ARL Accessibility and Universal Design Working Group
Case Study: Accessibility Hub, Queen's University

The Queen's University Accessibility Hub is a centralized online resource that links and supports efforts at Queen's to create a more inclusive and accessible University environment for persons with a disability. The Accessibility Hub assists members of the University community to comply with disability legislation and fosters awareness of accessibility issues at Queen's.

Background

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), which became law in 2005, provides a framework to create a more inclusive society for persons with disabilities. The AODA legislates the development and implementation of accessibility standards in several areas including customer service, information and communications, employment, transportation and the design of public spaces (built environment).

The statute requires all non-profit, private, and public sector organizations to make their facilities and services more accessible to people with disabilities.

Queen's University Accessibility Framework

The *Queen's University Comprehensive Strategic Framework for Accessibility* was developed to address the requirements of all accessibility standards under the AODA. Integral to the Framework are five working groups tasked with identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessibility.

The University Library has assumed a leadership role in ensuring the University's compliance with the AODA's Information and Communications Standard. This Standard regulates how organizations are required to create, provide and receive information and communications that are accessible for persons with disabilities. The *Information and Communications Working Group* is led by the University Librarian. This working group also includes the University Equity Advisor (who coordinates the group); the Coordinator of Library Services for Students with Disabilities; an Adaptive Technology Specialist; the Associate Dean of Arts and Science; and staff from Information Technology Services and the Registrar's Office.

Accessibility Hub

One of the first tasks for the *Information and Communications Working Group* was an environmental scan and gap analysis of service provision for persons with disabilities at

Queen's University. The scan found that although several departments are committed to advancing accessibility, there was a general lack of knowledge on campus regarding accessible information and communications. Although there was an awareness of the need for accessible information (for example, course materials in an alternate format), there was little understanding of the legal requirements outlined in the AODA or of how to create accessible content.

Among the Report's recommendations for addressing gaps in service provision was the creation of an online "hub" that would consolidate information from numerous Queen's websites and provide a centralized resource for students, staff and faculty needing support for creating or acquiring information in an alternate, accessible format. University funding was then allocated to hire an Accessibility Hub Coordinator to build, maintain and assess the usage of the online resource. The Accessibility Hub Coordinator reports to the Coordinator of Library Services for Students with Disabilities, who is also the Coordinator of the University's Adaptive Technology Centre. Strategic direction for the Hub is provided by the Queen's University Accessibility Framework.

In the early stages of establishing the Hub, the Accessibility Hub Coordinator consulted broadly with the campus community, including persons with disabilities, and specifically with key personnel from the Adaptive Technology Centre; Library Services for Students with Disabilities; Alma Mater Society (Queen's Student Government); Campus Planning and Development; Health, Counselling, and Disability Services; Human Resources; Human Rights & Equity Offices; ITServices; Marketing and Communications; Queen's Learning Commons; and the Society of Graduate and Professional Students.

The Accessibility Hub, which was launched in September 2013, serves as an online community for those seeking information on disability and accessibility issues on campus.

The Hub assists Queen's to meet its obligations under the AODA by informing and supporting the University administration, academic departments, service units, faculty, staff and students concerning accessibility issues and services. Through the Hub, the Accessibility Hub Coordinator provides direct guidance and feedback concerning accessibility initiatives. Specifically, the Coordinator assists with the provision of University online and print materials in an accessible format. More generally, the Hub offers information on library services for students with disabilities, accessibility of University buildings, adaptive technology resources on campus, disability awareness events, accessibility training and the creation of an inclusive learning environment. As well, the Coordinator of the Hub often works with faculty and staff to ensure that online courses are accessible.

To ensure that teaching methods, documents, and communications are accessible and comply with AODA regulations, the Accessibility Hub contains "how-to" guides on topics such as alternate formats, creating accessible documents, website accessibility and accessible event planning.

The website is interactive and employs Social Media to connect with users. The Accessibility Hub is on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.

<u>Resources</u>

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

> Integrated Accessibility Standards
>
> http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/source/regs/english/2011/elaws_src_regs_r11191_e.htm

Adaptive Technology Centre, Queen's University Library

> http://queensu.ca/atc/

Accessibility Framework, Queen's University

> http://www.queensu.ca/equity/accessibility/framework.html

Queen's University Accessibility Hub

> http://www.queensu.ca/accessibility/