# Multi-YearAccessibilityAccessibilityDian2019 Progress ReportUNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

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### **Accessibility Committee**

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## **From the Associate Provost, Human Resources**

After publishing the University of Waterloo's ("Waterloo") first Multi-year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) in 2018, we have been busy putting our plan into action, setting our accessibility priorities in motion for the next five years.

While Waterloo's priorities have been driven largely by the standards set within the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), we've used our trademark innovative approach to address many of the accessibility challenges.

The MYAP has brought together a new level of collaboration and partnerships within campus departments and between Waterloo and the community. This has cultivated a spirit of inclusion, universal access, and consideration for all abilities in everything we do and all the services we deliver.

As we highlight and celebrate our achievements over the past year, we will continue to build momentum and consider accessibility in everything that we do. We will not be complacent in our efforts, and recognize that this past year has been a catapult start to our journey of becoming an accessibility champion, and not the end of a goal achieved.

Sincerely, MARILYN THOMPSON ASSOCIATE PROVOST, HUMAN RESOURCES UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

## **BOOM STATES OF A CONTROL OF A**



This summary report highlights examples of progress towards each of the seven themes that were identified in Waterloo's MYAP 2018-2022. The report describes relevant projects and initiatives that have occurred at Waterloo up to and including December 2019. The report also includes an assessment of the status of each objective, to give the community a snapshot of Waterloo's progress. As this is the first year of implementation within our five-year plan, it should be understood that many objectives are only in the "Started" phase, and will move towards completion over time.

This is a non-exhaustive list of work that Waterloo has undertaken. Many departments and individuals have engaged in accessibility initiatives and activities to create an inclusive environment at Waterloo. Only objectives that were highlighted within the MYAP have been specifically noted and assessed using the "progress assessment" model.

#### Acknowledgement

The University of Waterloo acknowledges that we are on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnawbe and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.

## SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

Waterloo utilizes the requirements outlined within the AODA and its standards to measure progress. Each theme from the MYAP and their relative initiatives is included in this report. A status indicator summarizes the qualitative or quantitative completion. As the MYAP was established in winter of 2018, and recognizing that some of the noted initiatives require a multi-year approach for completion, it is expected that many of the objectives are in the "started" stage. The progress indicator further identifies whether the current stage of the initiative is meeting the pre-determined timelines for implementation.



#### **Status Overview**





## Section A Policies and Procedures

Waterloo is committed to the development of a specific policy concerning accessibility for Waterloo employees.

#### A1. Policy 57 – Employment Accommodations



Status:somewhat completeProgress:on track

Policy 58 – Accessibility was established in 2017 in response to the AODA's requirement for an organizational policy addressing accessibility for persons with disabilities. In particular, it addressed AODA's requirement for policies in accessible employment.

In November 2018, the Policy Drafting Committee on Policy 57 – Employment Accommodations was established and work of the committee started in February 2019. Waterloo recognizes the importance of accommodating all employees under the 17 different protected grounds within the Ontario Human Rights Code. As such, Waterloo utilizes this opportunity to develop a Policy that ensures all employees are treated equitably. Policy development follows standard University processes, as per its Policy 1 – Initiation and Review of University Policies. It is anticipated that this Policy will be ready for consultation during 2020-2021; consultation may last several months.





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#### Section B Customer Service

Over the next five years, Waterloo will develop a strategy for the following customer service areas:

- 1. Improving communications for service disruptions
- 2. Developing a consistent verification process for service animals
- 3. Developing a community engagement strategy that involves active and ongoing consultation with persons experiencing disabilities.

#### **B1.** Communications for service disruptions



Status:startedProgress:on track

As part of the University's business continuity strategy, a new system has been put in place that allows for targeted mail out of information regarding the University's infrastructure and status. This system has been leveraged to also communicate to groups regarding service disruptions to physical space and amenities. Over the next few months, the University will be working on building out mailing lists to ensure proper individuals are notified about service disruptions that impact their operations. Focus will be on planned service disruptions.

The revised mandatory Accessibility Training also includes awareness and information to all departments and University representatives on the requirements of service disruption notification regarding their specific departments (i.e. office closures, services adjustments, etc).

Waterloo's standard student communication tool, Portal, launched an Event Registration System (ERS) in 2019. This tool is designed to be a centralized registration and check-in platform for Waterloo students, staff and faculty. It is currently in the pilot phase within the Student Success office. Accessibility considerations related to events is included in the ERS training provided to event organizers. This is an example of Waterloo's ongoing efforts to empower all individuals to consider accessibility in everything we do as part of our regular processes and practice. A specific accessibility template section for events will be included as development resources permit.

#### **B2.** Service Animal Verification Guidelines

Status:completedProgress:completed

In 2016, the AODA revised its definition of "service animal", expanding the breeds of animals used for service beyond the traditional service dog, and did not require an animal to be specifically trained. Operationally, this created inconsistencies in the University's capacity to appropriately and accurately differentiate between service animals and other animals on campus. Furthermore, it created an inherent risk for community members who may be required to disclose personal health information, or subject to repeated questioning by University representatives on the validity of their service animal.

In July 2019, the University established Service Animal Verification Guidelines to support Policy 58 – Accessibility's commitment to ensure equitable access to individuals who utilize service animals for reasons related to their disability (uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policiesprocedures-guidelines/service-animal-verification). Individuals now go through a central verification process through AccessAbility Services (for students) or Occupational Health (for employees). Once verified, individuals are able to obtain a Service Animal Verification Card that identifies their service animal, without needing to disclose personal health information.

#### **B3.** Community engagement strategy

Status:somewhat completeProgress:on track

In May 2019, Accessibility (for persons with disabilities) was included as a topic area within the University's *Contact Waterloo* webpage, alongside *Alumni Inquiries, Future Students, Community Partnerships* and the like, positioning accessibility feedback at the most prominent and direct channel for community connections.

Since establishment of the Accessibility Committee in September 2017, members recognized the importance of including persons with disabilities in the development and design of University services. Various departments at the University have established disability advisory groups to inform their practices, such as the student advisory group for AccessAbility services. These groups were leveraged for consultation and advice when developing the MYAP. Over the next year, the University will explore avenues to gain feedback from the employee community, balancing the need for privacy and confidentiality of persons with disabilities within the work environment.



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## Section C Information and Communication

- The MYAP included the following objectives under the Information and Communication theme:
- 1. Identify the most commonly required communication formats and develop a strategy to meet those needs.
  - 2. Develop a sustainable strategy to ensure consistency across all publicly facing websites including open and online learning platforms.

#### C1. Alternate communication formats



Status:somewhat completeProgress:on track

Communication to the Waterloo community is an ongoing venture. With development of new technologies, the avenues to reach our campus community is forever changing. As Waterloo continues to explore new channels and forums for communication with our community, accessibility is at the forefront of each initiative and strategy.

In May 2019, the Library employed a chat bubble feature on various Library webpages, including the home page where visitors can virtually communicate with the Library for their inquiries. The chat bubble also gives users the option to search Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) or send questions by email for answers and resources without the need to physically visit the Library. This allowed individuals to better plan for their time and interactions with the Library while on site. Accessibility features within the system include FAQ knowledgebase with alt tags used for images and tables, making it more screen-reader friendly ensuring a smooth chat experience with the use of assistive devices. Accessible Rich Internet Application (ARIA) information has also been updated in several key places to increase accessibility of dynamic content and user-interface components on webpages.

Just in time for Fall term 2019, the Student Service Centre also launched a campus Chatbot, allowing students to virtually access answers to commonly asked questions such as applying, financial aid, OSAP, transcripts and other official documents, their student record, and their financial account. In developing this customized system, the team took great strides to consider accessibility including: font size, text to speech capabilities, and webpage mobility. The Bot will continue to expand throughout Winter 2020 to include a comprehensive listing of questions and answers across all campus services.

#### C2. Website accessibility



Status:startedProgress:on track

Waterloo continues to utilize the Web Content Management System (WCMS) as the recommended centralized platform for publicly facing websites. The Information Systems and Technology team has migrated 14 websites into the WCMS over the past year. An additional eight websites have been deleted as they were either no longer needed or replaced with a legislatively compliant alternative. As of December 2019, there were 971 sites within the WCMS. In March 2019, a survey was sent out to the campus community inquiring about preferred features and remaining barriers to using the WCMS, as part of the planning phases to modify the system. The project will run until November 2021, and accessibility features will be considered throughout the project implementation.

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Vladimir N. Bashkin Moscow State University, Russia

## OUR STORY

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#### Food Services' Mobile Ordering App

Food Services' operations are founded on three pillars: customers, convenience and choice. Along with the opening of the new dining area in the Student Life Centre (SLC) Fall Term 2018, Food Services' embarked on a 24 month journey of developing a mobile ordering system. The goal of this system was to offer customers an innovative and quick way to beat the long lines that can form at popular units, while still offering the choices they are used to. In the short term, the App also looked to minimize the size of queuing lines within the tight space

created by the ongoing construction of the SLC expansion, while still making everyone feel welcome and dine at these locations. From the inception of this project in May 2018, Food Services has taken persons of all abilities into consideration - from the heights of counters to the way menu boards are designed. With the busy SLC and ongoing construction limiting the walking space and dining spaces, the project team knew the service counter would need to be situated in a less congested area and easily identifiable. One large pillar was used as signage dedicated to alerting customers on the location of the pick-up counter. The App itself was also configured with accessibility in mind - when a mobile device is adjusted to its accessibility settings, the app will adjust accordingly, as well as being compatible with external accessibility application overlays. The Universal Design approach was achievable only through the commitment of all stakeholders understanding the value of building something inclusively from the beginning. From going through the Request For Proposal process to launching the app, Information Systems and Technology, Finance, University Records, WatCard and Legal and Immigration Services departments worked through the project with an accessibility lens, understanding that it would cost additional time and resources if accessibility were added in afterwards.

The Mobile Ordering App launched in September 2019 servicing the Brubakers establishment in the SLC, which includes Pizza Pizza, Sharwarma Hub, Pita Pit, Quesada and Subway. Since its debut in Fall Term 2019, they have seen the numbers grow to over 100 orders per day. They are looking forward to the completion of the SLC expansion so the remaining two units can be included in the App's menus, Teriyaki Experience and Chef & the Farmer Smokehouse Grill. There is also a future expansion to other large Food Services outlets in other parts of campus.



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## Section D **Design of Public Spaces**

In order for all individuals to move through and use the campus environment easier, the MYAP outlined the following objectives:

- 1. Identify the most commonly required communication formats and develop a strategy to meet those needs.
- 2. Develop a sustainable strategy to ensure consistency across all publicly facing websites including open and online learning platforms.

#### **D1.** Design Strategy



Status:not startedProgress:on track

While a comprehensive design strategy is not planned to start until the latter phases of this MYAP (2021-2022), accessibility is taken into consideration with all design projects that are currently underway. For example, the Campus Wayfinding Project considered accessibility from the initial phases (**uwaterloo.ca/wayfinding**). While it was not possible to make all the identified pathways fully accessible with the current topography and landscape, the project team identified the barriers early on. This allowed the University to plan for alternate solutions, which included applying for funding through the Federal Government's Enabling Accessibility Fund. As a successful recipient of the fund, the University was able to upgrade our Douglas Wright Engineering building and create an accessible, interior path, traveling parallel to the exterior path outlined within the Campus Wayfinding project. Upon installation of the pathway identifiers and markers, it will also include signage of alternate, accessible routes for individuals traversing through our campus.

Another project is the development of our Student Service Centre, which opened its doors in January 2019. Designed to provide a "one-stop" service for all student administrative needs, the project team took great strides in reviewing the design of the space to ensure it can service students of all abilities. Areas where there were known physical/structural barriers, the project team was then able to build and develop business processes to ensure service delivery remained consistent and equitable.

#### D2. Cataloguing accessible elements

Status:startedProgress:behind schedule

Waterloo is implementing a facilities management system which will have capacity to itemize and track all of Waterloo's assets. At present, accessible exterior entrances have been identified and tagged within the system. Other accessible elements have been defined and a review of existing spaces and cataloguing these areas will be completed as resources allow. No dedicated resource has been identified for this specific task at present.

#### D3. Facilities Management protocol



Status:startedProgress:at risk

Upon cataloguing the accessible elements noted in D2, the University will review its current facilities management processes and identify gaps, if any, between the noted elements and its facilities management procedures. Additional processes to address those gaps will be developed.

Operationally, the University finds opportunities to maintain accessibility of our campus on an ongoing basis. For example, the University adjusted our grounds maintenance program, including snow removal, to reflect the Campus Wayfinding Project's priority pathway strategy (uwaterloo.ca/plant-operations/winter-weather-information). Priority of clearing pathways follows Campus Wayfinding Project's defined primary, secondary and tertiary paths.







#### Section E **Employment**

Waterloo will develop a centralized and standardized process for managing accommodation requests for persons with disabilities (active or prospective employees, students, and cross-over populations). The priorities for this centralized body are to uphold the privacy and confidentiality of individuals in need of accommodation (to prevent real or perceived bias against an individual based on their disability) as well as to ensure that funding is provided for accommodation solutions regardless of an individual's faculty/department affiliation.

#### E1. Centralize accommodation process



Status: somewhat complete Progress: on track

Attempts to establish a central accommodation process began in 2016. In Waterloo's endeavor to meet the requirements of the employment standard within the AODA, an opportunity to expand this need to all marginalized groups within the university was identified. As such, Waterloo will look to first establish an accommodation policy for employees (as per section A1), setting the rules and parameters around accommodations, before looking at how to operationally centralize such accommodation requests. As such, this activity has been placed on hold.

Currently, the University's Occupational Health department assesses, reviews and monitors employment accommodation requests on the basis of disability for staff and CUPE members, while Faculty members go through Faculty Association for University of Waterloo due to their unique nature of employment. Updated accommodations guidelines will be drafted in reflection of the upcoming Employment Accommodation Policy. Upon finalization, the guidelines will serve to articulate and inform all employees on one centralized accommodations process. Planning for this work will coincide with the iterative process of the Accommodation Policy development.

#### E2. Employment accommodation funding

Status: **Progress:** 

not started on track

In February 2019, the University received a grant through the Government of Canada's Enabling Accessibility Fund to create an Assistive Technology (AT) Loan Library for employees. Leveraging the existing loan library program in AccessAbility Services for students with disabilities in their academic accommodations, the University was able to expand this library to offer various software, hardware, equipment and aids for employees on a temporary basis. This library includes provision of screen reader software for visual impairments, personal amplification devices for



hearing impairments, Smartpens for cognitive impairments, and speech-to-text software for physical impairments, among other devices. Departments are also able to loan this equipment when hosting events to assist in offering accessible customer service.

Waterloo recognizes the importance of establishing a consistent funding strategy for accommodation solutions to alleviate perceived burdens on individual faculties and departments. However, it is important that the upcoming Policy 57 – Employment Accommodations be established first (per section A1), to provide direction on how funding for accommodations solutions will be achieved. As such, planning for accommodation funding has been placed on hold. In the meantime, departments continue to manage the financial requirements for implementing disability accommodation solutions beyond what is offered in the AT loan library.





Waterloo will develop standard Student Academic Accommodation Procedures. From a teaching perspective, Waterloo will strive to incorporate universal design principles within teaching spaces and related protocols.

Within the experiential education space (e.g. co-op program), Waterloo will ensure the agreements with placement organizations address accessibility and that those organizations provide equitable opportunities for students with disabilities. To complement those agreements, students will have access to tools and resources that will empower them in their accessibility planning. Additionally, Waterloo plans to review the co-op interview process to ensure students with disabilities are supported to equitably compete for opportunities within their academic program, evaluated fairly.

#### F1. Student Academic Accommodation Guidelines

Status:completedProgress:completed

The University recently accepted new Student Academic Accommodation Guidelines which provide procedural guidance for students, faculty and staff on managing disability-based academic accommodations for students. The Guidelines articulate procedures for establishing accommodation plans, resolving accommodation disputes, and managing retroactive accommodations. The guidelines also describe the University's documentation requirements and provide tips on how to refer students to accommodation supports. The Guidelines are posted on the Secretariat website (uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/student-academic-accommodation-guidelines) for everyone to reference.

#### F2. Universal Design in Teaching spaces

Status:not startedProgress:behind schedule

As part of the University's commitment to review use of campus space and utilization of resources, review committees are looking into the development of a "classroom standard", outlining the requirements within a teaching space to ensure students experience a standard level of learning environment throughout their academic programming. Drafting such standards will include accessibility considerations for persons with disabilities. Over the next year, discussion on the best approach in establishing this standard will take place as resources allow.

#### F3. Accessible experiential education



Status: completed Progress: completed

Beginning in 2018, Waterloo International undertook an extensive review of agreement templates used to support student mobility internationally. This review process included extensive consultation with academic stakeholder units including Legal and Immigration Services. For example, template language speaks directly to prohibiting discrimination related to "race, colour, age, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, creed, disability or any other factor prohibited by the applicable laws of Canada or Ontario". All agreements are reviewed by Legal and Immigration Services as well as other relevant internal stakeholders prior to signing. It is the intention that this language will be included in all new and renewed agreements going forward.

From 2018-2019, the Student Success Office (SSO) revised their website, their mandatory go abroad information session, and their exchange application form to include "Wellness Planning" sections. The aim of these sections are to educate and inform students interested in mobility programs supported by the SSO about issues related to accessibility planning. (uwaterloo.ca/student-success/students/studyabroad-and-exchanges/go-abroad). Further, each webpage (uwaterloo-horizons.symplicity. com/index.php?mode=list) which advertises individual mobility opportunities includes links to partner schools' accessibility or wellness supports so that students may educate and inform themselves on potential opportunities. AccessAbility Services Student Advisory Committee was consulted upon to gain perspectives from students with disabilities about the challenges and barriers related to exchanges, and to explore recommendations on enhancing the accessibility of such processes.

## **OUR STORY**

#### F4. Co-op program

Status:completedProgress:completed

In 2017-2018, Co-operative Education and AccessAbility Services, with support from the Government of Ontario, engaged in a project to create toolkits and online resources for co-op students, staff and employers. The following deliverables were produced from the project:

- The Co-operative Education Self-Study Guide

   (uwaterloo.ca/centre-advancement-co-operative-education/resources/accessibility-resources) –
   a comprehensive resource designed to support
   post-secondary institutions in facilitating a process
   of reflection and collaboration that will strengthen
   strategic planning efforts to enhance accessibility in
   a way that is visible and tangible for students.
- Ready for Co-op? (uwaterloo.ca/co-operative-education/ ready-co-op) – A web-based self-assessment tool directing students, including students with disabilities, to targeted supports that address gaps in foundational competencies.
- 3. Accessibility and hiring co-op students (uwaterloo.ca/hire/accessibility) A web-based resource designed to support current and prospective employers in providing an accessible co-op experience for students with disabilities.
- 4. A new appointment type related to the co-operative employment process that is offered by AccessAbility Services.

From Fall 2018 to Spring 2019, Specialisterne Canada (ca.specialisterne.com) engaged with the Waterloo's Co-operative Education and the Centre for Career Action in a partnership known as the *Postsecondary Employment Bridging Program* for neurodiverse students in Ontario. This program offered a new avenue through which students with autism, or who identify with other neurodiversities, could gain access to important employment experiences while enrolled in postsecondary studies.

To help build a culture of inclusivity across the Co-operative and Experiential Education department, an on-campus accessibility working group across Co-operative Education and the Centre for Career Action with key membership and a dedicated project lead was established in Fall 2019. The mandate of the working group (among other priorities) is to respond to student accommodation cases, maintain relationships and ensure alignment across campus, develop standards, processes and resources to facilitate the accessibility and inclusivity of Co-op.

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Section G

#### **Training and Tools** for **Employees** (including instructors)



Waterloo plans to update accessibility training for employees to cover all aspects of the AODA and newly

created Waterloo policies and procedures related to accessibility. For Procurement in particular, a resource guide will support the consideration of accessibility features and design when contracting with third parties to provide goods, services, and facilities on behalf of Waterloo. Tools and resources to increase awareness of accessibility, universal design for learning principles, and development of accessible information and educational materials (including tools and resources to increase capacity for digital accessibility within the online learning environment) will be developed by Waterloo for instructors of students.

#### G1. Updated accessibility training



Status: completed Progress: completed

Waterloo released its new accessibility training on December 3, 2019, coinciding with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The new e-learning training course places a heavy focus on campus resources available to support each employee and university representative to become an accessibility champion. Completing this mandatory training received strong support from senior leadership, resulting in over 1,800 employees completing the training by the end of December 2019.

#### **G2.** Resource Guide for Procurement



Progress: behind schedule

In 2019, standard Request for Proposal language was modified to reflect the most updated requirements within the AODA.

Procurement and Contract Services also created a new section in their website titled "Accessibility" (uwaterloo.ca/procurement/accessibility), drawing attention to the importance of considering persons with disabilities when looking at purchasing goods and/or services. A resource checklist for procuring IT hardware and software has been posted on the Procurement and Contract Services website. Expansion of this toolkit will occur over the next several months, including checklists for procuring accessible goods, facilities, contracting services, etc. Progress on checklists is dependent on resource availability.

#### G3. Accessible Information and Educational material



Status:completedProgress:completed

Waterloo's Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) is a highly regarded department that promotes an institutional culture that values effective teaching and meaningful learning. Instructors across all ranks have turned to CTE to receive guidance and support in ensuring quality in delivery of information. CTE has taken great strides to integrate accessibility in all of their resources and workshop materials. In Spring 2019, CTE created an online resource on accessibility in teaching. Included are relevant sites from Ontario, Waterloo, and several higher education institutions, along with new checklists to help instructors to create accessible Word documents, PowerPoint presentations, and face-to-face presentations (uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/ resources/accessibility-teaching-0). This publicly available and accessible resource demonstrates the strides Waterloo is taking to support the creation and development of accessible educational and teaching materials.



## NEXT STEPS

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Waterloo has undertaken many initiatives this past year, covering broad areas to ensure we are addressing accessibility needs in many aspects. Over the next year, we will continue to work hard towards the completion of the initiatives we started, and look for opportunities to initiate other projects that will raise the accessibility profile of the University.



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