



## Association étudiante de l'Université McGill

*Située sur les territoires traditionnels des collectivités Haudenosaunee et Anishinaabe.*

## Students' Society of McGill University

*Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories.*

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# ACCESSIBILITY POLICY

Adopted by Legislative Council: 2021/01/28

Expires: 2026/01/01

[Adopted Motion](#) (Link)

## 1. Background

In its commitment to demonstrating leadership in matters of human rights and social justice, the Students' Society of McGill University ("SSMU") has promoted equity and anti-oppression through the development of the Equity Policy and the institutionalization of equity programming and advocacy. To, further, stand in solidarity with students with disabilities, the Accessibility Policy was adopted to operationalize the SSMU's commitment to accessibility and the prioritization of the unique needs of students with disabilities.

To fulfill this commitment, the SSMU must acknowledge and address the current barriers and issues of access that exist on the McGill campus and campuses around the world. 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 extracurricular 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](#), 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 projects on a campus that still [lacks barrier-free access](#) to many physical spaces. 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 SSMU 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



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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 SSMU recognizes that it is the fundamental responsibility of the institution to ensure that individuals are not expected to shoulder the burden of their 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 SSMU aims to demonstrate its active commitment to the promotion of universal access and the support of students with disabilities within the operations of the SSMU, as well as to advocate for the prioritization of accessibility at the university-wide level.

## 2. Scope

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

This Policy will apply to all activities and events hosted, funded, and promoted by the SSMU, all materials published by the SSMU, and all promotion taking place within spaces maintained by the SSMU.

This Policy will serve as a reference and mandate to all SSMU decision-makers and will act as a guide for the SSMU to demonstrate its commitment to universal access and respect for the dignity of persons with disabilities.

## 3. Definitions

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

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



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**3.2. 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 SSMU.

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

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

**3.5. 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.

**3.6. Reasonable Accommodation:** A necessary and appropriate modification or adjustment which can be requested by any person, at any time, to make fair an inaccessible system and ensure that all individuals can access, use, and benefit from everything within their environment on an equal basis with all others.

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

**3.8. 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 to meet 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.

## 4. Framework

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



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

#### 4.1. Social Model of Disability

The SSMU will 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, the society that disables a person, not their impairment. The model describes an impairment as the difference in the ability of an individual, while disability refers to the exclusion resulting from societal and systemic barriers.

#### 4.2. Universal Access

The SSMU will, 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 SSMU. To accomplish this objective, the SSMU will draw on the principles of Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning as defined in the Policy.

#### 4.3. Anti-Oppression

The SSMU 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 SSMU will confront these historical and current inequities, and promote and practice anti-oppression in all facets of the implementation of accessibility within the SSMU.

#### 4.4. Solidarity

The SSMU 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 SSMU decision making, and striving for the participation of affected individuals in all advocacy and policy. The SSMU will follow the leadership of and defer to individuals with disabilities advocating on their behalf where desired.

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



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This Policy will be implemented under the oversight of an Accessibility Commissioner, charged with maintaining this Policy and guiding the SSMU in its accessibility advocacy and its interpretation of this Policy. All individuals mandated by this Policy will consult regularly and in good faith with the Accessibility Commissioner in the implementation and execution of their mandates.

The SSMU will strive for the fulfillment of all of the mandates outlined below:

## 5. Communications and Promotions

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

5.1. Accessible design standards for online communication and web content will be incorporated into the SSMU's communication policies and reviewed on an annual basis by the Accessibility Commissioner and Vice-President (Internal Affairs).

5.2. All online publications, including the SSMU's Website, will be adapted to ensure accessibility of web content through the implementation of accessible design standards into the SSMU's Website. All updates to the SSMU's online presence will 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.

5.3. All communications and promotions regarding SSMU events that are published in print or online must explicitly include all relevant 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.

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

5.4.1. Submissions to the SSMU 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, will not be accepted nor promoted through the SSMU Listserv.

5.4.2. Submissions of event posters for approval for posting in SSMU-run spaces 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



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whisper or sign language translation and childcare, will not be accepted nor posted in SSMU-run spaces.

5.5 All SSMU broadcasts including, but not limited to, live streams and video promotions will include closed captions in all official languages.

5.6 The SSMU will maintain adequate infrastructure under the Communications Department and Francophone Affairs Commissioner to ensure that all communications and transmissions are made easily accessible in all official languages.

## 6. Programming and Events

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

6.1. All SSMU 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.

6.2. All SSMU events must publicize in their promotions a list of accessibility services available upon request, including but not limited to whisper or sign language translation, family care, quiet or reduced stimulus areas, and adapted physical access.

6.3. The SSMU will promote and encourage the use of accessible venues for events across campus, and will advocate for the inclusion of accessibility training in the planning for all cross-faculty events in which the SSMU participates through the Office of the Vice-President (Internal Affairs).

6.4. The SSMU, through the Accessibility and Equity Committees and the Offices of the Vice-President (External Affairs) and the Vice-President (University Affairs), will raise awareness of accessibility issues on campus and in the community at large by hosting annual events with a focus on accessibility and disability.

6.5. The SSMU will prioritize accessibility 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).

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

6.5.2. The Funding Committee will consider the accessibility of events, in consultation with the Accessibility Commissioner, before making funding decisions.



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## 7. Physical Access

The SSMU, through the Office of the Vice-President (Sustainability & Operations) and the Building and Operations Management Committee (BOMCOM), will ensure that the accessibility of spaces overseen by the SSMU is maintained and actively improved upon to ensure the continuance of access for individuals with disabilities.

7.1. The SSMU will address cosmetic access needs within SSMU-run spaces, 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 SSMU's website.

7.1.1. Before the development of renovation plans within SSMU-run spaces, the SSMU will consider the implications of the renovation for accessibility and will ensure the application of barrier-free design standards.

7.1.2. The SSMU will make every effort to consult and involve the Accessibility Commissioner and 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.

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

7.3. To facilitate continuous improvement in the accessibility of SSMU-run spaces, the SSMU will execute an Accessibility Audit of the building on a bi-annual basis and will develop a series of recommendations to the Legislative Council for making spaces within the building more accessible.

## 8. Student Groups

The SSMU, through the Office of the Vice-President (Student Life) and the Accessibility Commissioner, will ensure the maintenance of accessibility and inclusion among student groups through the provision of resources and awareness regarding accessibility issues.

8.1. The Vice-President (Student Life), in consultation with the Accessibility Commissioner, will 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



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inclusion of accessibility content in Club Workshops, at the Services Summit, and in the SSMU's online resources.

8.2. The Accessibility Commissioner will 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 will be paralleled by a “blacklist” of physically inaccessible event venues, for which booking events will be discouraged.

8.3. The Accessibility Commissioner will 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 Equity Commissioners, Vice-President (Student Life), and Vice-President (University Affairs).

## 9. University Advocacy

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

9.1. The SSMU will 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 accessible renovation of all buildings on campus; the expansion of access to gender-neutral washrooms and locker rooms, 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.

9.1.1. In doing so, the SSMU recognizes both the efforts and potential and the imperfection of University services like the Office for Students with Disabilities (“OSD”). As such, the SSMU will duly scrutinize the OSD and advocate for its continual improvement.

9.2. The SSMU will advocate for the inclusion of students and dedicated accessibility advocates in the consultation, decision making, and planning processes for all renovation projects on campus.

9.3. The SSMU will advocate for the University to implement University-wide accessibility plans that include timelines for consultation, implementation, and regular reporting to Senate.





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

9.4.1. The SSMU will, furthermore, undertake initiatives designed to reduce these barriers where the University fails to do so. This includes, but is not limited to, the Open Educational Resources and the Students From Care projects.

9.5. The SSMU will 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 ability.

## 10. External Advocacy

10.1. The Society, through the Office of the Vice-President (External Affairs), will advocate for increased accessibility measures at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels of government.

10.1.1. In particular, the Office of the Vice-President (External Affairs) will support and amplify the advocacy of accessibility-based organizations at the post-secondary level, such as the Association québécoise pour l'équité et l'inclusion au postsecondaire (AQEIPS).

10.2. The Office of the Vice-President (External Affairs) will advocate for a more robust and comprehensive framework for ensuring accessibility in the City of Montréal.

10.2.1. In particular, this Office will advocate for more physically accessible sidewalks surrounding McGill University during snowy weather. Of priority are:

- a. the portion of Rue University north of Avenue des Pins leading up to Bishop Mountain Hall;
- b. the sidewalks of Rue McTavish from Avenue du Docteur Penfield to Avenue des Pins; and
- c. the portions of Rue Peel and Rue Stanley extending from Rue Sherbrooke to Avenue des Pins.

10.2.2. The Vice-President (External Affairs) will include an update on the progress of this effort in their report to the Accessibility Commissioner.

10.3. The Office of the Vice-President (External Affairs) will collaborate with the Accessibility Commissioner to produce research reports to develop more concrete directions for accessibility advocacy to all levels of government.



## 11. SSMU Governance

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

11.1. The SSMU recognizes that there currently exist barriers to participation in SSMU 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 SSMU's governance bodies.

11.2. The SSMU will provide reasonable accommodations to members, whenever requested, to ensure the fairness and accessibility of SSMU governance so long as those accommodations do not gravely or unnecessarily hinder the functioning of the SSMU and its ability to further advocate for accessibility.

11.2.1. This includes, but is not limited to, the provision of whisper translation and sign-language interpretation services at meetings of the General Assembly, Legislative Council, and Board of Directors.

11.3. The SSMU recognizes that procedural fairness means prioritizing accessibility. As such, the accessibility of SSMU governance will be prioritized over unnecessarily strict adherence to rules of order. When necessary, reasonable accommodations will supersede rules of order when doing so will not compromise the integrity of SSMU governance.

11.3.1. The Steering Committee will strive to prioritize accessibility in the drafting of standing rules, in consultation with the Accessibility Commissioner.

11.4. The President and General Manager will be responsible for maintaining an accessible work environment for all staff of the SSMU and for ensuring the implementation of reasonable accommodations where required.

11.5. The President and Accessibility Commissioner will be responsible for conducting an audit of all the governance processes and positions of leadership within the SSMU with attention to the social, attitudinal, and physical barriers limiting participation.

11.6. The SSMU recognizes that financial barriers exist which prevent participation in SSMU governance and that all individuals can not be expected to volunteer time and labour that could otherwise be dedicated to paid employment.



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11.6.1. As such, the SSMU will strive to remunerate Councillors and Senators for their tireless participation in SSMU governance.

11.6.2. The SSMU will, furthermore, provide family care for students with dependents during meetings of the General Assembly, Legislative Council, and Board of Directors.

## 12. Oversight

12.1. All Officers mandated under this Policy will report on the implementation of their mandates to the Accessibility Committee twice annually. The Accessibility Commissioner will be empowered to request such reports should the mandated Officers fail to report promptly.

12.1.1 The Accountability Committee will be notified should an Officer fail to report on their mandate and will investigate such infractions in line with the Committee's Terms of Reference.

12.2. The Accessibility Committee, under the leadership of the Accessibility Commissioner, will be charged with monitoring and overseeing compliance with this Policy and advising on its implementation.

12.2.1. The Accessibility Committee will report annually to the Legislative Council on the implementation of this Policy and, more generally, on the accessibility of the SSMU.

12.2.2. The Accessibility Committee will, furthermore, encourage and receive feedback from members concerning the SSMU's accessibility efforts and will act as a liaison and advocate for students with disabilities to the governing bodies of the SSMU.

12.2.3. Any individual with concerns of inaccessibility or ableism within the SSMU may lodge a formal complaint with the Accessibility Commissioner. The Commissioner will, in collaboration with the Equity Complaint Committee, investigate and resolve such complaints following the procedures outlined in the Equity Policy.