McMaster Accessibility Council

2017-2018
Annual Report

McMaster Accessibility
Council (MAC)

McMaster
University

McMaster Accessibility Council

2017-2018 Annual Report

DATE: May 7, 2019

SUBJECT: McMaster Accessibility Council – 2017-2018 Annual Report

TO: Patrick Deane, President
David Farrar, Provost and Vice President (Academic)
Roger Couldrey, Vice-President (Administration)

FROM: Anne Pottier, Chair, McMaster Accessibility Council (MAC)

Please find enclosed, for your review, the ninth annual report from the McMaster Accessibility Council (MAC).

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Message from MAC Chair

During this last year we continued to see increased awareness of accessibility across campus. We can now see that the way we do our work is changing and progress is being made across all areas of the university, but there is still much work to be done. Policies and processes are in place, but there is a need to communicate all of this information. One of the ways we hope to do this is with the introduction of this Accessibility Update, which we plan to provide to campus on a regular basis.

There continues to be more conversation taking place across campus around accessibility in our everyday work, not just in meetings where accessibility is an agenda item. We are regularly incorporating accessibility into discussions related to renovations and new physical design work and how best to ensure that we are taking into consideration the broad range of individuals who may attend classes (either in-person or virtually), meetings or other public events on-campus. We can see that communication is key to advancing this work. We need to share what work is being done across campus, in order to further encourage all areas to work together. We hope that this will help ensure that work isn't being duplicated, and more importantly, will support the sharing of what is working, what isn't working, and why.

 While the McMaster Accessibility Council is working hard to advance accessibility at McMaster, it is important to acknowledge the staff, students and faculty who are also working to move the accessibility agenda forward. Accessibility is a shared endeavour and is not just the work of the Council. We all need to reflect on how we can integrate accessibility into our everyday work and ensure that accessibility becomes part of the way we do things at McMaster.

I am looking forward to a year filled with conversations around carrying out work more accessibly, and to see outcomes which incorporate this work naturally. I encourage everyone to do the same.

Anne Pottier

Message from Associate Vice-President, Equity and Inclusion

As the University Executive responsible for administering the university's Policy on Accessibility, it has been my pleasure to work this past year with senior colleagues on the McMaster Accessibility Council.

The Council is dedicated to advancing equity and inclusion for the diversity of persons with disabilities in our community. To that end, we have been working on developing an Accessibility Plan to support campus-wide efforts to meet and exceed Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act obligations.

The Plan will accompany the release of McMaster's first Strategic Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan. Guided by the Strategic EDI Planning Framework, the Accessibility Plan identifies several strategic actions across four pillars essential to institutional change:

A. Institutional Commitment and Capacity;
B. Academic Content and Context;
C. Interactional Capabilities and Climate; and
D. Compositional Diversity and Community.

McMaster University's Policy on Accessibility will be reviewed and revised as one of the strategic priorities under the Institutional Commitment and Capacity pillar. Stay tuned…we will be sharing the draft Accessibility Plan for community consultation in the spring of 2019.

I look forward to launching the Plan and to working with colleagues and community members to realize our vision of creating and maintaining barrier-free environments, promoting universally accessible programs and practices, and fostering a culture of awareness, respect and inclusion at McMaster.

Dr. Arig al Shaibah

Accessibility Accomplishments 2017-2018

Emerging McMaster Accessibility Plan

- MAC has been working with the AVP Equity & Inclusion on finalizing an Accessibility Plan, which will accompany the release of McMaster's first Strategic Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan. Guided by the Strategic EDI Planning Framework, the Accessibility Plan will identify several strategic actions across four pillars essential to institutional change.
- McMaster Policy on Accessibility will be reviewed and revised as one of the strategic priorities.
- The Accessibility Action Plan will be shared for community consultation in the spring of 2019.

Environments and Spaces

- An Accessible Furniture Protocol was developed to ensure accessible furniture is availbale when and where required in classrooms and exam rooms, for both students and instructors, as part of the accommodation process. This was a joint protocol between SAS, Registrar's Scheduling Office, and Facility Services.

- Campus Accessibility Action Plan – 2017/18 Expenditures
  - New ramp to access the Physical Activity Centre of Excellence (PACE)
  - UH 108 washroom upgrades (near new Equity & Inclusion Office)
  - Hedden Hall – replacement of fire notification system to include bells and strobes
  - Installed 16 barrier free drinking fountains on campus

- Creation of a new **C**ampus **A**ccessible **T**ech **S**pace (CATS) in Mills Library
  - Two private study booths with automated height adjustable tables which have built-in digital memory controllers
  - Additional four automated height adjustable work stations
  - Collaborative study table
  - Low sensory study area, complete with sound-dampening Privy Booths and bean bag chairs
  - Variety of technology available for loan or use in this space
    - PC and MAC laptop loaded with adaptive software
    - Echo Pen with notebook
    - DAISY players
    - Flatbed scanners
    - Braille printer
    - Tactile embosser
    - CCTV text enlarger
    - Large print keybaod

- ▪ Noise-cancelling headset with boom mic
- ▪ High quality standing microphone for desk use
- ▪ Various magnification devices

The Equity and Inclusion Office staff, the McMaster Accessibility Council Chair and Facilities Services have worked together to create an accessibility tracking protocol that allows McMaster community members to submit tickets for accessibility issues to Facilities Services using a newly created "Accessibility" category. These tickets are both prioritized to receive immediate attention and are further able to be tracked through Facilities Service's ticketing system.

EIO staff are also tracking reported accessibility issues, including physical accessibility concerns to report back to MAC and Facilities Services in order to compare with tracked Facilities numbers.

Digital Accessibility

Web Accessibility Project

The efforts from the Web Accessibility Project continue with focus being placed on next steps and recommendations coming out the of Web Accessibility Survey. The Web Accessibility Survey has allowed for McMaster website producers to report on the current compliance levels of their websites, and their state of readiness in producing sites to meet legislative requirements. This information will be useful in identifying gaps that exist in capacity and to consider possible solutions.

Elements that will be discussed in the recommendations are as follows:
- Creation of web accessibility plans
- Strategies for compliance across a decentralized infrastructure
- Capacity building and sustainability of accessible practices
- Centrally developing and maintaining web accessibility information such as audit and best implementation practices for McMaster
- Working with external vendors to ensure the procurement of accessible web sites

Accessibility.mcmaster.ca will be the primary location for information regarding web accessibility for the community to access. As the new version of the Accessibility Hub is released, content will be refreshed containing training and implementation information for all levels of web teams including managers, designers, developers, and content creators. Further, the Accessibility Hub will undergo user and accessibility testing, as well as broad accessibility considerations in its re-design, where changes made to enhance usability of the site for disabled users can then be applied to all other sites designed by Media Production Services.

Faculty of Social Sciences: Creation of Web Accessibility Plan

The Faculty of Social Sciences has initiated a 'Web Accessibility Plan' in response to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the 'Information and Communication Standards'. The following captures our approach to building a sustainable barrier-free website strategy:

1. Centralization and the Creation of Standards
2. Required Training and Culture Change
3. Developing a Sustainability Plan and Annual Auditing
4. Advocacy
5. Participation

Please refer to **Appendix A** for a detailed case study about how the Faculty of Social Sciences is accomplishing the above approach.

Communication

Since 2009, the McMaster Accessibility Council (MAC) has been tasked with compiling (this) Annual Accessibility Report that highlights and summarizes yearly MAC / EIO accessibility accomplishments and demonstrates how McMaster is meeting AODA legislative requirements on an ongoing bases.
This year and moving forward, we want to advance beyond reporting compliance requirements to facilitate greater awareness of accessibility work happening across campus by connecting students, staff, and faculty integrating accessibility into their teaching, work, and school practices and events.

With the goals of:

1. Communicating better to campus communities about accessibility initiatives being led by MAC/EIO, and
2. Building cross-campus community around accessibility and disability inclusion work that the broader McMaster community members are engaged in,

The inaugural [Accessibility and Disability Inclusion Update 2017-2018](#) was published.

In its first year, the Update drew upwards of 40 submissions from McMaster students, staff and faculty, comprising 29 pages in total and broken down into the following, easy-to-navigate sections:

- Student Initiatives
- Policy
- Spaces and Environments
- Teaching and Learning
- Technology
- Employment
- Community Engagement
- Resources

Recognizing the challenges of implementing a centralized accessibility communication plan within the decentralized working, teaching and learning environments of McMaster University, the Update works to connect individuals and units across campus who might otherwise be isolated in their individual efforts to make McMaster more accessible, equitable and inclusive. A goal moving forward with the Update is to continue building community digitally and in-person; to promote supportive relationships, through which future communication regarding accessibility messaging is more broadly shared; and to encourage stronger commitments from the McMaster community to take-up and take-on the work that needs to be done to continue moving accessibility forward at the University.

Accessible Education

After the launch of *Forward with Flexibility: A Teaching and Learning Resource on Accessibility and Inclusion*, EIO and MAC staff presented the resource, information about the revamp of the Accessibility Hub website and the Captioning protocol, as well as general information about what EIO and MAC are and do, during 7 beginning-of-year Faculty meetings (MBA Faculty, Engineering, Sciences, Integrated Science, Social Sciences, Humanities and to the Centre for Continuing Education).

Following this, a team of researchers at McMaster's MacPherson Institute are currently conducting research on factors that support (or discourage) the integration of accessibility principles in teaching and learning. Focus groups and interviews have been conducted with instructors and TAs from across campus, and have generated data that speaks to motivations for, and facilitators, and barriers to, accessible teaching. One component of this work considers the role of training opportunities, including resources like the FLEX Forward e-book, in supporting the growth of accessible education. Findings from this project will be shared with staff at the MacPherson Institute and other relevant offices in order to inform efforts to support accessible teaching on campus.

Additionally, The Student Partners Program, supported by the MacPherson Institute, also funded several additional projects focusing on accessibility and equity in teaching and learning in 2018. These include the following:

- Work assessing the extent to which student-faculty partnerships can contribute to campus and classroom equity and inclusion
- Research exploring the teaching experiences of TAs in relation to their identities and social locations (including disability)
- A project focused on enhancing field education experiences for equity-seeking students in Social Work
- Efforts to design a course focused on equity and inclusion in the Engineering workplace
- A project focused on developing diversity and inclusivity initiatives for students, staff, and faculty in the W. Booth School of Engineering Practice and Technology
- Investigation into accessibility barriers students face in completing social work assignments, and recommendations for redesign
- Exploring and proposing how to move forward with increasing Disability Studies curriculum on campus and recognition of accessible teaching through an awards program

- Students with disabilities user testing the Accessibility Hub website, the first point of contact for instructors with questions related to accessible education

With funding from SSHRC, researchers from the MacPherson Institute are also piloting an equity-focused stream of the Student Partners Program. In its pilot offering, this stream has connected 5 pairs of students and instructors, who are working together on advancing equity (including issues of accessibility) in the faculty member's course/program.

Employment

- Launch of new Human Resources Services website, where accessibility and accommodation information for employees is much easier to find / fore fronted on the Home page
- Ongoing work to have accessibility and accommodations statements included in all employee letters of offer, including temporary, TA/RA and work/study
- Ongoing relationship building and work with the Employee Accessibility Network and the EIO to create the Equitable and Accessible Workplace Accommodations training for McMaster managers and employees. Have so far provided 1 pilot session for the Network and 4 training sessions, (2 public, 2 for specific units), for approximately 50 McMaster managers and 20 members of disability and accessibility communities.

Advocacy and Awareness Raising

Student Initiatives

Undergraduate and graduate student advocacy and awareness raising for accessibility and disability inclusion were incredible this year including:
- MSU Maccess hosting DisVisibility Week at the end of February 2018, which focused primarily on conversations about accessibility, disability and visibility around campus, including the creation of safe spaces for persons with disabilities at McMaster
- The creation of the first Accessibility Plan in consultation with the AccessMac program within the EIO for the McMaster Health Advocacy Symposium, an annual student-led event that fosters the development of effective, responsible advocacy skills amongst health professional students.
- A collaboration of graduate and undergraduate students and recent alumni receiving SPICES funding from the School of Graduate Studies to establish a Disability and Mad Studies Reading Group.
- With many more examples detailed within this year's Accessibility and Disability Inclusion Update 2017-2018, under "Student Initiatives".

December 3rd International Day of Persons with Disabilities Celebration

This year's International Day of Persons with Disabilities Celebration was carried out through the organization of a 3-part discussion series in partnership with the EIO/AccessMac Program, the Disability and Mad Studies Reading Group and MSU Maccess. From November 29-December 3, participants in the

series explored topics and discussion around disability, accessibility, stigma and celebration. Additionally, and leading up to December 3, a 6-week social media campaign to launch the inaugural Accessibility and Disability Inclusion Update 2017-2018 paired illustrations from the newly published Open Accessibility: An Illustrated History of Disabled Advocacy at McMaster comic with excerpts from the Update on Facebook and Twitter platforms. The campaign culminated on December 3 with the release of a celebratory and commemorative email to the McMaster campus community.

Advocacy Groups

Disability Discussions

The Equity and Inclusion Office has been working with MSU Maccess to amplify this year's "Disability DIScussions" series to both meet the needs of the students participating, and to connect students with disabilities to various services on-campus (for example, the School of Graduate Studies and the Student Success Centre). One of the central goals of these DIScussions continues to be capturing the gaps in accessibility in services and environments that continue to exist at McMaster, and which impact students with disabilities in complex and often, harmful, ways at the University. Salient points from this year's DIScussions will be documented and presented to the MAC to discuss ways in which the barriers students are describing can be acknowledged and acted upon for removal.

The Employee Accessibility Network

The Employee Accessibility Network for employees with disabilities is now in its second year of meeting, where disabled employees at the University are invited to connect, network and collaborate, and where the Network acts additionally as a consultative unit to the MAC. This past year, the Network has worked together to consult and provide feedback in several areas, including:

- The Employee Accessibility Network's Terms of Reference and promotional material
- The McMaster Accessibility Policy
- The McMaster Tobacco and Smoke Free Policy
- Tuition rates for graduate students with disabilities in Masters studies
- Parking and parking lots on the main campus and satellite campuses
- The development of Accessible and Equitable Workplace Accommodations training for the entire McMaster community
- The (emerging) McMaster Accessibility Award
- The Post-secondary Education Standards Development Committee Mandate and Overview (provincial committee)

The Network has additionally hosted several educational opportunities and discussions for employees with disabilities, including:

- PATH Employment Services
- Employee Health Services workshop on workplace accommodations processes
- Career Advancement and Recruitment for employees with disabilities
- The emerging Equity, Diversity and Inclusion strategic framework for the University

Moving forward, some of the Network's goals include outreach and (flexible) recruitment of employees with disabilities, as well as continue to find ways in which the Network can remain a safe and inviting space for those who self-identify. To join the Network, please contact (confidentially) access@mcmaster.ca.

Consultation

MAC and EIO have been actively engaged in providing accessibility and disability inclusion consultations around the University for many years, and this past year we've seen the numbers are growing exponentially. Consultations may involve providing expertise in the areas of universal design for buildings/physical spaces, creation of media and digital presences, accessible customer service best practices, planning accessible meetings and events, accessible teaching and learning and accessibility within employment contexts. Some examples of consultations that have been provided over the last year have included:

- Hospitality and Residences Accessibility Audits
- McMaster Safety App
- MIRA Planning Grant (accessible art spaces)
- JHE Renovations Guidelines
- 3D Campus Map Project
- Grant applications for ET Clark and for Campus Services Building
- Temporary Classroom Building (behind Divinity College)
- SAFE building, extension to David Braley Athletic Centre (DBAC)
- Peter George Centre for Living & Learning
- MSU Accessibility Policy
- Accessibility considerations for the Degroote School of Business Health and Safety Committee
- Emergency Buttons Project (for lifts and universal washrooms) (Facility Services, Student Accessibility Services, Parking and Security)
- Beacon technology applications for campus wayfinding (Facility Services, Faculty of Engineering)
- Protocol for blocking of temporary construction (Facility Services)
- Many training sessions, for example, workplace accommodations and creating safe / accessible and inclusive spaces

Moving Forward

The 2017/18 academic year saw increased communication around the many accessibility related initiatives which are now in place across campus, culminating in the inaugural release of the *Accessibility and Disability Inclusion Update*. It was so wonderful to read the more than 40 submissions which came in from so many units and service providers. The range of activities was broader than we could have hoped for, which we anticipate will be used as a springboard for even more activities to be initiated over the coming year. We are very much looking forward to the release of the 2nd update later this year.

The addition of the new AVP Equity & Inclusion role to campus has provided the much needed high level analysis of the work which has been done around accessibility over the last several years. We are very happy to be assisting with the development of the Accessibility Plan which will be released later this spring and look forward to working within the new structure this plan will provide. Once the plan is in place we will resume the work of reviewing and updating the University's Policy on Accessibility.

The coming year will also see the release of the results and subsequent recommendations from the Web Accessibility Audit. We anticipate these recommendations will help frame the broader Web Accessibility Strategy which is being developed as part of the campus IT Strategy.

Appendix A – Faculty of social sciences case study on enhancing web accessibility across their faculty

1. **Centralization and the Creation of Standards:** Focus on centralizing the mechanisms and training that users in the Faculty use to publish to the web. Template level accessibility from a central position, increasing the accessibility of all sites within the Faculty portfolio of CMS (content management system) tools implementing WCAG AA. In the process of implementing standards around HTML/CSS/JS and ARIA (Accessible Rich Internet Applications) in the deployment of the web publishing tool(s), and also standardizing the content editor experience and rich-text editor. The template design considers accessibility (including the integration of McMaster brand tools code), the disability experience, and accessible UI (user Interface) features.

2. **Required Training and Culture Change**: Training is mandatory for staff, faculty or students who wish to access or edit websites in our Faculty. Applied semantic markup techniques and accessible media are a part of that required user training in our website content management system. In addition to basic CMS content editor training, accessibility is part of our training documentation. Additional training is also being rolled out for the creation of accessible digital media more broadly (Microsoft Word, PDF, PowerPoint (presentations), Excel, time-based media etc.) across all Faculty, Staff, and in some cases Students. Often it is this additional digital content (the content uploaded and linked to on our websites) that cannot be controlled via templating or systems/CMS that present barriers for users of assistive/adaptive technologies (AT), most notably users with disabilities, as well as disabled users who do not use AT. These guided workshops include awareness training on a variety of different disability experiences and kinds of disabilities, and how users who identify with certain types of disabilities (e.g. vison impairment, mobility impairment, hearing impairment, some cognitive disabilities) interact with the various digital content we create at McMaster.

   Currently the Faculty has introduced digital accessible media training for over 100 individuals, facilitated 29 training workshops since March 2018, and provided several departmental information sessions covering the 'Information and Communication Standards' aspects of the AODA.

3. **Developing a Sustainability Plan and Annual Auditing:** In addition to ongoing content editor training based on tightly controlled governance, a long-term accessibility strategy for website template renewal and audits is being developed. This plan will involve an evaluation methodology, audit schedule (evaluating WCAG AA compliance) soon (target: summer 2020) in a systematic and wholistic way. As part of this audit strategy, the Faculty of Social Science will look to hire and engage various disability community members as partners in this process. The Faculty is looking to develop a respectful, mutually beneficial, and meaningful relationship with disability experts and will be working closely with the Equity and Inclusion Office (Kate Brown),

the McMaster Accessibility Council (MAC), and will look to engage other partners across campus and outside the McMaster community. The Faculty has identified that automated validation of digital content alone is not enough to address the barriers that face the disability community and will look to integrate a meaningful disability user-testing perspective to any audit process.

Advocacy: The Faculty is actively lobbying senior leadership at McMaster to sustain both a culture of digital accessibility and deploy technical training support mechanisms across the institution in ways that put the disability experience first. The Faculty believes the only way to achieve a sustainable accessible media creation culture is to develop adequate internally sustainable training, along with an audit framework for web properties that includes paid user experience experts who identify from a variety of different disability experiences. It is our hope that such a framework could then be scaled and integrated into the larger institutional 'Web Strategy' for McMaster and become part of the McMaster Accessibility Policy.

'IT Forum': The Faculty also hosted a speed learning table at the 2018 'IT Forum' facilitating a roundtable information discussion titled: 'Understanding Accessible Media: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Information Communication Standards.' This interactive session introduced members of the McMaster IT community to the legislation and the way the integrated standards affect technology interventions on campus and the public sector compliance schedule.

Participation: The Faculty of Social Sciences participated in the 'Survey on Web Accessibility' at McMaster this year, reporting on both the strategy and current website accessibility compliance status for Faculty websites (currently not AODA compliant).