

CBU ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN UPDATE – 2025

Cape Breton University (CBU) introduced its first Accessibility Action Plan in 2022. Since then, CBU has made strides toward improving accessibility in several key areas; however, there is more work to do to continue on the path set by the initial plan. CBU remains committed to fostering diversity within our community and working toward achieving these action items.

PROGRESS AND KEY UPDATES

Awareness and Capacity Building

- ❖ The CBU Service Hub, built in 2022, was designed with “Accessibility for All” in mind. It supports use by assistive technologies, ensuring broader access for all users. Additionally, the Marketing team is collaborating with the Manager of Online Learning to enhance the presence of CBU.ca and better support fully online students.
- ❖ The Office of Research and Graduate Studies’ Research Bulletins regularly include information and insights to promote accessibility in research
- ❖ CBU’s manager of the Jennifer Keeping Centre (JKC) for Accessible Learning is active within the Provincial Accessibility Directorate.
- ❖ CBU has developed Disability Acceptance Week.
- ❖ Facilities, in partnership with Communications, have developed “Accessibility Matters” messages for our campus digital signage. These messages emphasize the importance of accessible parking and other key accessibility considerations. In May 2023, CBC’s Public Forum on Accessibility and Inclusion across the educational lifespan was held at Cape Breton University, and aired over one week on CBC Mainstreet.
- ❖ The CBU Communications team has been engaged to share stories and experiences from students with first-voice perspectives on accessibility. These firsthand accounts aim to highlight real-life challenges and successes, helping to inform and inspire more inclusive practices across the university.
- ❖ Awareness and capacity building can be evidenced by efforts to ensure accessibility across campus and in the learning environment, as outlined in this update.

Education: Teaching, Learning and Research

- ❖ CBU supports first-voice researchers in the area of accessibility through its internal research grants (RISE Grants). For example, Dr. Tammy Bernasky, Assistant Professor of Political Science, received RISE Grants in 2023-24 and 2024-25, for *Exploring the Impact of Medical Assistance in Dying Legislation on People with Disabilities*, with co-investigator, Dr. Rubina Ramji, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at CBU.
- ❖ CBU researchers have received external grants to fund accessibility-related research. For example, Dr. Bernasky has had the following research involvement:

Sept 2024 – Co-Principal Investigator SEED Grant (IDEA)	<i>Employment support for immigrants with disabilities in Nova Scotia: an exploratory study.</i> Co-PI – Firat Sayin, Saint Mary's University. Community Partner, Team Work Cooperative
June 2023 - Co-Investigator Future Frontiers Grant	<i>Inclusive Design for Employment Access (IDEA)</i> PI – Dr. Emile Tompa, McMaster University Co-PI – Rebecca Gewurtz. (Multiple cross-country Co-applicants and Collaborators – Joined in 2023).
2022 - 2024 Principal Investigator Change Lab Action Research Initiative Grant	<i>Exploring the Impact of Gender and Disability Based Violence Among Students at Nova Scotia Universities.</i> CI - Dr. Katie Aubrecht, St. FX University; Community Partner – Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities,

- ❖ CBU has established the University Teaching Chair in Disability Justice in the Classroom
- ❖ During Disability Acceptance Week (Oct.), the JKC has hosted a session on accessible and assistive technology open to all faculty and students.
- ❖ The CBU Centre for Teaching and Learning hosted a book club on Transforming Practice: Learning Equity, Learning Excellence (<https://pressbooks.atlanticoer-relatlantique.ca/transformingpractice/>)
- ❖ CBU continues to provide funding for five students with intellectual disabilities through CBU Inclusive, allowing students who do not meet the admission criteria to achieve a certificate of completion for study in various programs.
- ❖ The JKC hosts an annual open house to inform all members of the campus community on services available.

- ❖ CBU faculty are conscious of and proactive about the need for increased accessibility. For example:
 - An engineering faculty member has designed and 3D printed a custom keyboard pressing tool, to enable a student with only one functional arm to complete computer labs in a course that required them to be able to hold down keys on keyboard and use the mouse simultaneously. The model is freely available online for anyone else who wishes to 3D print it. (web link: <https://www.printables.com/model/1188326-keyboard-key-presser>)
 - CBU's Ornithology course was adapted to implement Birdability guidelines <https://www.birdability.org/> Fieldtrip locations were modified and supports put in place with a goal to balance inclusivity and accessibility for a student in a wheelchair, while optimizing the experience for all students and meeting the requirements for Ornithology.

Built Environment

- ❖ As part of a broader initiative in partnership with other Nova Scotia universities, CBU hired a third-party architect to support the accessibility audit. Her expertise contributed to a comprehensive evaluation of the campus's physical infrastructure, helping to align renovations with both building code requirements and accessibility best practices.
- ❖ Cape Breton University actively engages with officials responsible for the Nova Scotia Building Code to ensure we remain up to date on any changes. This collaboration helps guarantee that all new construction and renovations across campus are fully compliant with current building code requirements. New buildings, such as the Kehoe Forum, the Medical Campus, and the Centre for Discovery and Innovation, have been designed with accessibility as a core priority from the outset.
- ❖ Facilities Management at CBU, in collaboration with the Risk Management department, has worked closely with the Jennifer Keeping Centre to address accessibility accommodations for students. These efforts are often focused on older areas of campus, where updates are often needed to meet current accessibility standards.
 - For example, CBU Biology Department arranged in-lab walkthroughs to identify accessibility improvements for students in wheelchairs, ranging from simple things like removing excess furniture in the lab or having a student work bench lowered, to having sinks installed that were at the correct height for someone in a wheelchair.

- ❖ The CBU work order system includes an Accessibility option, allowing users to flag accessibility-related concerns. This ensures that such requests are properly triaged and prioritized. Additionally, the system enables CBU to automatically notify selected users when elevators are out of service.
- ❖ Specific examples of accessibility improvements to the built environment at CBU include:
 - Upgraded the Royal Bank Lecture Theatre classroom to include accessibility options. Students with hearing impairments can tune into a WIFI channel with their device/headphones to listen to the lectures. This space is also often used by community.
 - The library circulation area has been renovated to include an accessible service counter, ensuring that all students, staff, and visitors can easily access library services.
 - First level Campus Centre washrooms have undergone a full renovation to include more accessible stalls, stalls for limited mobility, and a universal washroom equipped with an adult change facility. These are amongst the largest washroom facilities on campus and are often accessed by the public due to their location.
 - Installation of two new wheelchair-accessible fume hoods installed in science labs.
 - Designs of new facilities meet CSA B651 accessible design standards, including fully accessible fume hoods being incorporated into the Centre for Discovery and Innovation science labs.
 - Renovations to the Kehoe Forum included the addition of an elevator, Universal washroom, additional accessible washrooms, and is fully equipped to accommodate Sledge Hockey
 - Creation of new signage standards to meet CSA B651 accessible design standards for implementation through new construction and future projects.
 - Installation of handrails throughout Campus Centre on stairways and ramps.
 - Installation of visibility strips on stairs in the cafeteria.

Information and Communication

- ❖ In 2023, members of the Marketing and Communications teams attended the online Design and Accessibility Summit. Key takeaways included the importance of using proper tagging and heading structures, considering color choices carefully, and creating clear, simple content that avoids excessive stylization.

Looking ahead, the Communications team will be developing an official Digital Signage Policy. Insights from the Summit will help ensure that our content is accessible and easy to read for all audiences.

- ❖ CBU has subscribed to the Siteimprove platform since 2022. Siteimprove offers cloud-based tools that support website governance, content quality, SEO, and accessibility compliance. As a recognized leader in digital accessibility, the platform has the WCAG 2.1 AA guidelines integrated directly into its system.

CBU uses Siteimprove to regularly scan and monitor its web content for issues related to accessibility, broken links, readability, and compliance. This proactive approach helps ensure our online presence remains inclusive, user-friendly, and aligned with best practices. The platform also provides actionable insights, allowing the Marketing and Communications teams to address issues promptly and continuously improve the digital experience for all users.

Delivery of Goods and Services

- ❖ The CBU Service Hub, built in 2022, was designed with “Accessibility for All” in mind. It supports use by assistive technologies, ensuring broader access for all users.
- ❖ As part of a broader initiative in partnership with other Nova Scotia universities, CBU hired third-party architect to support the accessibility audit. Her expertise contributed to a comprehensive evaluation of the campus’s physical infrastructure, helping to align renovations with both building code requirements and accessibility best practices.
- ❖ CBU’s Request for Proposal template has been updated to include a statement on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility as a priority, asking suppliers of goods and services to reflect upon and provide information about their own efforts in these areas.

Employment

- ❖ CBU actively works with and supports employees and their accommodation needs by following a standard process for employees to identify and request accommodations at work. We currently have employees on active accommodation streams. CBU is considering engaging with a third-party medical consultant to supplement our ability to evaluate and provide medical accommodations to our employees.

- ❖ CBU advertises and prioritizes diversity in our hiring practices and we are planning to review our overall hiring process for efficiency as well as accessibility and support for identified diversity candidates. This will include ensuring that in the future all hiring committee members complete training which will include how CBU's hiring practices support accessibility and diversity.

Transportation

- ❖ CBU has collaborated with Transit Cape Breton to improve transit services for all students.

