

COUNCIL ON ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

# Accessible Customer Service

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Online Training – Text Version

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This training program was created in partnership with Queen's University with support from the Enabling Change Program funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

## Module 1

### Understanding the AODA and the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

#### Getting Started

##### Welcome

In this module, you will review how you can make your services more accessible in the classroom, in the office and in campus facilities. As you will see, accessible service often begins with a simple question: May I help you?

Whether you teach, supervise or deliver administrative or ancillary services through the university registrar, physical plant, student awards, academic departments, residences or the library, you provide services to the public. On campus, our students, alumni, faculty, staff and visitors are our customers. The AODA applies to you and requires that you provide accessible customer service in the course of your job.

Other campus-related roles that involve “customer service” include campus tour guides, event and conference organizers, teaching assistants, career and academic counselors, orientation leaders, student union and government representatives, print-shop employees and campus security personnel.

##### Did You Know?

Why is providing accessible service on campus important? Persons with disabilities represent a growing segment of your university’s customers.

According to Ontario’s Ministry of Community and Social Services, for instance, 35,618 students with disabilities attended Ontario colleges and universities in 2007-2008.

##### Making Time for eLearning

Before you begin, may I suggest that you dedicate about an hour of uninterrupted time to complete the three modules in this series, depending on your individual pace.

Note that you don’t have to complete all three modules in one sitting. You may also return to any of the modules in the future, to refresh your memory or review the resources available to help you provide accessible customer service.

##### Learning Objectives

We’ve designed this eLearning course to help you and other university representatives understand and comply with the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (customer service standard) and to learn how to include accessible customer service in your work at your university.

After completing this first module, you will be able to:

- Summarize the purpose of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the requirements of the customer service standard; and
- Describe how the AODA and the customer service standard apply to a university setting in general and, more specifically, to you as a faculty member, support staff or student leader.

##### Check Your Learning

Take a moment to check what you already know about accessible service in a campus setting.

**Question 1**

Persons with disabilities encounter different types of barriers to participation. What kind of barrier to accessibility exists in a campus store with a “no refund” policy that sells university-logo paraphernalia, including clothing, but does not have a change room large enough to accommodate someone who uses a power scooter?

- a) Architectural or structural barrier
- b) Attitudinal barrier
- b) Information and communication barrier
- d) Systemic barrier
- e) Technological barrier

**The correct answer is d) Systemic barrier.** A systemic barrier can result from an organization’s policies, practices and procedures if they restrict persons with disabilities, often unintentionally. In this example, since the store does not have a suitable change room to provide accessible customer service, it should change its policy to allow persons with disabilities who are unable to try on the clothes to return them within a reasonable time-period.

**Question 2**

The definition of “disability” under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act does not include students with learning disabilities.

True

False

**The correct answer is b) False.** The AODA does include learning disabilities, which uses the same definition of “disability” as the Ontario Human Rights Code. Learning disabilities refers to one or more dysfunctions of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language.

**Question 3**

It is the week before classes begin and students are settling into residence, their new home away from home. Blair, a first-year political science student who has epilepsy, is excitedly moving in with her parents’ help. Blair’s service dog, Cosmos, is accompanying her as she goes to and from her room and their van. After watching her arrival, two other female students whose room is located right next door to Blair’s, approach the residence don, saying they don’t feel comfortable being next door to Blair because they are worried about the dog barking which may disrupt their studies.

How should the don handle this?

- A) She should ask Blair to speak to the concerned students about her dog’s behaviour.
- B) She should quietly explain that Blair has epilepsy and outline her rights and responsibilities as a person with a disability to the concerned students.
- C) She should thank the students for bringing their concerns forward and advise them that there will be a brief discussion about this at the next floor meeting. At that meeting, the don should outline the university’s obligation for providing accessible customer service, describe its service animal policy and explain that customers include students staying in residence.

**The Correct answer is c).** She should thank the students for bringing their concerns forward and advise them that there will be a brief discussion about this at the next floor meeting. At that meeting, the don should outline the university's obligation for providing accessible customer service, describe its service animal policy and explain that customers include students staying in residence. Keeping in mind the AODA principles of dignity and equal opportunity, this would be the best approach, as it redirects the focus away from Blair and her service animal, while sharing information with the other students about the university's official policy on providing accessible service. Answer A places a burden on the person with a disability by asking them to explain either their disability or their need for the service animal. Answer B does not respect Blair's right to confidentiality about her disability. The best approach is C, to redirect focus away from Blair and her service animal while sharing information with the other students about the university's official policy on providing accessible service.

## What you need to know

### Introductions

The customer service standard requires that “every person who interacts with the public on behalf of the organization and those involved in developing the organization’s policies, procedures and practices” receive training about the AODA and accessible customer service.

However, because of the nature of your work, you may not necessarily think of yourself as a “service provider”. As I mentioned earlier, if you teach a course, supervise a thesis or mark a paper, you are providing educational services to a specific public: your students.

Similarly, if you provide administrative services, for example through the bookstore, library or campus tours, you are serving members of the public.

Therefore, because you are serving the public, you need to be familiar with the AODA and the customer service standard, its principles and other key concepts.

How did you do on the questions asked earlier? Most people don't get it all right from the get go: that's why we are here to help you better understanding accessibility.

Let's start at the beginning, with the need for accessibility standards in Ontario.

### The AODA: Background

Since 1962, the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) has provided persons with disabilities with the right to access goods, services, employment, etc. without discrimination. The Code requires employers, service providers and landlords, for example, to accommodate persons with disabilities to the point of undue hardship.

The Code has resulted in some progress towards breaking down accessibility barriers in Ontario. However, progress has occurred on a case-by-case, reactive basis. Full access remains limited as persons with disabilities still encounter many barriers that prevent equal access and participation.

The goal of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) is to make Ontario accessible by 2025 through the development and implementation of accessibility standards. In addition to customer service, development of standards in other key areas is underway, including:

- information and communications
- built environment
- employment
- transportation

## Insights

You could say that the AODA reflects an attitudinal shift about the right of persons with disabilities to full participation in our society. Barriers are not acceptable since now we know that much of what “disables” people is not a disability but rather an inaccessible environment.

Accessibility is as much about anticipating and preventing barriers as it is about identifying and removing existing barriers. Often, if we design something with persons with disabilities in mind, we prevent barriers and help ensure better access.

## Did You Know?

The AODA is unique among accessibility legislation anywhere in the world. It obligates the proactive advancement of accessibility by developing and implementing accessibility standards.

Committees that include representatives from the public and private sectors as well as the disability community are developing accessibility standards. The direct involvement of persons with disabilities is one of the key features that distinguish the AODA from other international legislation.

After each standard is developed, the public has an opportunity to review and provide feedback before the committee finalizes it for submission to the Minister.

## The Customer Service Standard Timelines

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07, also known as the customer service standard, is the first standard developed under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. *Click the arrows below to find out more.*

### When did the standard come into effect?

The customer service standard came into force on January 1, 2008.

### Does it apply to my university?

The standard applies to all people or organizations, both public and private, that:

- Provide goods and services either directly to the public or to other businesses or organizations, and
- Have one or more employees in Ontario

As a result, the customer service standard applies to universities and colleges across Ontario, including yours.

### Is there a deadline for compliance?

Government of Ontario ministries and broader public sector organizations, including universities, must comply with the standard by January 1, 2010. Private sector and non-profit organizations must comply by 2012.

## The AODA: Key Concepts

### What does “disability” mean?

As we mentioned earlier, the AODA uses the *Ontario Human Rights Code* definition of disability. It includes disabilities of different severity, visible as well as non-visible disabilities and disabilities of which the effects may come and go. It also includes sensory disabilities (e.g., hearing and vision), learning disabilities and physical disabilities.

Note that the Code has always included learning disabilities explicitly, in distinction from some other provincial human rights codes. This has afforded many Ontario students with learning disabilities the rightful access to higher education.

## Disability

The Code defines disability as:

- a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical coordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,
- b) a condition of mental impairment or a development disability,
- c) a learning disability, or dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- d) a mental disorder, or
- e) An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

## Did You Know?

Understanding something about disabilities is helpful in learning about accessibility.

It is important to note, however, that accessibility focuses not on the person and his or her disability but on recognizing and removing barriers.

## Disabled

It is about looking at the “environment” – buildings, activities, services and practices – and making changes so that persons with disabilities can participate more fully.

## What are barriers?

A barrier is anything that keeps someone from fully participating in all aspects of society because of a disability. Barriers can be both visible and invisible. Furthermore, while barriers are often unintentional, they can restrict access to goods and services.

## Attitude

An attitudinal barrier is an ideological obstacle to good customer service. This barrier is about what we think and how we interact with persons with disabilities. It is perhaps the most difficult barrier to overcome because our attitudes – based on our beliefs, knowledge, previous experience and education – can be hard to change. For instance, some people don’t know how to communicate with persons with disabilities – they may assume that someone with a speech problem also has an intellectual disability. Some people worry about offending someone by offering help and deal with this by ignoring or avoiding persons with disabilities.

## Architectural or structural

Architectural or structural barriers may result from design elements of a building such as stairs, doorways, the width of hallways and room layout. These barriers may also occur through every day practices, such as when we store boxes or other objects in hallways, obstructing accessible pathways.

### **Information or communication**

Information or communication barriers – like small print size, low colour contrast between text and background or not facing the person when speaking – can make it difficult to receive or convey information.

### **Technology**

Technology, or the lack of it, can prevent people from accessing information. Common tools like computers, telephones and other aids can all present barriers if they are not set up or designed with accessibility in mind.

### **Systemic**

Systemic barriers can result from an organization’s policies, practices and procedures if they restrict persons with disabilities, often unintentionally, as in the case of making a full course load a requirement for eligibility for campus services such as residences, scholarships and honours listing.

An example of a systemic barrier would be an academic practice that does not allow for “make-up” mid-term exams and instead increases the weight of the final exam to include the missed mid-term. Students may be unable to write a mid-term for disability-related reasons, such as delayed access to texts in alternate format, assistive technology issues or regularly scheduled medical treatment like dialysis. The practice of re-weighing final exams may work for most students but, in some cases, constitutes an unfair practice for students with disabilities.

### **Insights**

As you can see, there are many different types of barriers and most of them are not obvious. Systemic barriers can result from an organization’s policies, practices and procedures if they restrict persons with disabilities, often unintentionally, as in the case of making a full course load a requirement for eligibility for campus services such as residences, scholarships and honours listing. Students may be unable to write a mid-term for disability-related reasons, such as delayed access to texts in alternate format, assistive technology issues or regularly scheduled medical treatment like dialysis. The practice of re-weighing final exams may work for most students but, in some cases, constitutes an unfair practice for students with disabilities.

### **Did You Know?**

There are many myths around disabilities that can create attitudinal barriers.

These attitudes can range from pity to hero worship, from ignorance to denial of a person’s disabilities.

You can find a full list of commonly held myths about disabilities in the Sources and Resources.

### **Disabled**

While used in the media to refer to persons with disabilities, some members of the disability community use the term “disabled people” for a much different reason. To them, “disabled” means that environmental barriers interfere with their ability to participate. Disability is as much a function of the environment as it is something that you are born with or acquire”. Please see Sources and Resources for more information about this topic.

You'll notice as you go through the training that we use the phrase "persons with disabilities" and not "people with disabilities". Using the word "persons" recognizes the diversity of experience among persons with disabilities, whereas the word "people" tends to imply that everyone in the group is the same.

### The Customer Service Standard Requirements

The customer service standard outlines a series of different requirements for service providers across Ontario. To achieve compliance with the standard, your university must do the following:

- Establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to persons with disabilities
- Train everyone responsible for developing these policies, practices and procedures on accessible customer service
- Ensure that the university's policies, practices and procedures are consistent with four principles: independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity
- Have a policy for people's use of their own assistive devices
- Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability

Permit persons with disabilities to bring their service animals onto campus

To achieve compliance with the standard, your university must also:

- Allow persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their support persons while on campus and let them know what, if any, admission will be charged for support persons
- Provide notice of temporary disruption to facilities or services that persons with disabilities may use or access
- Establish and make publicly available a process for receiving and responding to feedback about accessible customer service, specifying the actions to be taken if a complaint is received
- Have a policy for people's use of their own assistive devices
- Train anyone who interacts with the public on behalf of the university on accessible customer service, which is why you are taking this training

### Did You Know?

Schools, universities and colleges provide goods and services to the public and so are subject to the requirements of the customer service standard.

The standard also applies to every other organization that provides goods or services to the public and has at least one employee, including but not limited to:

- Stores, shops, restaurants, bars, theatres and hotels
- Hospitals and health services
- Organizations that operate public places and amenities, such as recreation centres, municipal offices

- Police, ambulance, fire and court services

### Insights

Even if you don't have a direct role to play in meeting these requirements, your actions and decisions significantly influence your university's success in achieving compliance. For example, although you may not be directly involved with establishing policies on the use of assistive devices, your willingness to provide accessible customer service will make a difference in how successfully your university applies this policy.

In addition to these requirements, senior administrators have additional responsibility for ensuring their university keeps written records of the policies, practices and procedures that I just listed and for notifying the public that these documents are available in an accessible format upon request.

### The Four Principles

Most universities have policies, practices and procedures that relate to customer service for persons with disabilities. Examples include policies on accommodating students with disabilities, procedures on booking assistive listening devices, room reservations and residence admissions policies. Some of these are formal, documented practices. Others are unwritten and informal, "this is the way we do things around here."

Under the customer service standard, each university must ensure that its policies, practices and procedures address the requirements of the standard, and use reasonable efforts to ensure they are consistent with the principles of **independence, dignity, integration** and **equality of opportunity**.

#### Dignity

Providing service with dignity means the customer maintains his or her self-respect and the respect of other people. Dignified service means not treating persons with disabilities as an afterthought or forcing them to accept lesser service, quality or convenience.

#### Example

A student who uses a power wheelchair registers late for a course, and asks his professor for a classroom change because the door leading to the current one is not wide enough to accommodate his power chair. The professor considers several responses to the request:

- Telling the student that it is too late to change classrooms now
- Getting the class to vote on the subject
- Announcing to the class the reason for the change

There are two issues here: first, the student is entitled to accommodation under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*; second, all of the professor's responses disregard the student's dignity either by disclosing confidential information or by ignoring the student's right to access.

In providing accessible customer service, the professor, with the student's consent, should consult with personnel in the Disability Services or Registrar's Office about how to arrange for a quick change in classrooms.

## Did You Know?

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, dignity encompasses individual self-respect and self-worth. It involves physical and psychological integrity and empowerment.

A person's dignity becomes harmed when he or she is marginalized, stigmatized, ignored or devalued.

### Independence

Ensuring people are able to do things on their own without unnecessary help, or interference from others.

#### Example

A student who uses a wheelchair and has no arms or legs approaches a front-line employee who works at a busy student loan office. The student indicates that she is here to pick up her student loan. The employee pulls out a form on which he requires the student's signature and tells the student that he can sign for her as long as there is a witness to the signing. The student informs him that she is able to sign her own form with her mouth stick and simply needs either access to a table or assistance from him to hold the form in front of her at the appropriate level.

People sometimes react to a person's disability and may try to resolve an access issue based on their own assumptions about the person's abilities. In this case, the best response would have been for the employee to say, "I'm going to need your signature on this form. Do you require my assistance in any way?"

### Integration

Integration means providing service in a way that allows the person with a disability to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in the same or similar way as other customers.

#### Example

A student, who is hard of hearing, is planning to attend a lecture by a world-renowned scientist and asks the organizers for an assistive listening device called an FM system. The organizers tell him that they don't know where to get an FM system and not to worry because the text of the scientist's lecture will be posted on the website a few days after the event.

This does not respect the principle of integration because the student cannot access the information at the same time as everyone else.

### Equal Opportunity

Equal opportunity means having the same chances, options, benefits and results as others. In the case of services, it means that persons with disabilities have the same opportunity as others to benefit from the way you provide goods or services.

#### Example

When she arrives early in preparation for her convocation, a graduating student who uses a wheelchair notices that while there is plenty of accessible seating in the hall, the processional route itself is inaccessible. She alerts a convocation coordinator.

Although the coordinator is flustered when she realizes this oversight, she and her fellow coordinators decide on a different processional route and quickly rearrange the lineup pattern accordingly. This adjustment allows the student to participate in the processional march along with her fellow students.

## Additional Requirements

As you are nearing the end of this overview of the AODA and the customer service standard, I would like to highlight two additional requirements under the standard: disruptions in service and a feedback process.

Does the service you provide on campus, whether it is in a classroom, office or other setting, already meet these requirements?

### Disruptions in Service

Your university must provide notice to the public when there is a temporary disruption to your facilities or services. This applies whether a temporary disruption is planned or unexpected. This notice is important to persons with disabilities because they often go to a lot of trouble to access your services. Here are a few examples of disruptions.

- Elevators out of service
- Cancelled classes due to illness
- Building shutdowns
- Changes in building access due to construction

### Example

Stan, a second-year geography student with multiple sclerosis, typically spends about two hours getting ready in the morning. One cold January morning, Stan prepares to go and meet with his teaching assistant during her regularly scheduled office hours. When he arrives at her office, Stan finds a note taped to the door indicating that the teaching assistant is away and has cancelled her morning office hours. What might the teaching assistant have done differently to help avoid situations like this?

The standard requires your university to provide notice of temporary service disruptions using a variety of methods that can include:

- Posting in a conspicuous place
- Sending an email message
- Posting on a website
- Any other reasonable method under the circumstances

In Stan's case, a reasonable response could have used all of these methods. The teaching assistant could also have called Stan at home to let him know she had cancelled her office hours.

The notice should also include information about:

- The reason for the disruption
- Its expected duration
- A description of alternate facilities or services, if available

Your university may already have in place or is in the process of developing formal practices, policies and procedures concerning the management of service disruptions. Since the provision of accessible customer service is a shared responsibility, I suggest you make an effort to familiarize yourself with these procedures and when observing disruptions, take appropriate and reasonable action.

### Feedback Process

Good customer service in any area relies on feedback. You probably have noticed that many stores have feedback forms and boxes or invite you to complete an online survey. Good customer service for persons with disabilities also includes a process for receiving and responding to feedback.

The standard requires your university to establish and implement a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the way you provide goods or services to persons with disabilities.

The process must allow people to give feedback in a number of ways:

- In person
- By telephone
- In writing
- By email
- On disk
- By other methods

Using a variety of methods ensures that you take into account the varying communication needs of persons with disabilities.

### **Example**

Jordan, captain of the rowing team, is leaving the physical education centre after his morning practice. He rolls up to the door opener button but is unable to reach it because there is a bucket of sand right in front of it. Fortunately, he is strong enough to move it.

Later, he goes to his university's website looking for a way to let someone know so that it doesn't happen again. He sends a message to the physical plant office and receives an automatic reply thanking him for his feedback with details about how the office manages feedback and that someone will be in touch with him shortly.

Of course, an important part of giving feedback is knowing what will happen afterwards. The standard requires your university to specify the action that staff, faculty or other respondents will take if a complaint is received.

In Jordan's case, he can expect someone to follow up with him about the blocked access to the door opener.

Finally, the standard requires that your university make information about the feedback process readily available to the public. This will help inform people that the feedback process is available and provide them with information about accessing it.

### **Tips**

At the beginning of the term, professors could include a short statement in their course syllabus that the university welcomes feedback on accessibility issues and that tells them how to provide this feedback. Alternatively, departments could include information and relevant links about the feedback process on their departmental websites.

### **Insights**

It really helps us improve our services when we hear from our students, faculty and staff about what we can do better. A feedback process brings to our attention situations in which we may not have adequately considered accessibility and allows us to better plan for accessibility in the future.

## Accessibility Terminology

As accessible customer service becomes second nature to you and your colleagues, you may hear several terms used in a new way. Take a moment to consider how these concepts apply to your work environment and practices. For more accessibility terminology, you may refer to the Glossary.

**Accessibility:** Accessibility is the degree to which persons with disabilities can access a device, service or environment without barriers. Accessibility is also a process - it is the proactive identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with disabilities.

**Accommodation:** Accommodation is different from accessibility. It is a reactive and individualized adaptation or adjustment made to provide a person with a disability with equitable and non-discriminatory opportunities for participation. It has its basis in anti-discrimination laws.

**Duty to accommodate:** Duty to accommodate means accommodation must be provided in a manner that respects general principles such as dignity of the person, individualization, integration and full participation.

**Undue hardship:** Organizations are required to accommodate someone with a disability to the point of undue hardship. There are only three factors to consider in assessing undue hardship: cost, outside sources of funding and health and safety requirements, if any.

Here are another two terms you may have heard of. Do you know the difference between them?

**Universal design:** Universal design helps to ensure a high degree of building accessibility. It is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

## Did You Know?

The Center for Universal Design in the U.S. originally developed seven principles of universal design in 1997 to guide a wide range of design disciplines including products and communications.

You can find out more about the seven universal design principles under Sources and Resources.

**Universal instructional design:** Universal instructional design helps to ensure a high degree of accessibility to subject matter and instruction. In terms of learning, universal design means the design of instructional materials and activities that make the learning goals achievable by individuals with a wide variety of learning styles or needs. For example, people attend to, organize, engage and remember information differently. Some people attend to what they see while other people take notes to help them process the material.

The use of universal instructional design principles helps to make instruction and teaching accessible because it incorporates into the design and delivery of a course a deliberate and pre-emptive response to the changing and varying learning needs of students, including those with disabilities.

It's important to note that universal instructional design does not mean changing or reducing teaching standards or academic excellence. It means striving to deliver subject matter using the widest possible range of approaches so that it engages students, irrespective of their individual learning styles or needs.

In addition to checking out the resources in the Sources and Resources, you may wish to contact your faculty development or teaching and learning office for more information on universal instructional design.

## Check Your Learning

Now that you've had a brief overview of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, have a look at how they apply to your job.

Here are a few situations as they occur in three common campus settings: the classroom, the office and campus facilities. Take a few moments to consider them and depending on your role and responsibilities, think about what you would do.

### In the classroom

Maria is a student in computer science who has vision loss. In April, she approaches the professors who will be teaching her in September asking for the titles of the textbooks she will need so that the Disability Services Office can arrange to get them in Braille.

What can Maria's professors do to help ensure that Maria is able to access the information required for her courses?

- A first step would be to ask Maria how they could accommodate her disability in the classroom: she probably has many good suggestions for them based on her experience.
- The Braille transcription process can take up to four months. Professors can help manage this time lag by selecting text titles as early as possible. It is also helpful when professors consider course outlines in advance, decide supplementary readings early in the process and post all course notes for students in an accessible format.
- Her professors may find it useful to consider incorporating principles of universal instructional design into their course preparation. This involves considering the potential needs of all learners when designing and delivering instruction as well as identifying and eliminating unnecessary barriers.

The success of students' individualized accommodation plans depends greatly on accessible customer service. In Maria's case, this refers to her professors' approachability and willingness to work with her and make adjustments as necessary so that she can participate fully in their classes.

### In the office

You are an administrative assistant in the Registrar's Office. When you answer your phone, the caller introduces himself as a Bell Relay Operator and announces that he has Brian Smith on the line. You have never heard of a Relay Operator before and you are not sure what to do when the operator says, "Hi, I'm Brian Smith and my student number is 123 456 789. I'm calling about my account. I was looking at it online and it says that I still owe fees for this term but the money has been taken out of my bank account".

What type of disability do you think Brian has? What would be the best response to his question?

- I'm sorry, information about students' accounts is confidential and I cannot give out information over the phone unless I am speaking directly with the student.
- One moment please Brian, while I look up your account.

Brian has a speech disability. The best response to his question is to provide him with the information he seeks. Just like interacting with someone using an American Sign Language-English interpreter, remember that the use of a Bell Relay Operator is a communication support. Good customer service recognizes the varying communication needs of persons with disabilities.

## Did You Know?

When you communicate with persons with disabilities, you should always take into account their disability. For example, some persons with disabilities use a teletypewriter (TTY). With the assistance of a Bell Relay Operator, who is subject to a code of strict confidentiality, they can call people with regular phones.

### In campus facilities

You are a teaching assistant in the Chemistry Department. In your building, security policy requires the locking of all entrance doors after 6:30 p.m. and they are unlocked each morning. One door is equipped with an automatic door opener that needs to be manually switched on and off. The custodians sometimes forget to switch on the opener when unlocking the door, rendering the entrance inaccessible.

A student complains to you about this in one of your early morning chemistry labs. What should you do?

- Tell the student that you don't know what to do about this and suggest that she contact the Disability Services Office.
- Tell a departmental assistant about the issue. She says she'll bring it up with Physical Plant Services.
- Tell the student that you will bring the issue forward to the appropriate offices. You follow up in a couple of days and inform the student that a new protocol has been implemented to ensure the door opener is always turned on when the door is unlocked.

Here, the best response is to look into the issue, follow up with the appropriate department and report to the student who brought it to your attention. In this case, inconsistent habits means that people who use mobility devices such as canes, walkers or wheelchairs receive a lower level of customer service because of the unreliability of the door's access in the morning. The solution need not be complicated; when people understand the consequences of inconsistent service for persons with disabilities, a more accessible approach can easily be adopted.

## What Would You Do?

Here are a few more questions about how to comply with the standard in your job. As you go through the following questions, you are welcome to answer only those relevant to your role on campus. However, we think you will find all of them interesting and helpful to understanding accessible customer service.

### In the classroom

After class, Mia, a student with a disability, presents her professor with a letter from the Disability Services Office, informing him about several requirements she has in order to participate in the class. Within earshot of several other students leaving the classroom, the professor asks in a brisk tone, "Why do you need to write the tests separately? What's wrong?"

This response is an affront to which of the following AODA principles?

- a) Dignity
- b) Independence
- c) Integration
- d) Equal opportunity

The correct answer is a) dignity. The professor is not respectful of Mia's dignity by asking questions about her disability, pressuring her to disclose confidential information in the presence of other people. It is not necessary for the professor to know specific details about Mia's disability. The professor and Mia should decide on a mutually agreeable time and location to discuss the appropriate steps privately to ensure they both have a complete understanding of what is required. The professor, with Mia's consent, may also contact staff in the Disability Services Office for further clarification.

### **In the office**

There is a position in the Office of the Vice President, Academic, at the local university in which Tim is very interested. He would like to submit his application in person and arranges for his support person to arrive at his house to assist him getting to campus. When he arrives at the Human Resources Department at 3 p.m. to submit his application, there is a sign taped to the door saying the Department is closed for a day-long staff meeting. In preparing his application letter and résumé, Tim had checked the HR website the day before and there was nothing about the closure posted there.

Would you be frustrated if you were this person? If you worked in the HR Department, what would you have suggested to your colleagues as you were planning for the day-long staff meeting?

- a) Post a notice on the HR website the day of the closure.
- b) Send an email to key departments in the university with notice of the closure.
- c) Provide advance notification in a variety of ways, including notice on the HR website in several places, such as the job opportunities pages.

The correct answer is c) Provide advance notification in a variety of ways, including notice on the HR website in several places, such as the job opportunities pages. Devising and implementing a process for managing temporary disruptions is part of your university's obligations under the standard. While the other two responses provide notice, only response C addresses the need for reasonable advance notification and considers the impact of service disruptions on customers. As you can see from this scenario, employment applicants are customers, and the seemingly innocuous action of closing the office for a day-long meeting can have implications for accessible customer service.

### **In campus facilities**

Charlene, a fourth-year student, is working as a campus tour guide in the university's recruitment office. She really enjoys this job, particularly introducing newly accepted students and their parents to the beautiful campus. As she arrives at the recruitment office to take a group on a tour, she notices that one of the parents is holding a long, white cane. Charlene can't recall having anyone with vision loss in one of her tours before and she's really not sure what to do.

What would you do?

- a) Speak quietly to the man's daughter and ask how her father will participate in the tour.
- b) Start the tour as usual, pointing to notable buildings and popular points of interest.
- c) Decide on your own to change the tour route to avoid a busy intersection, which also means not going by one of the libraries, one of the oldest and most beautiful buildings on campus.
- d) Welcome the man to the campus, briefly describe how you typically conduct the tour and ask him if there is anything in particular you can do for him.

Actually, the correct response is D. Answer A is not respectful of the parent's dignity and independence. Speaking directly to a person with a disability about his or her access needs is always the most appropriate approach. Answer B could reduce the parent's opportunity for full participation in the tour.

Charlene, not knowing the extent of his vision loss, may not provide enough detail in her descriptions for student's father to experience the tours as other might. As for answer C, Charlene is making assumptions about the father's lack of ability or may be inappropriately concerned about safety and making choices for him without his knowledge.

Here are a few things to keep in mind while providing service to our students, staff and members of the public.

- The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* aims to make Ontario accessible by 2025.
- The customer service standard came into effect in 2008, and requires all schools, colleges and universities, including yours, to comply with its requirements by January 1, 2010.

As you have seen, the best course of action is often a simple "May I help you?" In other words, accessible customer service does not require special expertise and does not have to be complicated.

## Wrapping Up

You've finished this introductory module on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service.

In most cases, accessible customer service starts with a simple question: May I help you?

## Module 1 Summary

### Understanding the AODA and the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

#### Background

Since 1962, the *Ontario Human Rights Code* (OHRC) has provided persons with disabilities with the right to access goods, services, employment, etc. without discrimination. The Code requires employers, service providers and landlords, for example, to accommodate persons with disabilities to the point of undue hardship. The Code has resulted in some progress towards breaking down accessibility barriers in Ontario. However, progress has occurred on a case-by-case, reactive basis. Full access remains limited as persons with disabilities still encounter many barriers that prevent equal access and participation.

#### Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

The goal of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (2005) is to make Ontario accessible by 2025 through the development of accessibility standards. In addition to customer service, development of standards in other key areas is underway, including:

- information and communications
- built environment
- employment
- transportation

#### Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

The Ontario government has developed a customer service standard, known as the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07, under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. The customer service standard came into force on January 1, 2008, and applies to all people or organizations, both public and private, that:

- Provide goods and services either directly to the public or to other businesses or organizations, and
- Have one or more employees in Ontario

Government of Ontario ministries and broader public sector organizations, including universities, must comply with the standard by January 1, 2010. Private sector and non-profit organizations must comply by 2012.

#### Definition of Disability

The AODA uses the *Ontario Human Rights Code* definition of disability. It includes disabilities of different severity, visible as well as non-visible disabilities and disabilities of which the effects may come and go. It also includes sensory disabilities (e.g., hearing and vision), learning disabilities and physical disabilities.

AODA defines a disability as:

- a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical coordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or

hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,

- b) a condition of mental impairment or a development disability,
- c) a learning disability, or dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- d) a mental disorder, or
- e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

### Barriers to Accessibility

A barrier is anything that keeps someone from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability. Barriers can be visible or non-visible. Furthermore, while barriers are often unintentional, they can restrict access to goods and services. Common barriers include:

#### Attitude

This barrier is about what we think and how we interact with persons with disabilities. It is perhaps the most difficult barrier to overcome because our attitudes – based on our beliefs, knowledge, previous experience and education – can be hard to change. For instance, some people don't know how to communicate with persons with disabilities – they may assume that someone with a speech problem also has an intellectual disability. Some people worry about offending someone by offering help and deal with this by ignoring or avoiding persons with disabilities.

#### Architectural or structural

Architectural or structural barriers may result from design elements of a building such as stairs, doorways, the width of hallways and room layout. These barriers may also occur through everyday practices, such as when we store boxes or other objects in hallways, obstructing accessible pathways.

#### Information or communication

Information or communication barriers – like small print size, low colour contrast between text and background or not facing the person when speaking – can make it difficult to receive or convey information.

#### Technology

Technology, or the lack of it, can prevent people from accessing information. Common tools like computers, telephones and other aids can all present barriers if they are not set up or designed with accessibility in mind.

#### Systemic

Systemic barriers can result from an organization's policies, practices and procedures if they restrict persons with disabilities, often unintentionally, as in the case of making a full course load a requirement for eligibility for campus services such as residences, scholarships and honours listing.

## Customer Service Standard Requirements

The customer service standard outlines a series of different requirements for service providers across Ontario. To achieve compliance with the standard, universities must:

- Establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to persons with disabilities
- Train everyone responsible for developing these policies, practice and procedures on accessible customer service
- Ensure that the university's policies, practices and procedures are consistent with four principles: independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity
- Have a policy for people's use of their own assistive devices
- Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability
- Permit persons with disabilities to bring their service animals onto campus
- Allow persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their support persons while on campus and let them know what, if any, admission will be charged for support persons
- Provide notice of temporary disruption to facilities or services that persons with disabilities may use or access
- Establish and make publicly available a process for receiving and responding to feedback about accessible customer service, specifying the actions to be taken if a complaint is received
- Train anyone who interacts with the public on behalf of the university on accessible customer service

Most universities have policies, practices and procedures that relate to customer service for persons with disabilities. Examples include policies on accommodating students with disabilities, procedures on booking assistive listening devices, room reservations and residence admissions policies. While some of these are formal, documented practices, others are unwritten and informal.

## Principles of Accessible Customer Service

Under the customer service standard, each university must ensure that its policies, practices and procedures address the requirements of the standard, and use reasonable efforts to ensure they are consistent with the following principles:

### **Dignity**

Providing service with dignity means the customer maintains his or her self-respect and the respect of other people. Dignified service means not treating persons with disabilities as an afterthought or forcing them to accept lesser service, quality or convenience.

### **Independence**

Ensuring people are able to do things on their own without unnecessary help, or interference from others.

### **Integration**

Integration means providing service in a way that allows the person with a disability to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in the same or similar way as other customers.

### **Equal Opportunity**

Equal opportunity means having the same chances, options, benefits and results as others. In the case of services, it means that persons with disabilities have the same opportunity as others to benefit from the way you provide goods or services.

### **Disruptions in Service**

Universities must provide notice to the public when there is a temporary disruption to their facilities or services. This notice is important to persons with disabilities because they often go to a lot of trouble to access your services.

This applies whether a temporary disruption is planned or unexpected, as in the following examples:

- Elevators out of service
- Cancelled classes due to illness
- Building shutdowns
- Changes in building access due to construction

The standard requires universities to provide notice of temporary service disruptions using a variety of methods that can include:

- Posting in a conspicuous place
- Sending an email message
- Posting on a website
- Any other reasonable method under the circumstances

The notice should also include information about:

- The reason for the disruption
- Its expected duration
- A description of alternate facilities or services, if available

### **Feedback Process**

Good customer service for persons with disabilities also includes a process for receiving and responding to feedback. The standard requires universities to establish and implement a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the way they provide goods or services to persons with disabilities.

The process must allow people to give feedback in a number of ways:

- In person
- By telephone
- In writing
- By email

- On disk
- By other methods

Using a variety of methods ensures that you take into account the varying communication needs of persons with disabilities.

The standard also requires universities to specify the action that staff, faculty or other respondents will do if a complaint is received.

Finally, the standard requires universities to make information about the feedback process readily available to the public.

## Module 2

### Communicating with Customers with Disabilities

#### Getting Started

##### Welcome

Welcome to this module on Communicating and Interacting with Customers with Disabilities, the second in the Accessible Customer Service eLearning course for the Council of Ontario Universities.

If you've completed the first module, Understanding the AODA and the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, you already know that Ontario universities are required to provide accessible service to their customers. A big part of accessible customer service is knowing how to communicate with people with different disabilities.

In this module, you will find tips and techniques on communicating with all of your customers, including those with disabilities. As you will see, good and accessible service begins with a simple question: "May I help you?"

To complete all three modules, you will need about an hour of uninterrupted time so that you may focus on your learning.

To help minimize distractions, you may wish to close your door, turn off your phone and otherwise give your full attention to the module.

##### Did You Know?

More than 15% of Ontarians have some type of disability. That's one in every seven persons in Ontario, and as the population ages, that number will grow.

You can probably think of several persons in your own circle of family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances who live with disabilities.

##### Learning Objectives

What will you learn in this module?

- Who your customers are.
- How to communicate and interact appropriately with persons with disabilities.
- Some basic information about different types of disabilities.

##### Check Your Knowledge

Before we begin to sharpen our communication skills, let's take a moment to check what you already know about communicating and interacting with customers with disabilities.

##### Question 1

You are welcoming alumni from the Faculty of Medicine to the meet-and-greet session before the start of a mini-lecture series. Your guests include alumni from cohorts spanning at least 25 years. A visitor

with vision loss asks you to direct him to the registration table. Which one of these four actions would you AVOID when communicating with this person?

- A) Speak directly to the person, not to his or her support person or companion.
- B) Take the arm of the person with vision loss and direct him or her to the registration table.
- C) Give clear and precise directions to orient the person to the surroundings.
- D) Say your name even if you know the person well, since many voices sound similar

**The correct answer is b):** *Take the arm of the person with vision loss and direct him or her to the registration table. You should never touch a person with vision loss without permission, unless it's an emergency. Instead, offer your assistance and wait until you receive permission*

### Question 2

A visitor approaches the reception desk of the Sports and Recreation Centre and asks for a pamphlet on the Centre's fitness programs. The receptionist has a difficult time understanding and asks the visitor to repeat himself several times. The receptionist eventually understands and responds by asking the visitor if he is staff, student, faculty or a community member as the Centre has pamphlets prepared with information specially tailored for each group. The visitor responds but again, the receptionist does not understand him. The phone on his desk is ringing and the receptionist is becoming frustrated with not being able to understand this visitor.

What should the receptionist do?

- A) Offer to use a pen and paper.
- B) Use plain language.
- C) Speak louder.
- D) Ask "yes" or "no" questions.

**The correct answer is a)** *Offer to use a pen and paper. Offering a pen and paper would be an appropriate way of serving this visitor, who appears to have a speech disability.*

### Question 3

The president of your university plans to deliver a speech about the university's financial challenges and she wants it videotaped and posted on the website. Since the speech will set the stage for upcoming changes, she wants to reach as many members of the university community as possible.

When a student union representative hears about the video-taping, he asks if the video will be accessible to persons with disabilities. A staff member from the President's Office says that when the video is posted a few days later, it will be closed captioned with embedded ASL/English interpretation and that a link to a text document of the president's speech will be posted.

Does this response fully address the student's question?

A) Yes

B) No

**The correct answer is a) Yes.** This response does address the student's concern that the video be accessible. By communicating with her audience using video that has been closed captioned and embedded with ASL/English interpretation and accompanied by a link to the text version, the president is taking into account a variety of communication modalities that persons with disabilities use.

## What You Need to Know

So who are the folks who make up your university's "public"?

The first group that comes to mind is students. According to the customer service standard, students are indeed your "customers". Faculty, staff and student leaders are "service providers". Professors provide their "customers" with educational services", while staff and student leaders provide other types of services.

The university's public is not limited to students. It also includes: (Mouse over each face below for more information.)

- University staff and faculty using campus services, e.g., human resources
- Residents of the city or town in which your university is located
- Visiting alumni and faculty
- Students' parents and other relatives
- Representatives from other organizations, e.g., universities, ministry, business partners

## How Does This Apply to You?

Now that you've had a brief overview of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, have a look at how they apply to your job.

Here are a few situations as they occur in three common campus settings: the classroom, the office and campus facilities. Take a few moments to consider them and depending on your role and responsibilities, think about what you would do. Click each of the following settings for more information.

### In the classroom

Dr. Trevor Jones, a well-known environmentalist, is scheduled to deliver a lecture on campus. About a week and a half before the lecture, organizers email Dr. Jones asking for copies of his PowerPoint presentation, both a regular file and a text-only version.

While Dr. Jones tends to prepare for his lectures in advance of their date, he also likes to review the materials the day before so that he can make any last-minute adjustments. He tells the organizers this in a reply message. The organizers explain one of the lecture's registrants is a person with a disability and they need his presentation so that they can respond to the person's request for the presentation materials in an alternate format.

Dr. Jones makes final adjustments to the presentations and sends the requested copies to the organizers.

### **In the office**

It's mid-September and an inter-university committee convenes for its first meeting of the academic year.

As committee members are arriving, one member from another university approaches the Chair and hands her a microphone and transmitter, asking her to pin the microphone to her lapel. Although these individuals were on the Committee last year, this is the first time the member has asked the Chair to use an FM system. As she takes the microphone and transmitter, the Chair says to the member, "I've seen you in some other meetings and you never used one of these before. How deaf are you?"

Here, the visiting committee member is considered a customer of the host university. As a university employee and service provider, the Committee Chair should remember that while it's natural to be curious about persons with disabilities, many persons with disabilities don't welcome questions about disability or their use of assistive devices.

If they volunteer that information and invite you to ask questions, you may do so. However, if you are asked to use an assistive device, you should respect the person's dignity and confidentiality and avoid making comments or asking questions about the person's disability.

### **In campus facilities**

Every year, the students, faculty and staff put on a very successful and popular production of the play "Rent". Bridgett, an administrative assistant in the Department of Biology and who is hard of hearing, looks forward to attending. Buying her ticket the day before, Bridgett asks the student selling the tickets if there will be FM systems available at the event. The student says she doesn't know and that the group hadn't thought about this. She tells Bridgett she will inquire and follow up.

The evening of the play arrives and, Bridgett still hasn't heard from the event organizers. She decides to bring her own personal system and arrives ahead of curtain time, although the hall is filling up quickly. She speaks with the audio-visual technician and because there are no other FM systems available, asks to use her personal system. To make her system work with the audio equipment, some testing is necessary and Bridgett helps the technician with this.

Although the system worked out well for Bridgett and she enjoyed the play, she was still upset because the planners did not follow up on her request for the FM system and that testing the equipment in front of so many people was embarrassing.

Often we do not know who, among our customers, will have disabilities. Therefore, we need to consider accessibility needs ahead of time. The planners should have tried to anticipate some accessibility needs and plan for these. They should also have asked attendees to inform them of any particular accessibility needs and then followed up on these requests in a timely fashion.

## What You Need to Know

Now that we've explored a bit about who our customers may be, let's learn more about communicating and interacting with customers with specific disabilities. First, let's look at some best practices for communicating and interacting with anyone with a disability.

- Be respectful.
- Dismiss your stereotypes and avoid making assumptions about a person's disability or capabilities. Many people with disabilities often talk about being frustrated when people assume what they can or can't do
- Speak directly to a person with a disability and not the support person, companion or interpreter. While this can sometimes be challenging, ignoring or talking over the person with the disability is patronizing and an affront to their dignity.

Some additional best practices for communicating and interacting with anyone with a disability include:

- Be patient - sometimes communicating with someone with a disability can take a bit longer, requiring you or the other person to repeat yourselves several times.
- Avoid touching or interacting with a service animal.
- Think of the assistive device as an extension of the person's personal space - touch these only if you are asked to.
- When you don't know what to do, it's always best to ask the person with a disability.

## Did You Know?

When speaking about persons with disabilities, take care to choose the right word.

- Use "disability", not "handicap" or "handicapped".
- Don't use terms like "mentally retarded", "slow", "delayed", "suffering from", "mute", "crippled" or "confined to a wheelchair". These words are demeaning and disrespectful to persons with disabilities.
- Remember to put the person first. It's proper to say "person with a learning disability" rather than "learning disabled".

## Insights

A good way to start is to ask, May I help you? What works for one person with a disability may not work for another person with a similar disability. Usually, the person with a disability knows what works best for him or her and is often only too glad to let you know.

## Communicating & Interacting with Customers with Disabilities

Now we're going to look at some strategies for communicating and interacting with persons with different types of disabilities.

As you consider these suggestions, take a moment to reflect on what you have done in the past and what you might do differently.

## Learning Disabilities

A learning disability is a disorder in the way a person processes information. This kind of disability can affect how a person acquires, organizes, expresses, retains and understands verbal and non-verbal

information. Examples include dyslexia (difficulty understanding written words), dyscalculia (difficulty solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts) and auditory or visual processing disorders (difficulty understanding language despite normal hearing and vision).

### Did You Know?

Many people with learning disabilities have met with success and fame in their chosen field. Whoopi Goldberg and Tom Cruise are two highly successful entertainers who have talked openly about their learning disability. Charles Schwab, a very successful investor (among the top 100 richest people in the US), says about his dyslexia, “Although I am a very slow reader, I’m really good at concepts and visualization. I can process all kinds of stuff and get to the conclusion much quicker than other people who have to go step by step.”

See Sources and Resources for more information about these celebrities and the organizations they support.

### Learning Disabilities - Tips

Don’t confuse a person with a learning disability with other types of disabilities such as developmental, mental or sensory disabilities. It may be helpful to remember that persons with learning disabilities learn differently from others.

When communicating and interacting with someone with a learning disability:

- Speak naturally, clearly and directly to the person.
- Provide information in a way that works best for that person. For example, even if you have written notes, it may be helpful to verbalize the information too. If you are not sure, gently ask the person if there’s a different way you can provide the information that would be helpful.
- Be patient and willing to explain something again.
- Extra time to complete a task is often helpful. As some students with dyslexia may take longer to read and understand written words, it is often helpful when they have extra time to complete an in-class activity.

### Insights

Today, there are more than 13,000 students in Ontario’s colleges and universities who have diagnosed learning disabilities. These students are capable of being successful... if they have the supports and services they require to level the playing field and demonstrate what they know.

### Did You Know?

Mad Students Society (MSS) is an organization run by and for students. MSS was created to provide peer support, advocacy and self-empowerment for students experiencing mental health issues in post-secondary institutions and other centres of education such as adult education, and privately funded education institutions.

### Mental Health Disabilities

Mental health disabilities affect the way people perceive the world and cope with stressors. When they

are under control, these disabilities are often non-visible. Sometimes, however, a mental health disability may present itself through “odd” behaviours.

For example, a person suffering from depression might break out in tears or fall asleep in class; a person with a panic disorder may become breathless and scattered; a person with dissociative identity disorder may suddenly act like a different person, or a person with obsessive-compulsive disorder may have to perform some kind of repetitive ritual before handing in a test.

### **Mental Health Disabilities - Tips**

When communicating and interacting with someone you know who has a mental health disability or who is exhibiting behaviours associated with mental health disorders:

- Treat the person with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be patient. A person with a mental health disability may have difficulty concentrating, mood swings, poor memory or a lack of motivation.
- In situations where you think the person needs additional help, be patient and calm.
- Familiarize yourself with any protocols in place at your university for dealing with crisis situations involving mental health disabilities.
- Make an effort to learn about resources available at your university and in the community for assisting persons with mental health disabilities.

### **Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities**

Intellectual or developmental disabilities are those characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviours, which covers many everyday social and practical skills.

Some persons with intellectual or development disabilities learn and process information more slowly and may have difficulty with abstract concepts or interacting easily with other people.

### **Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities - Tips**

Here are some strategies on communicating and interacting with someone with an intellectual or development disability.

- Remind yourself to be patient.
- Speak more slowly and leave pauses for the person to process your words.
- Use plain language and avoid jargon.
- Speak directly to the person.
- Ask one question at a time, giving the person time to formulate and give their reply.
- Make sure the person understands what you’ve said. You can be direct and ask, “Do you understand this?”

### Did You Know?

Many people think that communicating with someone with a disability is complicated or requires special skill. More often than not, providing accessible customer service can be achieved through basic, simple solutions

### Insights

Are you wondering why we're providing information about intellectual and development disabilities in training for the university community?

A few persons with intellectual or development disabilities do attend university. Furthermore, the purpose of this training is to encourage you to think about all the different people who come to your campus, including parents, children of mature students and kids attending campus programs like summer camps. Any of these people could be persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities, requiring your skills and willingness to provide them with accessible customer service.

### Hearing Loss

Many terms are used for hearing loss; commonly used terms are hard of hearing, deafened, deaf and oral deaf.

- A person who is **hard of hearing** has a mild to profound hearing loss.
- A person who is **deafened** has a significant hearing loss and may have lost their hearing gradually or suddenly.
- Persons who are deafened or hard of hearing may use devices such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems or they may rely on speech-reading (also known as lip reading).
- A person who is **deaf** has little or no functional hearing and may depend upon visual rather than auditory communication.
- **Oral deaf** refers to a person who is deaf and whose preferred mode of communication is verbal and auditory.
- The person may or may not use sign language.

### Did You Know?

The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association estimates that as many as one out of every ten Canadians have some degree of hearing loss; what's more, this number is growing.

Note that Deaf spelled with a capital D is used to refer to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and who identify with the culture, society and language of Deaf people, which is based on Sign Language. Their preferred mode of communication is Sign.

### Hearing Loss - Tips

When you are communicating with someone with hearing loss, the following strategies can be helpful.

- If the person isn't looking at you, attract their attention before speaking with a discreet wave of your hand or a gentle tap on the shoulder.

- Speak clearly, pacing your speech and pause normally. You don't have to shout, exaggerate or over-pronounce your words.
- If possible, find a quiet place to converse - background noise for persons with hearing loss can be hard to filter out.
- Don't stand in front of a window or light as it shades your face - poor light and shadows can make it difficult to speech read.
- Don't put your hands, glasses or other objects such as a pen, in front of your face when speaking. This too can make speech reading difficult.
- If interacting with a person with an interpreter, be sure to face and speak directly to the person, not the interpreter.
- If necessary, ask the person for suggestions on how to improve the communication. He or she may ask you to move away from the light, speak a little more slowly or perhaps even use a pen and paper

### Did You Know?

If you like to learn languages, why not consider learning sign language?

Like any other language, it takes quite a while to become fluent. However, an introductory course will give you enough signs to greet, welcome and exchange some basic information.

Deaf people always appreciate it when hearing people attempt to speak with them in their language.

### Insights

Although facing the person and not the interpreter sounds easy, for hearing persons who naturally face the speaker, it can be a little disconcerting to look at one person while listening to another one speak. When you are speaking, it may feel a little different to have the person not look at you but at the interpreter. With a little practice, though, this becomes easier and much more natural.

### Vision Loss

Vision loss reduces a person's ability to see clearly. Few people with vision loss are totally blind. Some have limited vision, such as the loss of side, peripheral or central vision. Some can see the outline of objects, while others can see the direction of light.

### Vision Loss - Tips

When interacting and communicating with someone with vision loss, remember:

- Don't assume the person cannot see you - few people with vision loss are totally blind.
- Do not touch the person without permission.
- When offering to guide someone with vision loss, stand on the side they direct you to and hold out your elbow. When they've taken it, walk at a normal pace and the person will usually walk a

step behind. Announce handrails, doors (e.g., to the left, right, push/pull to open) and describe the surrounding areas.

- Do not leave the person in the middle of a room. Show him or her to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- If you need to leave the person, let them know you are leaving and will be back.
- Identify yourself when you approach the person. Speak directly to him or her, not to his or her companion.
- Don't raise your voice. Say your name even if you know the person well, since many voices sound similar.
- Give clear and precise directions. For example, "a meter to your left" is better than "over there".
- If you're not sure how to give directions, ask the person what would be most helpful.
- Don't be afraid or embarrassed to use words such as "see", "read" or "look". Persons with vision loss also use these words.
- Do not touch or speak to service animals. They are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- When giving printed information, offer to read, summarize or describe it. Later in the module, we'll discuss alternatives to print materials that persons with disabilities can access.

### Did You Know?

January 4, 2009 marked 200 years since the birth of Louis Braille.

Braille lost his sight at the age of 3 and later went on to develop a system enabling persons who are blind to read and write by means of raised dots.

Many persons who are blind continue using the Braille system throughout the world.

### Insights

Legally blind refers to someone with a visual acuity of less than 6/60 or 20/200 or who has a field of vision of less than 20 degrees. In other words, a person who is legally blind would have to stand 20 feet from an object to see it with the same degree of clarity as someone with normal vision could see from 200 feet.

### Deafblind

People who are deafblind have a combination of vision and hearing loss. They usually have some useful but not always reliable vision and hearing.

People who are deafblind use many different ways to communicate including sign language, tactile sign language, tracking, tactile finger spelling, Braille, speech and speech reading.

### Deafblind - Tips

When communicating and interacting with a person who is deafblind:

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deafblind may have some hearing and/or vision.
- If you are not sure how to begin, ask the person what will be helpful.
- Many people will explain what you need to do, perhaps giving you an assistance card or note explaining how to communicate.
- Often people who are deafblind are accompanied by an intervenor. Again, speak directly to the person with a disability and not the intervenor.
- Identify yourself both to the person with the disability and the intervenor.
- Some people who are deafblind use service animals. Again, do not pet or interact with the animal.
- You can give a gentle touch on the arm to get the person's attention. However, do not touch a person who is deafblind on the shoulder or back, as they may not have enough vision to orient your location to them.
- Suddenly touching a person who is deafblind can be alarming and should only be done in emergencies.

### Did You Know?

You may recall one famous person who was deafblind: Helen Keller. She was the first deafblind person to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree, graduating from Radcliff College in 1904.

In 1873, Keller wrote that "not blindness but the attitudes of the seeing to the blind is the hardest burden to bear. The tragic aspect of blindness is not inherent in the condition. In nature, it is absent - it is an entirely civilized idea".

### Insights

The concepts of intervention and intervenor may help you understand more about communicating and interacting with a person who is deafblind.

- An intervention is the act of going or mediating between. With regard to persons who are deafblind, an intervention is the process that enables a person who is deafblind to receive information so that the person can interact with his or her environment.
- An intervenor, not to be confused with an interpreter, is a specially trained professional who mediates between the person who is deafblind and others, enabling him or her to communicate effectively with and receive information from his or her environment.

### Speech or Language Disabilities

A person with a **speech disability** is unable to produce speech sounds correctly or fluently. They often have too little voice strength or have an inability to understand certain words. Some people with speech disabilities have difficulties with articulation and stuttering.

A person with a **language disability** sometimes has trouble understanding others (receptive language) or sharing thoughts, ideas and feelings (expressive language). Please click on the folder to access important communication and interaction tips.

### **Speech or Language Disabilities - Tips**

Here are some things to keep in mind when communicating and interacting with someone with a speech or language disability.

- Don't assume that because a person has one disability, he or she also has another. Many people with speech disabilities complain that because they can't speak well, people treat them like they are unintelligent or developmentally delayed.
- Remember that anxiety can often aggravate a speech disability - being relaxed will help reduce the person's anxiety.
- Be patient and allow the person to complete what he/she are saying without interruptions.
- If the person is accompanied by a support person, follow the same guidelines as when an interpreter is present. Speak to and look at the person with the disability and not the support person.
- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information. Sometimes it is helpful to use "yes" or "no" questions.
- Some persons with speech disabilities use a communication board, symbols or cards to help them communicate. When asked, use these devices as instructed.

### **Did You Know?**

Stephen Hawking, a world-renowned theoretical physicist, communicates using computer speech synthesizers.

When asked about his celebrity status, Professor Hawking said, "I think that people are fascinated by the contrast between my limited physical powers, such as my difficulty to speak, and the vast nature of the universe I study".

Professor Hawking is a Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University (a position once held by Isaac Newton). In 2008, he accepted a Distinguished Research Chair at the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics in Waterloo, Ontario.

### **Insights**

Augmentative communication refers to any communication approach designed to support or augment an individual's communication output. There is a wide array of augmentative communication devices available, including voice output systems, keyboard text-to-speech generating devices, and picture or symbol communication boards or binders.

## Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities - not all require a wheelchair. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions or temporary disabilities may have difficulty with moving, standing or sitting. In many cases, it may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

### Physical Disabilities - Tips

When you communicate with someone with a physical disability, keep these tips in mind.

- When meeting a person using a wheelchair or walker, do offer to shake their hand, even if they appear to have limited use of their arms. This common action of personal contact creates a warm environment for communication.
- If the person uses a wheelchair and the conversation is expected to last longer than a few moments, find somewhere to sit down nearby. This enables you to make eye contact on the same level and reduces neck strain for the person having to look up at you.
- Don't make assumptions about a person's capabilities. Some people can walk with assistance but use a wheelchair or scooter to conserve energy or move around quickly.
- Remember that the person's assistive device is part of his or her personal space. Don't lean or rest your foot on the wheelchair, walker or other equipment.
- Don't move items or equipment, such as canes or walkers, out of the person's reach.
- Don't move a person's wheelchair without permission - moving them without warning can cause the person to lose their balance.
- If the person is accompanied by a support person or companion, speak to the person directly. It is annoying and frustrating not to be included in a conversation that involves you.
- Familiarize yourself with the location of accessible features located nearby, such as accessible entrances, washrooms, elevators and lifts. Although a student who uses a walker, for example, may be familiar with some parts of campus, he or she may still ask a faculty or staff member the location of the nearest accessible washroom.
- When hosting or planning an event, arrange to let attendees know about the location of these features beforehand, for example in event posters or other announcements.

## Insights

### Physical Disabilities

Have you ever assisted someone in a wheelchair? There are a few things to keep in mind for both persons' sake. If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair, you should:

- Wait for and follow the person's instructions.
- Confirm that the person is ready to move.

- Describe what you're going to do before you do it.
- Where possible, avoid uneven ground and objects.
- Avoid leaving the person in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.

### **Other Disabilities**

The students, faculty, alumni, visitors, guests and members of the public you communicate and interact with on campus may also have disabilities we haven't discussed here. Chronic health conditions, such as asthma, arthritis, diabetes, lupus, sickle cell anemia and hemophilia are disabilities that may affect a person's ability to move around, sit, stand or do other things.

Many people don't think of these health conditions as disabilities requiring accessibility considerations, but in some cases, they do. For example, some people with diabetes need to monitor their diet very carefully and there is nothing more unwelcoming for them to attend an event only to find they can't share in the refreshments. When hosting an event where food will be served, be sure to ask your guests or attendees to indicate if they have any food restrictions, to help you plan accordingly.

As we've mentioned earlier, it is likely you will not know that someone has a disability. University services have no way of identifying all of the persons with disabilities who may use its services. Therefore, it becomes important that the people acting on their behalf think more frequently and naturally about accessibility in their activities, services and interactions.

### **Insights**

Take a few moments to consider how you can change what you typically do in order to make your interactions and communications with persons with disabilities more accessible. You may be surprised how easy this is.

### **Alternate formats**

Alternate formats are simply ways of providing information in a variety of ways, different from the way in which the information was originally produced. For example, when you provide your audience with handout replicas of your presentation slides, you are providing information in an "alternate format".

### **Why are alternate formats important for persons with disabilities?**

As we learned earlier, persons with disabilities receive, convey and make use of information in a wide variety of ways.

- Some persons with disabilities may not be able to read print but can access the information using other formats such as audio, Braille, enlarged text and screen-reading software.
- Although we often think of persons with vision loss needing alternative-to-print formats, many people with learning disabilities also benefit from having access to information in other formats. For example, some people with auditory processing difficulties prefer written rather than spoken information.

- Closed captioning, CART (communication access real-time translation), sign language and text are all different types of alternate formats that people with hearing loss use to access information.
- Some people with physical disabilities (such as low upper body strength) may find it easier to access information using audio formats, as the effort to hold a book or sheaf of papers can be quickly tiring.

### Did You Know?

If an electronic version is not available, it can take weeks to produce a textbook in audio format and depending on the complexity of the material, up to four months to convert an entire textbook into Braille.

Some students with disabilities starting their courses in September often don't get to use their textbooks until weeks or even months later.

One of the key things that faculty can do to help reduce this lag is to select the textbooks and other text materials they will use in their course as early as possible. This lead time helps the disability and library services offices to procure or produce them in alternate formats, giving students access to the materials at the same time as their classmates.

### Insights

If you have a student with an auditory learning disability in your class, he or she may find it very helpful if you provide information about changes to assignments, due dates, homework questions and other in-class information in writing, perhaps through email or posting on the course website, even though they will likely have an accommodation plan. Although this may take a little extra time, it helps to ensure that not only this student but all your students have the same information. Furthermore, many students with a mild hearing loss don't identify themselves as students with a disability but would also benefit from being able to access information in text.

### Alternate Formats

You may be wondering how you will know which alternate formats you are supposed to produce if you don't know the accessibility needs of the people who may come to your class, office, meeting, etc.

The key to answering this question is to think about accessibility **at the time** you are preparing the information.

Let's say you are a teaching assistant in history and you are preparing a lecture on key dates in the Roman Empire timeline. These days, many people deliver lectures using presentation software such as PowerPoint or prepare notes using word processing. You would prepare your slides or notes as usual, then create a text-only version (perhaps using the cut & paste features) and save this file separately. Using this electronic file, you or the services on campus that provide alternate formats can easily transfer the information in several alternate formats, including Braille, enlarged font and text that can be read using screen software.

Notice it does not say to go ahead and make all of these alternate formats. If you produce the text-only document while you are preparing your lecture, you or someone else can easily transfer the information into an alternate format, now or for a subsequent request to do so.

When information is intended for a wide audience, as in a speech by university leaders, it is good practice to provide the information in a variety of formats. The key to good customer service is to make information available in as many ways as is reasonably possible; preparing a text-only version enables you and other planners to respond in a timely manner to requests for other formats, such as Braille copies, which requires more specialized effort.

### Did You Know?

Websites and web content can also be designed to be accessible to persons with disabilities.

The Adaptive Resource Technology Centre (ARTC) at the University of Toronto has created an online course that you can take to learn more about website accessibility. See Sources and Resources for the link to this free course.

Alternatively, contact your information technology services office for information, resources and tools available at your university.

### Insights

The more you consider accessibility in preparing information, like preparing text-only versions, the easier it will be for you to provide accessible customer service.

### How Does This Apply to You?

Now that you've had a brief overview of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, have a look at how they apply to your job.

Here are a few situations as they occur in three common campus settings: the classroom, the office and campus facilities. Take a few moments to consider them and depending on your role and responsibilities, think about what you would do. Click each of the following settings for more information.

#### In the classroom

A picture is worth a thousand words and it takes a lot of effort to describe a picture. Here's a story from a faculty member in a Languages department.

"I am a visual learner and a visual teacher. The limitations of my dependence on visual aspects became apparent to me the day I came to class armed with a PowerPoint presentation loaded with images of famous works of art.

A few slides into my presentation I realized that a student in the front row could not see the images. Although I had sent her the presentation by email well before class, I had not thought about 'translating' the images. I did two things to make the slides accessible to her. I directed the students' attention to various areas of the image using precise directions rather than simply gesturing with my hand, and refrained from saying things like, 'Look at the vibrant colours! Isn't this a remarkable picture?'

I also described each image as if it were not even on the screen and every student there had to imagine it instead. It felt like I was the curator of a museum conducting a guided tour for blind patrons. While it took longer this way, I ended up conveying more information to all the students than I would have otherwise... thanks to my student in the front row. While it took longer this way, I ended up conveying

more information to all the students than I would have otherwise... thanks to my student in the front row.”

### **In the office**

One day Jack, a student in the Executive Masters of Business Administration program, went to the school's student support office. The office prides itself on providing high quality services to its EMBA students, many of whom receive considerable financial support from Canada's top employers to attend the program.

Jack had tried to check online for the status of his scholarship but for some reason, he couldn't access his student account. Before the assistant could release information to Jack about the status of his account, he asked him to read and sign a brief release form. Jack asked the officer if he would read aloud the release statement to him. The assistant thought this was an unusual request and looked intently at Jack, thinking, "Wow, if he's blind, he manages very well". He shrugged his shoulders and read the statement as requested and watched in amazement as Jack took the form and signed his name without hesitation on the line indicated. The assistant proceeded to provide Jack the information he needed.

Later, in the staff room, the assistant mentioned his experience to his co-worker, who replied, "I remember reading about different types of learning disabilities a couple of years ago. Some people have difficulties processing written information but have no difficulties if they hear the information." Thinking about his interaction with Jack, the assistant was relieved he didn't speak out loud about his assumptions or ask any embarrassing questions.

### **In campus facilities**

Dwayne, a friend of mine, was recently appointed Associate Dean in the Faculty of Education at our university. He told me about an experience he had on his first day.

To familiarize himself with the campus, he visited a couple of times before the big day. Being a huge coffee lover, he took the time to note especially the location of the campus coffee shops.

Wanting to enjoy his favourite grande vanilla latte and muffin before starting his first day, Dwayne arrived on campus early wearing his best suit and Gucci shaded glasses. The coffee shop was very busy, as was usual for Monday mornings. The lone cashier, a little flustered with trying to keep up, was writing a sign indicating they were all out of vanilla syrup just as Dwayne stepped up to the counter. When she finished taping the sign over the menu, the cashier turned and asked Dwayne, "What can I get you?" When Dwayne asked for a vanilla latte, the cashier giggled loudly, pointed to a sign, saying, "You'll have to pick another flavour". Dwayne stood there - he couldn't see the list of flavours.

By coincidence, Joyce, a staff member from the Faculty of Education was standing in line right behind Dwayne. She stepped forward, and after giving her name, told Dwayne that the cashier just posted a sign that they were all out of vanilla syrup.

Feeling embarrassed, the cashier read aloud the other available flavours. Dwayne chose another flavour for his latte and the cashier proceeded to fix his order, being careful to put a lid on his coffee before putting the cup directly in Dwayne's hand. She then told him that the milk and sugar cart was about four feet directly to his left.

Dwayne turned and thanked Joyce, saying he was looking forward to seeing her back at the office.

### What Would You Do?

Here are a few more questions about how to communicate with customers with disabilities. Have a look at all three situations, as they may prove helpful to you when communicating with persons with disabilities.

#### In the classroom

A few years ago, Wallace, a veterinary science student, attended a guest lecture given by one of the leading researchers in his field of interest, animal influenza. Although Wallace has Asperger Syndrome, if you met him you probably wouldn't even notice. However, he is very open about it with those around him, especially the people with whom he works and studies because it becomes apparent in a few particular social settings.

When attending the guest lecture, Wallace started asking the speaker detailed, specific questions just as she was beginning to get into the material. The speaker and some people in the audience began shifting uncomfortably. However, Wallace didn't notice their reaction and he continued asking for immediate clarification, almost appearing as if he wanted to engage the speaker in a debate.

**At this point, what would be the most appropriate response by the speaker to Wallace's questions?**

- A. Ignore Wallace and continue speaking.
- B. Thank him for his questions and ask him to hold off on them until the question period at the end of the lecture.
- C. Answer his questions one by one, as other audience members were likely asking themselves the same questions.
- D. Ask the audience whether they would prefer to have a formal question period at the end of the lecture, or to clarify points during the course of the talk.

**The correct answer is b)** *Thank him for his questions and ask him to hold off on them until the question period at the end of the lecture. The best response here is to recognize that there is a reason for Wallace's pointed questions, and to acknowledge them, without disrupting the lecture for the other audience members. By asking Wallace to save his questions for later, and telling him that she would be pleased to answer them at that time, the speaker helped alert Wallace to the fact that he was beginning to speak out of turn. It also helped reassure the audience that she, the speaker, was in control of the talk. In this way, everyone could relax, listen and learn.*

### Did You Know?

Asperger Syndrome is a type of autism but without many of the debilitating symptoms. Persons with Asperger Syndrome often are described as having social skills deficits, such as difficulty understanding social give and take.

Many persons with Asperger Syndrome are very bright and capable.

For example, Dawn Prince-Hughes, PhD, a primate anthropologist and ethologist, has Asperger Syndrome. In her book, *Songs of the Gorilla Nation*, she describes how she learned techniques to

manage her Asperger Syndrome from experiences observing and interacting with gorillas at the Woodland Park Zoo.

### In the office

A couple of months ago Elaine, an accessibility coordinator in the university's equity office, received a call from a graduate student working on a large research project studying human motion. The student told Elaine that one of the participants in the research project was "visually impaired". She was calling the equity office to find out where she could get written materials about the research translated into Braille.

#### How should Elaine respond to this question about alternate formats?

- A) Ask the student if she knows for sure that the research participant requires the materials in Braille.
- B) Suggest that the grad student confirm with the participant whether she needs materials in a different format
- C) Inform the student that many persons with vision loss can access materials with a screen reader, which just requires a text-only electronic format.
- D) All of the above

**The correct answer is d)** *All of the above. Elaine should suggest all of these things to the grad student, whose good intentions may be misguided. Not all people with vision loss read Braille, so it's important to confirm with the person how they would prefer to receive the information in question.*

### In campus facilities

Every year in August, new faculty members are welcomed to the university with a President's Reception, usually held in the evening following a day-long orientation.

Yasmine, a new faculty member in the Department of Computing, specializing in Biomedical Computing, plans to attend the reception. She uses a wheelchair. Once there, two of her colleagues from the Department are also in attendance and they gather around Yasmine, engaging her in small talk about the department, the students and the community.

The Department Head, who has been milling around the room, joins the group, pulling with him one of the stacking chairs that are located near the wall.

Why would the Department Head bring a chair with him?

- A) It has been a long day and he is tired.
- B) He offers the chair to one of the Yasmine's colleagues so that she may rest her feet.
- C) He wants to chat with Yasmine at eye level.
- D) He wants to create a seating circle for the group.

**The correct answer is c)** He wants to chat with Yasmine at eye level. The Department Head knows that it is uncomfortable for a seated person to look straight up for a long period of time, so he brings a chair with him to be able to chat with Yasmine at eye level. If conversation proceeds for more than a few minutes, and it is possible to do so, you should sit down in order to share eye level, like the Department Head does here.

## Wrapping Up

You've completed this module on communicating with persons with disabilities.

I hope you've learned a few techniques to help you polish your communication skills, both on and off campus. You may wish to keep this printable summary of the module for future reference.

When we put ourselves in the other person's shoes, we're setting the stage for thoughtful, respectful communication. When we ask, "May I help you?" we're on our way to providing excellent and accessible, customer service.

## Module 2 Summary

### Communicating with Customers with Disabilities

#### Who are customers on campus?

Universities have all kinds of customers, including full-time and part-time undergrad and graduate students, city residents, visiting alumni and faculty, students' parents and other relatives, and representatives from other organizations, e.g., universities, ministry, business partners.

#### What kinds of disabilities are there?

Disabilities can be both visible and non-visible: while some disabilities are immediately recognizable, others are not.

#### When you interact and communicate with persons with disabilities:

- Be respectful
- Dismiss your stereotypes and avoid making assumptions about a person's disability or capabilities. Many persons with disabilities often talk about being frustrated with people assuming what they can or can't do.
- Speak directly to the person with a disability and not their support person, companion or interpreter. While this can sometimes be challenging, ignoring or talking over the person with the disability is patronizing and an affront to their dignity.
- Be patient – sometimes communicating with someone with a disability can take a bit longer, requiring you or the other person to repeat yourselves several times.
- Avoid touching or interacting with a service animal.
- Think of the assistive device as an extension of the person's personal space – touch these only if you are asked to.
- When you don't know what to do, it's always best to ask the person with a disability.

#### Learning Disabilities

The term "learning disability" describes a range of information processing disorders that can affect how a person acquires, organizes, expresses, retain and understands verbal and non-verbal information. Examples include **dyslexia** (difficulty understanding written words), **dyscalculia** (difficulty solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts) and **auditory or visual processing disorders** (difficulty understanding language despite normal hearing and vision).

#### When communicating and interacting with someone with a learning disability:

- Speak naturally, clearly and directly to the person.
- Provide information in a way that works best for that person. For example, even if you have written notes, it may be helpful to verbalize the information too. If you are not sure, gently ask the person if there's a different way you can provide the information that would be helpful.

- Be patient and willing to explain something again.
- Extra time to complete a task is often helpful. As some students with dyslexia may take longer to read and understand written words, it is often helpful when they have extra time to complete an in-class activity.

### **Mental Health Disabilities**

Mental health disabilities are usually not visible. Most of the time, you will not know that a person has a mental health disability. Sometimes, a mental health disability may present itself through “odd” or very different behaviour although again, you may have no way of knowing for sure.

Mental health disabilities cover a wide range of disorders and include depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic attacks and dissociative disorder.

#### **When communicating and interacting with someone you know has a mental health disability:**

- Treat the person with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be patient. A person with a mental health disability may have difficulty concentrating, mood swings, poor memory and lack of motivation.
- In situations where you think the person needs additional help, be patient and calm.
- Familiarize yourself with any protocols in place at your university for dealing with crisis situations involving mental health disabilities.
- Make an effort to learn about resources available at your university and in the community for assisting people with mental health disabilities.

### **Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities**

Intellectual or developmental disabilities are those characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviours, which are required in many everyday social and practical skills. Some people with intellectual or development disabilities learn and process information more slowly and may have difficulty with abstract concepts and subtleties of interpersonal interactions.

#### **When communicating and interacting with someone with an intellectual or development disability:**

- Remind yourself to be patient.
- Speak more slowly and leave pauses for the person to process your words.
- Use plain language and avoid jargon.
- Speak directly to the person.
- Ask one question at a time, giving the person time to formulate and give their reply.
- Make sure the person understands what you’ve said. You can be direct and ask, “Do you understand this?”

## Hearing Loss

Many terms are used for hearing loss; here are a few commonly used terms:

- A person who is **hard of hearing** has a mild to profound hearing loss.
- A person who is **deafened** has a significant hearing loss and may have lost their hearing gradually or suddenly.
- People who are deafened or hard of hearing may use devices such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems or they may rely on speech-reading (also known as lip reading).
- A person who is **deaf** has little or no functional hearing and may depend upon visual rather than auditory communication.
- **Oral deaf** refers to a person who is deaf and whose preferred mode of communication is verbal and auditory. The person may or may not use sign language.
- **Deaf** spelled with a capital D is used to refer to people who are deaf or hard of hearing and who identify with the culture, society and language of Deaf people, which is based on Sign Language. Their preferred mode of communication is Sign.

### When communicating or interacting with someone with hearing loss:

- If the person isn't looking at you, attract their attention before speaking with a discreet wave of your hand or a gentle tap on the shoulder.
- Speak clearly, pacing your speech and pauses normally. You don't have to shout, exaggerate or over-pronounce your words.
- If possible, find a quiet place to converse – background noise can be hard to filter out.
- Don't stand in front of a window or light as it shades your face – poor light and shadows can make it difficult to speech read.
- Don't put your hands, glasses or other objects such as a pen, in front of your face when speaking. This too can make speech reading difficult.
- If interacting with a person with an interpreter, be sure to face and speak directly to the person, not the interpreter.
- If necessary, ask the person for suggestion on how to improve the communication. He or she may ask you to move away from the light, speak a little more slowly or perhaps even use a pen and paper.

## Vision Loss

Vision loss reduces a person's ability to see clearly. Few people with vision loss are totally blind. Some have limited vision, such as the loss of side, peripheral or central vision. Some can see the outline of objects, while others can see the direction of light.

**When communicating and interacting with someone with a vision loss:**

- Don't assume the person cannot see you – few people with vision loss are totally blind.
- Do not touch the person without permission.
- When offering to guide someone with a vision loss, stand on the side they direct you and hold out your elbow. When they've taken it, walk at a normal pace and the person will usually walk a step behind. Announce handrails, doors (e.g., to the left, right, push/pull to open) and describe the surrounding areas.
- Do not leave the person in the middle of a room. Show him or her to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- If you need to leave the person, let them know you are leaving and will be back.
- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to him or her, not to his or her companion.
- Don't raise your voice. Say your name even if you know the person well, since many voices sound similar.
- Give clear and precise directions. For example, "a metre to your left" is better than "over there".
- If you're not sure how to give directions, ask the person what would be most helpful.
- Don't be afraid or embarrassed to use words such as "see", "read" or "look". People with vision loss also use these words.
- Do not touch or speak to service animals. They are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- When giving printed information, offer to read, summarize or describe it.

**Deafblind**

Most people who are deafblind have a combination of vision and hearing loss. They usually have some useful but not always reliable vision and hearing. People who are deafblind use many different ways to communicate including sign language, tactile sign language, tracking, tactile finger spelling, Braille, speech and speech reading.

**When communicating and interacting with a person who is deafblind:**

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deafblind may have some hearing and/or vision.
- If you are not sure how to begin, ask the person what will be helpful.
- Many people will explain what you need to do, perhaps giving you an assistance card or note explaining how to communicate.

- Often people who are deafblind are accompanied by an intervenor. Again, speak directly to the person with a disability and not the intervenor.
- Identify yourself both to the person with the disability and the intervenor.
- Some people who are deafblind use service animals. Again, do not pet or interact with the animal.
- You can give a gentle touch on the arm to get the person's attention. However, do not touch a person who is deafblind on the shoulder or back as they may not have enough vision to orient your location to them.
- Suddenly touching a person who is deafblind can be alarming and should only be done in emergencies.

### **Speech or Language Disabilities**

A person with a **speech disability** is unable to produce speech sounds correctly or fluently, sometime due to voice strength or aphasia. Some people with speech disabilities have difficulties with articulation and stuttering.

A person with a **language disability** has trouble understanding others (receptive language) or sharing thoughts, ideas and feelings (expressive language).

#### **When communicating and interacting with someone with a speech or language impairment:**

- Don't assume that because a person has one disability, he or she also has another. Many people with speech disabilities complain that because they can't speak well, people treat them like they unintelligent or developmentally delayed.
- Remember that anxiety can often aggravate a speech disability – your being relaxed will help reduce the other person's anxiety.
- Be patient and allow the person to complete what they are saying without interruptions.
- If the individual is accompanied by a support person, follow the same guidelines as when an interpreter is present. Speak to and look at the person with the disability and not the support person.
- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information. Sometimes it is helpful to use "yes" or "no" questions.
- Some people with speech disabilities use a communication board, symbols or cards to help them communicate. When asked, use these devices as instructed.

### **Physical Disabilities**

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities – not all require a wheelchair. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions or temporary disabilities may have difficulty with moving, standing or sitting. In many cases, it may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

### **When communicating and interacting with someone with a physical disability:**

- When meeting a person using a wheelchair or walker, do offer to shake their hand, even if they appear to have limited use of their arms. This common action of personal contact creates a warm environment for communication.
- If the person uses a wheelchair and the conversation is expected to last longer than few moments, find somewhere to sit down nearby. This enables you to make eye contact on the same level and reduces neck strain for the person having to look up at you.
- Don't make assumptions about a person's capabilities. Some people can walk with assistance but use a wheelchair or scooter to conserve energy or move around quickly.
- Remember that the person's assistive device is part of his or her personal space. Don't lean or rest your foot on the wheelchair, walker or other equipment.
- Don't move items or equipment, such as canes or walkers, out of the person's reach.
- Don't move a person's wheelchair without permission – moving them without warning can cause the person to lose their balance.
- If the person is accompanied by a support person or companion, speak to the person directly. It is annoying and frustrating not to be included in a conversation that involves you.
- Familiarize yourself with the location of accessible features located nearby, such as accessible entrances, washrooms, elevators and lifts. Although a student who uses a walker, for example, may be familiar with some parts of campus, he or she may still ask a faculty or staff member the location of the nearest accessible washroom.
- When hosting or planning an event, let attendees know about the location of these features beforehand, for example in event posters or other announcements.

### **Other Disabilities**

Chronic health conditions, such as asthma, arthritis, diabetes, lupus, sickle cell anemia and hemophilia, are disabilities that may affect a person's ability to move around, sit or stand or to do other things. Many people don't think of these health conditions as disabilities requiring accessibility considerations but in some cases, they do. You will probably not know that someone has a disability. Since universities have no way of identifying all of the persons with disabilities who may use its services, university employees should think more frequently and naturally about accessibility in their activities, services and interactions.

### **Alternate formats**

Alternate formats are simply ways of providing information in ways other than it was originally produced.

### **Why are alternate formats important for persons with disabilities?**

Persons with disabilities receive, convey and make use of information in a wide variety of ways.

- Some persons with disabilities may not be able to read print but can access the information using other formats such as audio, Braille, enlarged text and screen-reading software.
- Although we often think of people with vision loss needing alternative-to-print formats, many people with learning disabilities also benefit from having access to information in other formats. For example, some people with auditory processing difficulties prefer written rather than spoken information.
- Closed captioning, CART (communication access real-time translation), sign language and text are all different types of alternate formats that people with hearing loss use to access information.
- Some people with physical disabilities (such as low upper body strength) may find it easier to access information using audio formats as the effort to hold a book or sheaf of papers can be quickly tiring.

## Module 3

### Serving Customers with Disabilities

#### Getting Started

##### Welcome

Welcome to this module on Serving Customers with Disabilities, part of the Accessible Customer Service eLearning course for the Council of Ontario Universities.

You will recall that in the previous module, we discussed how to interact with persons with various types of disabilities.

In this module, we're going to explore more specifically how to interact with persons with disabilities who use service animals, support persons or personal assistive devices.

We'll talk about how to support accessible customer service to persons with disabilities by assisting their access to devices typically available at your university.

Finally, we'll discuss some of the steps you may take if someone with a disability is having difficulty accessing services at your campus, be it in the classroom, office or other campus facility.

##### Check Your Knowledge

Before we have a closer look at assistive devices, service animals and personal supports, take a moment to check what you already know.

##### Question 1

A university art centre cannot charge extra admission for the support person who accompanies a patron with a disability.

- A) True
- B) B) False

**The correct answer is b) False.** Under the customer service standard, if organizations typically charge an admission fee for a service, the organization can charge support persons the fee as well. The standard does require organizations to have and post its admission fee policy in a conspicuous and accessible location.

##### Question 2

You are hosting a focus group meeting. It is a closed meeting, consisting of representatives from the university's equity-related offices and units. Part of the meeting will involve small group discussions, limited to three people. You have carefully assigned participants to each group, based on the focus questions. To ensure the meeting progresses smoothly, you decide to assign participants to their seats as they arrive.

One participant, Owena, is a staff member who is hard of hearing and accompanied by her hearing dog, Caesar. Owena arrives about 10 minutes before the meeting and you direct her to her chair. A short time later, another participant, Henry, arrives. His assigned seat is right next to Owena's. He takes his seat but a few minutes later comes to you and quietly indicates that he is allergic to dogs and requests a seat on the opposite side of the room. A change in seating at this point will really mess up your plans for the question format and the small-group discussions.

What should you do?

- A) Ask Owena if the dog can wait outside of the room during the meeting, telling her that you will alert her to any emergencies or other information.
- B) Tell Henry that a change in the seating arrangement will really mess up your plans for the meeting and ask if his allergy is so severe that he can't bear it just for this meeting.
- C) Modify the questions and/or seating to meet Henry's request.

**The correct answer is c)** *Modify the questions and/or seating to meet Henry's request. Options A and B ignore the rights of access for one or the other participant. Only option c responds sufficiently to both of their rights to participate in the meeting in a way that respects their particular access need.*

### Question 3

Renata sits on the executive committee of the student government and she is hard of hearing. Kelly, a student volunteer, attends the bi-weekly committee meetings to take notes, clarify key points and provide general support for Renata's participation in the meetings. This week, the committee needs to hold a portion of its meeting in-camera to deal with a sensitive non-academic discipline issue.

Since Kelly is not an official member of the committee, should the Chair ask her to leave for the in-camera portion of the meeting?

- A) Yes
- B) No

**The Correct answer is b)** *No. Kelly is a support person for Renata, assisting in her access to the meeting and therefore, should be permitted to stay for all parts of the meeting. If the Chair is worried about confidentiality, he or she could remind all attendees about the purpose of going in-camera and the importance of observing confidentiality protocol.*

## Introduction

Many persons with disabilities rely on service animals, support persons and personal assistive devices to help them carry out their daily activities on our campuses.

Let's find out more about these personal supports.

### What You Need to Know

What exactly is a service animal?

A service animal is any guide, hearing or signal dog or other animal individually trained to assist a person with a disability.

### Did You Know?

Under the standard, an animal is a service animal if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by a person for reasons relating to his or her disability or if the person has a letter from a physician or nurse verifying that the animal is required for reasons relating to his or her disability. Typically, only staff in human resources or the disability services office would have access to medical documentation

However, if it is not obvious that the animal is a service animal, it is appropriate for other university representatives – i.e., faculty and support staff who provide services to the public – to ask the person if it is a service animal.

### Customers with Disabilities Who Use Service Animals

Each animal is trained to perform various tasks and provide a range of services.

- A **guide dog** serves as a travel aid for a person with vision loss.
- A **hearing or signal animal** alerts a person with hearing loss when a sound occurs, such as knock on the door or alarm.
- **Mobility assistance** animals may carry, fetch, open doors, ring doorbells, activate elevator buttons, pull a wheelchair, steady a person or help someone get up after a fall.
- A **seizure response** animal warns a person of an impending seizure or provides aid during a seizure such as going for help or standing guard over the person.
- **Therapeutic assistance** animals aid people with cognitive or psychological disabilities by bringing a phone to the person in emergency, calling 911 or the suicide hotline, turning on the lights, fetching medication, barking for help in emergency or assisting a person with panic disorder coping in crowds.

### Service Animals - Tips

What you should and should not do when communicating and interacting with someone who uses a service animal?

- Do not request that the owner leave the animal in a different location, such as outside of your office or classroom.
- Avoid petting or talking to a service animal: this distracts the animal from its tasks.
- Do not feed or offer treats to the animal.
- Avoid deliberately startling the animal.
- Not all service animals wear special collars or harnesses. If you are not sure and it is necessary that you verify, it is okay to ask the owner if it is a service animal.
- Remember that the owner is responsible for maintaining control over the animal at all times. You are not responsible for cleaning up after it or feeding it. You may provide water if the owner requests it.

### Did You Know?

It's important to remember that service animals are working. They go through extensive training to be of service to the person with a disability.

If they are petted and played with while harnessed, it confuses them and may mean that they are not available if the person requires their assistance at that time.

In fact, this can be very dangerous for the person with a disability and may put him or her at serious risk for accidents.

### Where on Campus are Service Animals Permitted?

A question that many people ask is whether there are any locations on campus where service animals are not permitted.

Under the standard, universities must permit service animals in all areas to which the public normally have access. There are only a few exceptions where a service animal would be excluded by law, as in these examples.

- The *Health Protection and Promotion Act (1990)* does not allow animals in places where food is manufactured, prepared, processed, handled, served, displayed, stored, sold or offered for sale. However, the Act does contain specific exemptions for service dogs only, allowing them to accompany their owners into areas where food is normally served, sold or offered for sale.

Two additional exceptions where a service animal would be excluded by law are described in the following examples.

- In some unique situations where the presence of an animal may present a significant risk for another person, say for example in cases of severe allergies. However it should be noted that the university is required to meet the needs of both persons in these situations and would have to devise an accommodation plan that enables both persons to access services and goods accordingly.
- Some municipal by-laws restrict certain breeds of animals or dogs from the municipality. If a service animal is excluded by law from the premises, the provider of goods or services shall ensure that other measures are available to enable the person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the provider's goods or services.

### Insights

By the way, service animals are not excluded by law when others are mildly allergic, fearful, or annoyed by their presence.

Please refer to your university's service animal policy and procedure to learn more about service animals on your campus.

### Customers with Disabilities Who Have Support Persons

#### Who is a support person?

A support person is someone either hired or chosen to help a person with a disability. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or spouse or a friend of the person with

the disability. A support person in some cases does not necessarily need to have special training or qualifications.

Under the customer service standard, universities must permit persons with disabilities to be accompanied and assisted by their support persons while accessing goods or services.

### Did You Know?

Under the customer service standard, whether to charge admission fees to support persons would not extend to fees like tuition. As well, students with disabilities staying in residences requiring overnight personal care attendants would normally not be charged for two rooms.

While the standard permits organizations to levy admission fees for support persons, perhaps your university may consider situations where it may waive this requirement for the purposes of enhancing access to the service for persons with disabilities. For example, residence staff hosting “movie night” to raise money for charity would set a good example by waiving admission fees for support persons.

### Insights

Sometimes, faculty and students may be curious about the role of a support person for a student with a disability or they may think that a support person gives a student with a disability an edge or advantage. For example, some people may feel that students who receive the support of notetakers don't need to attend class or students who use interpretation or scribe services during exams may receive helpful hints that students without disabilities don't get.

It is important to know that having a support person aids accessibility in much the same way a service animal or assistive device does. The presence of a support person does not reduce academic standards or expectations of a student's performance. Students with disabilities are expected to demonstrate their knowledge just as other students are.

Support persons may provide one or more types of assistance.

- Transportation
- Guiding a person with vision loss
- Adaptive communication (e.g., Intervenor for someone who is deafblind)
- Interpretation (e.g., ASL/English interpreter, LSQ/French interpreter)
- Note-taking, scribe or reading services (usually coordinated by disability or library services offices)
- Personal care assistance
- Support persons in the event of a seizure (e.g., protect from falls)
- Interpret and speak on behalf of someone with a speech disability

### Did You Know?

Do you remember our discussion of universal design in the first module, Understanding the AODA and the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service?

You may have noticed universal washrooms in some new buildings. Universal washrooms are an excellent example of accessible design that meets the needs of persons with disabilities who may be of a different gender than their support person. Parents with young children or persons who use mobility aids also benefit from this design.

### **Support Persons - Tips**

When interacting and communicating with someone accompanied by a support person, here are some things you can do.

- A person with a disability may not always introduce his or her support person. If you are not sure, it is appropriate to ask, “Is this your interpreter or support person?”
- Although it can feel a little awkward, speak to and look directly at the person with a disability even though the message may be coming from the support person.
- Address the person appropriately: “What courses are you taking this year?” as opposed to “Can you ask him what courses he is taking this year?”
- Remember that support persons, especially interpreters, tend to communicate everything to the person. Avoid engaging in “side” conversations with the interpreter, thinking these won’t be conveyed to the person with the disability.
- Plan for the presence of support persons, e.g., help facilitate the interpreting process by reserving seats of persons who are deaf and by allocating space near presenters for interpreters.
- Where possible, provide written materials both to the person with the disability and the support person.
- During event planning, note the location of washrooms that will accommodate persons with disabilities and their support persons.

## **Customers with Disabilities Who Use Assistive Devices**

### **What is an assistive device?**

An assistive device is any device that is used, designed, made or adapted to assist people in performing a particular task. Assistive devices enable persons with disabilities to do everyday tasks such as moving, communicating, reading or lifting.

### **Insights**

When we think of assistive devices, we often think of medical-type devices. However, for disability-related reasons, persons with disabilities often use devices used by general consumers. For some people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have learning disabilities, smart phones and text messaging have opened up a whole world of instant communication that was unavailable only a few short years ago. Does your department provide the option of communicating with customers using text-messaging?

Some persons with disabilities use personal assistive devices. Here are a few examples:

- Wheelchairs

- Canes
- Walkers
- Assistive listening devices (FM systems)
- Laptops with screen-reading software or communicating capabilities
- Smart phones (i.e. wireless handheld devices)
- Hearing aids
- Global positioning system (GPS) devices

Your university may also provide assistive devices such as loaner wheelchairs, stair lifts, FM systems, laptops or computer adaptive technology.

### Did You Know?

In 1921, an English photographer, named James Biggs who became blind following an accident, had an idea of painting his cane white so that it could be easily seen at night.

The white cane has become an internationally accepted symbol of blindness and nine Canadian provinces, including Ontario, have legislation restricting the use of the white cane to those who are legally blind.

### Assistive Devices -Tips

Here are a few more examples of assistive devices you may come across when communicating and interacting with persons with disabilities on campus.

- Persons with vision loss may use a digital audio player to listen to books, directions, art shows, etc.
- Some persons who are deaf or hard of hearing use teletypewriters (TTY). This machine enables telephone-like communication using text. Calls placed to or from a non-TTY user can be made through the Bell Relay Service.
- Persons who are blind may use a white cane to assist with safety, mobility and independence. The cane is used to check for objects in a person's path, changes in walking surfaces and dangers like steps and curbs.
- Some persons with breathing difficulties carry portable oxygen tanks.
- Persons with learning disabilities or difficulties with memory use personal digital assistants for storing, organizing or retrieving personal, school or employment information.
- Persons with physical, learning or speech disabilities may use laptops to access information, take notes or to communicate.

- Some persons with speech disabilities may use a variety of communication devices, such as voice-output systems or pictures/symbols to communicate.

### Did You Know?

Robert Weitbrecht, an American physicist who was Deaf, collaborated with Andrew Saks, a mechanical engineer, who was also Deaf, to invent the first “telephone for the deaf” or the TTY in 1969.

With support from the Alexander Graham Bell Association and the National Association of the Deaf, these two inventors re-built and distributed discarded teleprinters from Western Union and other companies, making the telephone accessible to thousands of deaf Americans.

In module 2, *Communicating with Customers with Disabilities*, we covered some strategies for appropriately interacting and communicating with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices. Let’s review some of those key strategies.

- Consider the assistive device as an extension of the person’s personal space: don’t touch, lean on or move the device without permission.
- Avoid moving the device out of the person’s reach. If it is necessary to move the device, please return it to the person’s reach when requested.
- Wait for and follow the person’s instructions.
- Don’t move the device out of the person’s reach. If this can’t be avoided, be sure to move the device back within the person’s reach when requested.
- In the case of a person in a wheelchair, confirm that the person is ready to move.
- Describe what you are going to do before you do it.
- Confirm that the person in a wheelchair is ready to move.
- When asked, agree to use an assistive device (such as an assistive listening device), being sure to ask for directions on its proper use.

### Providing Devices that Help Persons with Disabilities

Your university may also make available assistive devices to persons with disabilities for accessing its goods and services. The customer service standard requires that faculty, staff members and student leaders who act on behalf of the university be familiar with these devices and either provide assistance or know whom to contact about operating them upon request.

Here are examples of assistive devices that may be available at your university.

- Adjustable desks and workstations in classrooms or offices
- Assistive listening devices (e.g., FM systems)
- Lifts in stairwells
- Manual wheelchairs or power scooters

- Teletypewriters (TTY)
- Adaptive computer technology or software

### Insights

Many persons with disabilities remark that customer service is sometimes compromised not because of lack of willingness but rather because service providers often don't know what to do when asked to use, or to assist with using, assistive devices. The intent of this requirement is to ensure that those in direct contact with persons with disabilities know enough to respond to basic requests, such as using assistive listening devices or assisting with using a stairwell lift.

Remember, you don't need to become an expert in the use of assistive devices. Do take the time to become familiar with devices that may be available in your unit. Learn the names of those people on campus who have information and knowledge about the devices just in case you need to contact them. These two simple tasks will help significantly towards enhancing accessible customer service for persons with disabilities.

When you think about it, this is not unlike other requirements we have as university representatives, such as acquiring a general awareness of health and safety practices and knowing who serves as our department health and safety representatives.

### Persons with Disabilities Accessing Your Services

A final requirement of the customer service standard is that faculty, staff members and student leaders know what do to if they encounter a person with a disability having difficulties accessing services or goods on campus or if they observe something that may interfere with accessibility.

Again, this is not about everyone becoming experts. Rather, it is about becoming more aware of challenges that persons with disabilities have with accessibility on our campuses and helping address those challenges. Let's say you notice someone in a wheelchair having difficulties accessing the paper towel dispenser in the washroom because the garbage receptacle is in the way. What would you do?

We hope that you would offer to assist, perhaps by moving the garbage receptacle. You should then bring the issue to the attention of the appropriate unit.

### What to do if persons with disabilities are having difficulty accessing your services - Tips

Here are a few other situations you might encounter on campus where you can easily offer assistance:

- While selecting some books from the library stacks, you may assist someone who uses a walker with getting the books they need from the top shelf.
- You could call physical plant services when you notice that a power door opener doesn't work after trying it yourself while carrying several bags and your coffee.
- You could read aloud some written materials that were circulated during a meeting of a committee that includes a member who has vision loss.
- You should call physical plant services if you notice that the elevator in your department is out of service, expressing concern that there are some individuals on the upper floors who depend on the elevator to exit the building.

- You might suggest to a receptionist who is having difficulties communicating with someone with a speech disability that he offer to use a pen and paper.
- You could repeat each question during a question/answer period in class that includes a student who is hard of hearing.
- You could offer to escort a student who is in significant distress to the mental health services on your campus.
- You might offer to assist a person using a white cane cross a busy intersection after you notice she seems to be having trouble distinguishing the sloped sidewalk from the street.

### Insights

As you can see, there are many everyday situations where you may notice a person with a disability having difficulty accessing the services or goods on your campus. One of the key goals of the customer service standard is that we all take action when we observe these things happening.

### Communicating & Interacting with Customers with Disabilities

Let's have a look at a few situations on campus involving persons with disabilities accompanied by service animals, support persons or in need of assistance.

#### In the classroom

Dr. James Smith is a faculty member in the Department of Sociology; Ella is a student in one of his very popular introductory courses. Ella uses a wheelchair and is accompanied by Charlie, a service dog who wears a special harness and jacket. Dr. Smith sees the obvious reason for the wheelchair but after several weeks of classes has not yet learned why Ella brings the dog to class.

One day while he is lecturing, Ella, who always sits at the front of the class, drops a small case and several pens and other items fall out. Just as Dr. Smith is about to step over and pick them up for her, he stops when he sees Charlie pick up each item and bring them to Ella.

Dr. Smith now understands why Ella brings the dog to class. You may encounter people using service animals or assistive devices without knowing why they use them. While Dr. Smith was curious, he did not ask Ella why Charlie accompanies her to class, and rightly so. Don't expect people who use service animals or assistive devices to disclose the reason they use them if there is no need to do so.

#### In the office

Following his training on accessibility issues, a Department Head became curious about whether his course website is accessible to persons with disabilities. He decides to purchase some software to help him find out and calls Joseph, a computer science student working in the department for the summer to help him test it.

Joseph comes the next day with his guide dog, Bart. An avid dog lover, the Department Head forgets himself for a moment and begins to pet Bart on the head. Then he remembers not to do that and apologizes.

Joseph laughs, saying, “Oh, if you start petting him, I’ll never get him back to work”. This situation serves as a reminder for the Department Head about the importance of not petting service animals. He’ll likely remember it the next time he encounters someone else with a service animal.

### **In campus facilities**

One cold January morning, Pedro, who uses a walker, is nervously trying to make his way down a steep access ramp that has quite a bit of ice on it. The concrete ramp has railings on either side but if Pedro lets go of his walker, it along with his computer and books will do a runner down the ramp.

He’s really lucky because at the right moment one of his professors comes along and notices what is happening. He asks Pedro if he can be of assistance and when Pedro says yes, the professor holds the walker and walks slowly backwards, allowing Pedro and his walker to proceed safely down the ramp.

Pedro is very grateful, especially when his professor later emails to tell him he has alerted the grounds maintenance unit about the ice on the ramp.

Not only does this scenario exemplify our shared responsibility around what to do when noticing that someone with a disability is having difficulties accessing a service, it also illustrates the importance of notifying the appropriate campus department(s) to ensure that accessibility issues are addressed.

### **What Would You Do?**

Here are a few more questions about how to comply with the standard in your job.

As you go through the following questions, you are welcome to answer only those relevant to your role on campus. However, we think you will find all of them interesting and helpful to understanding accessible customer service.

### **In the classroom**

As a faculty member, you constantly try to find new ways of engaging your students’ attention in the material you teach. In spite of all your efforts, you are finding in one particular theory course that a good number of students are text messaging or hanging out on Facebook, MySpace or Twitter.

In preparing your next lecture, you decide that you will ask the students to close or put away their laptops so that they can better concentrate on the material you are teaching. As you make this decision, you recall that some students use laptops for disability-related reasons.

How can you follow through with your decision while respecting these students’ accessibility needs?

- A) Tell yourself that any students with disabilities in your class can forgo their use of laptops for this one lecture.
- B) Prepare and distribute hard copies of your lecture notes at the beginning of class.
- C) When asking the students to put away their laptops, tell them you have posted your lecture notes on the course website and that they can access them after class.

***The correct answer is c)*** When asking the students to put away their laptops, tell them you have posted your lecture notes on the course website and that they can access them after class. While option b may

*seem reasonable, only option c, which makes the notes available electronically, recognizes the fact that some students with disabilities may use a laptop for a variety of disability-related reasons, including the use of screen-reading software. It is important to recognize that in certain circumstances students may absolutely require the use of a laptop for disability-related reasons. Questions about these individual cases are best handled through your disability services office.*

### **In the office**

You are a member of the Board of Trustees and Dr. Brett Jones, one of your fellow Board members, is deaf.

Coincidentally, you attend the same gym as does Raul, the sign language interpreter who usually provides access at the Board's monthly meetings. The two of you have gotten to know each other fairly well over the past couple of months.

Before the start of one Board meeting, you go over to Raul as he's standing next to Dr. Jones and ask Raul, "How's your training going for the rowing championship?"

How do you think Raul will respond?

- A) Interpret your question to Dr. Jones in sign language and answer the question both in voice and using sign language.
- B) Reply to your question in voice.
- C) Signal to you that he will catch up with you later.

***The correct answer is a)*** Interpret your question to Dr. Jones in sign language and answer the question both in voice and using sign language. As part of their professional code of conduct, sign language interpreters are required to interpret everything during the time they are providing access for persons who are deaf. This includes conversations that are typically not seen as a part of the official meeting and this is why interpreters ask hearing persons to avoid engaging them in "side" conversations not intended for the person who is deaf.

### **In campus facilities**

You work as a shift supervisor at the circulation desk in the main campus library. There is a large bank of computers located just to the left of the circulation desk. Immediately adjacent to the computers is a small café with a few tables.

Over the past couple of weeks you've noticed a middle aged man, accompanied by a medium size dog, using a computer right next to the café. The dog does not wear a harness or have any other markings indicating it is a service animal. And, from what you can tell, the man doesn't seem to have a disability.

You are aware of the library's policy that states patrons cannot bring animals into the library unless they are service animals. You think this man is bringing his pet to the library. What would you do?

- A) Ignore the man and his dog, telling yourself no one else seems to be concerned about it.

- B) Ask the workers in the café if they are concerned about the presence of the dog and if they are, call the disability services or human resources office to find out if any person fitting the man’s description is permitted to bring his dog on campus.
- C) Go over to the man, identify yourself and ask if the dog is a service animal.

**The correct answer is c)** Go over to the man, identify yourself and ask if the dog is a service animal. Although universities must permit persons with disabilities to bring their service animals to all areas of the campus open to the public, this requirement does not extend to pets or other animals that are not service animals. For example, many universities do not permit students to have pets while living in residences. While only disability services or human resources personnel should request and access medical documentation verifying the need for a service animal, other university personnel may ask the person for confirmation in situations where it may not be obvious if the animal is a service animal.

## Wrapping Up

In this module, we learned about persons with disabilities and their use of personal supports such as assistive devices, service animals and support persons.

While we discussed some specific things to remember when interacting and communicating with persons with disabilities who use personal supports, we also saw that a respectful and helpful approach goes a long way towards providing accessible customer service in almost any situation.

We also learned about two other important requirements of the customer service standard: becoming familiar with the assistive devices that our university provides and knowing what to do when we observe persons with disabilities having difficulties accessing our services or goods.

Congratulations! With this final module, you have completed this eLearning course on providing accessible customer services to persons with disabilities on your campus.

We hope that you enjoyed the course and that you gained some useful information that will help you provide and improve accessible customer service as you go about your work on campus. You may wish to keep this printable summary of the module for future reference.

Before we sign off, here are some “take home” messages that we’d like to leave you with.

- Accessible customer service starts with recognizing, removing and preventing barriers and ends with persons with disabilities being served in a manner that takes into account their disability.
- Addressing everyday accessible customer service issues is key to ensuring that we treat persons with disabilities with the same dignity and respect as we show others on our campuses.
- Resolving many accessibility-related customer service issues is not difficult. A little bit of awareness and interest goes a long way.
- You can greatly enhance accessible customer service by asking and learning about accessibility within the context of your role on campus. Based on this learning, we invite you to think about what you will do differently.

Persons with disabilities are one of the best resources for finding out what to do. The simple question “May I help you?” speaks volumes about your commitment to accessible customer service.

This was an introductory course into the area of accessible customer service, and we encourage you to learn more on your own. In addition to accessing the resources provided in this course, please consider contacting your university's accessibility coordinator or personnel in the disability services, equity, human rights or human resources offices with your questions, comments and interest.

## Module 3 Summary

### Serving Customers with Disabilities

#### What is a service animal?

A service animal is any guide dog, signal dog or other animal individually trained to assist a person with a disability.

#### What do service animals do?

Each animal is trained to perform various tasks and provide a range of services.

- A **guide dog** serves as a travel aid for a person with vision loss.
- A **hearing or signal** animal alerts a person with hearing loss when a sound occurs, such as knock on the door or alarm.
- **Mobility assistance** animals may carry, fetch, open doors, ring doorbells, activate elevator buttons, pull a wheelchair, steady a person while walking or help someone get up after a fall.
- A **seizure response** animal warns a person of an impending seizure or provides aid during a seizure such as going for help or standing guard over the person.
- **Therapeutic assistance** animals aid people with cognitive or psychological disabilities by bringing a phone to the person in emergency, calling 911 or the suicide hotline, turning on the lights, fetching medication, barking for help in emergency or assisting a person with panic disorder coping in crowds.

#### What should you do when communicating and interacting with someone who uses a service animal?

- Do not request that the owner leave the animal in different location, such as outside of your office or classroom.
- Avoid petting or talking to a service animal: this distracts the animal from its tasks.
- Do not feed or offer treats to the animal.
- Avoid deliberately startling the animal.
- Remember not all service animals wear special collars or harnesses. If you are not sure and it is necessary that you verify, it is okay to ask the owner if it is a service animal.
- Remember that the owner is responsible for maintaining control over the animal at all time. You are not responsible for cleaning up after it or feeding it. You may provide water if the owner requests it.

#### Are there any locations on campus where service animals are not permitted?

Under the standard, universities must permit service animals in *all* areas to which the public normally have access. There are only a few exceptions where a service animal would be excluded by law, as in these examples.

- The *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (1990) does not allow animals in places where food is manufactured, prepared, processed, handled, served, displayed, stored, sold or offered for sale. However, the Act does contain specific exemptions for service dogs only, allowing them to accompany their owners into areas where food is normally served, sold or offered for sale.
- In some unique situations where the presence of the animal presents a significant risk for another person, say for example in cases of severe allergies the university is required to meet the needs of both persons in these situations and would have to devise an accommodation plan that enables both persons to access services and goods accordingly.
- Some municipal by-laws restrict certain breeds of animals or dogs from the municipality and these by-laws apply even if the animal is acting as a service animal

### **What is a support person?**

A support person is someone either hired or chosen to help a person with a disability. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or spouse or a friend of the person with the disability. A support person in some cases does not necessarily need to have special training or qualifications.

Support persons may provide one or more types of assistance.

- Transportation
- Guiding a person with a vision loss
- Adaptive communication (e.g., intervenor for someone who is deafblind)
- Interpretation (e.g., ASL/English interpreter, LSQ/French interpreter)
- Note-taking, scribe or reading services (usually coordinated by Disability or Library Services Offices)
- Personal care assistance
- Support persons in the event of a seizure (e.g., protect from falls)
- Interpret and speak on behalf of someone with a speech disability

Under the customer service standard, universities must permit persons with disabilities to be accompanied and assisted by their support persons while accessing its good or services.

### **When interacting and communicating with someone who has a support person:**

- A person with a disability may not always introduce his or her support person. If you are not sure, it is appropriate to ask, "Is this your interpreter or support person?"

- Although it can feel a little awkward, speak to and look directly at the person with a disability even though the message may be coming from the support person.
- Address the person appropriately: “What courses are you taking this year?” as opposed to “Can you ask him what courses he is taking this year?”
- Remember that support persons, especially interpreters, tend to communicate everything to the person. Avoid engaging in “side” conversations with the interpreter, thinking these won’t be conveyed to the person with the disability.
- Plan for the presence of support persons, e.g., ensure seating arrangements accommodate support persons in locations that will help facilitate communication.
- Where possible, provide written materials both to the person with the disability and the support person.
- During event planning, note the location of washrooms that will accommodate persons with disabilities and their support persons.

### **What is an assistive device?**

An assistive device is any device that is used, designed, made or adapted to assist people in performing a particular task. Assistive devices enable persons with disabilities to do everyday tasks such as moving, communicating, reading or lifting.

Some persons with disabilities use personal assistive devices. Here are a few examples.

- Wheelchairs
- Canes
- Walkers
- Assistive listening devices (FM systems)
- Laptops with screen-reading software or communicating capabilities
- Smart phones (i.e. wireless handheld devices)
- Hearing aids
- Global positioning system (GPS) devices

Here are a few more examples of assistive devices you may come across when communicating and interacting with persons with disabilities on campus.

- Persons with vision loss may use a digital audio player to listen to books, directions, art shows, etc.

- Some persons who are deaf or hard of hearing use teletypewriters (TTY). This machine enables telephone-like communication using text. Calls placed to or from a non-TTY user can be made through the Bell Relay Service.
- Persons who are blind may use a white cane to assist with safety, mobility and independence. The cane is used to check for objects in a person's path, changes in walking surfaces and dangers like steps and curbs.
- Some persons with breathing difficulties carry portable oxygen tanks.
- Persons with learning disabilities or difficulties with memory use personal digital assistants for storing, organizing or retrieving personal, school or employment information.
- Persons with physical, learning or speech disabilities may use laptops to access information, take notes or to communicate.
- Some persons with speech disabilities may use a variety of communication devices, such as voice-output systems or pictures/symbols to communicate.

The customer service standard requires that faculty, staff members and student leaders who act on behalf of the university are familiar with these devices and can either provide assistance or know whom to contact about operating them upon request.

Here are a few examples of assistive devices that may be available at your university.

- Adjustable desks and workstations in classrooms or offices
- Assistive listening devices (e.g., FM systems)
- Lifts in stairwells
- Manual wheelchairs or power scooters
- Teletypewriters (TTY)
- Adaptive computer technology or software

A final requirement of the customer service standard is that faculty, staff members and student leaders know what to do if they encounter a person with a disability having difficulties accessing a service or good on campus or if they observe something that may interfere with accessibility.

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## SOURCES and RESOURCES

Here is a list of quality general resources on accessibility, as well as sources of information used in this eLearning course on accessible customer service.

### AODA, CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARD, ACCESSIBILITY

**Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, (AODA):**

<http://www.accesson.ca/en/mcss/programs/accessibility/OntarioAccessibilityLaws/2005/index.aspx>

**Ontario Regulation 429/07: Accessibility Standards for Customer Service:** [http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/source/regs/english/2007/elaws\\_src\\_regs\\_r07429\\_e.htm](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/source/regs/english/2007/elaws_src_regs_r07429_e.htm)

**Summary of Requirements: Accessibility Standards for Customer Service:**

<http://www.cfcs.gov.on.ca/NR/rdonlyres/6B812F75-88E4-4731-9BA0-7F9FE01F70BD/1898/SummaryofRequirementsJAN172008EN.pdf>

**Guide to Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07:**

<http://209.167.40.96/page.asp?unit=cust-serv-reg&doc=guide&lang=en>

**Compliance Manual: Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07:**

[http://209.167.40.96/page.asp?unit=cust-serv-reg&doc=workbook&lang=en&page=1#h1\\_1](http://209.167.40.96/page.asp?unit=cust-serv-reg&doc=workbook&lang=en&page=1#h1_1)

**Frequently Asked Questions about the Accessible Customer Service Standard Regulation:**

[http://www.accesson.ca/en/mcss/programs/accessibility/ComplyingStandards/toolsToHelpYouComply\\_FAQ.aspx](http://www.accesson.ca/en/mcss/programs/accessibility/ComplyingStandards/toolsToHelpYouComply_FAQ.aspx)

**Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services:**

- General information: <http://www.accesson.ca/en/mcss/index.aspx>
- Accessibility terminology: *Talk About Disabilities: Choose the Right Word:* [http://www.accesson.ca/en/accesson/understandingDisabilities/right\\_word.aspx](http://www.accesson.ca/en/accesson/understandingDisabilities/right_word.aspx)
- Accessibility Directorate of Ontario (Access ON): <http://www.accesson.ca/en/accesson/>

### Ontario Human Rights Commission

- General information: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en>
- Disability issues: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/issues/disability>

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

**Mad Students Society (MSS):** <http://www.madstudentsociety.com/>

**Accommodating Students with Disabilities** (Ontario Human Rights Commission):  
<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/factsheets/Principles>

**Helping Students Succeed / Learning Disabilities** (Disabilities Assessment Centres of Ontario):  
[http://www.accessstolearning.ca/index.php?view=article&id=84%3Acambrian-college-and-queens-university-helping-students-succeed-learning-disabilities-assessment-centres-of-ontario&option=com\\_content&Itemid=61](http://www.accessstolearning.ca/index.php?view=article&id=84%3Acambrian-college-and-queens-university-helping-students-succeed-learning-disabilities-assessment-centres-of-ontario&option=com_content&Itemid=61)

**Yale Centre for Dyslexia and Creativity:** <http://dyslexia.yale.edu/>

## ASSOCIATIONS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities:**  
[http://www.aamr.org/content\\_100.cfm?navID=21](http://www.aamr.org/content_100.cfm?navID=21)

**American Association Speech-Language-Hearing Association:** <http://www.asha.org/default.htm>

**Canadian Association of the Deaf:** <http://www.cad.ca/>

**Canadian Council of the Blind:** <http://www.ccbnational.net/new/index.php?Welcome>

**Canadian Deafblind and Rubella Association:** <http://www.cdbraontario.ca/>

**Canadian Hard of Hearing Association:** <http://chha.ca/chha/>

**Canadian Hearing Society:** <http://www.chs.ca/>

**Canadian National Institute for the Blind:** <http://www.cnib.ca/>

**Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria** (strategies for communicating and interacting with someone with an intellectual or development disability):  
<http://www.cddh.monash.org/assets/documents/working-with-people-with-intellectual-disabilities-in-health-care.pdf>

**Royal Institute of the Blind (UK):** <http://www.rnib.org.uk>

## UNIVERSAL DESIGN and UNIVERSAL INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

**Seven Principles of Universal Design** (Centre for Universal Design):  
[http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about\\_ud/udprinciples.htm](http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about_ud/udprinciples.htm)

**Universal Instructional Design at the University of Guelph:** <http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/uid/>

**Universal Design of Instruction (UDI): Definition, Principles and Examples** (University of Washington):  
<http://www.washington.edu/doi/Brochures/Academics/instruction.html>

**Institute for Inclusion:** <http://www.instituteforinclusion.org/>

## ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

**Adaptive Resource Technology Centre, University of Toronto** (offers an online course on *Understanding Web Accessibility*): <http://atrc.utoronto.ca/>.

**Resource Services Library** (provides alternate format media to students with disabilities):  
<http://rsl.psbnet.ca/rsl2005/StaticInformationPage/WhoWeAre.aspx>.

## ASSISTIVE DEVICES

Telephone relay services: [http://www.bell.ca/specialneeds/PrsSN\\_SvcRelay.page](http://www.bell.ca/specialneeds/PrsSN_SvcRelay.page)

## FAMOUS PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Tom Cruise:** <http://www.childrenslearningcenters.org/news/tomcruise.pdf>

**Whoopi Goldberg:** [http://organizedwisdom.com/Whoopi\\_Goldberg\\_and\\_Dyslexia](http://organizedwisdom.com/Whoopi_Goldberg_and_Dyslexia)

**Stephen Hawking:** <http://www.hawking.org.uk/>

**Charles Schwab:** <http://www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/1999/marapr/articles/schwab.html>

## OTHER SOURCES

Woodcock, K., & Aguayo, M. (2000) *Deafened People: Adjustment and Support*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press

Prince-Hughes, D. (2005) *Songs of the Gorilla Nation: My Journey through Autism*, New York: Harmony Books/Random House

Tanya Titchkosky, "Disability: A Rose by Any Other Name? 'People First' Language in Canadian Society," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, The, May 2001  
[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_go2771/is\\_2\\_38/ai\\_n28846363/?tag=content:col1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_go2771/is_2_38/ai_n28846363/?tag=content:col1)

## GLOSSARY

*The following terms are commonly used in discussions about accessibility in general, and accessible customer service on campus in particular. Refer to Sources and Resources for the sources of information on which these definitions are based.*

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### **Accessibility**

Accessibility is the degree to which persons with disabilities can access a device, service or environment without barriers. Accessibility is also a process – it is the **proactive** identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with disabilities.

### **Accessibility standards**

An accessibility standard is a rule that persons and organizations have to follow to identify, remove and prevent barriers. Each university must ensure that its policies, practices and procedures address the requirements of Ontario's accessible customer service standard, and ensure that they are consistent with the principles of dignity, equal opportunity, independence and integration.

### **Dignity**

Providing service with dignity means the customer maintains his or her self-respect and the respect of other people. Dignified service means not treating persons with disabilities as an afterthought or forcing them to accept lesser service, quality or convenience.

### **Equal opportunity**

Equal opportunity means having the same chances, options, benefits and results as others. In the case of services, it means that persons with disabilities have the same opportunity as others to benefit from the way you provide goods or services.

### **Independence**

Ensuring people are able to do things on their own without unnecessary help, or interference from others.

### **Integration**

Integration means providing service in a way that allows the person with a disability to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in the same or similar way as other customers.

**Accommodation**

Accommodation is an individualized and reactive adaptation or adjustment made to provide a person with a disability with equitable and non-discriminatory opportunities for participation. For students with disabilities, accommodation is a collaborative process between the student, faculty and disability service personnel to identify and remove environmental barriers to learning and performance. Appropriate and reasonable accommodation is determined based on an individualized assessment of the interaction between the student's disability and required tasks. Accommodation is **not** treatment or rehabilitation.

**Alternative format**

Alternative format refers to the conversion of printed text, audio or video files into formats more easily accessed by persons with disabilities.

**Audio format**

Audio is an alternative format for persons with a vision, intellectual or developmental or learning disability, or who cannot read print. Labels should be prepared in large, high-contrast print and Braille.

**Braille**

Braille is an alternative format for persons who are blind or deafblind. It is a tactile system of raised dots representing letters or a combination of letters of the alphabet. Braille is produced using Braille transcription software.

**Captioning**

Captioning translates the audio portion of a video presentation by way of subtitles, or captions, which usually appear on the bottom of the screen. Captioning may be closed or open. Closed captions can only be seen on a television screen that is equipped with a device called a closed caption decoder. Open captions are "burned on" a video and appear whenever the video is shown. Captioning makes television programs, films and other visual media with sound accessible to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**Descriptive Video Service (DVS)**

DVS provides descriptive narration of key visual elements—such as the action, characters, locations, costumes and sets—without interfering with dialogue or sound effects. DVS makes television programs, films, home videos and other visual media accessible for persons with vision disabilities.

**Electronic text**

Electronic text is used with computer synthetic voice technology (screen reading software) that

allows persons who are blind, have low vision (such as seniors) or who have learning disabilities to hear a spoken translation of what others see on the monitor. When an electronic form of a document is placed on a CD, it should be labelled in large, high-contrast print and Braille.

**Large print**

Large print is an alternative format for persons who have low vision. Large print materials should be prepared with a font (print) size that is 16 to 20 points or larger.

**Windowing**

Windowing enables persons who are deaf to read by means of a sign language interpreter what others hear in a video presentation or broadcast. The interpreter appears in a corner or “window” in the screen, translating spoken word to sign language. Windowing may include open or closed captioning.

**Assistive device**

An assistive device is a tool, technology or mechanism that enables a person with a disability to do everyday tasks such as moving, communicating or lifting. Assistive devices help persons with disabilities maintain their independence at home, at work and in the community.

**Digital audio player**

An assistive device that enables persons with hearing loss to listen to books, directions, art shows, etc.

**FM transmitter system**

An assistive device used by persons who are Deaf, deafened, oral deaf or hard of hearing to help boost sound closest to the listener while reducing background noise

**Hearing aid**

An assistive device that makes sound louder and clearer for persons who are Deaf, deafened, oral deaf or hard of hearing

**Magnifier**

An assistive device that makes print and images larger and easier to read

**Mobility device**

An assistive device that helps persons who have difficulty walking. Examples include wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, canes and crutches.

**Personal data manager**

An assistive device that helps persons with learning disabilities store, organize and retrieve personal information

### **Portable global positioning systems (GPS)**

An assistive device that helps orient people to get to specific destinations

### **Speech generating device**

These assistive devices are used to pass on a message using a device that “speaks” when a symbol, word, or pictures is pressed.

### **Teletypewriter (TTY)**

An assistive device that helps persons who are unable to speak or hear to communicate by phone. The person types his her messages on the TTY keyboard, and messages are sent using telephone lines to someone who has a TTY, or to an operator who passes the message along to someone who doesn't have a TTY.

### **White cane**

An assistive device that helps persons who are blind or have vision loss find their way round obstacles

## **Augmentative communication**

Any communication approach designed to support or augment an individual's communication output. There is a wide array of augmentative communication devices available, including voice output systems, keyboard text-to-speech generating devices, and picture or symbol communication boards or binders.

## **Barrier**

A barrier is anything that keeps someone with a disability from participating fully in society because of his or her disability. Barriers can be visible or non-visible. Furthermore, while barriers are often unintentional, they can restrict access to goods and services.

### **Attitude**

This barrier is about what we think and how we interact with persons with disabilities. It is perhaps the most difficult barrier to overcome because our attitudes – based on our beliefs, knowledge, previous experience and education – can be hard to change. For instance, some people don't know how to communicate with persons with disabilities – they may assume that someone with a speech problem also has an intellectual disability. Some people worry about

offending someone by offering help and deal with this by ignoring or avoiding persons with disabilities.

### **Architectural or structural barrier**

Architectural or structural barriers may result from design elements of a building such as stairs, doorways, the width of hallways and room layout. These barriers may also occur through everyday practices, such as when we store boxes or other objects in hallways, obstructing accessible pathways.

### **Information or communication barrier**

Information or communication barriers – like small print size, low colour contrast between text and background or not facing the person when speaking – can make it difficult to receive or convey information.

### **Systemic**

Systemic barriers can result from an organization’s policies, practices and procedures if they restrict persons with disabilities, often unintentionally, as in the case with setting requirements such as full course loads in establishing eligibility for services such as residences, scholarships and honours listing.

### **Technology**

Technology, or the lack of it, can prevent people from accessing information. Common tools like computers, telephones and other aids can all present barriers if they are not set up or designed with accessibility in mind.

## **Customer**

University customers include a wide range of people who pay for services available on campus, such as full-time and part-time undergraduate and graduate students, university staff and faculty using campus services, city residents, visiting alumni faculty, students’ parents and other relatives, and representatives from other organizations, e.g., universities, government departments and business partners.

## **Disability**

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* uses the Ontario Human Rights Code definition of “disability”, which includes physical, mental health, developmental and learning disabilities. A disability may be visible or non-visible, as follows:

- a. Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and (...) includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical coordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical

- reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,
- b. A condition of mental impairment or a development disability,
  - c. Learning disability, or dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
  - d. A mental disorder, or
  - e. An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

### **Deafblind**

A person who is deafblind can neither see nor hear to some degree. Many persons who are deafblind are accompanied by an intervenor. Intervenors are trained in special sign language that involves touching the person's hands in a two-hand, manual alphabet.

### **Hearing loss**

Persons who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. Deafness can be evident at birth, or occur later in life from other causes, such as meningitis. Persons who are partially deaf often use hearing aids to assist their hearing. Deaf persons also use sign language to communicate. While American Sign Language and Quebec Sign Language (LSQ, or Langue des signes québécoise) are commonly used in Ontario, not everyone with hearing loss uses them.

### **Deaf**

In Deaf culture, indicated by a capital "D", the term "Deaf" is used to describe a person who has severe to profound hearing loss and who identifies with the culture, society and language of Deaf persons, which is based on Sign Language. Persons who are profoundly deaf may identify themselves as culturally Deaf or oral deaf.

### **Deafened**

This term describes a person who has lost their hearing slowly or suddenly in adulthood. The person may use speech with visual cues such as captioning or computerized note-taking, speech reading or sign language.

### **Hard of hearing**

This term describes a person who uses his or her residual hearing and speech to communicate. The person may supplement communication by speech reading, hearing aids, sign language and/or communication devices.

### **Oral deaf**

This term describes a person who was born deaf or became deaf before learning to speak, but is taught to speak and may not typically use American Sign Language.

**Intellectual or developmental disability**

Persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one's ability to learn. These disabilities are often non-visible.

**Learning disability**

The term "learning disabilities" refers to a range of disorders that affect how persons process information. Learning disabilities can result in reading and language-based learning problems (dyslexia), problems with mathematics (dyscalculia), or problems with writing (dysgraphia). Learning disabilities affect people from all backgrounds and are not a result of culture, language or lack of motivation. Persons with learning disabilities just learn differently.

**Mental health disability**

Mental health disabilities include schizophrenia, depression, phobias, as well as bipolar, anxiety and mood disorders. Mental illness is often episodic, so a person who has a psychological or psychiatric disability may not have symptoms all the time, and a person who has experienced an episode of mental illness in the past will not necessarily have a repeat experience.

**Non-visible disability**

Non-visible disabilities include a wide range of impairments that may not be immediately noticeable, such as back injury, vision or hearing loss, arthritis and medical conditions like diabetes or multiple sclerosis.

**Physical disability**

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities that can affect a person's mobility. The cause of the mobility disability may be non-visible, as in the case with arthritis, heart and lung conditions.

**Speech or language impairment**

Some people have problems communicating. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some persons who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

**Vision loss**

Vision loss reduces a person's ability to see clearly. Few persons with vision loss are totally blind. Some have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side

vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Some common causes of vision disabilities are scratched corneas, diabetes-related eye conditions, injuries and corneal grafts.

**Duty to accommodate**

Duty to accommodate means accommodation must be provided in a manner that respects general principles such as dignity of the person, individualized, integration and full participation.

**Inclusion**

Inclusion is engaging differences to create a culture of belonging in which people are valued and honoured for the improvement of our society, world and enterprises. Inclusive behaviours are those practices and behaviours that leverage and honour the uniqueness of people's different talents, beliefs and ways of living,

**Intervention**

The act of going or mediating between. With regard to persons who are deafblind, an intervention is the process that enables a person who is deafblind to receive information so that the person can interact with his or her environment.

**Intervenor**

A person who provides intervention to an individual who is deafblind. Not to be confused with an interpreter, an intervenor is a specially trained professional who mediates between the person who is deafblind and others, enabling him or her to communicate effectively with and receive information from his or her environment.

**Service animal**

A service animal is an animal that does a job for a person with a disability. Examples include autism assistance or service dogs; guide dogs, dog guides or seeing eye dogs; hearing ear, hearing, sound alert or hearing alert dogs, cats or animals; psychiatric service dogs; service or mobility dogs or animals, special skills dogs or animals; seizure, seizure alert, seizure assist or seizure response dogs or animals.

**Undue hardship**

Organizations are required to accommodate someone with a disability to the point of undue hardship. There are only three factors to consider in assessing undue hardship: cost, outside sources of funding and health and safety requirements, if any.

**Universal design**

The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

**Universal Instructional Design**

In terms of learning, universal design means the design of instructional materials and activities that makes the learning goals achievable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, hear, speak, move, read, write, understand English, attend, organize, engage and remember. Universal design for learning is achieved by means of flexible curricular materials and activities that provide alternatives for students with differing abilities. These alternatives are built into the instructional design and operating systems of educational materials: they are not added after the fact.

## Common Myths about Disabilities

*There are many myths, or inaccurate assumptions, about disabilities. Here are just a few attitudes that can constitute barriers for persons with disabilities. Have you encountered any of them yourself?*

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### **Inferiority**

Because a person may be impaired in one of life's major functions, some people believe that the individual is a "second-class citizen". However, most persons with disabilities have skills that make the impairment irrelevant.

### **Pity**

People feel sorry for the person with a disability, which tends to lead to patronizing attitudes. Persons with disabilities generally don't want pity and charity, just equal opportunity to make their own way and live independently.

### **Hero Worship**

People consider someone with a disability who lives independently or pursues studies to be brave or "special" for overcoming a disability. Most persons with disabilities do not want accolades for performing day-to-day tasks. The disability is there, and the person has simply learned to adapt by using his or her skills and knowledge.

### **Ignorance**

Persons with disabilities are often dismissed as incapable of accomplishing a task without the opportunity to display their skills. In fact, persons with quadriplegia can drive cars and have children. Some persons who are blind can tell time on a watch and visit museums. Persons who are deaf can play baseball and enjoy music. Persons with developmental disabilities can be creative and maintain a strong work ethic.

### **The Spread Effect**

People assume that a person's disability negatively affects other senses, abilities or personality traits, or that the total person is impaired. For example, many people shout at persons who are blind or don't expect persons using wheelchairs to be able to speak for themselves. Focusing on the person's abilities rather than on his or her disability counters this type of prejudice.

### **Stereotypes**

The other side of the spread effect is the positive and negative generalizations people form about disabilities. For example, many believe that all persons who are blind are great musicians or have a keener sense of smell and hearing, that all persons who use wheelchairs are docile or compete in Paralympic Sports (or the Paralympics), that all persons with developmental disabilities are innocent and sweet-natured, or that all persons with disabilities are sad and bitter. Aside from diminishing the individual and his or her abilities, such prejudice can set too high or too low a standard for individuals who are merely human.

### **Backlash**

Many people believe that persons with disabilities are given unfair advantages, such as easier graduation criteria or work requirements. The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* does not require special privileges for persons with disabilities, just equal opportunities.

### **Denial**

Many disabilities are "non-visible", such as learning disabilities, mental health disabilities, epilepsy, cancer, arthritis and heart conditions. Accommodating non-visible disabilities can help talented students prepare for rewarding careers, keep valued employees on the job, and open doors for new employees.