

Background on UFV's Commitment to Accessibility

Territorial Acknowledgement

The University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) is situated in the traditional territory of the Stó:lō peoples (people of the river), who have occupied the land long before Canada was formed. The Stó:lō have an intrinsic relationship with S'ólh Tém:éxw (Our Sacred Land) and spoke Halq'eméylem. UFV supports and honours the contribution that Indigenous people have made and continue to make to our community. Incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and learning is important to the university.

Introduction

Purpose

In June 2021, the [Accessible B.C. Act](#) ("the Act") became law and established a legal framework to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to the full and equal participation of people with disabilities. The new legislation is a significant step in the journey to becoming a truly accessible province.¹ Subsequently, the provincial government announced that all publicly funded post-secondary institutions will be required to meet specific legislative requirements by September 1, 2023, discussed below.

In 2022, UFV launched the Accessible BC Act Steering Committee ("the ABCASC") to lead UFV's response to new the legislation. Led by Dr. Alisa Webb, VP Students and acting Vice-Provost Academic, and Audrey Ackah, General Counsel, the Steering Committee is developing the foundation necessary to build on existing plans and approaches to ensure UFV is a fully accessible institution.

About the University of the Fraser Valley

The University of the Fraser Valley (UFV), a public teaching university established in 1974 and longstanding member of the Universities Canada organization that enrolls approximately 15,000 students per year². Serving residents of the Fraser Valley and from around the world, UFV has campuses and locations in Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Mission, and Hope, along with a presence in Chandigarh, India. The largest campus is located in Abbotsford—a culturally diverse and welcoming community surrounded by agricultural activity and within close proximity to local mountains, the Pacific Ocean, and the US border. UFV offers small class sizes and dedicated faculty, an excellent learning environment, creative programming, and is committed to its work and collaboration with community partners. Our passion and commitment towards engaging learners, transforming lives, and building community is woven into all that we do, envisioning our campuses as a gathering place for learners, leaders, and seekers.³

Definitions

Ableism: "A view or attitude that treats people without disabilities as "normal" and those with disabilities as "abnormal," "inferior," or "other." Ableism can be both intentional and unintentional."⁴

Accessibility: "Having programs, services, and environments that enable everyone to participate fully in society without barriers."⁵

Adaptability: The ability to evolve in response to changing services, technology, and attitudes.⁶

Barrier: “Anything that hinders the full and equal participation of a person with an impairment. Barriers can be (a) caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications, or technologies, and (b) affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.”⁷

Collaboration: The exercise of working together and sharing responsibility for promoting access and inclusion.⁸

Disability: “An inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.”⁹

Discrimination: “Is any form of unequal adverse treatment of a person or group, whether intentional or not, on the basis of one or more prohibited grounds set out in the [British Columbia Human Rights Code](#), namely: age, ancestry, colour, family status, marital status, physical or mental disability, place of origin, political belief (applicable to employment advertisement and employment), race, religion, sex (including gender identity), sexual orientation or criminal conviction unrelated to employment or program of study; and which has the effect or purpose of unreasonably interfering with that person’s or group’s access to the employment or educational opportunities, benefits and advantages available to other members of society.”¹⁰

Impairment: “Includes a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive impairment with is permanent, temporary, or episodic.”¹¹

Inclusion: “Is an attitude and approach that embraces diversity and differences and promotes equal opportunities for all. Inclusion is not just about people with disabilities. When our communities include and embrace everyone, we are ALL better able to reach our full potential.”¹²

Intersectionality: A term coined by black feminist legal scholar Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the ways in which people's lives are shaped by their multiple and overlapping identities and social locations (such as race, gender, class, ability, etc.) and these can come together to produce different experiences and interdependent systems of Discrimination (definition above) or disadvantage.¹³

Self-determination: “Empowering people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.”¹⁴

Universal Design: The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as “the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.”¹⁵

Framework Guiding Our Work

Legislation

In 2021, British Columbia became the fifth province in Canada to introduce accessibility legislation. The Act provides a framework to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility. It is an important step to making B.C. a more accessible and truly inclusive province for all people with disabilities.

Earlier last year, the provincial government announced that all publicly funded post-secondary institutions will be required to have the following by September 2023:

1. An Accessibility Committee must be established to assist the institution to identify barriers and advise on how to prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the institution. Also, the selection of accessibility committee members must, to the extent possible, be in accordance with the following goals:
 - at least half of the members are persons with disabilities or individuals who support, or are from organizations that support, persons with disabilities,
 - at least one member must be Indigenous, and
 - members reflect the diversity of persons in B.C.
2. The development of an Accessibility Plan which aims to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization.
 - The Act requires institutions to consider the following principles when developing and updating our accessibility plan: inclusion; adaptability; diversity; collaboration; self-determination; universal design.
 - The provincial government is currently developing province-wide standards that all institutions covered by the Act will need to meet. The standards will cover: Employment; Delivery of Services; Built Environment; Information and Communication; Transportation; Health; Education; and Procurement.
3. The creation of a tool for receiving feedback on accessibility.

Other legislation that guides our work includes the following:

- [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)
- [Canadian Equity Employment Act](#)
- [Human Rights Code](#)
- [Global Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Accessible Canada Act](#)

UFV's Commitments to Accessibility

In fulfilling UFV's [Mission](#) of engaging learners, transforming lives, and building community, UFV is committed to providing accessible and inclusive welcoming environments that ensures respect for every person's human rights, dignity and independence. To achieve this, UFV commits to removing and preventing barriers to ensure equal access to our education, services, and campuses. This requires identifying and dismantling ableism so that all students, employees, and visitors can fully and meaningfully participate in all facets of our university and in our communities.

This commitment is guided by UFV's [Vision](#) "UFV will be known as a gathering place for learners, leaders, and seekers. We will pursue diverse pathways of scholarship, leading to community connection, reconciliation, and prosperity, locally and beyond," and UFV's [Values](#) of integrity, inclusivity, community, and excellence.

As an institution, we respect and uphold the requirements set forth under the Act.

Institutional Goals & Priorities

UFV's commitment of becoming a more accessible and inclusive institution is further supported and embedded in several institutional goals and priorities.

UFV's Integrated Strategic Plan: IYAQAWTWX

The [Integrated Strategic Plan](#) outlines primary goals and strategic imperatives under the three pillars of UFV's Mission: Engaging Learners, Transforming Lives, and Building Community. There is one primary goal and four strategic imperatives which directly refer to inclusivity and accessibility, a few under each goal is highlighted below:

Primary goal listed under Engaging Learners: Provide inclusive learning environments for everyone

- Strategic Imperatives:
 - Identify and remove access barriers for individuals from marginalized and underrepresented groups
 - Provide accessible and flexible opportunities to support personalized, lifelong learning

Primary goal listed under Transforming Lives: Provide opportunities for people to discover, develop, and share their gifts while also recognizing and celebrating the gifts of others

- Strategic Imperatives:
 - Prioritize the health and well-being of our community members and our ecosystems
 - Integrate equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into all aspects of our institutional culture

Primary goal listed under Building Community: Collaborate and partner in pursuits that enrich the lives of all people communities, and beyond

- Strategic Imperatives:
 - Improve community access to UFV's programs
 - Develop a vibrant and diverse culture on each of our campuses

UFV SEM Plan

The [UFV SEM Plan](#) includes institutional goals and actions which speak directly to accessibility, some of which are highlighted below:

- Identify and remove non-academic barriers that may prevent acceptance of an offer of admission
 - Review admission requirements for equity and access consistency
- Increase student retention rates by 5% – particularly from Year 1 to Year 2
 - Identify and resolve challenges experienced by underserved and/or historically marginalized students.
- Enhance student experience and strive to be a student-ready University.
 - Explore opportunities to enhance the student experience on campus.

A student-ready university seeks to:

- Meet students where they are
- Teach, support, and engage the students they have
- Create a welcoming environment for all
- Embrace empathy and compassion
- Support the needs of all students
- Believe in all students
- Understand the barriers students face
- Consider everything through the lens and perspective of the student
- Embed SR thinking and approaches in every aspect of the university

At its core, a student-ready university ensures it is ready for all of the students that it admits, doing all that it can to remove barriers to success for a diverse student population. Further, it takes responsibility for, and demonstrates accountability to, its commitment to embrace the success of every student it admits.

EDI Action Plan

In fall 2019, President MacLean formed a [President's Task Force on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) to provide leadership in creating and fostering an environment that supports and creates best practices, policies, and pedagogy for EDI. The Task Force on EDI focused on the identification and elimination of barriers blocking career advancement, recruitment, and retention of underrepresented groups in our organization. The [EDI Action Plan](#) has four overarching goals, all of which align with accessibility and inclusion.

The EDI Action Plan also outlines concrete actions needed to achieve the goals. Given that the majority reference EDI as a lens through which to take action, all 40 of the defined actions could be applied to accessibility as one part of an EDI lens and framework.

Some of the action items include the following:

- Develop an EDI lens to be used as a tool for UFV's policies, programs, and practices.
- Expand opportunities for employees and students to engage in dialogue and action around EDI.
- Develop training for students, faculty, and staff regarding UFV's commitment to EDI and how it extends to off-campus and out-of country activities.
- Conduct a review of faculty workload: teaching, service, and scholarly activity to identify inequitable workload conditions or patterns.
- Conduct a review of marketing and communications materials, tools, and processes examining with an EDI lens.

UFV Space planning and renovation principles

[Campus space](#) is recognized as a critical and limited university resource to be used efficiently and effectively for the highest and best use for the university. The Campus Planning Advisory Committee developed principles to guide space planning and allocation, some of which speak to accessibility, flexibility, and EDI:

Principle A: Learner perspective first

Campus space planning and allocation places a high value on the needs of the learners and those who

support them. It is recognized that there are diverse and evolving ways to deliver educational and learner support services. Thus, we expect to see innovative proposals informed by the scholarship of teaching and learning or by effective pedagogical practices.

Principle C: Flexibility

UFV's campuses will reflect the ability to adapt to multiple uses, reconfigure spaces, and respond to changing program and service needs.

Principle D: Sustainability

UFV's campuses will reflect the ability to adapt to multiple uses, reconfigure spaces, and respond to changing program and service needs.

Principle F: Equity, diversity, and inclusion

UFV campuses will reflect the value of inclusion and diversity, including the principle of designing "with" rather than simply "for".

Principle G: Accessibility

Space planning will facilitate access for all. Space will prioritize and reflect learner accessibility and the principles of universal design.

UN Sustainable Development Goals Accord

In 2023, UFV committed to the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Accord](#) (the SDG Accord).¹⁶ Launched in 2017, the SDG Accord is a global initiative encouraging universities and other post-secondary institutions to pursue the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). Goal 4 Quality Education recognize that access to higher education is vital to lifelong learning.¹⁷ One of its target under this goal states that "By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities..."¹⁸

United Nations Academic Impact

In 2022, UFV received membership in United Nations Academic Impact Initiative. The [United Nations Academic Impact](#) (UNAI) is an initiative that aligns institutions of higher education with the United Nations in supporting and contributing to the realization of United Nations goals and mandates, including access to education: a commitment to the opportunity for every interested individual to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for the pursuit of higher education.¹⁹

Existing UFV Policies

The following policies at UFV speak to inclusion and accessibility:

- [Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#)
- [Safe Student Learning Community](#)
- [Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment Prevention](#)
- [Educational and Employment Equity](#)

Accessibility Services & Programs at UFV

The following services and programs provide accessibility support and resources for students and faculty.

Centre for Accessibility Services

The [Centre for Accessibility Services](#) (CAS) is the main point of contact for students with disabilities at UFV. CAS provides academic accommodations and services that support student success.

Human Resources

UFV is committed to providing employees with a safe and healthy work environment. The [Early Intervention Support Program](#) is available to facilitate appropriate and customized return to work and medical accommodation programs for employees with occupational and non-occupational disabilities.

Teaching & Learning Centre

- The [Teaching and Learning Centre](#) (TLC) provides leadership, support, and resources to advance evidence-based teaching and learning practices and scholarship at UFV. Their goal is to assist faculty in developing meaningful learning experiences for UFV students including resource on ensuring course materials and other documents are accessible. TLC, together with the Centre for Accessibility Services host an annual event to promote and raise awareness of the National AccessAbility Week, which typically takes place in late May. Also, UFV has a long-standing [Accessibility Advisory Committee](#). In the past, the AAC reported to the VPS but, in practice, is predominantly linked to the AVP, Teaching and Learning. The purpose of the committee was to raise awareness; serve as a resource to the university on issues related to accessibility; promote accessibility at UFV; and conduct professional development. The current AAC will become the Teaching and Learning Accessibility Advisory Committee, reporting to the AVP, Teaching and Learning, with a focus on accessible and inclusive teaching and learning. Areas of focus will include universal design for learning, faculty development and support, and more.

Workplace TASK

UFV's [Workplace TASK](#) is an eight-month program that offers students with disabilities the opportunity to learn self-management and employment skills. TASK stands for Training in Attitudes, Skills, and Knowledge for the Workplace.

Conclusion

While much has been accomplished over the years, we acknowledge that accessibility is a journey of continuous development. UFV is committed to meeting the needs of people who face barriers to accessibility to ensure our campuses are an inclusive space for learning and working. We all play a role in fostering an inclusive work and learning environment. All feedback and suggestions from our UFV community are welcomed as we work together to continuously identifying, preventing and removing barriers to accessibility.

References

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- ⁵ Government of Canada (Employment and Social Development Canada), "Towards an Accessible Canada", modified 2023-01-23, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada.html>.
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- ¹³ Crenshaw, Kimberle () "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Available at: <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>
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