

# Draft Coordinated Accessibility Strategy

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CARLETON UNIVERSITY

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Coordinated Accessibility Strategy emerged from the desire to continue building on Carleton's commitment to creating a culture of accessibility. The Coordinated Accessibility Strategy Steering Committee (see Appendix A) was formally established in the fall of 2018 to support and guide the creation of the Coordinated Accessibility Strategy. The committee draws its membership from across the university to ensure that the perspectives of all stakeholders are reflected in the recommendations and objectives of the Strategy. The Coordinated Accessibility Strategy could not have been developed without the support and commitment of the members of this committee.

We would also like to acknowledge the members of the Carleton community for engaging in the creation process, shaping content and providing continuous feedback for the Strategy. Feedback was collected in a variety of formats, including focus groups, online feedback forms, one-on-one meetings, stakeholder group consultations, and e-mail, which provided us with perspectives and ideas for the direction of the Coordinated Accessibility Strategy. The development of this Strategy benefitted immensely from the input and shared knowledge of students, faculty, and staff to create a framework that represents the voices of our diverse community.

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Carleton Strategic Integrated Plan (2013-2018) highlighted accessibility as one of Carleton's values, and described Carleton as "a leader in ... student support and accessibility." Goal 3-3 of the Strategic Integrated Plan is "to consolidate and build on Carleton's status as Canada's most accessible university," and identified the following strategic action: "Complete the linkages among the research, support services and academic programming related to accessibility in order to develop a university-wide Coordinated Strategy for Accessibility that builds on our accomplishments."

Disability issues affect a significant minority of Carleton students, with approximately 10% of the undergraduate population being registered at the Paul Menton Centre (PMC). Accessibility-related policies and procedures also impact a large group of staff and faculty members in a variety of departments and services. The term "accessibility" can have different meanings depending on the context. In this context, accessibility is understood broadly, including but not limited to academic accommodations, with the following definition adopted for the Coordinated Accessibility Strategy:

"Accessibility is best defined as the provision of flexibility to accommodate each [individual's] needs and preferences;<sup>1</sup> when used with reference to persons with disabilities, any place, space, item or service, whether physical or virtual, that is easily approached, reached, entered, exited, interacted with, understood or otherwise used by persons of varying disabilities, is determined to be accessible."<sup>2</sup>

In addition to a diverse understanding of the term accessibility, there is also a variety of preferred language used in reference to disability. For the purposes of this document, we have adopted 'persons with disabilities' as our language. However, we acknowledge and respect the many ways in which individuals self-identify, and hope that the chosen language can be understood to represent the variety of experiences and preferences that exist within our diverse community.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Valdes, "Accessibility on the Internet", report to the United Nations (16 June 1998, updated 31 March 2004) available [online] at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/disacc00.htm>, cited in report of the Secretary General, "Implementation of the world programme of action concerning disabled persons", (United Nations document A/54/388/Add.1) cited in United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Social Policy and Development, "Accessibility and Development Mainstreaming disability in the post-2015 development agenda", United Nations, 2013, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2013/12/24/accessibility-and-development-mainstreaming-disability-in-the-post-2015-development-agenda/>.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Social Policy and Development, "Accessibility and Development Mainstreaming disability in the post-2015 development agenda", United Nations, 2013, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2013/12/24/accessibility-and-development-mainstreaming-disability-in-the-post-2015-development-agenda/>.

# SNAPSHOT OF ACCESSIBILITY AT CARLETON

30 416	Total students enrolled at Carleton (2017-2018 school year) <sup>3</sup>
3 403	Number of students enrolled at the Paul Menton Centre <sup>4</sup>
11.2%	Percentage of Carleton Students registered with the Paul Menton Centre <sup>5</sup>
29 081	Number of accommodated exams (2017-2018 school year) <sup>6</sup>
3 000	Approximate number of monthly service calls received by Attendant Services <sup>7</sup>
6.4%	Percentage of Carleton workforce who Identified with a Disability in 2018 <sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Carleton University, “Facts and Figures”, accessed June 7, 2019, <https://carleton.ca/about/facts/>.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, Carleton University.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, “Quick Facts 2017”.

<sup>8</sup> Office of Institutional Research and Planning, Carleton University, “Staffing Statistics”, accessed June 7, 2019, <http://oirp.carleton.ca/databook/index/html/personnel.htm>.

## **CARLETON'S HISTORY IN ACCESSIBILITY**

Carleton University's commitment to creating an accessible campus can be traced back to its earliest years when the campus comprised a handful of buildings. Originally intended to provide maintenance staff access to electrical and water systems, Carleton's tunnels were expanded and opened for faculty, staff and student use in the 1960s. The expansion allowed the entire campus community to move more easily from building to building throughout the changing seasons. In the 1970s residences were constructed that accommodated students with disabilities, and in 1987, the Attendant Services program was introduced providing individual attendant supports 24/7 to students with significant mobility disabilities. Coupled with the tunnel system, the program allowed full academic participation to students who otherwise would not be able to attend classes on campus, and it remains unique in Canada and around the world.

The establishment of the Paul Menton Centre (PMC) in 1990 provided a central location for the development of accessible programs, services and awareness on campus and beyond. The PMC currently focuses on coordinating academic accommodation and learning support services for students with disabilities, as well providing education and consultation relating to disabilities in higher education. It collaborates with partners across the University to provide accommodations and support services to Carleton students, such as the Scheduling and Exam Services, Library, Teaching and Learning Services, Health and Counselling Services, and academic units. The PMC also works towards improving physical accessibility on Carleton's campus, and to creating awareness through the provision of educational and communication materials, professional development and other campus activities.

In 2012, the Research, Education, Accessibility and Design (READ) Initiative was launched - a campus-wide initiative dedicated to accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities at Carleton, in the community and around the world. READ supports interdisciplinary accessibility collaborations to encourage awareness of, and solutions for, societal barriers for persons with disabilities. The initiative also promotes increased program emphasis in all faculties in areas of disability, universal design, accessibility and inclusion. Further, it is tasked with the capacity building for the development of a Centre of Excellence in Accessibility at Carleton University.

To address the support needs of a growing population of students with mental health disabilities, the PMC established a research-based program, From Intention to Action (FITA), in 2010 as part of Carleton's Student Services. FITA is designed to support mental health and academic success for students who are experiencing significant stress during their post-secondary education. In 2016, Career Services launched the Accessible Career Transitions program (ACT) with support from READ and the PMC. ACT provides individualized in-depth career planning and professional development, preparation, and skill building for students and graduates with disabilities. In 2018, the Provincial Government committed \$5 million for a project developed by READ and PMC, the David C. Onley Initiative for Employment and Enterprise Development, to support employability of postsecondary students with disabilities.

Carleton students with disabilities are engaged through the Carleton Disability Awareness Centre (CDAC), a student-run hub that brings together students and provides community space and relevant resources. It organizes speaker events and workshops regarding issues surrounding visible and non-visible disabilities, including mental health, sexuality, accessibility, and more. The Centre also runs programs to support students with disabilities on campus, such as wheelchair rentals and campaigns to improve accessibility and disability awareness on campus.

In terms of some of Carleton's recent academic and research accessibility highlights, in 2014 the Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies introduced a minor in disability studies. The minor explores disability from historical, cultural, political, economic and social perspectives, and offers students the choice of 24 elective courses from a variety of disciplines. In 2013, an interdisciplinary team of researchers created the Carleton University Disability Research Group, whose mission is to "examine the ways in which disability studies, technology and history interrelate, largely through researching and designing virtual exhibits". In 2017, Carleton received an NSERC CREATE grant in the amount of \$1.65 million for the Research and Education in Accessibility, Design, and Innovation (READi) training program. READi is a 6 year initiative - an integrated solutions-oriented training program that emphasizes applied and experiential learning, providing accessibility training and skills to students, with a particular emphasis on those studying engineering, information and communications technology (ICT), and design.

Research on attitudes and practices related to issues of accessibility and inclusive teaching shows Carleton faculty to espouse positive attitudes and a high degree of implementation of universal design principles in their course development and teaching. Annual surveys of faculty and instructors related to academic accommodations for students with disabilities demonstrate very positive experiences and high approval rates for accommodation procedures.

While much has been accomplished, we acknowledge that accessibility is a journey of continuous development. This strategy will serve as a framework to guide Carleton's ongoing commitment toward a campus that is accessible and inclusive.

# PURPOSE, VISION, GUIDING VALUES OF THE COORDINATED ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY

## Purpose

To continue to build Carleton University's culture of accessibility and be a catalyst for creating a more accessible and inclusive society, in particular for persons with disabilities.

## Vision

Our vision is to continually strengthen Carleton's commitment to accessibility, and to be a recognized leader, central to accessibility initiatives nationally and globally.

## Guiding Values

### **Inclusivity**

We are guided by the value of inclusion; striving to create opportunities for every person to participate in all areas of campus to the fullest extent possible.

### **Innovation**

We will continually strive for transformational change in the area of accessibility. We aim to be acknowledged as leaders and trailblazers of accessibility.

### **Collaboration**

We aim to engage both internal and external community members in collaborations and partnerships to build capacity by facilitating and mobilizing interdisciplinary knowledge, experience, and expertise among students, staff and faculty.

### **Commitment**

We acknowledge that creating a culture of accessibility is an eternal task. We are guided by our ongoing, genuine and lasting commitment to this endeavour, and will strive for a campus-wide culture of continuous improvement in all aspects of accessibility. We are committed to putting our words into action.

### **Community**

We recognize that to strive for true inclusion, accessibility must be embedded into all aspects of our campus. It is the collective responsibility of our community to challenge ableism to work towards a more inclusive campus and world.

# COORDINATED ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY

Carleton University is a dynamic and innovative university with over 30 000 undergraduate and graduate students and approximately 5 000 faculty and staff<sup>9</sup>. Although we are proud of the progress made towards creating a culture of accessibility on campus, we recognize that there will always be opportunities to continually improve and strive for a more accessibility and inclusion.

Education is considered a crucial component to the holistic development of a person, and “achieving one’s education potential affects a person’s ability to take part in the labour market, realize their full potential, live independently, and participate meaningfully in society”<sup>10</sup>. As an educational institution, Carleton is committed to continuing to build on its history in accessibility to keep moving towards its vision for a more accessible campus and world.

The Coordinated Accessibility Strategy will serve as a framework to guide Carleton’s ongoing commitment toward a campus that is accessible and inclusive. The Strategy is intended to not only coordinate the many accessibility services, programs, and initiatives that already exist, but also continue to inspire a strong campus culture of accessibility and inclusion.

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<sup>9</sup> Supra, note 3.

<sup>10</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission, “Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities”, March 2018, [http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Policy%20on%20accessible%20education%20for%20students%20with%20disabilities\\_FINAL\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Policy%20on%20accessible%20education%20for%20students%20with%20disabilities_FINAL_EN.pdf), page 7.

# AREAS OF FOCUS, OBJECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Initial interviews with key stakeholders led to the emergence of several areas of focus for the Coordinated Accessibility Strategy:

1. Coordination and leadership
2. Education and training
3. Information and communication
4. Physical campus
5. Employment and employee support
6. Student support services
7. Research and development

Each of these areas of focus is further explored and developed in the sections below. For each of the broad themes, objectives and recommendations have been outlined to help guide Carleton's vision for accessibility.

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# Coordination and Leadership

## Description:

This theme refers to the need to better coordinate the various accessibility initiatives at Carleton. Strategic and coordinated activities can enhance effectiveness and impact of efforts to promote accessibility. An accessibility lens should be given to many activities, including building, renovations, research, pedagogical development, student services, and information technology. Policies, guidelines, and best practices related to accessibility need to be shared and well communicated. Increased awareness and promotion of accessibility should be done both within Carleton and beyond. The goals of the Coordinated Accessibility Strategy should be supported and sustained long term.

## Objectives:

1. Accessibility as a priority at all levels of leadership, with a commitment to continuous improvement.
2. Dedicated University resources for coordination, leadership, and expertise in accessibility.
3. Increased awareness and internalized culture of accessibility among the entire Carleton community, where accessibility is a consideration in everything we do.
4. Recognition as a leader in accessibility internally by faculty, staff, and students, as well as the external community.

## Recommendations

- A. Conduct a thorough environmental scan and create a living document of all accessibility initiatives at Carleton.
- B. Establish an interdisciplinary centre of excellence in accessibility that provides leadership, coordination, best practices, research, support, training, and knowledge mobilization.
- C. Formalize the senior leadership responsibility for accessibility across the university portfolios.
- D. Increase depth of accessibility training of people in leadership positions.
- E. Expand university-wide and community events and campaigns to increase awareness and foster a culture of accessibility.
- F. Develop membership and contributions to accessibility partnerships, organizations, and consortium, partnering at the local, provincial, national, and global level.
- G. Establish a central resource to disseminate and receive information on accessibility.

## Education and Training

### Description:

This theme refers to best practices in accessibility for teaching and learning (e.g., Universal Design for Learning) as well as developing relevant policies, knowledge, skills, and attitudes within Carleton's academic programs.

The theme also refers to skills-focused certification training programs (e.g., Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Professional, International Association of Accessibility Professionals Certification).

### Objective:

1. Greater awareness and understanding of accessibility and disabilities, and increased capacity to respond to accessibility needs.
2. Accessible teaching and learning environments with relevant supports and resources.
3. Comprehensive academic, educational and professional development programming in accessibility.
4. Academic culture that supports accessibility.

### Recommendations:

- A. Increase the number of in-depth training opportunities in accessibility on campus that are relevant to different settings.
- B. Increase the number of community activities that build greater awareness and understanding of accessibility and disabilities.
- C. Provide educators on campus with skills and resources to consider accessibility in the design of courses, such as using the Universal Design for Learning guidelines.
- D. Include persons with disabilities and their lived experience as a resource in the design of teaching and learning.
- E. Expand interdisciplinary academic programming and professional development in accessibility for members of the internal and external community.
- F. Address issues of disabilities and accessibility within the Faculties and Departments and encourage faculty to utilize relevant teaching and learning services.

# Information and Communication

## Description:

This theme refers to the accessibility of all information and communication content and technologies at Carleton, including websites, documents, and events.

## Objectives:

1. Compliance that exceeds accessibility standards for all University information and communications systems.
2. Accessibility and accommodation resources for information and communications needs on campus that are built-in or readily available.
3. Increased knowledge, skills, and attitudes in all Carleton faculty and staff in accessibility in information and communications technologies.

## Recommendations:

- A. Perform system audits for accessibility, driven by individual units.
- B. Establish process for support for providing accommodations, and adaptive and assistive devices for Carleton events.
- C. Establish a reporting protocol to identify information and communication related accessibility barriers and areas for improvement.
- D. Establish best practices for accessibility in all knowledge creation and sharing (e.g., documents, presentation, websites, conferences), which are shared internally and externally.
- E. Provide information and training opportunities on accessibility in knowledge creation and sharing for faculty and staff.
- F. Ensure accessibility to be part of the procurement requirements.

# Physical Campus

## Description:

This theme refers to the reduction and elimination of physical barriers at Carleton University, consideration of accessibility in future development of spaces and buildings on campus, as well as accessible signage and wayfinding.

## Objectives:

1. Standards for accessibility of the physical campus that go beyond the minimum requirements.
2. Continual commitment to the elimination of existing physical barriers at Carleton University.
3. University policies and practices regarding the use of space, which supports the accessibility of the physical campus.

## Recommendations:

- A. Create a Carleton University standard for accessibility of physical spaces based on best practice guidelines and certifications that surpass minimum requirements.
- B. Perform a full accessibility audit of the physical campus with input from the campus community, particularly persons with disabilities.
- C. Undertake systematic retrofitting to address current problems and meet the new standards for the physical campus.
- D. Establish a reporting protocol to identify physical accessibility barriers and areas for improvement.
- E. Establish a permanent University budget and related supporting resources for accessibility of physical spaces.
- F. Review University policies and practices to consider accessibility where relevant to the physical campus.

## Employment and Employee Support

### Description:

This theme refers to inclusive hiring of persons with disabilities at Carleton University, and ensuring an accessible and inclusive work environment, as well as contributing to employment initiatives.

### Objectives:

1. Greater representation of persons with disabilities at all levels among Carleton employees.
2. Inclusive and accessible hiring policies and practices, and working environments.

### Recommendations:

- A. Improve processes on campus for disability-related accommodations and supports for employees.
- B. Review employment-related policies and practices that support accessibility and accommodations.
- C. Provide targeted opportunities across campus that promote career development and training for Carleton employees with disabilities.
- D. Evolve supports for accessibility and accommodations to meet the needs of employees.

## **Student Support Services**

### **Description:**

This theme refers to a range of student support services related to accessibility (e.g., Paul Menton Centre, Health and Counselling Services, Carleton Disability Awareness Centre (CDAC), and Career Services).

### **Objectives:**

1. Ongoing capacity for services to fully support students with disabilities to achieve academic success.
2. Supports for students with disabilities and accessibility expertise across all students services and the broader campus community.
3. Excellence in services for students with disabilities.

### **Recommendations:**

- A. Optimize resources to be responsive to the growing needs for accommodation and support of students with disabilities.
- B. Review student services programming with consideration of students with disabilities.
- C. Provide accessibility and disability-related training specific to different student services programs.
- D. Build knowledge, awareness, and attitudes in accessibility and accommodations across all student facing services and points of contact on campus.
- E. Establish formal student feedback and program evaluation protocols for disability-related student services for continuous quality improvement.

# Research and Development

## Description:

This theme refers to academic research and application of research to campus and community development in accessibility.

## Objectives:

1. Increased research activity in accessibility; particularly interdisciplinary, participatory research, including those that address systemic and attitudinal barriers.
2. Community of world-class accessibility researchers, particularly researchers with disabilities.
3. Increased awareness, recognition, and coordination of research activities in accessibility both internally and externally.
4. Significant contribution and leadership of Carleton University researchers to building a published knowledge base in accessibility.

## Recommendations

- A. Develop a strategic plan for accessibility research and knowledge mobilization (e.g., research informed campus initiatives).
- B. Create a university-wide network of researchers in accessibility.
- C. Grow the research capacity in accessibility, including increasing the number and retention of researchers, research funding, research infrastructure, and community partnerships.
- D. Pursue research chair(s) in accessibility.
- E. Establish academic programming to support accessibility research.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Carleton University is committed to building on a culture of accessibility by continuing to strive toward a campus that is accessible and inclusive. Carleton's history in accessibility can be traced back to its earliest years, however, there will always be opportunities for growth, improvement and innovation. This document recognizes the need for a Coordinated Strategy to serve as a framework to guide Carleton's ongoing commitment to being a leader in accessibility.

Upon the implementation of the Coordinated Accessibility Strategy, the READ Initiative will prioritize the recommendations, assign ownership, and create a five-year plan for implementation and continued support. Members of the Coordinated Accessibility Strategy Steering Committee will form an Advisory Committee, under the leadership of the READ Initiative, which will meet regularly and complete annual reports with the intent of maintaining sustainability and transparency. Committee members will be invited to renew their position on the Advisory Committee yearly to confirm their ability to continue to participate in the implementation of recommendations or suggest new members to take on new tasks.

Additionally, there will be ways for faculty, staff and students to be involved in the implementation of various recommendations - everything from being aware of Carleton's Coordinated Accessibility Strategy and promoting our continued work to becoming more involved in the development or delivery of specific recommendations. Students, faculty and staff are all encouraged to think about how they can contribute to an accessible and inclusive campus environment that is consistent with this Strategy.

As the recommendations are prioritized and implemented, evaluation criteria for the Strategy will be established and monitored. The Coordinated Accessibility Strategy Advisory Committee will also aim to develop an evaluation process for individual recommendations to assess their impact and effectiveness. Necessary adjustments will be made where the recommendations do not achieve intended results. New research and emerging best practices will also inform the implementation and evaluation of our framework.

It is the hope of the Coordinated Accessibility Strategy Steering Committee that this Strategy will be a living document and will support all members of the Carleton community – students, faculty and staff – to provide an accessible and inclusive environment in which to pursue educational and life goals.

# APPENDIX A: Committee Composition

## Coordinated Accessibility Strategy Steering Committee

### Co-Chairs:

- **Adrian Chan**, Professor, Faculty of Engineering and Design and Chair, Advisory Board, Research Education, Accessibility, and Design (READ) Initiative
- **Boris Vukovic**, Director, Research, Education, Accessibility and Design (READ) Initiative

### Members:

- **Cathy Edwards**, Research Facilitator, Strategic Initiatives, Research Impact and Engagement, Carleton Office for Research Initiatives and Services
- **Kelly Fritsch**, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Arts and Social Science
- **Ikram Jama**, Director (Acting), Equity Services
- **Larry McCloskey**, Director, Paul Menton Centre
- **Elsbeth McCulloch**, Manger, eLearning, Educational Development Centre
- **Dean Mellway**, Special Advisor, READ Initiative
- **Gary Nower**, Assistant Vice-President (Facilities Management and Planning)
- **Graduate Student Representative(s)**
- **Mary Kathryn Roberts**, ITS Communications Advisor, Web Services
- **Undergraduate Student Representative(s)**

### Support:

- **Greg Aulenback**, Manager, Strategic Initiatives, Office of the Vice-President (Students and Enrolment)
- **Lakin Dagg**, Special Project Officer, Office of the Vice-President (Students and Enrolment)

## Coordinated Accessibility Strategy Working Group

- **Boris Vukovic**, Director, Research, Education, Accessibility and Design (READ) Initiative
- **Adrian Chan**, Professor, Faculty of Engineering and Design and Chair, Advisory Board, Research Education, Accessibility, and Design (READ) Initiative
- **Greg Aulenback**, Manager, Strategic Initiatives, Office of the Vice-President (Students and Enrolment)
- **Lakin Dagg**, Special Project Officer, Office of the Vice-President (Students and Enrolment)

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## APPENDIX B: References

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