Advancing Accessible Teaching and Learning Environments in Ontario Universities

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Introduction

This article is to be included in the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) Educators' Accessibility Resources Kit.[1] Intended as a high-level overview of the topic of disability and inclusion, the article discusses the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) along with the broader policy context of disability-related legislation that affects the post-secondary sector in Ontario. Audiences for this article are faculty members, sessional instructors and teaching assistants along with university administrators, other university staff and faculty associations.

One aim of the article is to support Ontario universities and educators in promoting accessibility on campus and in creating more accessible teaching materials and learning environments, whether through awareness training on program design, course instruction and delivery or though more systemic initiatives regarding university policies and services. Another aim is to address faculty member concerns and responsibilities with respect to the implementation of standards under the AODA and with respect to university specific policies on reasonable accommodation and inclusive accessibility. Universities in Ontario have a distinctive opportunity and a specific obligation to positively transform the accessibility and inclusiveness of post-secondary learning.

[1] The Educators' Accessibility Resource Kit is in response to Section 16 of the Integrated Accessibility Standards, under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This specific section is a requirement for universities in the province to train educators on accessible program or course delivery and instruction. See http://www.accessiblecampus.ca

The article examines the public policy context for the academic accommodation of students with disabilities; considers the awareness and understanding by faculty on the purpose and rationale of the AODA and their responsibilities under that legislation; the basis of faculty reluctance, hesitation or even resistance to accommodation and accessibility at their university; and, the measures needed to encourage university educators and administrators to be proactive about accessibility. The article also outlines what successful accessibility might look like at a university for students, faculty, administrators, staff and members of the public.

The range of disabilities under consideration include sensory ones related to seeing and/or hearing; physical ones that concern mobility, agility and chronic conditions of pain; cognitive impairments associated with learning, memory, and developmental/intellectual disability; and mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and other emotional or psychological conditions. In educational settings, accommodation has several aspects: physical, for example inclusive classroom arrangements; pedagogical, for example choices on assignments or choices in method of assessment; cultural and social, for example attitudes and relationships of acceptance. The concept of reasonable accommodation is rooted in legislation and the limits of what is reasonable are framed in relation to undue hardship to the program or university. Academic accommodations tend to be individualized adaptations of materials or environments or requirements which provide the student with an alternative means of meeting the essential requirements of an assignment or course or co-op placement or degree program. Accessibility encompasses more than successful admission to a university program and more than physical access to buildings and rooms. The idea of accessibility refers as well to the user-friendliness of a particular course activity or the overall course curriculum or the academic program design, the approachability of faculty and staff, the ready availability of teaching or learning support and various modes of communication, and the ease of accessing and understanding
information materials.

An important message of this article is that making a university accessible and inclusive will benefit the entire student population, including students with identified disabilities and those without identified disabilities. Inclusive accessibility will also greatly reduce the need for retroactive accommodation which ultimately would mean less work for faculty members and fewer incidents where there is potential for human rights complaints due to delays or refusals to provide academic accommodations.

The Public Policy Context

On the academic accommodation and inclusive access of students with disabilities in Ontario universities, the public policy context includes several levels and forms: an international treaty, a Canadian constitutional document, provincial legislation and standards, court rulings and human rights tribunal decisions, university plans and policies, and faculty procedures and practices.

This policy context reflects various community expectations, articulates certain legal duties and rights, identifies assorted mechanisms for implementation, and expresses authoritative statements of values and goals. For example, the guiding principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereafter referred to as the UN Convention or the Convention) include respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons; full and effective participation and inclusion in society; respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity; equality of opportunity; accessibility; and equality between men and women. The Ontario Human Rights Code states that "it is public policy in Ontario to recognize the dignity and worth of every person and to provide for equal rights and opportunities without discrimination."

On the question of what is disability, the UN Convention, states that "persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis." Canada signed this Convention in 2007 and, following consultations and processes of legislative reviews, the federal government and all provincial and territorial governments ratified it in 2010, which means that all governments agree to be legally bound by the provisions of the Convention. Article 8 of the Convention concerns awareness-raising and commits governments to adopt measures:

a. To raise awareness throughout society, including at the family level, regarding persons with disabilities, and to foster respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities;

b. To combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities, including those based on sex and age, in all areas of life;

c. To promote awareness of the capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities.

Measures to this end include:

a.   Initiating and maintaining effective public awareness campaigns designed:

i.   To nurture receptiveness to the rights of persons with disabilities;

ii.   To promote positive perceptions and greater social awareness towards persons with disabilities;

iii.   To promote recognition of the skills, merits and abilities of persons with disabilities, and of their contributions to the workplace and the labour market;

b.   Fostering at all levels of the education system, including in all children from an early age, an attitude of respect for the rights of persons with disabilities;

c.   Encouraging all organs of the media to portray persons with disabilities in a manner consistent with the purpose of the present Convention;

d.   Promoting awareness-training programmes regarding persons with disabilities and the rights of persons with disabilities.

Article 24 recognizes "the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and life-long learning." Moreover, to "ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary [post-secondary] education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others" governments "shall ensure that reasonable accommodation [of the individual's requirements] is provided to persons with disabilities." For the purposes of the UN Convention, reasonable accommodation means "necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms."

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, entrenched in the constitution, states with respect to equality rights that, "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on … mental or physical disability." The Charter then immediately adds that the previous section "does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability."

This later section allows for affirmative action and equity measures that aim to improve the circumstances of disadvantaged people, including those individuals with a mental or physical disability. The constitutional basis for such equity measures rests on the belief that identical treatment of a group, such as students in a course, can result in significant inequality, especially for individuals disadvantaged because of mental or physical impairments not supported. The essence of true equality, as the Supreme Court of Canada has stated, is the accommodation of differences.

For some decades now the Ontario Human Rights Code has recognized people with disabilities as a group that warrants protection from discrimination. "Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to services, goods, and facilities, without discrimination because of … disability." Under the Code, disability is defined as "any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect, or illness;" "a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;" "a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;" and "a mental disorder." On the matter of reasonable accommodation and the duty to accommodate, the Ontario Code states that it must be demonstrated that "the needs of the person cannot be accommodated without undue hardship on the person responsible for accommodating those needs, considering the cost, outside source of funding, if any, and health and safety requirements, if any." From the Ontario Code have come a number of human rights tribunal decisions and court cases dealing with accommodation and disability in general and some relating to education more specifically, thus forming an important part of the policy context for universities.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005 creates a legal duty to remove and prevent barriers in both the public and private sectors to create a more inclusive Ontario by 2025. All Ontario universities are required to comply with the legislation and its associated regulations. Through this legislation, the government of Ontario committed to increasing accessibility with a focus in five specific areas, namely, customer service; information and communications; transportation; employment; and, built environment. The first of the five AODA Standards to become law was the Customer Service Standard in 2008.

Under the Standard, businesses and organizations that provide goods or services to people in Ontario, including universities, are now legally required to make their customer service operations accessible to people with disabilities. As of January 2010, universities were required to be in compliance with the Standard. On July 1, 2011 the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) was enacted into law by the Ontario government. The IASR was initially composed of Regulations related to three Standards: Information & Communications, Employment, and Transportation and general requirements related to each standard.[2] The Design of Public Spaces Standard was included in the IASR on January 1, 2013, this standard is focused on the removal of barriers in public spaces such as trails, beach access routes, and exterior paths of travel and do not encompass areas that are covered by the Ontario Building Code. Compliance dates for this Regulation are staggered, allowing for graduated implementation starting in 2011 and ending in 2025.

A number of accessibility requirements under the AODA will require organizations to pro-actively remove barriers to create more inclusive environments, including those within universities. As regards the Customer Service Standard, all staff, volunteers, contractors and any other individuals who interact with the public or other third parties on behalf of the university must be trained on accessible customer service delivery. Under the IASR, organizations will be required to create a multi-year plan outlining strategies to meet accessibility requirements, including but not limited to, providing training on accessibility standards, providing accessible formats, communication supports and websites, and incorporating accessibility criteria into their procurement processes.

The AODA is unique in Canada. Ontario is the first province with such comprehensive legislation that offers a clear public policy commitment to accessibility for people with disabilities and which links expectations by individuals, families and community groups of leadership and collaborative action over time to advance inclusion and participation for all citizens.

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[2] Enhancements to accessibility in buildings are in progress through a review of Ontario's Building Code by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

General Situation In Ontario Universities

The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) has been working with universities and the Ontario government in preparing for the implementation of AODA. Execution of this accessibility legislation in the post-secondary education sector has not been top-down; rather, through bodies like COU implementation is occurring through networks of working groups and by initiatives within individual universities. For example, in partnership with Queen's University, COU developed a training module for Customer Service training requirements. The module was created in both English and French and distributed to all campuses in December 2009.

In order to respond to the IASR, COU, in partnership with the Government of Ontario, and the University of Toronto, and in collaboration with all universities in Ontario, developed the Accessibility Toolkit, which includes resources to assist universities in meeting the requirements of the AODA. To assist universities in providing resources to faculty on the design, development and delivery of inclusive course curriculum – an educational specific requirement under the AODA - COU is also working with the Government of Ontario, the University of Guelph, the University of Toronto and York University in order to develop the Educators' Accessibility Resource Kit. Since 2012, COU has also been working in partnership with the Government of Ontario to run a student competition on accessible design. The Innovative Designs for Accessibility (IDeA) competition challenges university students to create innovative practical solutions to accessibility-related issues that promote inclusive environments. The COU have also produced a series of short papers on academic issues prepared by Academic Colleagues on such topics as learning disabilities, accommodating graduate students with disabilities, and online education.

In the last five years or so, the number of individuals responsible for coordinating the implementation of the AODA has grown from there being a few to there now being accessibility coordinators established in almost all universities across the province. In some cases, accessibility coordinators are also moving beyond the implementation of AODA requirements and promoting accessibility more broadly in Ontario universities. These accessibility coordinators join the infrastructure in Ontario universities of teaching and learning centres in addition to counselling, equity and diversity services for aboriginal students, international students, students with disabilities, and other groups.

[3] See http://www.cou.on.ca/publications/academic-colleague-papers

A shift is also detectable, at least by those working in this area, in the language around meeting the needs of students from an emphasis on disability and accommodation to accessibility and inclusion; and in a move from responding to requests and human rights complaints toward more proactive awareness raising and barrier removal. An example is the discussion taking place in universities on mental health services and care and on promoting healthy environments. Physical accessibility in the built environment of campus is being addressed with new ramps and doors and retrofitting of older facilities as well.

Nonetheless, as some Canadian academics have recently observed, "while progress has been made, a number of barriers to inclusion of students with disabilities, remain" (Coriale, Larson and Robertson 2012: 424; see also Hibbs and Dianne Pothier 2006). Concerted attention by universities to the needs of students with disabilities remains uneven, with outdated or unwarranted taken-for-granted assumptions about disability playing a part, and undoubtedly with some students with disabilities falling through the cracks. Among faculty across universities and within any given university, the level of awareness on the AODA, and the basic understanding of issues of disability, accommodation and accessibility, while growing, remains modest, probably even among administrators at the departmental and faculty levels. There is likely confusion over the meaning of reasonable accommodation and inclusive accessibility. With sessional instructors, the low level of awareness might well be even more serious, especially if they are not routinely involved in faculty meetings are not on a campus frequently or are not using the university's email system.

In Ontario, in the 2010-2011 academic year, more than 43,000 students with disabilities were registered in the post-secondary system.[4] The general trend in all provinces includes a growing number of students with disabilities – including a trend towards "invisible disabilities" such as learning disabilities and chronic illness – enrolled in colleges and universities; a growing number of requests for accommodations to meet learning needs; a growing presence of aids, devices and assistive technologies on campuses; a growing number of students with cognitive, learning and mental health conditions; among the student population generally, perhaps a greater awareness and familiarity of disability, having had one or more classmates with disabilities in elementary and or secondary school; and, thus, among students with disabilities (and their families), an expectation of inclusion within the university system. [5]

[4] Ontario Ministry of Education, Special Education Update (October 2012), p. 15. See http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/specialed_update2012.pdf

[5] More date can be found at http://heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/At%20Issue%20-%20Disability%20in%20ON_ENG.pdf

Being a post-secondary student with a disability can mean having your needs for learning not recognized or only partially supported, and so adapting oneself as best as possible to standardized course or program requirements. The academic literature on disability and university education is primarily from the perspective of students with disabilities. Studies have examined the transitions and social experiences of university students with disabilities, including their motivations and self-perceptions. A prominent theme in this literature concerns students with disabilities managing their impairments and negotiating their educational environments. These processes of management and negotiation concern the issues of self-disclosure, determining the actual availability of supports, the formation of social relations at university, and the attitudes and perceptions of peers, staff and instructors (Holloway 2001; Low 1996; Olney and Brockelman 2003; Papasotiriou and Windle 2012).

Being a post-secondary student with a disability can mean being invisible or too visible at times, facing unfair stereotypes and awkward silences. It can mean having a sense of being limited in connecting with fellow students or in contributing to classes or seminars. Despite provincial initiatives such as the Disability Bursary Program, it can mean incurring not insignificant out-of-pocket expenses for supports or technical aids. Being a student with a disability can mean experiencing unexpected disparities when transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education in the services and supports available (Farmakopoulou and Watson 2003; Stienstra 2012).

Under the policy and practice context in Ontario universities, students with a disability seeking an academic accommodation have certain procedural responsibilities and rights. The student must "provide recent and relevant documentation substantiating the disability and the need for accommodation." Moreover, "The student must show that the disability affects his/her ability to benefit equally (vis-à-vis non-disabled students) from the program that the university is providing." In addition, "once an academic accommodation is in place … it is the student's responsibility to meet the essential requirements of a course/program."

In terms of rights or protections, "The student is required to disclose only such information as pertains to the need for accommodation and any restrictions or limitations. The documentation supporting the request for a particular accommodation need be provided only to those who need to see it in order to substantiate the request and oversee the development of a course of action" (Rose 2009: 7-8).

Faculty Responses: Understanding the reality of reluctance

What does disability mean to faculty members? How do they, university senior administrators or support staff perceive and treat students with disclosed impairments? Responses undoubtedly depend on personal and career experiences as well as the policy context, individual awareness, and collegial knowledge. At the level of principle, perhaps most faculty members in Ontario universities understand the necessity and desirability for new measures to enhance the accessibility of teaching environments and learning materials. In recent times, awareness of the diverse abilities of students has likely risen among faculty and staff, accommodation policies have been adopted by universities, and some teaching practices have adjusted in academic units. However, that there is reluctance by instructors and administrators and, at times, resistance to academic accommodation must be acknowledged. What forms does such reluctance take, what is their apparent basis, and what are the consequences of this reluctance?

For some faculty members the move to inclusive accessibility in Ontario universities may be seen as yet another government imposition, a form of social engineering and political correctness imposed on the academy. Joined to this sentiment may be concerns of encroachments on academic freedom or on the academic integrity of a program of studies. Such concerns overlook the fact that universities are public bodies operating within the political communities of Ontario and Canada, with commensurate social policy responsibilities. Indeed, such sentiments are a form of elitism, claims of exclusivity that academic freedom trumps human rights, provincial and federal laws, and international treaties.

The student presenting with a certified disability may be seen as "an irregular learner," one that represents additional work for the instructor of an established course with time-honoured requirements; new work on top of all the other things a faculty member is expected to do. These concerns may contain outmoded beliefs about what a successful student looks like, speaks, writes and acts like in the classroom or laboratory setting. Without the participation of faculty members, however, the onus of the work will be on the student with the disability striving to succeed within universities as complex and formal organizations. To a certain extent, those time-honoured methods and assignments may be built upon outdated pedagogical beliefs about learning and teaching.

To be sure, the faculty member may well lack knowledge about disability in general or a particular disability that the student self-discloses and may be also understandably uncertain as to how to proceed and become a more accessible and effective instructor. A faculty member may wonder: how can I possibly anticipate all the potential disabilities that my future students may have. Why not just wait then, if and when a student individually requests an accommodation because of their disability. The short answer is that one cannot foresee the composition of needs and abilities of all your students. Rather than take a reactive stance of wait-and-see, assuming diversity in abilities and anticipating probable needs in the student population can encourage a more proactive approach in reviewing program requirements and instruction design and delivery.

In some cases, faculty members resist a request for academic accommodation to a student with a documented disability on the grounds that the accommodation reduce academic standards and/or be unfair to all the other students in the course. This perspective can come from mistaking equality and equity; not recognizing that equal treatment can be discriminatory and result in unequal opportunities for learners with diverse abilities. The faculty member may feel like they are "walking on eggs," worried not to offend or to become the subject of a human rights complaint. Even if motivated to respond to an accommodation request, a faculty member may not know where to start; who to turn to for advice or where on campus to go for information or a consultation.

A general reluctance to support academic accommodation places an undue burden on the individual students to initiate, negotiate and oversee any accommodation request and process. As noted earlier, this is a main theme in the research literature on the experience of students with disabilities in universities. Students with disabilities grapple with privacy concerns, worries of stigma and possible isolation from peers in everyday interactions. Furthermore, as Rose points out, "the costs to students of self-advocacy [involve] a great deal of time and is stressful, especially given the difficulty of accessing scarce professional resources in times of economic constraint. The wait-time for meeting with a case manager can be very long, and the case that has to be made for assistance can be laborious to put together and to present" (2009: 13). Resistance to accommodation by faculty or staff can also have the effect of disregarding the systemic barriers and practices within universities that reproduce disablement and reinforce a bio-medical model of disability; a model that portrays the student as an abnormal person, a person with defects and problems; not as someone with capacities, interests, and abilities that, within an inclusive and supportive environment, can flourish.

Imagining what success looks like in Ontario universities

One way to think about how to build support for accessibility within a university setting is to appreciate the range of factors that can enhance inclusion and participation by students with disabilities. Six types of enabling factors can be identified. These are: (i) physical or structural design; (ii) attitudinal – beliefs about abilities and disabilities; (iii) informational – nature of awareness, knowledge and understanding; (iv) technological – telecommunication and information technologies and equipment; (v) organizational – governance policies, accommodation and accessibility strategies, and distribution of responsibilities; and, (vi) financial – resources of time, staff and funding are committed to the development and implementation of accessibility policies and practices.

There are two primary approaches to advancing the inclusion of students with disabilities in post-secondary institutions in Ontario, one of which is fairly established and the other of which is emergent across the university system. Table 1 outlines major characteristics of both approaches.

(VIEW TABLE 1 ON NEXT PAGE)

While these two approaches are different and probably inconsistent in certain aspects, they are not either/or choices in everyday practice in the university. They can be complementary in some important aspects. Indeed, progressively shifting toward greater accessibility will require the articulation of policies, ideas, and procedures as well as the acceptance of shared responsibility among all groups in universities.

The vision of advancing accessible teaching and learning environments involves an adjustment in emphasis from mainly reacting to individual requests on a case by case basis within a program to routinely anticipating and planning for equal opportunities through universal practices throughout a university. "Faculty members who relate to students in authentic, personalized ways and engage in a process of self-reflection about their own feelings and attitudes toward disability are much more likely to create meaningful, inclusive and empowering relationships with students" (Cariole, Larson and Robertson 2012: 432). Effective realization of inclusive accessibility requires a mixed approach to implementation with "bottom-up" and "top-down" commitment, leadership, and collaboration.

Table 1
Reasonable Accommodation and
Inclusive Accessibility: comparative dimensions

Dimensions	Reasonable Accommodation	Inclusive Accessibility
Public Policy Basis	Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982 Ontario Human Rights Code, 1990	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2010 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005
Key Ideas	Disadvantaged individuals Affirmative actionAnti-discrimination Duty to accommodateUndue hardship Essential requirements of academic programming andof health and safety	Disability rights are human rightsPrevent and remove barriers pro-activelyPublic awareness and training of professionals Universal design for services Inclusive learning environmentsOutreach to all groups
Level Of Attention	Individual students and faculty members and specific courses and academic units	Across academic and administrative units of the overall university
Basic Objective	Respond to individual requests for academic accommodations by students with disabilities within the essential requirements of the degree program in question	Develop a culture of inclusive learning for all students by planning for diverse capacities and circumstances and receiving resources on accessible course design and delivery
Documents, Processes And Methods	University policy on procedures for requests, records needed, and rules around appeals Self-disclosure by students and providing relevant certification Degree program conditions Academic unit practices	University policy on accessibility and inclusion Admissions and recruitment outreach to encourage applicationsCentral funds for assistive supports, student awards and bursaries
Responsibility	On individual student to advocate and negotiate in relation to an instructor and the university systems	On the university administration, faculty and staff in relation to students with disabilities
Target Of Change	Barriers in a course or field placement	Awareness and knowledge, and teaching practices and learning supports available in the university
Underlying Model Of Disability	Individualistic and bio-medical with emphasis on limitations from a norm	Interplay of impairments and environments, a social model with emphasis on inclusive attitudes and actions

Moreover, inclusive accessible university education requires a cultural move; that is, an intellectual shift to a general understanding of the variety of people and the diversity within ability and disability. For accessible learning and teaching to take root, this shift must take place university-wide, a shared commitment anchored in consultative processes and formal policies as well as on the ground practices. It would be a university culture in which regular faculty member and sessional instructors would be comfortable asking students, both those with disabilities and those without, "Does this work for you?" and, in turn, students would feel comfortable expressing their preferences, making recommendations, and presenting questions. Departmental chairs and faculty deans/associate deans would assist in making available information on how to review courses and adopt more inclusive instructional design elements in teaching, research and supervisions. Ideally, it would be a culture in which faculty would not want to be left behind on the changes taking place with respect to accessible and inclusive teaching and learning.

This new culture of learning and teaching would involve an appreciation that accessibility is equitable and fair, and a recognition that even with the introduction of universal design[6] practice in program delivery there will always be a need for certain specific accommodations. Requests for specific academic accommodations may someday be exceptional but they should still be expected and welcomed, seen as opportunities for university faculty, staff and administrators to further learn and be responsive to students (Hibbs and Pothier 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

Advancing accessible teaching and learning environments in Ontario universities is a policy commitment in progress and the Educators' Accessibility Resource Kit is a series of resources still evolving as the project develops. The public policy context has increased in recent years, including legislative requirements of the AODA, 2005 and the international obligations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by Canada in 2010.

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[6] As Stienstra (2012: 81) says of universal or inclusive design: "The principles are widely used by architects, engineers, urban planners and many others. Specifically they call for environments that are equitable, flexible, intuitive, perceptible, safe, easy and accommodating." The intention is to create environments that can be used by people of diverse abilities, capacities, and preferences along with choices in the methods of use.

These initiatives build on other fundamental laws at both the federal and provincial levels in which people with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments are granted important rights of dignity, respect, and equality of opportunity. Certainly, "the broader legislative environment will continue to require that universities accommodate students with disabilities in a variety of ways. While legislation such as the Ontario Human Rights Code addresses the need for individualized response to academic disabilities, for example, the collective responsibility of universities to meet the needs of students with disabilities is signalled by legislation such as Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act" (Rose 2009: 16).

The relative shift from a culture of reasonable accommodation to one of inclusive accessibility is underway in Ontario. It is, undeniably, a gradual and challenging process; one of aspirations and ambiguities that confront attitudinal, architectural and organizational issues; yet, a process incredibly worthwhile and potentially transformative with some successes already and other promising practices forthcoming.

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