

Western University
Accessibility Report 2019-2020



Western

Prepared in accordance with the
Accessibility of Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

Introduction

In December 2001, Ontario passed the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (the "ODA"). The purpose of the ODA 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. The ODA mandates that every university prepare an annual accessibility plan.

Despite the passage of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, (the "AODA") the requirements under the ODA, specifically in reference to the preparation of this report, remain in force. To view Western University's compliance reporting under the AODA, please see:

<http://accessibility.uwo.ca/resources/reports.html>

The following accessibility plan is prepared in accordance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001.

Objectives

The purpose of an accessibility plan is to document barriers to accessibility that have been removed to date and identify those barriers that will be removed in the coming year. A plan must also identify how the barriers will be removed and present a plan for identifying and removing barriers in the future, and preventing the development of new barriers. Plans must be made public and accessible to allow for input from the broader community.

Western's Commitment to Accessibility Planning

As stated in the University's Accessibility at Western policy:

The University of Western Ontario is committed to recognizing the dignity and independence of all staff, students, faculty and visitors and seeks to ensure that persons with disabilities have genuine, open and unhindered access to University goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises.

Western University has been committed to accessibility planning for many years. In particular, we are committed to achieving barrier free accessibility for persons with disabilities studying, visiting and working at Western. As part of this commitment, there are a variety of services, groups and committees on campus devoted to promoting accessibility and to ensuring that individuals have equitable access to services and facilities. Western actively works towards meeting its obligations under legislation, as well as towards achieving the following goals:

1. The continual improvement of access to University premises, facilities and services for all persons with disabilities;
2. Compliance with accessibility standards consistent with regulations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, as they come into force;
3. The participation of persons with disabilities in the identification and follow up of accessibility concerns and best practices on campus; and
4. The provision of quality services to persons with disabilities.

Barrier Removal Initiatives

Physical and Architectural Barriers

All physical and architectural accessibility enhancements on campus are coordinated through Western's Facilities Management Division. All plans for new buildings and major renovations to existing buildings are reviewed to ensure that barriers are addressed at the planning and design stage where possible. Standards used by Western often go beyond the standards found in the Ontario Building Code (which are acknowledged to be a base only). It is expected that contractors bidding on and completing work at Western will meet higher standards.

All construction on campus requiring a building permit will meet or exceed the amendments to the Ontario Building Code. The amended requirements will substantially enhance the accessibility in the newly constructed buildings and buildings scheduled for extensive renovations. Meetings with the Acting Director of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) and the Diversity & Accessibility Coordinator as well as other campus partners, (including but not limited to the USC Accessibility Coordinator and the SOGS Accessibility Commissioner include a review of upcoming new building plans and renovations from an accessibility lens. Feedback through the accessibility@uwo.ca and from students is also incorporated into the review.

Barrier free door operators and hold-open devices continue to be installed at various locations across campus. Additional barrier-free ramps, sidewalks and curbs have been installed across campus. An additional ramp was added to the Weldon parking lot, closer to the main walkway.

Height adjustable tables are being added across campus for increased accessibility in customer service for service counter spaces.

SSD continues to arrange accessible campus transportation for students with disabilities.

Western's Ergonomic Specialists continued to provide a variety of services including office ergonomic assessments, risk assessments, job coaching, job demands descriptions (JDD), job matching and education sessions. This service is available to all university departments in order to provide recommendations to promote safety and well-being.

Employee Wellbeing, (formerly Rehabilitation Services), continued to offer its assistance to individuals requiring workplace accommodations and parking permits for persons with disabilities.

The University Students' Council, Housing and the affiliated Colleges consult with the Diversity & Accessibility Coordinator to plan accessible events for orientation and to arrange funding for accessible transportation during orientation week.

Information and Communications Barriers

Initiatives to remove information and communication barriers across campus in the past year include:

Communications and Public Relations has piloted a project with SiteImprove to audit Western webpages. The pilot project was limited to 500 webpages.

In the 11 months with Siteimprove, the entire 500 pages included in the project went through a dramatic positive transformation:

- Accessibility score saw a modest improvement of 14% (from 84 to 97), which speaks to the fact that the Western template had been in a good place in terms of the AODA compliance, when the pilot project started.

Social Media at Western training highlights social media accessibility including but not limited to: alternative text, closed captions, colour contrast and accessibility best practices for Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Youtube videos.

Through the Accessibility at Western website, Western received feedback on accessibility issues. Between September 2019 and August 2020, 136 accessibility related inquiries were received. All feedback (received either by phone or email) was triaged and referred to the appropriate individual or service provider at Western for follow up.

Student Experience's Accessible Education team, (AEW), [formerly known as Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD)], provided services for 3,917 students with disabilities in 2019-2020. Most, if not all, of these services facilitated access to information and assisted students with communication. These services included exam accommodations (e.g., extra time, text & screen reading software, digital & Braille exams, computers for word processing) which allowed students to access information and communicate their answers during exams.

AEW provided access to information shared in class through real-time captioning, sign-language interpretation, and/or computer note-taking for students who were deaf or hard of hearing. AEW arranged alternative format textbooks (e.g., digital & Braille) for students. AEW provided training or consultative services regarding the use of assistive technology to access information for students. AEW also provided learning strategy instruction for students with learning disabilities.

Accessible Education, Information and Technology Services, the Registrar's Web and IT Team, and Western Libraries collaborated to facilitate timely provision of accessible information in the classroom, on course websites, and on Reserve in the libraries.

Western Libraries continued to provide alternative text formats for library materials on an as needed basis. Western Libraries continued to provide information about accessibility at all library locations on its website:

<http://www.lib.uwo.ca/accessibility>

A revision of Western Libraries' Articulate Storyline modules was begun to ensure accessibility.

All six Western Libraries library locations have Kurzweil 3000 and Zoomtext 10 software for use on public library computers.

The USC continues to maintain a note-taking program to develop an online notes bank that provides access to notes for students.

Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers are the most difficult of the barriers to identify and address. Western is fortunate to have a large number of interested and concerned individuals in its community who regularly take on the task of educating others about the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in our community, both formally in the work that they do and informally. The office of Equity & Human Rights Services provides Lunch & Learns as well as workshop opportunities to raise awareness of accessibility concerns, universal design best practices and proactive solutions to create an inclusive campus.

The Diversity & Accessibility Coordinator, along with the Senior Human Rights Advisor have created and deliver a workshop to Western Leaders on 'Accessibility & Accommodation'. This session has become part of the Western Leadership series offered twice/year through the Talent, Learning & Engagement team.

The Diversity and Accessibility Coordinator continues to work with campus partners and community organizations to promote awareness and accessibility 'best

practices'. Best practices are shared with the London Accessibility Committee as well as the Council of Ontario Universities Accessibility Committee.

The Mental Health at Western website continues to be updated and maintained. It has helped to increase awareness about mental health needs. This website directs students, faculty, staff, parents and families to mental health services and resources available at Western. The website is located at:

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

The Mental Health at Western for Leaders & Supervisors program continued to be offered on campus. The objective of Mental Health at Western is to improve knowledge of mental health issues at Western including how to support employees and how to access resources.

The Mental Health Interactive Learning Module launched in 2013 continues to be offered to faculty/staff and students. The module was co-developed by Learning and Development and Student Health Services. Completion of the module is recorded on participants' Western training records and participants can also print a certificate of completion for their own records.

Employee Wellness and Student Health Services delivered "Staff, Faculty and Student Mental Health: The Leader's Role" as part of Western's BASICS (Building Administrative Skills Through Innovation, Collegiality and Strategy) program.

Through appropriate accommodation and support, arranged by Accessible Education (AEW), students have demonstrated their ability to engage with their academic work and succeed at university. This demonstration has

changed attitudes about students' limitations that were held by some faculty and staff. AEW also engaged in outreach within the University community for the purpose of increasing awareness among faculty regarding the rationale for various accommodations, the University's and students' responsibilities regarding accommodation, and SSD's requirements for documentation of disabilities. This outreach seemed to foster greater appreciation of the legitimacy and appropriateness of accommodation.

In keeping with the requirements of the AODA Customer Service Standard, Western continued to offer online accessibility-related training. There are two versions of Western's online AODA Customer Service Training and each is targeted to the role of the individual in the organization. Accessibility in Service is intended for Academic and Administrative Leaders, staff members, student volunteers, and associated persons. Accessibility in Teaching is intended for Faculty, Graduate Teaching Assistants, Archivists and Librarians.

Housing offers some key initiatives to help de-stigmatize mental illness. Suicide first response and suicide intervention courses continued to be mandated for all residence staff and managers in the form of two courses called Safe Talk and ASIST. The goal is to enable housing staff to identify those who may be having thoughts of suicide and to encourage open, direct and honest talk about suicide to increase the number of those seeking assistance.

Housing and Ancillary Services continued to educate Orientation Week Coordinators about the need to accommodate students with disabilities to ensure that orientation-related activities are inclusive.

An Accessible Event Planning guide has been added to the Accessibility website and shared with campus partners with the goal of ensuring all events held on campus are open and accessible for individuals with disabilities.

Technological Barriers

Efforts to remove technological barriers on campus are on-going and the removal of such barriers is a priority for all departments. Initiatives from the past year include:

Western Technology Services (“WTS”) continued its efforts to ensure all of Western’s official websites are accessible according to standards approved by WTS and implemented by the Department of Communications and Public Affairs through the Western template.

WTS continued to respond on an as-needed basis to requests for accessible content on websites where adaptive technology is being used by members of the Western community. Such websites include official University websites and course websites on OWL.

Western’s Learning Management System (LMS), referred to as OWL, meets accessibility standards. In those cases where improved accessibility is needed support has been provided by the WTS Instructional Support Team.

Accessible Education, (AEW), continued to provide assistive technology in its facilities at the D. B. Weldon Library. The University also provided assistive technology in various locations in Western’s libraries. This technology removed barriers that students would have encountered if they had tried to use other computers on campus.

Many students registered with AEW benefitted from technology-related exam accommodations that allowed them a fair opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge (e.g., word processors and/or voice recognition software to prepare answers to exam questions).

Western Libraries offers Kurzweil 3000 and Zoomtext 10 software for use on the public library computers at all six library locations. Kurzweil 3000 is suitable for users with perceptual disabilities, while Zoomtext 10 is for use by patrons with visual disabilities.

Barriers Created by Policies or Practices

With an organization the size of Western, there are a great number of policies and practices, both formal and informal. Pursuant to obligations set out in the AODA, it is anticipated that many policies and practices will be reviewed by the appropriate departments, and barriers will be identified and brought forward, either by those departments or by individuals impacted. Resources such as Staff Relations, Employee Wellbeing, Accessible Education and Human Rights Services are available to receive concerns and provide advice. These resources also continue to review policies and practices as part of their work on campus.

Some specific initiatives in the past year undertaken to address policy or practice barriers include:

AEW staff members participated in outreach by delivering presentations to faculty and staff.

AEW continued a partnership with local psychologists and a psychological associate in London for the purpose of referring students who require assessments. This arrangement and improved processes resulted in more timely assessments for students.

The Diversity & Accessibility Coordinator and representatives from AEW consulted with departments at Western regarding best practices to enhance accessibility.

Equity & Human Rights Services continued to provide advice to Academic and Administrative leaders on best practices with regards to Western's Duty to Accommodate, as it pertains to disability and the Human Rights Code.

Representatives from AEW participated in decisions regarding admission to most undergraduate programs for applicants who had requested special consideration for health or disability related reasons.

Review and Monitoring Process

The University will continue to comply with all applicable Federal, Provincial and Municipal legislation with respect to accessibility and will implement the standards specified under the AODA. Western is committed to actively identifying and addressing barriers on our campus. As part of this commitment, there are a variety of services, groups and committees on campus devoted to accessibility and to ensuring that individuals have equitable access to services and facilities. Through the establishment of strong partnerships among campus partners, we will review and monitor accessibility on Western's campus. As a community devoted to accessibility, we will continue to work together to find reasonable and timely resolution to accessibility concerns.

For More Information

For more information on this accessibility plan, please contact Lesley Oliver, Diversity & Accessibility Coordinator at: 661-2111 ext. 81458 or accessibility@uwo.ca.

Accessible formats of this document are available upon request from Human Resources.

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