency procedures. This could be accomplished by:
 - discussing emergency procedures in class
 - encouraging anyone who may need assistance during an emergency to discuss a plan with the instructor
 - including a brief section on emergency procedures in the course outline
- Faculty or staff with disabilities are encouraged to develop individualized plans and discuss them with students or designated individuals.

Current status:

Evacuation procedures have been posted in all classrooms and beside emergency phones. The evacuation of persons with disabilities in the event of an emergency is described in the Ryerson Emergency Manual, the "Yellow Book". It remains for all members of the Ryerson Community to be made aware on an ongoing basis of their roles and responsibilities in this regard. The RAAC feels that available venues such as new employee orientations and departmental team meetings should be used to promote these actions by faculty and staff, with reminders prior to the beginning of each semester. Furthermore, Ryerson could perhaps benefit from renewed efforts to promote the Ryerson Emergency Manual to new and existing employees.

Priority Area B: Awareness, Elimination, and Prevention of Attitudinal and Systemic Barriers

B.1 Ryerson will continue to promote accessibility awareness

To further promote disability and accessibility awareness, the RAAC recommends the following specific objectives:

- Orientation programs for faculty, staff, and student will promote awareness of policies and resources related to accommodation
- Ryerson will promote educational programming for staff, such as the efforts by Human Resources to enhance managers' and leaders' knowledge of employee accommodation obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2001) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005).

Current status:

Ryerson's efforts to promote accessibility awareness continued over the past year, and once again included Accessibility Awareness Week in March, 2009. The week featured daily events intended to bring attention to the barriers faced by community members and was organized by the RAAC, the Access Centre, and RyeAccess – a student-run organization which advocates on behalf of disabled students. The office of Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Services held nine “NoBarriers@Ryerson” education sessions over the past year with close to 100 participants who included students, staff and faculty. Through an exploration of best practices, the NoBarriers@Ryerson program seeks to raise awareness of disability and accessibility issues on the Ryerson campus, promotes ways to remove barriers, and encourages participants to become accessibility allies.

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.

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 sit 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 sits 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 is preparing for 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, is working to fully identify the impacts of these new customer service requirements, to develop and implement required training, and to prepare the framework for compliance reporting and feedback mechanisms. With the impending release of new information and communication standard, this committee's work will be expanded to ensure Ryerson methods of communicating – with students, staff, faculty and the general public – meet the new standards being established.

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 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 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