

NIPISSING UNIVERSITY

Designated Public Sector Annual Status Report 2020-2021

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), universities are annually required to prepare and publicly release an annual status report on the progress of measures taken to implement the strategy outlined in the multi-year accessibility plan. The 2020-2021 accessibility status report provides an update on measures that Nipissing University has put in place to reduce barriers to accessibility. The purpose of this report is to track Nipissing University's progress and make the public aware of our initiatives. Nipissing University has also established a multi-year accessibility plan to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility and to meet requirements under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the Integrated Accessibility Standards.

This report is also available on Nipissing University's website at this link: [Nipissing University](#)

To request an alternate format of this annual report status report, please contact the general Accessibility email account at access@nipissingu.ca.

Alternatively, you can email Human Resources & Equity Advisor:
Traci Malkowski (leave until January 2023) tracim@nipissingu.ca
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Statement of Commitment

Nipissing University is committed to ensuring equitable access and participation for people with disabilities. We are committed to treating all people in a way that empowers them to maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in fostering an inclusive culture that supports the consistent and passionate pursuit of excellence for all members of the Nipissing community. We are committed to meeting the needs of people with disabilities in a timely manner, creating barrier-free learning and working conditions for persons with both physical and psychological health conditions or impairments. We respect diversity and continue to build on past lessons and achievements as well as on-going challenges, by creating a living, learning, and working community that is accessible and supportive of all members of the community. We are committed to taking concrete action; not only by being responsive and removing barriers to accessibility, but also proactively fostering an inclusive culture, supporting health and well-being initiatives, and preventing barriers to accessibility.

In 2005, the Ontario legislature passed the AODA. This legislation was designed to make Ontario accessible to persons with disabilities by 2025. The Act contemplated achieving its goal through the development of five separate standards – Customer Service, Information & Communication, Employment, Transportation, and Design of Public Spaces. This report highlights these standards and measures taken by Nipissing University to achieve compliance and describes initiatives undertaken over the past year to prevent and remove barriers at Nipissing University.

Information and Communications Standard

Initiatives implemented related to the Information and Communications Standards. For example, this can include creating accessible documents, updating websites to meet accessibility requirements, developing new policies to ensure information/documents are provided in alternate formats, follow up on feedback.

Academic Advising

- Students can access Academic Advising support through email, video conferencing, instant chat messaging, telephone, and in-person. Students are encouraged to choose the option that best suits their individual needs.

External Relations: Alumni, Communications & Marketing, University Advancement

- The Communications and Marketing department has been working with Nipissing University's accessibility software provider to correct errors created by site editors outside of the marketing department.
- The accessibility checker has been upgraded and has been set to the highest threshold (including best practices not just WCAG requirements).
- In the past year, the sitewide accessibility score has been increased and has scored higher than the higher education industry average.
- The Communications & Marketing department has worked to correct historical site issues this includes alt text on images, misspellings, heading hierarchy, etc.
- Communications with donors and alumni has primarily gone digital which is timelier and more accessible for the constituents. All tax receipts are now being sent to donors electronically. This is timelier, more accessible and allows the donor to retain a digital copy for their records.
- Key publications are now designed in accessible PDF format including the Nipissing University Admissions Viewbook and Nipissing University Mature & Transfer Student Guide.
- Nipissing University brand colours have been adjusted for higher contrast for those who are blind or have low vision.
- The content on the Giving and Alumni pages are in the process of being updated with giving forms embedded in the page, creating a more accessible experience for donors and alumni who want to give back or engage with the University.
- Social media content includes alt text where possible.
- New pages on the Nipissing website are being developed and designed with accessibility considerations.
- Enhanced web editor training is being provided to any new editors requesting site access.
- The Communication and Marketing department have applied language simplification for key pages.

Harris Learning Library (HLL)

- Library staff have reviewed DVDs and checked for closed captioning; DVDs without closed captioning have either been replaced with DVDs with closed captioning or removed from the collection. Since late 2019/early 2020, the library has only purchased DVDs and streaming video resources that have closed captioning.

Human Resources

- All health and safety inspections and Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) meetings have been moved to an electronic format.

- Many forms including the injury/incident report form have been moved to an electronic format.
- Basic lab safety training has transitioned to an online platform and the department is working on moving biosafety training to an e-learning format as well.
- The request to hire a student was moved to an online format to streamline the process and make the training and forms more accessible.
- Timesheets are completed online rather than submitted using paper copies.

Office of Dean of Teaching (Teaching Hub)

- The Teaching Hub, specifically the Learning Systems Technologists (LSTs), are responsible for ensuring course content adheres to AODA compliance. Specifically, LSTs ensure images have alternative text, that documents are accessible (e.g., Word, PDF, PowerPoint), and that text-to-speech technology (i.e., ReadSpeaker) is functioning in Blackboard course shells.
- The Teaching Hub, specifically LSTs and Teaching Hub Technologists, have supported faculty members requiring assistance with captioning services.
- The Teaching Hub has provided professional development support through faculty workshops and one-on-one consultations related to designing for accessibility. Some of the topics covered have included captions, alternative text, universal design for learning, and overall course design features related to accessibility
- LSTs support and provide feedback to faculty members regarding:
 - Adding structure to documents including the use of Styles, Headings, and a Table of Contents
 - Spacing of content
 - Alternative text for images
 - Describing hyperlinks to optimize screen readers
 - Using bulleted lists
 - Using accessibility checkers in Word, Adobe, and Blackboard
 - Alternate document formats provided via the Blackboard Ally tools (e.g. MP3 audio or High Contrast copies)
- LSTs support and provide feedback to faculty members regarding the creation of spreadsheets including optimal formatting for students with a variety of learning styles, needs, and accommodations.
- LSTs and Teaching Hub Technologists are responsible for updating the Teaching Hub website, which includes paying attention to accessibility requirements.
- The Teaching Hub focuses on promoting the importance of accessibility through Twitter by retweeting useful information and following accessibility rules for hashtag use (e.g., #TeachingHub vs. #teachinghub) to optimize screen readers

Student Development & Services: Student Accessibility Services, Student Counselling Services, Student Learning & Transitions & Residence

- Started utilizing RedShelf and Vital Source for students who require digital textbooks. Both services have build-in assistive technology such as contrast enhancement, magnification, and text-to-speech programs.
- Student Accessibility Services created a process for providing testing services/accommodations online, including virtual proctoring, readers and scribes. SAS was able to fully accommodate all students using Teams and Team Viewer.
- TextAid (blackboard tests/midterms), which was previously only available for Lockdown Browser tests, is now available outside Lockdown Browser tests.

Customer Service Standard

Initiatives implemented related to the Customer Service Standards. For example, this can include training employees, updating/establishing policies, follow up on feedback received.

Academic Advising

- Academic Advising offers students a variety of ways to access direct support in a manner that is barrier free and responsive to the needs of students.

External Relations: Alumni, Communications & Marketing, University Advancement

- Content on the accessibility policy page is in the process of being updated working with Human Resources.
- A footer has been added to the bottom of every webpage with contact information for anyone who experiences barriers and requires accessibility support or alternative formats.
- The Marketing and Communications department releases updates regarding service interruptions and elevator outages on Twitter and on a website banner on the Nipissing website
- Nipissing website includes campus map updates to show directional flow of traffic due to COVID restrictions.
- The Communications & Marketing department ensures timely promotion of campus accessibility standards.

Human Resources

- Human Resources and Marketing are working on a new webpage for Human Resources to address Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility; the accessibility section is the first part of the new page to be updated.
- AODA training has been a priority and reminders have been sent out to members of the community including members of the Board of Governor's, the Nipissing University Student Union (NUSU) and all new part-time faculty hires. Certificates of completion or screenshots to ensure the training component has been successfully completed is now tracked and stored in the Human Resources Information System (HRIS), Colleague and is also saved electronically.
- The Human Resources department recently put out a call to volunteers in our community that identify as persons with a disability, Nipissing University is committed to including this important group in the review or certain accessibility policies on campus.

Student Development & Services: Student Accessibility Services, Student Counselling Services, Student, Learning & Transitions & Residence

- ATP Launch, Nipissing University's summer transition program, was designed to introduce new incoming students who are registered with Student Accessibility Services to the available services and supports, various skill development workshops and an opportunity to connect with other peers and the Student Accessibility team.
- ATP Launch has traditionally been an in-person program which takes place over 3-5 days at the end of August; however, due to COVID-19 restrictions, ATP Launch was conducted in a 100% online format. ATP Launch took place over a 3-week period, beginning on August 10, 2020. Throughout these 3 weeks, various workshop modules were provided to students, as well as resources and supports through the SAS department. The program was housed primarily in Blackboard.

- To mitigate a delay in the process of acquiring digital copies of textbooks for students who use assistive technology to read text, a review of 2 online bookshelf services, RedShelf and VitalSource was undertaken. Both services allow for the rental or purchase of textbooks with immediate delivery and have built-in study tools such as digital flash cards, digital highlighters, and online dictionaries.
- In addition to the workshops that Student Accessibility Services traditionally provide on learning strategies, study skills, self advocacy, etc., additional workshops were created to address an online learning environment in order to better meet the current needs of our students, such as:
 - Stress Management From Your Home & Relaxation Techniques
 - Creating a Positive Workspace While Learning Online
 - Time Management with a Focus on Online Learning
 - Notetaking for Online Courses
- Nipissing University has changed the *Testing Agreement* to account for the changes in testing supports/services given the virtual nature of the tests and exams.
- Annually the Residence Life department work closely with Student Accessibility Services to ensure students are supported in their residence living environment through the Residence Special Accommodations review process wherein student submit their accommodation requests to Accessibility Services, who review the documentation, and provide instructions for support implementation
- Student Accessibility Services has put additional emphasis on their social media to better communicate with students regarding services, updates, events, and reminders. Feedback received from the previous year indicated that many of our students were unaware of our social media presence, thus further promotion of our social media accounts was achieved by linking our social media accounts to our emails, newsletters, and website.
- Student Counselling Services continues to provide counselling to all students, specialised therapeutic groups for various concerns as well as hosting wellness, educational and awareness events for students and the community.
- Student Counselling Services offers both in-person and virtual service options to reduce barriers and to enhance student experience in services should the use of assistive technology be helpful in session.
- Student Accessibility Services offers several communication and appointment options in addition to existing on-campus (when permitted) appointments including email, phone, virtual teleconferencing or video conferencing. Upon request, the Student Accessibility Services team met and/or communicated with students outside of the usual 8:30am-4:30pm business hours to accommodate individual needs.
- Student Accessibility Services created a process for supporting faculty by providing information on how to set up various testing accommodations and addressing any issues related to online testing accommodations.

Employee Standard

Initiatives implemented related to the Employment Standards. This can include, for example, accommodating all candidates during the recruitment process and employment life cycle, steps taken to ensure accommodation plans and ensuring employees have accessible emergency information.

Human Resources

- During the faculty recruitment process Nipissing University follows the new guidelines on virtual interviews from the *Creating an Equitable, Diverse & Inclusive Research Environment: A Best Practices Guide for Recruitment, Hiring & Retention* from the Canada Research Chairs Program (CRCP).
- During the pandemic, health and safety accommodations were made that approved employees use of equipment and ergonomic devices to in home offices.
- The Employment Accommodations policy was updated, and the process was centralized to make it more straightforward for employees.

Office of Dean of Teaching (Teaching Hub)

- In all postings during 2021, the Teaching Hub ensured all candidates have access to accommodations as needed.

Student Development & Services: Student Accessibility Services, Student Counselling Services, Student Learning & Transitions & Residence

- During the student staff hiring process, Nipissing University seeks options with universal design in mind and consistently offers applicants the opportunity to identify any accommodation requirements for accessible engagement with the elements of the selection process.
- In the student staff training processes, Nipissing University presents content in a variety of ways to ensure that students with unique learning needs can receive the information in a way that best suits them. We also invite student staff to share their individual needs to address their specific information processing needs.

Design of Public Spaces Standard

Initiatives implemented related to the Design of Public Spaces Standards. This can include, for example, installing accessible playgrounds, tactile walking surface indicators and establishing design guidelines that consider accessibility.

Harris Learning Library (HLL)

- The Harris Learning Library offers seven enclosed Adaptive Technology rooms that are reserved for persons with disabilities. These rooms provide a distraction-reduced study environment, and five of these rooms are equipped with computers and adaptive technology to support individuals with perceptual or learning disabilities.
- The Harris Learning Library has installed four barrier-free washrooms advocated for by Facilities Services.
- The Harris Learning Library has four power-operated doors installed and seven private adaptive technology rooms with key sign out at the Reception/Circulation desk.
- Part of the Harris Learning Library and the Robert J. Surtees Athletic Centre expansion project included adding additional barrier-free ramps, sidewalks and curbs.
- Window coverings for Adaptive Technology rooms were installed in February 2013 in the Harris Learning Library
- In November/December of 2020, The Harris Learning Library website pages were updated to meet and ensure WCAG Level AA compliance.

Human Resources

- The Human Resources department moved to a more accessible space in B215. The space also provides the ability to have more private or confidential discussions with employees.

Student Development & Services: Student Accessibility Services, Student Counselling Services, Student Learning & Transitions & Residence

- A significant renovation was made to the Founders House Residence front desk, and in making these updates, the space was designed and built within AODA standards to ensure that the front desk is accessible to all students