

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

2020 Progress Report

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

PUBLICATION DATE

March 2021



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO



Table of Contents

Accessibility Committee	1
Message from the Associate Provost	2
About this Report	3
Summary of Progress	4
Policies and Procedures	5
Customer Service	6
Information and Communication	8
Design of Public Spaces	12
Employment	14
Education	15
Training and Tools for Employees (including instructors)	16
Next Steps	20

Accessibility Committee

Prepared by the Associate Provost, Human Resources' Advisory Committee on Accessibility (membership as of December 2020):

Nada Abouelnaga

VP Student Life, Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association

Joyce Barlow

Workplace Accessibility Specialist, Human Resources (secretary)

Victoria Chu

Associate University Librarian, Learning, Research and User Services, Library

Jennifer Coghlin

Associate Registrar, Enrolment Services & Academic Policy, Registrar

Katie Damphouse

Representing Faculty Association of the University of Waterloo

Annette Denny

Representing University of Waterloo Staff Association

Jennifer Gillies

Associate Director, AccessAbility Services

Gina Hickman

Director of Equity, Human Rights, Equity, and Inclusion

Joe Kwan

Manager, Web Development , Information Systems and Technology

Kathy MacDonald

Head, Information Services and Resources, Library

Lee Hornberger

Director, Total Compensation, Human Resources (chair)

Rob Hunsperger

Director, Design and Construction Services, Plant Operations

Zara Rafferty

Representing Faculty Association of the University of Waterloo

Angela Rooke

Manager, Graduate and Postdoctoral Experience, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs

Fatima Suleiman

Representing Graduate Student Association

Doug Turnbull

Representing CUPE Local 793

For any questions about this report, please contact Joyce Barlow, Workplace Accessibility Specialist at joyce.barlow@uwaterloo.ca or 519-888-4567, ext. 40520.

MESSAGE

from the Associate Provost, Human Resources

2020 has been an unprecedented year for the University. As our campus community grapples with changes in our society amidst a global pandemic, ongoing climate change, and demand for social justice, our plans to meet the objectives laid out in our Multi-year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) 2018-2022 remain unchanged. We continue to push forward in all areas of our MYAP, making progress in several of the initiatives set forth.

Our campus pivoted to an online environment in March 2020, and it remains largely unchanged. As a result, priorities were mainly focused on providing quality education and a supportive virtual work environment. This led to Waterloo providing more support, creating more tools, and developing more strategies to bolster an inclusive environment on digital platforms. Waterloo has always delivered best-in-class virtual learning through our Centre for Extended Learning, and we exceeded our plans

in offering training to instructors on universal instructional design and accessible technology to meet the demands of our virtual teaching and learning environment. Subsequently, while we progressed with our accessibility initiatives for our physical campuses, the momentum did not gain the same amount of traction we had planned back in 2018.

This year has taught us to be flexible, responsive, and resilient to the ever-changing environment we live in. Waterloo continues to be committed to inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities, and the foundational initiatives we laid out in our MYAP will remain relevant regardless of the current climate. We will continue to use our innovative spirit and be flexible in our approach to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,

MARILYN THOMPSON

ASSOCIATE PROVOST, HUMAN RESOURCES
UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO



ABOUT THIS REPORT



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 2020. The report also includes an assessment of the status of each objective, to give the community a snapshot of Waterloo’s progress. 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 much of our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. Our main campus is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. Our active work toward reconciliation takes place across our campuses through research, learning, teaching, and community building, and is centralized within our *Indigenous Initiatives Office*.

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

Waterloo uses the requirements outlined within the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (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. 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

MYAP:

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

A1. Policy 57 – Employment Accommodations



Status: somewhat complete

Progress: on track

Since starting their work in February 2019, the Policy Drafting Committee on Policy 57 – Employment Accommodations have worked tirelessly on developing a policy draft on the University’s approach in accommodating employees within the 17 different protected grounds within the Ontario Human Rights Code, including persons with disabilities. Following some remaining editorial revisions to the draft, such as style, consistency, grammar, etc., the committee will be looking to undergo broader stakeholder consultation, as per standard University processes outlined in Policy 1 – Initiation and Review of University Policies. This is currently scheduled to start in Spring Term 2021.



Summary of Progress

CONTINUED



Section B

Customer Service

MYAP: Waterloo will develop a strategy for the following customer service areas:

1. Improving communications for planned service disruptions (such as IT, roads, elevators, etc.)
2. Develop a community engagement strategy that involves active and ongoing consultation with persons experiencing disabilities.

B1. Communications for service disruptions



Status: somewhat complete

Progress: on track

Plant Operations is working to improve how service interruption notifications are issued to the campus. The new system will allow users to self-register and manage their preferences, with the ability to subscribe to a variety of emailed service interruption notifications. Individuals can self-select the types of service interruptions they wish to be notified about, such as those related to planned power outages, elevator maintenance, water shut-offs, etc. Users will be able to select notifications based on impacted services and/or locations.

Improvements are also planned to standardize the format and content of notifications. Messages will generally include when the disruption will occur, the duration, and the reason for the disruption. It is hoped that the system will also assist in automatically incorporating language related to potential impact on accessibility, such that occupants of the buildings are prompted to make alternate arrangements as necessary (i.e. a general “power shutdown in the east wing” could also automatically include “accessible power door operators may not be functioning during this time. Please consider making alternate arrangements”). Roll out of the system is planned for early 2021.





B2. Community engagement strategy



Status: mostly complete

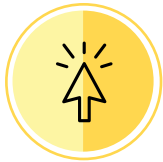
Progress: behind schedule

Over the past year, the Accessibility Committee has been working on its Terms of Reference. It was important to the committee to ensure contributions from persons with lived experience interacting with the University in multiple capacities (students, employees, community, clients/patients, etc.) were included. The Terms of Reference clearly outlines the University's commitment to inform the Advisory Panel of accessibility initiatives undertaken by the University, and to seek input on its impact to persons with disabilities throughout the development process.

Concerted effort was put into selecting the best forum for communication and hosting of the Advisory panel, respecting the complexities of representation while maintaining confidentiality with our members. The Committee has agreed to move forward with a virtual registration format, whereby all information and communication will be channeled through the Secretary of the Accessibility Committee. Over the next few months, a virtual platform that allows all Waterloo community members to participate and contribute will be established. It is anticipated that registration will be posted on the Accessibility at Waterloo website by March 2021.

Summary of Progress

CONTINUED



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 complete

Progress: on track

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the way the University communicates with our community has drastically changed. As with most of the world, most of our communication channels pivoted to a digital format, whether that be providing information, receiving feedback or hosting sessions.

Thankfully, with the University's launch of Microsoft Office 365 to all University owned computers, current staff, faculty, and students could access a platform that provides various built-in accessibility features to ensure our digital platform can service all individuals. Faculty, students, and staff were also able to download this software suite for up to 5 personal devices, free of charge. This includes auto-captioning of speech in the virtual meeting platform TEAMS, subtitle functionality in presentation mode for PowerPoint, and alternate text suggestions for use of images. Furthermore, internal training was made available to all employees on use of Office 365 features to ensure content creators understood the tools that were available to them in creating accessible information.

Over the next year, the University will be developing a central process in sourcing third-party provider services to deliver alternate communication formats that we may not be able to complete in-house (see objective G1 – Resource Guide for Procurement). A centralized process will ensure consistent quality of communication across the University and delivery of service in a timely manner.



C2. Website accessibility



Status: somewhat complete

Progress: on track

The Information Systems and Technology (IST) team remains on track in updating Waterloo's web content management system, WCMS 3, with a planned project completion date of November 2022. This new system is designed to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA standard. Upgrades are anticipated to address some historically difficult areas such as math equations, timeline presentation, and more. It is anticipated that with the launch of WCMS 3, the remaining sites hosted outside of the WCMS will be in a better position to migrate over, which will ensure all our publicly-facing websites meet WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards. Following successful migration, an awareness campaign specifically related to accessible web content will be launched in 2022 for all digital content creators. This campaign will include resources such as tip sheets, in-house training, and technical support available through the WCMS Training and Support team.



Summary of Progress

CONTINUED

OUR STORY



Design For All – Engineering Outreach

Our Faculty of Engineering's Outreach department, Waterloo Engineering Outreach (WEO), has a goal to empower youth to be the change our world will need in the future by creating opportunities for them to increase confidence in their science, engineering and technology abilities. We believe in creating a sense of responsibility, showing youth how to be mindful and considerate in the world they live in. This includes understanding the different challenges individuals face in our society – such as persons with disabilities.

Design For All is a virtual six-week program that aims to teach participants about the principles and applications of universal design. Available for students from Grades 9-12, participants apply universal design principles to design a device for people with different exceptionalities and disabilities using common materials.

Program participants were provided with the opportunity to learn valuable skills like design programming and they were challenged to apply these skills to design and create prototypes using only kit materials. The final projects were a success and program participants came up with amazing ideas.

Another goal for this program was to determine how our program could impact not only our future generation of Engineers and STEM professionals, but society itself. Participants rose to this challenge by eagerly volunteering their time to design assistive technology prototypes for the community for non-profit organizations such as Makers Making Change.

“Creating programs virtually that are engaging and impactful has really allowed us to push boundaries [...] it was wonderful to see how participants took time outside of the program to set up meetings, work on schematics, coding and even present their functional ideas cohesively as a group.”

– Nikita Cruz, Program Delivery Team Lead

Waterloo's commitment to accessibility extend beyond the work we do within our campus borders. We believe that educating our youth on the importance of inclusion and equity for persons with disabilities is foundational in our contributions to creating an accessible community for everyone.

Summary of Progress

CONTINUED



Section D

Design of Public Spaces

MYAP:

1. Develop a consistent design strategy to address those limitations or building elements where it may be feasible for Waterloo to exceed legislative requirements.
2. Catalogue existing physical space elements on Waterloo campus, identifying spaces with accessibility considerations.
3. Support the space and asset management strategy to embed accessible elements and integrate it with Waterloo's standard facilities management protocol.

D1. Design Strategy



Status: started
Progress: on track

In January 2020, the Government of Ontario partnered with the Rick Hansen Foundation to offer complimentary accessibility ratings to 250 organizations in 15 different municipalities. Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) is “a national rating system that measures and certifies the level of meaningful access of buildings and sites”. Waterloo’s School of Pharmacy, residing in Kitchener, Ontario, was a successful applicant to receive an accessibility rating, and started the process in late November. On December 17, 2020, the Pharmacy site achieved a certification level of RHF Accessibility Certified with a score of 71 per cent. The rating also includes a summary of the key areas of success and areas of improvement that the School of Pharmacy can focus on as they work to increase the accessibility of their site. This is Waterloo’s first step in identifying an accessibility design program that aligns with the purpose and ideals of Waterloo as a post-secondary institution. If proven successful, the University will consider opportunities to embed the RHFAC rating system into our accessible design strategy for physical spaces.

D2/D3. Cataloguing accessible elements, Facilities Management protocol



Status: started

Progress: at risk

The University closed its doors to physical campus buildings in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited access to university buildings continue into April 2021. COVID-19 has caused the University to take pause and review many of its facilities management processes to ensure alignment with public health guidelines. The impact of changes to the disability community has been considered every step of the way. As the University continues to work with public health officials to determine the best path forward in re-opening our campus spaces, ongoing review and consultation of accessibility requirements at each phase will be completed. Other facilities management processes as it relates to accessibility will be reviewed as resources are made available.



Summary of Progress

CONTINUED



Section E

Employment



MYAP: Waterloo will:

1. Develop a centralized and standardized process for managing accommodation requests for persons with disabilities (active or prospective employees, students, and cross-over populations).
2. 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: at risk

As noted in the previous progress report, Waterloo had determined to establish an accommodation policy for employees (as per section A1) first, before looking at how to operationally centralize such accommodation requests. As such, this activity has been placed on hold. With the anticipated consultation phase of the Accommodation Policy beginning in Spring 2021, we will begin process planning efforts shortly thereafter.

E2. Employment accommodation funding



Status: not started

Progress: at risk

As outlined in E1, employment accommodation funding will serve as part of the central accommodation process, thereby requiring the upcoming Policy 57 – Employment Accommodations be established first to provide direction on how funding for accommodations solutions will be achieved. At present, departments continue to manage the financial requirements for implementing disability accommodation solutions.





Section F

Education

MYAP:

1. Waterloo will strive to incorporate universal design principles within teaching spaces and related protocols.

F1. Universal Design in Teaching spaces



Status: started
Progress: behind schedule

Late 2019, the Space Planning office engaged with a third-party provider to develop 3D models of campus spaces, cataloguing and marking all space elements. The intent is to provide a real-life depiction of our campus space to assist with planning of our campus activities, including data collection of assets and tools within each classroom for scheduling, identifying facility deficiencies, and available technology, etc. This information will help formulate what a classroom design standard should look like, meeting the various needs of instructional space. Accessibility considerations continue to be an integrated part of this process.

However, since March 2020, Waterloo expended significant time and resource to pivot majority of our teaching and learning activities online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This required many stakeholders involved to shift focus away from physical teaching spaces to online teaching spaces for much of the year. Waterloo will continue to build on this infrastructure when the timing is right.



Summary of Progress

CONTINUED



Section G

Training and Tools for Employees (including instructors)



MYAP:

1. 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.
2. 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. Resource Guide for Procurement



Status: completed
Progress: completed

The Council for Ontario Universities has released an Accessible Procurement Guide to support universities in their mandate for accessible procurement under the AODA. Waterloo has leveraged this guide within our internal practices. This guide is referenced in our Procurement and Contract Services website and recommends all University representatives to consider its contents as part of the overall acquisition of goods and services.

With increasing amounts of information and communication being delivered digitally, Waterloo recognized the need and value to centralize efforts in sourcing external accessibility services that can support our work. A working group comprising departments that use virtual platforms for communication was formed to determine common requirements. Through this collaboration, Procurement and Contract Services is able to negotiate service agreements with single source providers to address departmental needs. This centralization removes the need for each department to research and source service providers on their own, while ensuring providers meet the legislative and principle requirements the University has for our partners. It also creates collective purchasing efforts to negotiate the most reasonable pricing for service, reducing the financial strain for departments. Procurement and Contract Services have successfully put in place service agreements for virtual conference platforms and live captioning services. Over the next year, we will look to other services such as document remediation and American Sign Language interpretation.

OUR STORY

G2. Digital Education



Status: completed

Progress: completed

In March 2020, Waterloo, like all other Ontario universities, pivoted to offering all its courses remotely. Operating in a virtual environment within the middle of a school term required us to address the needs of digital accessibility at a fast pace. Communication barriers typically experienced by persons with disabilities were quickly brought to the forefront, as individuals began to struggle with accessing technology, requirements for flexibility to balance competing priorities, and the need to consume information in various formats to manage digital fatigue. The Centre for Teaching Excellence, Centre for Extended Learning, Instructional Technologies and Media Services and the Library came together in March 2020 to form the Keep Learning (KL) team. The team's support efforts were focused on instructors, who were not only required to teach remotely with little notice or preparation, but also provide the quality learning experience expected at Waterloo. The Keep Learning website was quickly established with the collective expertise of these units. Other Academic Support Units such as AccessAbility Services, Office of Academic Integrity, and Student Success Office, to name a few, provided valuable contributions to the site and various initiatives to further support instructors in designing and teaching courses online.



OUR STORY

CONTINUED



In the Spring 2020 term, Waterloo offered 1,372 courses. While some of these courses were already fully online (226), the majority (1146) were rapidly developed to meet the need during the pandemic. In the Fall 2020 term, 2231 courses were offered, with only 12 per cent of them using pre-existing CEL courses.

The KL team brought together resources related to *Accessibility and Universal Design* under one umbrella, and they continue to maintain and update the site regularly. As instructors turned to technology for the creation of their remote courses, resources such as *Captioning Capabilities of University Supported Platforms* and *Accessibility Checklist for Alternative Assessments* were developed. The Centre for Teaching Excellence's *Inclusive Instructional Practice Series of Teaching Tips* was leveraged. These tips include guidance and easy to follow checklists for creating content in accessible formats and for designing broadly inclusive courses and course materials.

Throughout the spring and fall terms, the KL team offered (and continues to offer) virtual events for faculty. These webinars have been recorded and transcriptions added for easy, accessible, and open access. A remoteteaching@uwaterloo.ca support queue was established early in the pandemic to complement the one-on-one support currently in place. The team has responded to many requests to support universal design/ accessibility and questions were led directly to resources that included topics such as closed captioning and transcribed video.

Furthermore, AccessAbility Services (AAS) created an online learning strategy and assistive technology learning modules, videos, pre-recorded workshops, and worksheets. All of these online tools and resources were instrumental in enabling AAS, the department responsible for facilitating student academic accommodations, to seamlessly offer remote learning strategy and assistive technology support to students during the pandemic.



**SPRING
2020:**

**1,146 OF
1,372** COURSES OFFERED
were developed to
an online platform
during the pandemic

FALL 2020:

2,231 modified
200 COURSES OFFERED
FACE-TO-FACE
ONLINE courses

CTE'S INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE SERIES OF TEACHING

**CATEGORY
LANDING
PAGE HAD** **2,639**
page views

4,000
CONSULTATIONS CONDUCTED

ACCESSABILITY SERVICES FACILITATED

13,158
academic accommodations

4,009 COURSES
required academic
accommodations





NEXT STEPS



2020 has demanded a specific focus for Waterloo in campus planning. Each step of our planning and work has been guided by public health guidelines and considerations for our whole campus community, regardless of abilities. As we look to gradually return to campus in a different era, we recognize this as a prime opportunity to ensure our plans are inclusive of persons with disabilities, taking on a universal design approach.



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO



UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO
200 UNIVERSITY AVE. W., WATERLOO, ON, CANADA N2L 3G1

uwaterloo.ca/accessibility



[twitter.com/@UWaterlooHR](https://twitter.com/UWaterlooHR)