**EMILY CARR
UNIVERSITY**
of Art + Design

Emily Carr University Draft Accessibility Plan

SEPTEMBER 20, 2023

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Territorial Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that Emily Carr University is situated on unceded, traditional, and ancestral xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and səl̓ilw̓ətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) territories.

As guests on unceded territory, we have a responsibility to work towards reconciliation, decolonization, and social justice. We recognize that acts of colonialism have created many enduring inequities for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Emily Carr University is situated on unceded lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and səl̓ilw̓ətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) people, the original and rightful caretakers of this place.

As a guest institution, we are responsible for creating systems that do not damage or interfere with those of the Salish people, and which work to rectify the enduring inequities that colonialism has wrought for Indigenous peoples. Because colonialism and white supremacy are inherently disabling, we know that any work looking to increase the accessibility of our institution must deeply consider these intersections and perspectives.

Language

Throughout this document, you will notice that people-first language and identity-first language are used interchangeably (i.e., people with disabilities and disabled persons). This is done intentionally to pay respect to those who choose to identify by either means. The issue of language and identification has traditionally been decided by those without lived experience, so this measure aims to ensure that people feel respected while they engage with the ECU accessibility plan.

Introduction

Emily Carr University is proud to present this initial blueprint toward a fully realized accessibility plan that strives to create an inclusive, barrier-free environment for everyone who engages with our learning institution. This plan represents the first step of many as we come together as a community to undertake this deeply important work.

About Emily Carr University and Design

Emily Carr University of Art + Design (ECU) is a school of students, teachers, thinkers, and makers unlike any other – at once laser-focused and infinite by practice and nature. Established in 1925, we are the only specialized, accredited, public, post-secondary university in British Columbia solely devoted to education and research in the creative sector and its associated knowledge economy. ECU is Canada's top-ranked school for art and design, and 25th in the world. We merge research, critical theory and studio practice in an interdisciplinary environment, strengthening our work by the integration of our personal and professional practices. Our strategy, facilities, partnerships and resources are intentionally student-centered to foster dialogue, expression and open connections in support of the next generation of creative and cultural leaders.

Our home base in Vancouver – a young, vibrant city, known for its verve, beauty and unparalleled livability – reflects our core belief: creativity will always be our greatest natural resource, individually and collectively. Inspired by this belief, our programs offer undergraduate, graduate degrees, and applied research in the fields of visual arts, media arts, and design, as well as professional certificates, pre-university, and lifelong learning in these areas.

A Message from Leadership

Dear ECU community,

As Emily Carr University nears our 100th anniversary, it's incredible to reflect on the many incarnations this school has been through. We are a constantly evolving community. Something I'm particularly proud of is ECU's students, staff, and faculty's commitment to social justice which fuels our ongoing work around equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). We have much to do to create a truly equitable, diverse and inclusive community, but our progress is real and palpable.

Ensuring that our school is accessible and barrier-free for everyone, regardless of ability, is a core principle of EDI. As an art, media, and design institution, we have unique considerations when thinking of what it means to remove physical, virtual and attitudinal barriers at ECU. Art is for everyone, and through the creation of ECU's first accessibility plan, we have the privilege of exploring how we invite people to experience ECU.

We are at the very beginning of this significant undertaking. This plan represents an initiation of a large body of work that lies ahead. You might call it a "plan for a plan." As we move forward, our Accessibility Committee will expand to ensure that all facets of our community are represented. Student participation will be key, along with staff and faculty. ECU is grateful to the Government of British Columbia for igniting this long-overdue work by introducing the province's new accessibility act. We are enthusiastic participants as we look ahead to ECU's next incarnation; one that is accessible, inclusive and welcoming for all community members.

Thank you to the Accessibility Committee for volunteering your time, energy and lived experience to get this first step on our journey moving forward. I'm excited for the work ahead.

Sincerely,

Trish Kelly, PhD
Interim President + Vice Chancellor
Emily Carr University

Message From our Accessibility Committee

As ECU's first-ever accessibility committee, we approach this important work with the goal of creating a learning and working environment where all students, staff and faculty can thrive. Our work will be grounded in anti-ableism and meaningful inclusion. Our committee recognizes that all people experience barriers at some point in their lives, and for some, on a moment-by-moment basis.

We at Emily Carr University are collectively responsible for breaking down barriers as they arise. As a learning institution, creating learning spaces that welcome the lived realities and the whole participation of all is imperative for students to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to form a community with others, preparing them to enter the world as empathetic, creative problem solvers.

The committee acknowledges this plan is an important first step with much work to follow. We hope to develop a plan that evolves over time; one that highlights our gaps, provides the opportunity to bridge these gaps, and shares these learnings with the ECU community. We are committed to developing mechanisms that support regular feedback so we can constantly, collectively create accessible environments. Along the way, we intend to find joy and embrace the challenges that come with undertaking this kind of complex work.

Definitions

Ableism

Ableism is discrimination, prejudice or a systemic bias against individuals with disabilities. Ableism instills the idea that disabled people are less than people without disabilities. Ableism is commonly connected with other forms of oppression such as racism and sexism[i].

Accessibility

For the purposes of this plan, the provision of accessibility should be seen as a shared responsibility of the university, its faculty, staff, and students to ensure that barriers are identified and removed[ii].

Barrier

A barrier is anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with an impairment.

Disability

Disability means an inability to participate fully and equally in society as the result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.

Disabilities can be invisible (un-see-able to someone other than the disabled person) and episodic (vary in intensity by the day or hour); the best way to understand what is disabling to someone is to trust what they say and to understand that this can change based both on the trust one has earned and what the disabled person is experiencing at that moment.

Legislative Framework

The U.N Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CPRD) was the first convention produced in the 2000s and the very first human rights convention in history to be developed by the people who would benefit from it, being people with disabilities. The U.N CRPD is an integral piece of international legislation that assists us in making decisions that are respectful of the inherent dignity and respect that disabled people deserve.

The UN CRPD gives us the tools as Canadians to review and update our laws to reflect the intent of becoming an inclusive society. The UN CRPD provides us with a much-needed lens that helps make the Canadian Charter on Rights and Freedoms work for every Canadian and which forms the backbone of human rights in Canada.

The ability to use the influence of the UN CRPD thoughtfully has resulted in the development of further legal requirements, such as the Accessible Canada Act. Along with national and provincial human rights mechanisms, the use of this framework allows us to create provincial measures that will help us make sure that barriers are removed and not replaced. All the while guaranteeing that dignity and respect for disability and its intersections are championed and maintained.

The Accessible BC Act upholds a main theme that underpins all of this. Disabled people must be involved in decisions that affect them.

Our Commitment:

The Emily Carr University of Art and Design (ECU) is committed to building an academic environment where people with disabilities can learn, work, and enjoy. This commitment is long-lasting and indivisible from the [values](#) that ECU upholds.

Our Approach

We invite anyone who wants to join us in this work, to seek out past and ongoing moments of joy and community, and to find out more about what is already working. We endeavour to seek out past and ongoing moments of ableism and to find out where attention and resources can make our institution less exclusionary.

We uplift and amplify the voices of those impacted by barriers to inclusion. We uplift and amplify the decades of work that have been done by individual students, staff, and teachers at Emily Carr, to create access within our institution.

We recognize the importance of compliance documentation but acknowledge also that confronting ableism in our systems requires a cultural shift and collective intention. Processes like this take time, and we wish to honour our journey as it unfolds. The learning that needs to take place and the time it takes to build trust, relationships, and accountability is central to our approach.

About our committee: "Nothing About Us Without Us"

The Accessibility Committee serves a critical role in the development and review of the accessibility plan, as required by the [Accessible B.C. Act](). The Accessibility Committee is responsible for:

I. assisting ECU to identify barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization, and
II. advising ECU on how to remove and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization.

As outlined in the [Accessible B.C. Act, Sec. 9 (2)]() the committee is composed of individuals who represent the diversity of B.C., the lived experience of disability and the perspectives of indigenous people whose land was taken, and the university now occupies. ([see appendix a) for terms of reference]())

The work of this committee is still new in the context of Canada and its provinces. Traditionally, decisions were made that impacted the fabric of societies without the involvement of disabled people. The term "nothing about us without us" means that the evolution to an accessible and inclusive society requires the leadership of disabled people.

The Accessibility Committee was recruited through an invitation that was sent out to the ECU community. Members were selected based on their interests, their work in the field and their voluntary disclosures of disability and indigeneity.

Our Consultation Process

This initial plan has been informed by the voices of the Accessibility Committee and their knowledge of the University and its community. ECU has held multiple meetings with the Accessibility Committee and a specific session was held to develop a list of achievements and future goals that are listed below. Since the University has a higher population during the academic year, there is a vested interest in expanding the committee's approach and membership to include further feedback from the community and student voices, a crucial component in the ongoing consultation process at ECU.

How to Give Feedback

Members of ECU's community and guests are welcome and encouraged to provide feedback about accessibility at Emily Carr by contacting: accessibility.feedback@ecuad.ca.

Accessibility Accomplishments and Work Planned

ECU has developed a list of accomplishments and work planned that highlights ECU's long-standing and enduring commitment to accessibility. This list is framed using the future requirements of the Accessible BC Act.

Accessibility Accomplishments

Information and Communication:

a) The library website has been improved to allow the equal engagement of people with disabilities following WCAG 2.1 guidelines.

b) A toolkit has been built for writing accessible job descriptions and a neurodiversity tool has been developed for ECU's lending program.

c) ECU's classrooms have allowed automatic captioning for videos and workshops for Moodle, an online learning system.

d) In-person and online counselling services are available as well as coaching for students with learning disabilities.

e) Improved processes to reduce barriers for graduate students and researchers to access research funds and research assistant grants.

f) Increased availability of accessibility education and resources for faculty and staff through the NSERC-funded EDI capacity building grant (2023-24).

Built Environment:

a) Physical accessibility improvements such as accessible shower and washroom facilities, wayfinding, signage with pictograms and braille have been applied to the university as well as analyzing support structures for better physical accessibility.

b) ECU has implemented automated doors, a dedicated main entrance, quiet spaces, and a student wellness lounge.

Planned Accessibility Work

Built Environment

a) ECU will focus on physical accessibility within the University's new building and the intention is to centralize efforts to gather and disseminate accessibility information to improve services and facilities.

Systems

a) Community-driven initiatives like the ECU Disability and Neurodivergent Collective will show the importance of fostering activism and support within the university community.

b) The Gallery and the Writing Centre are engaged in presenting co-learning opportunities around tangible first steps to accessible arts presentation (non-auditory access, low-sensory presentation and visual description).

c) ECU has implemented a student position for captioning and transcription of

recorded talks, lectures and course materials.

Delivery of Services

a) ECU will work toward publicly highlighting and endorsing innovation for accessibility coming from students, faculty, and partner researchers.

Our Three-Year Plan

Our three-year plan was assembled in conjunction with the Accessibility Committee and the internal working group as a collective. This facet of community building is integral to the discovery of future actions that will impact the broadest scope of the ECU community. The action plan is as follows:

Priority 1

a) Build the ECU Accessibility Committee to meaningfully engage with and include student perspectives at all points. This will occur before any major review of the accessibility plan so that students can assist in designing and implementing future plans.

b) Build an overarching approach to engagement and establish exchanges and shared space with disability and neurodivergent communities within and outside the ECU community.

c) Promote a culture of curiosity around accessibility work by inviting folks in, providing resources for individuals looking to improve accessibility in their spaces, asking generative questions, embracing both optimism and conflict.

d) Build skills as a community around generative conflict.

e) Provide space and resources to disability communities that are specific for these communities, and where there is no desire to extract labour or knowledge.

Priority 2

a) Centralize ECU's accessibility design criteria for the built environment to improve services and facilities.

b) Build a strategy and process for the incorporation of feedback based on what is needed, and desired, and how to resource and plan for related changes.

Priority 3

Review and update the Accessibility Plan so that it considers the following:

a) Further community engagement deployed by the university such as regular EDI climate surveys, and pulse checks or other group consultations during exceptional circumstances like publicly declared emergencies.

b) Information that is articulated through the University's feedback mechanism, and

c) by the Government of BC through further accessibility requirements.

d) The specific contributions and innovation from the ECU community (in art and design education and research) to accessibility in spaces such as education, presentation, and other public spheres.

e) A shift away from accommodating individual barriers toward creating supportive systems, culture and infrastructure that address accessibility so that as we evolve, it becomes a given that we will build meaningful (physical, curricular, social, emotional, creative) space so as to avoid replacing barriers where they have previously been removed.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The accessibility plan will be reviewed at least once every three years, or as needed. During any review or update of the plan, the Accessibility Committee will be consulted to address and prioritize any new information that might impact the plan. The accessibility committee and the feedback process will continue to act as vital components in the articulation of accessibility at ECU.

How to Give Us Feedback

ECU takes all feedback seriously and will use information that the community has provided to make the University accessible and inclusive. You can give us feedback by contacting: accessibility.feedback@ecuad.ca.

Appendices

Appendix a) Terms of Reference

ECU- Emily Carr University of Art and Design Accessibility Committee Terms of Reference

Name of Committee
ECU Accessibility Committee or "Accessibility Committee".

Vision/Goal Statement
ECU and its accessibility committee will continue to strive towards ensuring an accessible and inclusive environment for all of our community as required by the [Accessible B.C. Act](#).

Statement of Commitment
The Emily Carr University of Art and Design (ECU) is committed to building an academic environment where people with disabilities can learn, work and enjoy. This commitment is long-lasting and indivisible from the values that ECU upholds.

Background
Founded in 1925, ECU is one of B.C.'s oldest, and the only one dedicated solely to professional education and learning in the arts, media, and design. In Canada, Emily Carr University is one of only four post-secondary art institutions and one of only 18 art institutions in North America with close to 2,000 full-time employees. In 2021, Emily Carr University was ranked the top university in Canada for art and design, and number 30 in the world, in the (QS) World University Rankings.

Purpose of the Committee
With the introduction of the Accessible BC Act, ECU has coordinated and assembled an Accessibility Committee that upholds the tasks as required by the Act.
The ECU Accessibility Committee was organized in 2023 to:

a) Assist ECU in identifying barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization, and

b) Advise ECU on how to remove and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization.

The Accessibility Committee will also assist in the review and update of the ECU Accessibility Plan. The main area of focus for the ECU Accessibility Committee is to ensure that people with disabilities can access and enjoy the university, and to partake in campus life, whether they are students, employees or volunteers, by removing barriers that exclude them.

The voices of people with disabilities have traditionally been neglected in decisions that affect them. It is important that the ECU Accessibility Committee undertake to privilege their perspectives and listen to those people who have been most impacted by barriers to equal participation.

Scope & Composition
As outlined in the Accessible B.C. Act, Sec. 9 (2) the committee is composed of individuals who represent the diversity of B.C., the lived experience of disability and the perspectives of indigenous people whose land was taken, and the university now occupies.

Roles & Responsibilities
a) The role of the committee is to help the university identify barriers and advise the university on how to remove barriers.
b) Committee members must interact with others in a respectful and inclusive manner.
c) In its meetings, the committee will act with integrity and honesty, be prepared and informed, use active listening and be tolerant of other's perspectives.
d) If there is a decision to be made that directly affects the accessibility plan in any way, the committee will strive for consensus. If a decision can't be reached using consensus, a vote will be carried out.
e) The Accessibility Committee will continue to conduct its meetings using hybrid, remote and in-person platforms.
f) Meetings will be recorded and shared with its members.
g) The ECU Accessibility Committee will undertake meetings with the highest regard for different perspectives.
h) Any subject matter and issues that are discussed as required by the function of the ECU Accessibility Committee, will be kept confidential.

    i) In the spirit of collaboration, no one member should work towards their own personal benefit.

    j) Conflicts of Interest are to be disclosed at the beginning of meetings in relation to the work at hand.

    k) It is the committee's discretion to deal with conflicts of interest reasonably.

Terms of Service

    a) The ECU Accessibility Community will evaluate its membership annually to maintain the integral perspectives of the university's staff and student body.

    b) The terms of service for those already on the committee can be renewed by expression of interest on an annual basis.

    c) There should be no decisions made that directly affect the committee without the appropriate consultation of the university's student body.

Procedures

    a) Meetings will be 2-3 times per semester, or as needed.

    b) Support for minute-taking and technical requirements will be arranged at least 2 weeks before a meeting.

    c) Quorum will be comprised of 50 percent of the active committee plus 1 individual.

    d) The Accessibility Plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every three years.

Resources:

Legislation:

[UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

[The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)

[The Accessible Canada Act](#)

[The B.C. Human Rights Code](#)

[The Accessible B.C. Act](#)

Community

[British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS)](#)

[BC Accessibility Hub](#)

[BC Disability Alliance](#)

[BC Ombudsperson](#)

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[i] Canadian Encyclopedia: Ableism.
https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/ableism

[ii] Definitions for Accessibility, Barriers, and in part, Disability originated from the
[Accessible B.C. Act Sec (1)](#)