

## Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost

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**DATE:** April 20, 2023

**TO:** Members of Senate

**FROM:** Helga Hallgrímsdóttir, Acting Deputy Provost

**CC:** Melissa Donaldson, Executive Director, Facilities Management

**RE: Report on UVic Accessibility Committee and Academic Accessibility for Students**

In 2022, the BC Government released the *Accessible British Columbia Act*, which requires all publicly funded universities to develop, by September 1, 2023, an Accessibility Committee, an Accessibility Plan, and a public tool to receive feedback on accessibility.

Given this new legislation, the university has paused the Advisory Committee on Academic Accommodation and Access for Students with Disabilities until we can determine what structures are needed under the new legal requirements set by the province. This report intends to meet the reporting requirements for the university's policy on Academic Accommodation and Access for Students with Disabilities ([AC1205](#)).

### **Accessibility Committee**

As per *Accessible BC Act*, at least half the institution's Accessibility Committee members must be people with disabilities or representatives of disability-serving organizations, and include at least one member who identifies as Indigenous. As with the Advisory Committee, the newly formed Accessibility Committee includes faculty, staff and student representatives. Efforts were made to ensure appropriate and inclusive representation from across campus, as accessibility is all of our responsibilities and ensuring alignment across functional areas is essential.

As the committee's scope covers all areas of campus, the committee is co-chaired by the Deputy Provost (in the Vice-President Academic and Provost portfolio) and the Executive Director, Facilities Management (in the Vice-President Finance and Operations portfolio) with representation from the following areas and groups:

- Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost (co-chair)
- Facilities Management (co-chair)
- Equity and Human Rights
- Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation
- Office of the Vice-President Indigenous
- UVic Libraries
- Human Resources
- University Systems
- Centre for Accessible Learning
- Faculty Association
- PEA
- CUPE
- UVSS
- GSS
- Society for Students with a Disability
- Three additional students: undergraduate, graduate and non-degree

The Accessibility Committee provides a forum for consultation and collaboration on UVic initiatives relative to improving accessibility for persons with disabilities, both visible and invisible. Compliance with the *Accessible BC Act* is a foundational focus for the Accessibility Committee and, where possible, members consider inclusive practices that extend beyond a state of Act compliance.

In 2022/23, the Accessibility Committee met on the following dates:

- November 4, 2022
- December 9, 2022
- March 3, 2023
- April 4, 2023

Meetings focused on developing the Accessibility Plan, including identifying barriers, priorities to address those barriers, consultations and ways to gather community feedback.

### **Accessibility Plan**

While the BC Government is not prescriptive about who should lead the development and oversight of the Accessibility Plan, it recommends a project sponsor from senior leadership who understands the sense of urgency and gravity required. The Vice-President Academic and Provost and Vice-President Finance and Operations are co-sponsors of the plan, with all of Executive Council ultimately approving the plan. UVic has chosen to maximize the involvement of the Accessibility Committee early in the plan's development, and to align this work as a positive and meaningful complement to our existing plans and values, particularly our Equity Action Plan.

As per *Accessible BC Act*, the plan will describe to the public UVic's efforts to identify barriers to accessibility and how we plan to reduce and remove those barriers. The plan will be posted online once approved by the President and ahead of the September 1, 2023 deadline set by the BC Government. The plan must be reviewed at least once every three years, and incorporate principles of:

- Inclusion
- Adaptability
- Diversity
- Collaboration
- Self-determination
- Universal design

The plan will also reflect UVic's values, principles and aspirations as outlined in our Strategic Plan, Equity Action Plan and Indigenous Plan. Other internal resources include Aspiration 2030, our Campus Plan, Policy AC1205, Policy on Human Rights, Equity and Fairness (GV0200), and collective agreements with employee groups. External resources include the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Canadian Charter of Rights, the Accessible Canada Act, and the BC Human Rights Code.

The committee is developing a draft plan that will be available to our community as an accessible web page for feedback over the summer. Both the committee and the plan will evolve over time and be more responsive to the accessibility needs of everyone.

### **Academic Accommodations and Policy AC1205 Revisions**

Policy AC1205 has been in effect since January 2006 and was last edited December 2017. The policy articulates the expectations and responsibilities of the institution, instructors and students in ensuring a successful and accessible learning environment. Students with disabilities seeking academic accommodation are expected to contact UVic's Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) to initiate the process of determining and arranging the appropriate academic accommodation in individual situations.

In 2021/22, significant efforts were made to revise policy AC1205 but were not ultimately successful. It became clear through extensive consultations and discussions with Senate that many students were eager for accessibility improvements beyond those proposed in the revisions, or within the scope of AC1205. The committee at the time determined that a larger framework for accessibility at the university was likely required—one that encapsulated more than the legal duty to accommodate or CAL's mandate.

Across Canada, there has been a significant increase in requests for academic accommodations in recent years. In a 2022 First-Year Student Survey by the [Canadian University Survey Consortium \(CUSC\)](#), about 40% of UVic first-year students reporting having a disability or

impairment, with mental health being the most common (28%), followed by neurodivergence (13%), learning/memory (5%), chronic conditions (4%) and vision (2%). Fourteen per cent indicate it impacts them daily. [UVic's annual CUSC report](#) is available through Institutional Planning and Analysis.

This is higher than the national average of about one third of first-year students, with one in 10 students indicating that their disability or disabilities impact them daily. In the same survey conducted in 2001, about 5% of all first-year students surveyed reported having a disability, the most common being a learning disability.

At UVic, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 10% of UVic students registered with CAL every year. In 2021/22, 2,980 students registered with CAL. In 2022/23, 3,341 students registered with CAL, which is about 15% of degree-seeking students. There has also been a 50% increase in exams taking place in CAL from the previous year, with 22,464 scheduled from May 2022–April 2023. As well as the increased demand on CAL, this also burdens academic units who are expected to supervise exams. Our current model for exam and assessment accommodations cannot keep up with increased demand and would likely not be sustainable longer-term even if we invested in additional staffing and spacing resources.

To address the rising need for accommodations and improve accessibility for all, an increasing number of leading universities in Canada, including UVic, are adopting universal design principles into courses. Generally speaking, the number of requested accommodations goes down the more accessible the course. It will be important to ensure that UVic has adequate resources to support instructors as they revise their courses, including through the Learning Experience Designers and other resources in the Division of Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation (LTSI).

In fall 2022, the Digital Learning Committee was established by the Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost to develop a Digital Learning Plan. This plan will draw on our learning and experience from supporting digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and capitalize and build on the targeted investments we have made to envision and imagine how digital learning can be deployed to enhance UVic's in-person learning experience. The Digital Learning Committee is co-chaired by the Deputy Provost and Associate Vice-President Academic Programs, with staff members from University Systems and LTSI, four faculty members and two student representatives.

The *Accessible BC Act* has provided a timely opportunity for UVic to review accessibility from a pan-university lens, and develop aspirations for a more inclusive and accessible institution going forward. The university will seek to revise policy AC1205 once the Accessibility Plan and Digital Learning Plan are in place, which will include reviewing feedback from the various consultation phases for both the policy and plan held between 2021 and 2023.