

# Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

2018-2022

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UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

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# Accessibility Committee

Prepared by the Associate Provost, Human Resources'  
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Representing CUPE Local 793

For the most current membership, please visit our Accessibility at Waterloo webpage:  
[uwaterloo.ca/human-resources/accessibility/accessibility-committee](http://uwaterloo.ca/human-resources/accessibility/accessibility-committee)

# MESSAGE

## from the Associate Provost, Human Resources

I am pleased to present the University of Waterloo's ("Waterloo") Multi-year Accessibility Plan, which captures our priorities in the area of accessibility over the next five years.

As Canada's most innovative university, we apply that creative energy towards meeting a host of accessibility challenges. Considering accessibility in everything we do, before action is taken, is the most effective and efficient way of addressing barriers that might exist rather than retrofitting accessibility considerations in an end state.

Towards the end of 2017, our President approved Policy 58: Accessibility to address these and other issues and to build a foundation for further action. As articulated within the Policy:

Waterloo is committed to achieving accessibility and its requirements established under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Waterloo is committed to fostering an accessible campus environment for persons with disabilities.

This multi-year accessibility plan is intended to support and align with the commitments within Policy 58: Accessibility. The strategies and actions also meet Waterloo's obligation for creating an accessible environment under the AODA.

Waterloo's current strategic plan is in its final year and we are in the process of developing a new plan that will take us through 2020 and beyond. Accessibility, along with all equity and similar value-related and driven initiatives will be embedded in everything we do. As such, I am confident that accessibility will be positioned prominently within our next strategic plan and progress will be tracked at all levels of the organization. To demonstrate Waterloo's commitment, a dedicated Accessibility Plan that outlines specific initiatives for achieving these goals and the detailed accomplishments need to be highlighted on their own and, to that end, Waterloo is committed to maintaining a standalone plan which will guide us in tracking progress on at least an annual basis.

Building upon a commitment to promote equitable opportunities for all individuals, Waterloo's multi-year accessibility plan has been created to enhance, formalize and make public many of our current and proposed practices. The initial and subsequent plans will set directives to support and encourage members of Waterloo's community to think strategically regarding accessibility planning.

## 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.


Sincerely,

MARILYN  
THOMPSON

ASSOCIATE PROVOST, HUMAN RESOURCES  
UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

# ABOUT WATER





home of  
the world's  
largest

**CO-OP EDUCATION  
PROGRAM**

**CANADA'S  
TOP**  
innovation  
university

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University of Waterloo is Canada's top innovation university. With more than 36,000 students we are home to the world's largest co-operative education system of its kind. Our unmatched entrepreneurial culture, combined with an intensive focus on research, powers one of the top innovation hubs in the world.

As of 2017, we have 35,156 full-time equivalent student enrollment, 1,260 faculty members, and an academic support staff of 2,466. The University provides academic accommodations to over 2,300 of our students, and three per cent of our employees (faculty and staff) have self-identified with a variety of disabilities.

Waterloo has a long-standing commitment to the provision of equitable access, as well as the identification and removal of barriers encountered by persons with disabilities in the academic environment. Implementation of programs and services for persons with diverse needs, including persons with disabilities, is supported by Waterloo's mission to advance learning and knowledge through teaching, research, and scholarship, nationally and internationally, in an environment of free expression and inquiry.

The Waterloo teaching environment and learning commons is based on inclusion, integrating technology transfer and technology-mediated learning. Waterloo endeavors to ensure the environment is accessible to all visitors, campus and community members regarding the physical design of classrooms, access to learning facilities and communal spaces, access to information and curriculum in our classrooms, laboratories, and via technology-enabled and fully online learning.

Accessibility efforts within Waterloo are centralized through the Accessibility Committee ([uwaterloo.ca/human-resources/accessibility/accessibility-committee](http://uwaterloo.ca/human-resources/accessibility/accessibility-committee)) with the aim of providing a unified approach in creating a fully inclusive environment for people with disabilities within the campus community.

# RECENT ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AT WATERLOO

Over the past few years, Waterloo has made dedicated efforts to review our established programs, practices, policies and services to promote equitable opportunities for persons with disabilities. While some initiatives were undertaken to include recent updates and changes to the AODA, many campus departments inherently determined the need to address barriers and implement change or modifications to be inclusive and enhance offerings. Some of our more recent initiatives are summarized in the following sections.





## ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

As an initial step in centralizing accessibility efforts within Waterloo, an Accessibility Committee was formed with individuals who influence or experience campus-wide accessibility issues. Reporting to the Associate Provost, Human Resources, the members of this committee act as problem solvers for current and future barrier identification and remedies.

## STUDENT EXPERIENCE

### Student Engagement

AccessAbility Services, Waterloo's centralized office for the management of student academic accommodations, established a Student Advisory Committee that offers input regarding the offices' programs and services. The committee has also been leveraged to provide feedback to the broader University community on matters related to accessibility.

### Assistive Software for Students

Waterloo has procured a site license for Kurzweil software, providing this assistive technology on any computer at Waterloo. This will allow students to access digital material in a format that is most conducive to their needs anywhere on campus – not limited by one particular computer lab or area of campus.

An adaptive technology loan cabinet has also been created through AccessAbility Services, enabling students to trial or borrow technology without the financial burden of purchasing it, allowing for greater access to student accommodations.

### Diversity in Study Spaces for Students

Recognizing the different needs and study preferences of students, our main libraries, Dana Porter and Davis Centre Libraries, have created different zones for silent, quiet and group study.



# Recent Accessibility Accomplishments at Waterloo

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## Academic Accommodations

Waterloo is committed to creating an environment that promotes students' well-being in every way possible. The Graduate Student Medical Leave Award ([uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies/awards/graduate-student-medical-leave-award](http://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies/awards/graduate-student-medical-leave-award)) has been created for eligible research-based graduate students who must go inactive for medical reasons (e.g., physical or mental health) and, as a result, may have their current university funding discontinued. Effective January 1, 2018, eligible students may receive a one-time award valued at a maximum of \$5,000. This new medical leave award will provide support to eligible inactive students as they return to health, allowing them a timely return to their studies and Waterloo's community.

Waterloo also offers a 10 per cent tuition discount for undergraduate students who require a reduced course load as part of their accommodation plan.

In response to recent recommendations made by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, AccessAbility Services developed a new protocol that ensure students with disabilities receive interim accommodations pending formal documentation.

Furthermore, AccessAbility Services launched a new online system which promotes greater independence, autonomy, and streamlined processes for facilitating academic accommodation. This has allowed students to obtain the required accommodations sooner, minimizing disruption to their studies.

## Enhancing Accessibility of Co-operative Education

Co-operative and Experiential Education office and AccessAbility Services collaborated to enhance students with disabilities to meaningfully participate in Waterloo's robust co-operative education program. This new collaboration received support from the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario's EnAbling Change Program grant to further its work.

## Student Access Van

The Student Access Van is a shuttle service offered through AccessAbility Services that is supported through University funding and student auxiliary fees. The service is for students with a temporary or permanent disability requiring transportation support between main campus buildings.



## EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

### Recruitment and Onboarding Practices

Waterloo is an equal opportunity employer in recruitment and retention of employees. In 2016, Waterloo implemented a new talent acquisition system and process, and took this opportunity to ensure communication of Waterloo's commitment and ability to accommodate were included at every stage of the recruitment process. Waterloo extended its commitment beyond the candidate process, and offered accommodation and alternative communication formats during reference checks as well.

Orientation for new staff and faculty incorporates a component on the diverse workplace and the support services available on campus and in the community to address the needs of faculty or staff with suspected or identified disabilities.

The Academic Leadership Program for newly appointed faculty members with administrative duties (including Associate Deans, Chairs, Associate Chairs and directors) has a dedicated portion on AODA requirements, accessibility and inclusion as an employer and educator.

### Professional Development for Employees

Waterloo endeavors to create a climate that is respectful of diversity in its policies, practices and procedures and outreach to the community. Instilling a culture of inclusion and empathy within the Waterloo community is critical to success. To that end, Waterloo offers training and professional development opportunities to all our employees to increase their knowledge on accessibility and inclusion.

In 2011, the Inclusivity Series, a multi-series professional development program including seven half-day workshops, was developed to promote and embed inclusion principles in the campus culture. The introductory half-day workshop entitled Principles of Inclusivity is one of four core development workshops that all staff are encouraged to take during their first year of employment at Waterloo.

Waterloo's internal Information Systems and Technology department regularly offers software accessibility workshops to all employees through their Skills for the Electronic Workplace courses. Standard workshop offerings include: Introduction to Web Accessibility, Accessible Word and PDF Files, Accessible Digital Design, and Creating Accessible Tables.

### Scheduling of Classes

As of Fall 2016, Waterloo instructors (faculty and staff who teach) are asked to select a teaching window within which they will be scheduled to teach. Within this new system, there is a priority level given to accommodate verified disabilities. In practice, this allows faculty and staff and their departments a confidential and standardized management of accommodation requests related to teaching schedules.



## ACCESSIBLE PARKING SPACES

Waterloo's Community is vibrant and engaging, with its members mobilizing between various buildings for gatherings, meetings, and services offerings. While Waterloo strives to provide adequate, accessible parking on campus for students, staff, faculty, and community visitors with permanent disabilities, Waterloo understands the increased need for accessible parking for individuals with limited mobility for temporary periods. A cross-department group worked together to create a new process to meet short-term needs, including assigned permit spaces to accommodate individuals with temporarily reduced mobility, who may not have a Ministry of Transportation issued accessible parking permit.



# ACTIONS PLANNED FOR 2018–2022

The Accessibility Committee has set forth a five-year plan to bring accessibility and inclusion to the forefront of Waterloo's operations, while ensuring ongoing legal compliance with the AODA. Underpinning specific accessibility projects, the ultimate goal is to forge collaborative campus and community initiatives that will include accessibility planning within standard processes. The following initiatives have been identified to ensure ongoing compliance with accessibility legislation and will be accomplished in accordance with the spirit of Policy 58 – Accessibility.

## Policies and Procedures



Waterloo recognizes the changing legislative landscape of the AODA and the anticipated federal legislation on accessibility. We will embed elements pertaining to accessibility into related policies throughout policy reviews. As outlined in Policy 58 – Accessibility, Appendix B, Waterloo is committed to the development of a specific policy concerning accessibility for Waterloo employees.

## Customer Service



The Customer Service Standard within the AODA is aimed at making an organization's operations accessible to persons with disabilities. Over the next five years, Waterloo will develop a strategy for the following customer service areas: improving communications for service disruptions (such as IT, roads, elevators, etc.); developing a consistent verification process for service animals; and developing a community engagement strategy that involves active and ongoing consultation with persons experiencing disabilities.

## Information and Communication



The Information and Communication Standard within the AODA is focused on ensuring persons with disabilities are able to access information. Waterloo will identify commonly required communication formats and develop a strategy to visibly support a culture of inclusivity and reduce the number of individual requests for accommodation. Recognizing Waterloo's current Web Content Management System (WCMS) meets WCAG 2.0 Level AA standard, but that some websites were developed outside of the WCMS or are not fully utilizing its features, Waterloo will develop a sustainable strategy to ensure consistency across all publicly facing websites; including open and online learning platforms.

## Design of Public Spaces



The Design of Public Spaces Standard within the AODA is focused on making it easier for persons with disabilities to move through and use the environment. Understanding that limitations within the Ontario Building Code (OBC) perpetuate a degree of inaccessibility within post-secondary educational institutions, Waterloo plans to develop a consistent design strategy (including self-service kiosks) to address and exceed legislative requirements, where feasible. A catalogue of existing physical space elements on Waterloo campus will be developed with accessibility considerations. Additionally, a supporting space and asset management strategy will include accessible elements within Waterloo's standard facilities management protocol.

## Employment



The purpose of the Employment Standard within the AODA is to integrate accessibility into regular workplace processes and to ensure that employers provide accessibility across all stages of the employment life cycle – including recruitment, onboarding, performance assessment, promotion, and departure. Waterloo will develop a standard process for managing accommodation requests for persons with disabilities (active or prospective employees, students, and cross-over populations). The priorities 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.

## Education



An Education Standard is currently under development within the AODA and Waterloo anticipates that various requirements will come into effect by 2020. In an effort to get ahead of the requirements, several initiatives to provide students with equitable access to programs and the ability to complete their degrees have been identified and will be expanded upon. One example would be the Student Academic Accommodation Procedures. From a teaching perspective, Waterloo will strive to incorporate universal design principles within teaching spaces and look for training and awareness opportunities for all faculty/instructors regarding student accommodation.

## Training and Tools for Employees (including instructors)



Waterloo implemented customer service training for employees to address the AODA requirement in 2005. With the finalization of Policy 58 – Accessibility, Waterloo plans to update the training for employees to cover all aspects of the policy and AODA. In addition to this, training resources will be developed for select departments. 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 will be developed for instructors to increase awareness of accessibility and universal design for learning principles in the classroom. Support for the creation of accessible information and educational materials (including digital accessibility within the online learning environment) will be available.

Within the experiential education space, Waterloo will ensure the agreements with placement organizations address accessibility and provide equitable opportunities for students with disabilities. Students will also 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 and that they are evaluated fairly.



# NEXT STEPS

While individual departments have undertaken specific measures to increase accessibility for persons with disabilities, this plan is the first step in establishing a university-wide framework and vision for an inclusive culture within Waterloo, with disabilities in mind. The visionary goals outlined above will allow individual departments to respond with detailed implementation plans that will be sustainable and actionable for their specific operations.

Waterloo will be transparent in its work and continued progress towards these goals by releasing accessibility progress reports annually to track its activities against each of the objectives highlighted. In addition to standalone accessibility reports, which will address the AODA requirements for reporting, Waterloo will include key metrics into relevant standardized campus reporting to emulate the importance of inclusion and integration of accessibility as a standard university benchmark.



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