Accessibility at George Brown College

ANNUAL STATUS REPORT 2020–2021

GEORGE BROWN COLLEGE

This document is available in alternate formats upon request. Please contact: aoda@georgebrown.ca

WHAT'S INSIDE

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

George Brown College is located on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and other Indigenous peoples who have lived here over time. We are grateful to share this land as treaty people who learn, work, and live in the community with each other.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We welcome your feedback. Let us know if you have any questions or feedback about the activities and programs highlighted in this 2020–2021 Status Report, the George Brown College Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and accessibility matters in general.

To view previous Status Reports, visit georgebrown.ca/about/aoda/reports

To request a copy in another format or to send us your comments or questions, please contact us at:

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GEORGE BROWN COLLEGE *ACCESSIBILITY STATUS REPORT 2020–2021*

Under the the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA), George Brown College is considered a large designated public sector organization. As such, George Brown is required to ensure its compliance to the standards outlined in the AODA legislation. Compliance standards include developing and implementing a multi-year plan identifying actions to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities who engage with our institution.

AODA legislation also requires designated public sector organizations to prepare an Annual Report relative to the multi-year accessibility plan. This Report documents the planning and implementation activities undertaken by George Brown as part of the multi-year plan.

The college continues to support all previous and ongoing milestones and initiatives outlined in the college's multi-year plan. This status report outlines our achievements including:

- Meeting the current legislative requirements

- Reporting on recent activities identified within our multi-year plan

- Identifying related accessibility initiatives that continue to prevent and remove barriers and promote inclusion college-wide

This report highlights our efforts over the past year to not only meet compliance standards, but also to live up to our commitment to demonstrate leadership for accessibility throughout the college sector.

GEORGE BROWN'S STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

As a college and public sector organization, George Brown College is committed to creating an accessible environment by preventing and removing barriers for people with disabilities and demonstrating leadership for accessibility throughout the college sector and Ontario.

To make accessibility a reality throughout the organization, we recognize that all employees have a role in creating an accessible and inclusive college. Our goal is to ensure accessibility for all of our employees, our students and our community members.

OFFICE OF ANTI-RACISM, EQUITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS SERVICES (OAREHRS)

The OAREHRS is responsible for ensuring that the college meets its obligations under the AODA. This includes leading, planning, supporting, implementation, filing and reporting to the government and the public on progress. OAREHRS is also responsible for providing training, consultation, support, and advice on how to meet broad accessibility requirements. Most significantly, the office ensures through collaboration and consultation that the college continues to uphold the four core principles of the AODA. These principles include independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity. Finally, the office works within a shared commitment to continue to uphold our commitment to cultivating a more accessible and inclusive college community for persons with disabilities.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

This year's Status Report is different from previous versions. In 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic changed our college, our communities, and our world. The province ordered the closure of non-essential services, including colleges, during this report's timeframe. Students and employees adjusted to learning and working remotely and this continued throughout the 2020–2021 academic year.

These have been challenging times for all of us, however this continuation of remote learning and working has exacerbated many accessibility challenges for persons with disabilities. Our most vulnerable employees and students were and remain at an increased risk of experiencing exclusion, isolation, and increased barriers as a result of the pandemic. The need for effective captioning for learning, accessible virtual events, and accessible documents and websites are only a few of the challenges faced. We recognize that challenges extend beyond the campus environment, as persons with disabilities also may:

- Have underlying health conditions that place them at higher risk and vulnerability to the virus

- Depend on or access social supports that were compromised or interrupted during the pandemic, leading to social isolation, greater marginalization, and increased barriers to accessing fundamentals of daily life

- Experience greater financial hardship, as students with disabilities were less likely to be employed than students without disabilities prior to the pandemic

These challenges were ever present throughout this past year and the college committed to a response to COVID-19 that recognized and sought to address these barriers, while also recognizing that people with disabilities have intersecting identities that may also exacerbate these barriers. This report provides a snapshot of how George Brown College adapted services, programs, and policy to meet the new challenges COVID-19 presented and address some of the barriers identified during the pandemic, while continuing to meet compliance and advance our efforts to prevent and eliminate barriers to accessibility to create a more inclusive institution.

COMPLIANCE REPORTING

George Brown College is required to submit an Accessibility Compliance Report in accordance with the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). This reporting is an attestation that the college meets the required applicable standards. George Brown submitted the compliance report in December 2021, meeting required deadline. The compliance report can be found on the George Brown website (georgebrown.ca/about/aoda/reports).

MULTI-YEAR ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

George Brown College continues to work in accordance with the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan developed to meet our organizational obligations under the AODA, *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (O. Reg. 191/11, s. 4 (1) (2))*.

As the college's AODA obligations are far-reaching with varying levels of responsibility across the college, our multi-year plan reflects a strategic approach to implementation that assigns leadership and responsibility to various groups to ensure our accessibility goals are met.

The multi-year plan is a fluid document and framework that provides high level deliverables and activities and is updated as progress continues at the college.

Our current multi-year plan came to an end in 2021. To ensure continued progress towards greater accessibility at George Brown College, a process will be developed to establish a new multi-year plan to ensure the continued address of barriers and the planning of activities to promote greater accessibility at George Brown. In 2022, George Brown will engage our community, including the AODA Committee, members of the disability community within our college and external expertise, to develop a comprehensive and progressive plan to build on the work that has been done to date, meet or exceed compliance and address any new requirements.

AODA ADVISORY COMMITTEE

George Brown has a dedicated committee to address accessibility issues on an ongoing basis. Our AODA Committee is comprised of senior leaders and employee representation throughout the college. Membership includes identified champions of accessibility best practices, employees who are accountable for the successful implementation of accessibility initiatives and AODA regulations and the AODA Lead (currently held by the Director, OAREHRS) who provides leadership and expertise across the college in support of the college's accessibility plan.

George Brown is also required to engage and consult with persons with disabilities when preparing documents, policies, and procedures such as our accessibility policies, status reports and multi-year plans. It is important that persons with disabilities are meaningfully engaged throughout the process to ensure that plans are well informed and centred around the needs of those who are most impacted by decisions.

George Brown is committed to increasing representation of persons with disabilities on the AODA committee; this includes hearing from students within our community. It is essential that the voices of those most impacted by our efforts are centred and amplified as we continue our planning. In 2022, a recruitment effort will be undertaken to ensure that the committee has greater engagement with, improved communication to, and greater representation from persons with disabilities throughout the college.

MEMBERS OF THE AODA COMMITTEE

Jennifer Grant (Chair)	Director, Office of Anti-Racism, Equity & Human Rights Services
Leslie Quinlan	VP, People, Enablement and Experience
Colin Fitzsimons	Director, Academic Services & Learning Resources
Janet Foster	Manager, Service Provision, Accessible Learning Services
Alexis Lau	Research Resource Coordinator, Research & Innovation
Ellen Flanagan	Accessibility Consultant, Student Support & Wellbeing
Joanna Friend	Professor, Centre for Community Services & Health Sciences
Marisol Escobar	Visual Designer/Asset Maintenance Coord., Marketing
Nerys Rau	Director, IT Operations
Roanna Moses	Manager, Disability & Accommodation
Robert Wilson	Project Manager, Capital Projects, Facilities
Susan Toews	Dean, Centre for Preparatory and Liberal Studies
Jackie Tan	Director, Planning, Operations & Administration
Asim Ayub	Interim Campus Manager, WF, Facilities
Cathy Weyman	CFB Participant - Rise Project, Centre for Business
Kathleen Abbott	Associate Dean, Centre for Continuous Learning
Jessica Grant	Marketing Manager, Marketing
Hooman Farhangnia	Campus Manager, Casa Loma, Facilities
Mubein Tarahi	Manager, Capital Projects & Construction, Facilities
Vakul Arora	Supply Chain Business Process and Compliance Manager, Office of the VP

To learn more about the committee, or how to become a member please contact: aoda@georgebrown.ca

WORKING TOWARDS GREATER ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) requires designated public sector organizations to meet standards of accessibility in the areas of information and communications, employment, transportation, design of public spaces and customer service.

The items below are a summary of the AODA requirements that are completed and continue to be part of George Brown's day-to-day operations. Meeting the requirements of the AODA legislation is an ongoing process; exceeding these requirements is an ongoing commitment. George Brown will continue to seek opportunities to build on successes in the areas below in an effort to create a more accessible and inclusive working and learning environment.

✔ Accessible customer service

✔ Accessibility policies

✔ Accessible purchases

✔ Emergency response plans for employees

✔ Ongoing staff and faculty training

✔ Accessible feedback

✔ Educational resources (see below)

✔ New websites that conform to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA (see below)

✔ Employment standards

✔ Accessible formats and communication supports

✔ Design of public spaces standards

✔ Compliance monitoring and reporting

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES COMPLIANCE

In January 2020, new AODA requirements for producers of educational resources came into force. Under the Information and Communication Standards, colleges as producers of educational resources are required to make all print and supplementary learning resources accessible. These resources must be available either in accessible formats or in conversion-ready formats.

WEBSITES AND WEB CONTENT COMPLIANCE

In January 2021, all obligated organization websites were required to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 defines how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning and neurological disabilities.

The remainder of the report outlines actions George Brown has taken throughout this reporting year to meet or exceed the above requirements as well as areas of focus for the upcoming year.

WORKING TOWARDS 2025: ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2020–2021

The following is a summary of efforts and accomplishments that apply to the 2020–2021 requirements under the AODA and the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR 191/11)*. Accomplishments are organized under applicable standards. Only standards pertinent to this report are included. These include general, customer service, information and communication, employment, design of public spaces standards.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

The General Requirements are those regulatory requirements that apply across all standards. The section governs several areas of compliance including establishment of accessibility policies, multi-year accessibility plans, procuring or acquiring goods services or facilities, self-service kiosks and training.

Accomplishments include:

- New employees offer letters harmonized to ensure AODA training requirements are consistently communicated to all employees.
- Multi-year plan ended in 2021; the objectives outlined within the plan were met, and plans are underway to develop a new and progressive five-year plan.
- Supporting Employees During COVID-19 Protocol (General Requirements):
- Delivered training and resources developed to ensure health and well-being practices. Resources communicated and posted on college internal and public website.

CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARD

The Customer Service Standard mandates that service providers must find ways to break down barriers that prevent customers with disabilities from accessing the services they need. Barriers may be due to physical obstacles, technology, information and communication, an organization's practices or procedures and attitudes of employees. This standard requires institutions to ensure that policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the four core principles: Independence, Dignity, Integration, and Equality of Opportunity. Areas covered within this standard include: accessibility policies, use of service animals and support persons, notice of temporary disruptions, AODA training for employees, feedback process and format of documents.

2020–2021 Accomplishments include:

- AODA compliant template for service disruptions posted publicly and redistributed to Facilities and other departments throughout the college.
- Program Review templates and handouts revised to meet accessible document standards.
- Program Review Student Survey revised to include questions about accessibility.
- Comprehensive Program Review revised to include questions for both faculty and students on accessibility criteria.
- Delivered training on accessible document creation and promoted video tutorials to support employees to address accessibility issues in PDFs: georgebrown.ca/about/aoda/accessibility/accessible-information-communication#HowTo
- Supporting Employees During COVID-19 (Customer Service Standard):
    - Provided designated support to COVID-19 symptomatic students to navigate the COVID-19 testing protocols and procedures

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS STANDARD

The Information and Communications Standard is a part of the Integrated Accessibility Standard Regulation. This standard outlines requirements for organizations to create, provide and receive information and communications in ways that are accessible for persons with disabilities. The standard focuses on accessible formats and communication supports, emergency procedures, plans and public safety, accessible website and web content, educational and training resources, and materials (including training for educators and producers of educational or training materials), libraries of educational and training institutions, and public libraries.

2020–2021 Accomplishments include:

- Website Compliance:

  - Refreshed all content throughout the AODA website pages to improve user experience.

  - Launched new georgebrown.ca website in May 2020. The website features Drupal 8 as its new Content Management System (CMS). Drupal 8 is equipped with the Web Accessibility Initiative, which will enhance websites' accessibility for people with disabilities.

  - George Brown website continues to achieve accessibility scores above the Education Industry benchmark of 81.3.

  - Developed Web Style Guide that includes instructional information on creating accessible content, focused on areas such as compatibility with screen readers for visual impairment, and reading level and clarity of content.

  - Completed accessibility checks on all documents before posting on college website.

  - Engaged in testing of all HTML templates, web services tools and email templates for accessibility.

  - Web Publishing Team updated signatures to include AODA compliance statement and compliance resources.

- Continued assurance that all video graphics and text are compliant with AODA standards, and that audio includes closed captioning.

- Accessibility Consultant Faculty Ambassador hired to strengthen relationships and build capacity within academic department to assist with complex accommodation implementation, thereby increasing access and inclusion for students facing barriers within the college learning environment.

- Program Approvals Process updated to include accessibility section for all new programs.

- Course outlines are fully accessible, meeting required accessible standards and are available in alternative formats when required.

- Several webinars and workshops held over the reporting period to support educators in advancing skills to support students with disabilities, including Intro to Kurzweil 3000, Learner Variability and Removing Barriers, How to Create Accessible PowerPoints.

- Accessibility Tips and Faculty Support included creating Blackboard (Learning Management System) templates, Blackboard course builder.

- Supporting Students with COVID-19 Protocols (Information and Communication Standard):

  - Live Transcription: Deaf Services has collaborated with Habitat Learn to improve the quality of the service received. The service providers assigned by Habitat Learn transcribe verbatim what is being said by the professor or classmates through typed notation on a laptop. A plan is being developed to provide ongoing access to this feature with varying delivery methods.

  - Access to Virtual Synchronous Lectures: Implementation of Platform caption box and Messenger Pigeon. Students have choice to display transcript, increases equal access to recorded lectures.

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Multiple efforts throughout the college focus on the implementation of UDL:

  - Webinars: Supporting the Mental Health and Accommodations Needs of Students in Online Platforms through a UDL lens, Managing & Collecting In-Class Worksheets in the Class Notebook (UDL & OneNote)

  - Communities of Practice: UDL Practice Zone (a peer support space for those integrating UDL practices)

  - Convened Book Club focused on UDL capacity building, which read Antiracism and Universal Design for Learning: Building Expressways to Success.

  - Conference: Pathways to Success: Inclusion. Equity. Empowerment.

  - UDL Certificate Program implemented

EMPLOYMENT STANDARD

The Employment Standard, under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, requires employers to provide for accessibility across all stages of the employment life cycle. These standards provide guidelines around accessible employee recruitment and communication, interviewing, hiring and employment practices. Areas of focus include (but are not limited to): recruitment, assessment or selection processes, notices to successful applicants, workplace emergency response information, individual accommodation plans, return to work processes, performance management, career development and advancement.

2020–2021 Accomplishments include:

- Individualized Emergency Accommodation Plans for employees with disabilities continue to be created with the input of the employee with reference to their specific needs.

- Family Status Accommodation policy and procedure along with application form and FAQs reviewed and updated, resulting in consistent practice of the review of Family Status Accommodations and providing greater flexibility for employees to care for family members.

- Medical Accommodation policy and procedures along with application form reviewed and updated to ensure consistent practice of the review and implementation of employee medical accommodations to ensure individual needs are met.

- Onboarding for student and graduate hires within Research and Innovation has been enhanced to improve awareness and communication on AODA requirements, accessibility, and inclusion.

- Student hires within Research and Innovation are now provided with flexible timesheets as opposed to regular scheduling to better accommodate schedules and provide greater flexibility and work satisfaction.

- Supporting Employees During COVID-19 Protocols (Employment Standard)

  - Ergonomics procedures reviewed and updated to enable consistent practice surrounding ergonomic assessment requests and equipment requests.

  - System developed to ensure ergonomic equipment can be requested through online portal, enabling employees' easier access to equipment and facilitating more accessible workstations in remote working environments.

  - Enhanced mask policy: sourced transparent window masks to allow entire face and facial expression to ensure communication among employees and students is accessible.

DESIGN OF PUBLIC SPACES STANDARD (BUILT ENVIRONMENT)

The Design of Public Spaces Standard, under the Integrated Accessibility Standards, is intended to remove barriers in buildings and outdoor spaces for people with disabilities. The standard applies only to new construction and extensive renovation and covers outdoor recreation. Focus areas include (but are not limited to) parking, playground equipment for children and youth, and space maintenance.

2020–2021 Accomplishments include:

- Plan to install universal washroom at Casa Loma Campus developed and process implemented, with an expected completion date of March 2022.

WORKING TOWARDS 2025: ACCESSIBILITY AT GEORGE BROWN, WHAT'S NEXT?

George Brown College will continue to meet and strive to exceed the requirements set out in the AODA, including upcoming obligations. The college is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming working and learning environment that supports persons with disabilities. To do this we will need to ensure ongoing and meaningful consultation, comprehensive and collaborative action planning and sustained shared effort in implementation. Over the next year, we will turn our focus to multi-year action planning to ensure that there is a plan in place to support the college in progressing towards our accessibility goals. In addition to a focus on multi-year planning and maintaining our responsibility for compliance under the Act, the following actions are planned for the year ahead:

- Reviewing the new Education Standards that are currently being developed by the provincial government. The draft version of the post-secondary standards was released in fall 2021 for feedback. Preparations for the changes these standards will bring to the college will be a focus in the next year.

- Strengthening our AODA committee by engaging with, listening to, and increasing representation of persons with disabilities within the college community.

- Develop and implement a plan to review the AODA policy.

- Review and refresh Cornerstone required AODA Training Modules as well as compliance indicators throughout the college.

- Developing and providing tools, training and support in planning and hosting accessible virtual events.

- Increased emphasis on virtual events that promote inclusion and a welcoming climate for persons with disabilities and their intersecting identities.

- Upgrade website Content Management System to Drupal 9, which includes improved Accessibility features.

- Expand accessible document training across the organization.

- eLearning & Teaching Innovation (eLTI): Promote Ally and M365 for accessibility content and create alternative support materials for FAQ for Blackboard Classic and Blackboard Ultra.

- Implement new training to support faculty in incorporating learning technologies that support UDL practices.

- Establishing the Designing for Inclusion Taskforce to support accessibility and accommodations for students with disabilities through a focus on three key areas:
    1. teaching and learning;
    2. services and engagement; and
    3. infrastructure.

- Implementing Mental Health and Well-Being multi-year strategy with an initial emphasis on gap analysis and leadership commitment and engagement.

CONCLUSION

Creating an accessible institution requires collaborative work to remove barriers and create greater opportunities. The OAREHRS office will continue to maintain our legal responsibilities under the AODA and will strive to build representative coalitions to promote and advance this work. Our commitment to these efforts will also extend to the development of comprehensive plans that enable us to cultivate a community that empowers all its members to engage in inclusion, and ensure inclusive design in all aspects of our policies, planning, and programming.

CONTACT

If you have any questions about AODA compliance or accessibility best practices at George Brown College, please contact: aoda@georgebrown.ca