Students' Society of McGill University
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3600 McTavish St., Suite 1200, Montréal, QC, H3A 0G3
Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories

ACCESSIBILITY POLICY

Adopted by Legislative Council: 2016/04/07
Expires: 2021/01/01
Adopted Motion (Link)

Background

As outlined in its constitution, the Students' Society of McGill University has a strong commitment to demonstrating leadership in matters of human rights and social justice and "commits itself to groups, programs, and activities that are devoted to the well-being of a group disadvantaged because of irrelevant personal characteristics that include but are not limited to race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, gender identification, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or social class."[1]

The Society has shown leadership in its efforts to promote equity and anti-oppression through the development of an Equity Policy and the institutionalization of equity programming and advocacy, but to date has not placed a focus on the support of students with disabilities or on the accessibility of the Society and campus at large in collaboration with this community. In order to stand in solidarity with students with disabilities, the adoption of this Accessibility Policy serves as the operationalization of a commitment to ensuring that the Society prioritize accessibility and the unique needs of students with disabilities.

In order to fulfill this commitment, the Society must acknowledge and address the current barriers and issues of access that exist on the McGill campus and on University campuses at large. The barriers experienced by students with disabilities extend far beyond the physical built environment on campus and affect access to essential support services, participation in the classroom and learning environment, and involvement in extra-curricular activities.

Important first steps towards increasing access for students with disabilities have been taken at McGill University, including the implementation of a Policy Concerning the Rights of Students with Disabilities,[2] the establishment of the University's Joint Board Senate Committee on People with Disabilities, and the application of barrier-free design standards to renovation and construction

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[1] SSMU Constitution, amended March 18, 2016

[2] Policy Concerning the Rights of Students with Disabilities, last amended by McGill Senate in 2005.

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projects [3] on a campus that still lacks barrier free access to many physical spaces [4]. However, substantial barriers to access remain in the built environment, learning environment, and student life as a whole. Recognizing that the number of students with disabilities on campus continues to increase alongside rising mental health concerns in the McGill community, while noting that not all individuals who have a mental illness identify as having a disability, the need to develop a culture of accessibility on campus is pressing.

In light of the lack of accessibility associated with many aspects of student life and learning, the Society must show leadership in meeting the needs of Members and building a strong and more equitable community through demonstrating its commitment to accessibility and the support of students with disabilities. This involves engaging with issues of disability and ableism in meaningful ways through solidarity and advocacy, while recognizing that disability does not exist in isolation and often intersects with other identities, such as, race, gender and class, to disproportionately marginalize certain individuals and/or groups.

This marginalization continues to exist where accommodations are made available, as accommodations made to students with disabilities often place undue burden on the individual requesting accommodation. The Society recognizes that it is the fundamental responsibility of the institution to ensure that individuals are not expected to shoulder the burden of their own accommodation and aims to be cognizant to avoid the double-burdening of students with disabilities and instead act in meaningful solidarity.

Through the implementation of this Accessibility Policy, the Society aims to demonstrate its active commitment to the promotion of universal access and the support of students with disabilities within the operations of the Society, as well as to advocate for the prioritization of accessibility at the university-wide level.

Scope

This Accessibility Policy shall apply to all individuals and bodies involved in decision making processes for the Society, including but not limited to Directors, Officers, Councillors, Senators, Committees and Committee Members, and Staff.

This policy shall serve as a reference and mandate to all Society decision makers and shall act as a guide for the Society to demonstrate its commitment to universal access and respect for the dignity of persons with disabilities.

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[3] McGill University Barrier-Free Design Standards, McGill Facilities
[4] Guide to Accessibility on the Downtown Campus, Office for Students with Disabilities

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This policy shall apply to all activities and events hosted, funded, and promoted by the Society, all materials published by the Society, and all promotion taking place within the William Shatner University Centre.

Definitions

The definitions outlined below are only for the purposes of this policy. The Society acknowledges that there is no neutral language to discuss or describe disability, and that individuals may identify or choose to define these terms differently.

Ableism: Ableism, which can be conscious or unconscious, refers to practices and dominant attitudes in society that privilege able-bodied individuals. Ableism is the belief system that underlies negative attitudes, stigma, and discrimination against people with disabilities.

Accessibility: Accessibility refers to the ability for everyone, regardless of disability or a difference in needs, to access, use, and benefit from everything within their environment. As a practice, it aims to facilitate the full participation of individuals with disabilities in society.

Barrier: Barriers refer to circumstances or obstacles that prevent the full participation of an individual in a given activity or in society at large. Barriers may include, but are not limited to, economic, systemic, environmental, attitudinal, psychological, physical, academic, informational or communication-based, or technological factors.

Disability: Disability refers to an exclusion or limitation that may restrict the full participation of an individual in society as a result of systemic barriers, including, but not limited to, physical, attitudinal, and social factors.

Disadvantage: A circumstance or a situation that puts an individual or a group of people in an inferior or less favourable position compared to others, resulting in compromised access to resources or opportunities.

Universal Design: Universal Design (UD) is a concept that promotes the production and creation of physical spaces, products, services, and built environments that allows for use by everyone to the greatest extent possible. This process involves continuous improvement toward the ultimate goal of full inclusion.

Universal Design for Learning : Universal Design for Learning (UDL) refers to a teaching approach that encourages diverse methods of instruction, assessment, accommodation, and resource provision with the goal of meeting the needs of the greatest number and most diverse group of learners possible. The goal of UDL is to create a learning culture in which diversity is respected and embraced, and where all students are encouraged to learn and demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of ways.

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Framework

The Society will formally adopt a framework for accessibility based on its values of equity and anti-oppression, and the Society shall refer to these fundamental principles in advocacy for and implementation of accessibility within the Society, on campus, and in society at large.

The Society's framework of accessibility shall be based upon the following fundamental values and concepts:

Social Model of Disability. The Society shall operate under the understanding of a social model of disability, which focuses on the structures and barriers that impose limitations on certain groups or individuals. The social model of disability maintains that systemic barriers to participation and exclusion, including physical, attitudinal, social, and other factors, are the primary contributing factors to an individual's experience of disability, and it is therefore society that disables a person, not their impairment. The model describes an impairment as the difference in ability of an individual, while disability refers to the exclusion resulting from societal and systemic barriers.

Universal Access. The Society shall, in its advocacy and programming, work towards the promotion of universal access, with the goal of all individuals having the opportunity for full participation in society. To accomplish this objective, the Society will draw on the principles of Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning as defined in the Policy.

Anti-Oppression. The Society will advocate and organize around the principles of an anti-oppressive mandate. Anti-oppression recognizes that various axes of oppression, including disability, contribute to power imbalances that differentially marginalize certain communities. The Society shall confront these historical and current inequities, and promote and practice anti-oppression in all facets of the implementation of accessibility within the Society.

Solidarity. The Society will act in meaningful solidarity with individuals with disabilities through maintaining relationships with affected communities, facilitating opportunities for self-advocacy wherever possible, including a diversity of voices in Society decision making, and striving for the participation of affected individuals in all advocacy and policy. Society shall follow the leadership of and defer to individuals with disabilities advocating on their own behalf where desired.

Implementation

This Accessibility Policy shall mandate the Society to take action in six areas associated with barriers to accessibility within the context of the Society: communication and promotions; programming and events; physical access; student groups; advocacy; and Society governance.

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The Society shall strive for the fulfillment of all of the mandates outlined below:

1. Communications and Promotions

All Society communication projects must be undertaken with full respect for accessibility and with the goal of ensuring that all Society information is accessible. This goal will be operationalized through the following means:

1.1. Accessible design standards for online communication and web content shall be incorporated into the Society's Communication Plan and reviewed on an annual basis by the Vice-President (Internal Affairs).

1.2 All online publications, including the Society's Website, shall be adapted to ensure accessibility of web content through the implementation of accessible design standards into the Society's Website. All updates to the Society's online presence shall take into consideration the accessibility of the information presented through consideration of the use of fonts, graphics, colours, headings, content organization, and other factors affecting the accessibility of information online.

1.3. All communications and promotions regarding Society events that are published in print or online must explicitly include basic accessibility information about the event in question, including the physical accessibility of the venue and the availability of additional accessibility factors, including but not limited to whisper or sign language translation and childcare.

1.4. All external promotional materials advertised by the Society must include explicit accessibility information to be considered for promotion.

> 1.4.1. Submissions to the Society Listserv or social media channels that do not include accessibility information where applicable, including the physical accessibility of venues and the availability of additional accessibility accommodations, including but not limited to whisper or sign language translation and childcare, shall not be accepted nor promoted through the Society Listserv.

> 1.4.2. Submissions of event posters for approval for posting in the Shatner Building that do not include accessibility information where applicable, including the physical accessibility of venues and the availability of additional accommodations, including but not limited to whisper or sign language translation and childcare, shall not be accepted nor posted in the Shatner Building.

2. Programming and Events

All Society events must be physically accessible and must make every effort to provide reasonable accommodation to ensure that all Members have equal access.

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2.1. All Society events must make every effort to be accessible to all Members, and must be held in venues that are physically accessible to individuals with limited mobility.

2.2. All Society events must publicize in their promotions a list of accessibility services available upon request, including but not limited to whisper or sign language translation, childcare, and adapted physical access.

2.3. The Society shall promote and encourage the use of accessible venues for events across campus, and shall advocate for the inclusion of accessibility training in the planning for all cross-faculty events in which the Society participates, including but not limited to Orientation Week, through the Office of the Vice-President (Internal Affairs).

2.4. The Society, through the Equity Committee and the Office of the Vice-President (University Affairs), shall raise awareness of accessibility issues on campus and in the community at large through hosting at least one annual event with a focus on accessibility and disability.

2.5. The Society shall take accessibility into consideration when making determinations about the allocation of Fees distributed by the Funding Committee to programming and events, through the Office of the Vice-President (Finance).

> 2.5.1. The Funding Committee shall incorporate at least one question soliciting accessibility information about the event or project seeking funding into the Funding Application.

> 2.5.2. The Funding Committee shall consider the physical accessibility of event venues prior to making funding decisions.

3. Physical Access

The Society, through the office of the Vice-President (Operations) shall ensure that the integrity of the William Shatner University Centre as an accessible space is maintained and actively improved upon in order to ensure the continuance of access for individuals with disabilities.

3.1 The Society will address cosmetic access needs in the William Shatner University Centre, including but not limited to the transition of lighting to non-fluorescent, improving building signage, increasing the number of push buttons in the building and ensuring their functionality, implementing even grating on floors, changing knobs to handles, ensuring accessible seating lounges and cafeterias, and widely publicizing accessibility information for the building on the Society's website.

> 3.1.1. Prior to the development of renovation plans within the William Shatner University Centre, the Society shall consider the implications of the renovation for accessibility and shall ensure the application of barrier free design standards.

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3.1.2. The Society shall make every effort to consult and involve the Office for Students with Disabilities in the planning process for potential renovation or construction projects to ensure that spaces within the building remain accessible.

3.2. Accessibility of projects and initiatives within the building shall be taken into consideration prior to the funding of such projects from the Space Fee Fund as allocated to internal Society projects. The Committee responsible for these allocations shall be responsible for reporting to Legislative Council on the accessibility implications of the projects selected for funding.

3.3. In order to facilitate continuous improvement in the accessibility of the William Shatner University Centre, the Society shall execute an Accessibility Audit of the building on a bi-annual basis and shall develop a series of recommendations to Legislative Council for making spaces within the building more accessible.

4. Student Groups

The Society, through the Office of the Vice-President (Student Life) shall ensure the consideration of accessibility and inclusion among student groups through the provision of resources and awareness regarding accessibility issues.

4.1. The Vice-President (Student Life) shall be responsible for educating student groups on issues of access through the inclusion of accessibility information in training materials made available to student groups, including but not limited to the inclusion of accessibility content in Club Workshops, at the Services Summit, and in the Society's online resources.

4.2. The Vice-President (Student Life) shall be responsible for the production and annual maintenance of a master list of accessible venues to be identified as priority venues for event bookings for student groups. The accessible venue list shall be paralleled by a "blacklist" of event venues that are physically inaccessible, for which booking events shall be discouraged.

4.3. The Vice-President (Student Life) shall be responsible for the production and maintenance of an Equitable Event Planning Guide to be circulated to student groups as a resource for hosting accessible events with the support of the Vice-President (University Affairs).

5. Advocacy

The Society, through the Office of the Vice-President (University Affairs) and its student membership on relevant University committees, shall make every effort to promote a culture of accessibility within the McGill community at large, including advocating for the prioritization of accessibility on campus.

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5.1. The Society shall advocate for McGill to prioritize improving the accessibility of the physical, social, and learning environment of the University. This should include but is not limited to the accessibilization of entrances to all buildings on campus; the implementation of Universal Design for Learning on campus in both curriculum and assessment design; ensuring an accessible work environment for all University staff; and the prioritization of funding for accessibility initiatives and services for students with disabilities.

5.2. The Society shall advocate for the inclusion of the Office for Students with Disabilities or an accessibility officer in the consultation, decision making, and planning processes for all renovation projects on campus.

5.3. The Society shall advocate for the University to develop a University-wide accessibility policy that includes a timeline for consultation, implementation, and regular reporting to Senate.

5.4. The Society will advocate for the elimination of any and all physical, social, and financial barriers preventing a student from receiving the necessary accommodations to fully access academic or social services provided by the Society or the University.

5.5. The Society shall stand in solidarity with any member of the McGill community who is discriminated against or prohibited from full participation within the University due to their disability.

6. Society Governance

The Society, through the Office of the President, shall make every effort to increase the accessibility of participation of its membership within the Society's governance structures and will work towards eliminating any and all barriers to participation in decision making.

6.1. The Society recognizes that there currently exist barriers to participation in Society governance, including but not limited to the time commitment associated with serving as an elected representative and the length and intensity of meetings of the Society's governance bodies.

6.2. The Society will provide reasonable accommodations when required in a manner that does not compromise the functioning of the Society in order to make participation in Society governance accessible to all students.

6.3. The President shall be responsible for maintaining an accessible work environment for all staff of the Society and for ensuring the implementation of reasonable accommodations where required.

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6.4. The President shall be responsible for conducting an audit of all the governance processes and positions of leadership within the Society with attention to the social, attitudinal, and physical barriers limiting participation.

7. Reporting

All Officers responsible for the implementation of the Accessibility Policy through targeted action points shall report to the Equity Committee on a bi-annual basis and to the Legislative Council on an annual basis regarding the fulfillment of their responsibilities as outlined in the Accessibility Policy.