



Accommodation in and out of the classroom-  
Recommendations towards the full integration  
and participation of students with a hearing  
disability at the University of Ottawa

Office of the  
**Ombudsperson**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Office of the Ombudsperson wishes to thank the students who brought their complaints to our office, without them we would not have undertaken this review. We would also like to thank the members of the Advisory Committee of the Ombudsperson who provided their support for this review. As well, we thank the students who completed the questionnaire to provide us with their feedback, and Francine Page and her staff from the Centre for Equity and Human Rights of the SFUO. As well, we are grateful for the constant collaboration of Amy Grumberg and her staff of the Student Academic Success Service's (SASS) Access Service, and Yolaine Ruel, Senior Policy Officer, Accessibility, both from the University of Ottawa. We also appreciate the information provided by the representatives of the Centre for Students with Disabilities of the SFUO. We are grateful to the different persons working in other Canadian universities who very generously took the time to answer our questions and provide us with useful information.

# Office of the Ombudsperson

## **INTRODUCTION**

Following the receipt of complaints from some students with a hearing disability, we thought that it would be useful to examine more closely the situation of students who are deaf or hard of hearing at the University of Ottawa. In accordance with our terms of reference, we consulted the members of the Advisory Committee of the Ombudsperson who were very supportive of the initiative. Based on our experience with the complaints that had been brought to our attention, we believed that more needed to be done to respond to the academic needs of these students, as well as to provide them with equal access to the full student experience, which includes social activities and services provided by the Student Associations.

This report contains basic information on legislative obligations, interesting findings from other studies that are relevant to this issue, some best practices which we have found in other Canadian universities and recommendations for the consideration of the University and the Student Associations.

We report on what students have told us, what we have observed, what the complaints brought to us taught us, and what some experts in the field have documented. We invite

the Student Associations as well as the University officials to examine more closely the gaps that we have uncovered, to review the accessibility of all services and to take all necessary measures to address these gaps.

The population of students with a hearing disability is small: from May 2010 to April 2011, 34 students in total had registered at Access Service as having some degree of hearing impairment; of these, 16 used some form of interpretation services. Our findings are not presented quantitatively; we report on our observations and on the conclusions we have reached following interviews and review of material. As well, we want to be very clear that we did not review all services provided by Faculties and services or by the Student Associations.

The report is not written from the perspective of attributing blame or signalling any human rights infractions but from the perspective of identifying gaps and some best practices for the consideration of the University and the Student Associations to ensure that the students receive an equal and fair academic opportunity and are able to integrate in student life as much as they would like to do so without barriers.

Addressing barriers for a small population of students where communication is the main challenge within a university is not necessarily an easy task. It requires the full cooperation between service providers and the students as well as a strategic and planned approach to the removal of barriers and the full inclusion of the students. We would thus expect to see the University and the Student Associations develop plans to mobilize its personnel in order to achieve better integration of students with a hearing disability.

## **LEGISLATIVE OBLIGATIONS**

Universities in Ontario must comply with the Ontario Human Rights Code (*Code*) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) (AODA). As far as the SFUO is concerned, it is a non profit organization and as such is mandated by the AODA to meet service related accessibility standards by January 2012. SFUO has indicated to us that it is committed to ensure that its policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the AODA principles that respect the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission has published the following policies and guidelines setting standards for how service providers, such as universities, should act to ensure compliance with the Code: 1) Policy and guidelines on disability and the duty to accommodate (2000, revised 2009), 2) Guidelines on accessible education (2004, revised 2009) and 3) The Opportunity to Succeed, Achieving Barrier-free Education for Students with Disabilities.

«Under the Code, everyone has the right to be free from discrimination because of disability or perceived disability in the social areas of employment, services, goods, facilities, housing, contracts and membership in trade and vocational associations. This right means that persons with disabilities have the right to equal treatment which includes the right to accessible workplaces, public transit, health services, restaurants, shops and housing. »<sup>1</sup>

Universities have a duty to accommodate students with a disability and provide them with equal access to all their services. The right to be accommodated and the corresponding duty to do so are now well recognized in statute and case law. Failure to address the needs related to a disability is a breach of human rights.

In its policy on accessibility, the University of Ottawa has affirmed its commitment «to recognizing the dignity and independence of all employees, students, faculty and visitors, and it seeks to ensure that persons with disabilities have genuine, open and unhindered access to University goods, services, facilities, accommodations, employment.»<sup>2</sup>

The goal and obligation of the University and the Student Associations should be to achieve the full integration, inclusion and participation of students who have a hearing disability. It requires the identification and removal of existing barriers, and where it is impossible to remove these barriers, and then accommodation must be provided, short of undue hardship.<sup>3</sup> Where a prima facie case of discrimination is found to exist, the legal burden to justify the discrimination would lie with the University or the Student Association.<sup>4</sup> In our review we have not found any instances where that principle surfaced as an issue. The other consideration to take into account in providing the accommodation is that while the highest level of accommodation must be achieved, those responsible to respond to the person's needs in a dignified manner are entitled to select the one that is less expensive or less disruptive to the organization.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission, «Policy and guidelines on disability and the duty to accommodate» (November 23, 2000) 4. <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/code> (accessed May 3, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> University of Ottawa, Policy on Accessibility <http://www.uottawa.ca/accessibility/policy.html> (accessed May 3, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission, «Policy and guidelines on disability and the duty to accommodate» (November 23, 2000) 11.

<sup>4</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission, «Policy and guidelines on disability and the duty to accommodate» (November 23, 2000) 12.

<sup>5</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission, «Policy and guidelines on disability and the duty to accommodate» (November 23, 2000) 15.

The OHRC policy recognizes that the accommodation process is a shared responsibility between the student with a disability and the University. Although not specifically mentioned in the documentation we reviewed, it would be fair and reasonable to also expect the Student Associations to participate in this process.<sup>6</sup> It is clear from the policy that cooperation is required between the students, the University officials as well as the Student Associations in order to make the process work. Without good communication and cooperation the accommodation process breaks down.

In 2003, the OHRC released a report entitled *The Opportunity to Succeed: Achieving Barrier-free Education for Students with Disabilities* following an extensive consultation process which led to specific recommendations to address systemic issues in educational services. Subsequently the OHRC developed and published the *Guidelines on Accessible Education* intended to provide universities and other education institutions with guidance and support to fulfill their duties and obligations under the *Code*. It is in these guidelines that we find very useful clarification on the principles of accommodation, namely «dignity, individualization and inclusion,»<sup>7</sup> as well as on appropriate accommodation and the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process. While not intended to provide prescriptive solutions, they are very useful to guide the process of achieving full integration of students with disabilities, preventing and removing barriers that impede students with disabilities from participating fully in all aspects of university life, both academic and non-academic.

According to these *Guidelines*, the University should have in place an effective mechanism to resolve disputes that arise in the accommodation process to help identify problems and to also determine ways to solve them; failure to provide a timely and effective dispute resolution mechanism increases the risk of non-compliance and may result in a failure to the duty to accommodate. We did not find any such mechanism in place, and we are recommending that a feedback mechanism be put in place and communicated to the students.

«Persons with disabilities might be expected to first avail themselves of outside resources available to them when making accommodation requests to an employer or service provider. However, such resources should most appropriately meet the accommodation needs of the individual, including respect for dignity.»<sup>8</sup> This means that the students are expected to cooperate with the University officials and their respective Ministry of

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<sup>6</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission, «Policy and guidelines on disability and the duty to accommodate» (November 23, 2000) 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission, «Guidelines on accessible education» (2004, Revised 2009) 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission, «Policy and guidelines on disability and the duty to accommodate» (November 23, 2000) 26-27.

Education officials, to follow the process that has been put in place in order to obtain the necessary funds to cover the cost of accommodation. Most students who attend the University of Ottawa live in the Province of Ontario or Québec. The respective Ministry of Education of these provinces have very different processes in place to obtain the financial support for accommodation. This has caused problems for the students residing in Québec as well as for the University. We will be examining this question more fully later in the report.

The University must also comply with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005*. This is a unique legislation in Canada, and it requires that the service providers take a proactive approach rather than just reacting to a request for accommodation. The goal of this legislation is to make Ontario accessible by 2025 through the development of accessibility standards. Universities must comply with these standards, and more specifically the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Services* that came into force on January 2008. The next standards to be published will be of great relevance to students with hearing disabilities; they are related to communication and information, at the core of the integration and full inclusion of these students. The message is clear, it is not sufficient to respond albeit positively to a request for accommodation, leaving the responsibility to the students. Institutions must review accessibility of all their services systematically without waiting for a request for accommodation. To illustrate this point, we no longer wait for a person in a wheelchair to ask for a ramp to be able to enter a building and when we build sidewalks, we build a slope to allow persons in wheelchairs to cross the street. A similar approach is needed for students with a hearing disability.

## **INFORMATION FROM OTHER SOURCES (NON LEGISLATIVE)**

We have also reviewed reports prepared by other sources that focus more specifically on the need and the duty to accommodate students who are deaf or hard of hearing. As you will see in the information that we have extracted from these sources, students who are deaf or hard of hearing are still facing many barriers to achieve full integration and participation in universities.

### **Information from the Canadian Hearing Society (2003-2004):**

A 2004 study conducted by the Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) «reported that while 25% of the Canadian population faces some degree of hearing loss, numbers show that a majority of this population does not access post-secondary education. Only 2% of Deaf

and 2.7% Hard of hearing Canadians held university degrees, as compared to 14% of the general population. Only 8% of deaf and hard of hearing Canadians obtained any kind of post-secondary education. »<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Canadian Hearing Society found that students who are deaf or hard of hearing take between 7 to 10 years to graduate from a university and incur between \$16,200 to \$34,200 more cost than non-disabled students.<sup>10</sup> The data is from a 2004 study, we did not find any more recent data.

Interestingly, the CHS reported a dramatic decline in deaf and hard of hearing student applicants to colleges and universities.<sup>11</sup> The CHS points out various barriers for these students in Post-Secondary education in Canada. It would be useful for the University to take into account the findings in this report in examining its accessibility policy.

CHS identified a number of barriers that students who are deaf or hard of hearing face during their attendance at colleges and universities: confusion over complicated processes of applying to funding, lack of student orientation or student handbook on support services available, unfamiliarity of students coming from municipal schools to use accommodations such as interpreters, insufficient pool of qualified interpreters and specialized tutors and TTY machines, as well as lack of awareness from the general population including instructors and students.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Accommodating Students with Hearing Losses in Post-Secondary Settings- A research Report Conducted for SDSS (2005)**

The authors of this 2005 report from the University of Alberta's Western Canadian Centre of Studies in Deafness- David Peikoff Chair of Deafness Studies, Debra Russell and Robin Demko, conducted a more thorough research of the experience of deaf students in their University, including the technology available for this population. We would encourage the University officials to review this report, if they have not already done so, to examine their findings, suggestions and recommendations, many of which I am convinced would benefit the students who are deaf or hard of hearing at the University of Ottawa.

In their literature review, they quoted Schroeder, Watson, and Ashore (2003) as reporting that « if the academic and social needs of students with hearing losses were not

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<sup>9</sup> Debra Russell and Robin Demko, «Accommodating Students with Hearing Losses in Post-Secondary Settings, A Research Report Conducted for SDSS », Western Canadian Centre of Studies in Deafness and the David Peikoff Chair of Deafness Studies (July 2005) 8.

<sup>10</sup> The Canadian Hearing Society, «Response of The Canadian hearing Society to the Ministers of Finance and National Revenue's Technical Advisory Committee on Tax Measures for persons with Disabilities (The Canadian hearing Society: Toronto, August 2003) 16.

<sup>11</sup> The Canadian Hearing Society, «Status Report on Deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing Ontario Students in Post-Secondary Institutions » (The Canadian hearing Society: Toronto, Feb 2004) 22.

<sup>12</sup> The Canadian Hearing Society, «Status Report on Deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing Ontario Students in Post-Secondary Institutions» 17-20.

appropriately addressed, they were more likely to drop out before the completion of the degree. Academic needs include but are not limited to:

- Teacher preparation in order to provide a conducive learning environment for the individual needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing,
- Enrichment of student language skills thereby facilitating greater academic achievement.
- Strengthening graduates' job preparedness thereby increasing the probability of securing employment on graduation. »<sup>B</sup>

This information is important and illustrates the comprehensive perspective that the University and Student Associations must take in pursuing the full integration and participation of this population of students.

## **FINDINGS FROM OUR REVIEW**

### **Population**

The University of Ottawa has approximately 1200 students officially identified as requiring accommodation out of a total population of approximately 44000 students, representing about 3% of the total University population. The provincial average of disabled students in post secondary education institutions is 5% . In the fall 2010, 34 students with a hearing loss identified themselves at Access Service, 16 of these students requested some form of interpretation services.

We hesitate to identify these 34 students as having English or French as their first language, because while some would identify English or French, others would more likely identify their sign language as their first language and French or English as second languages. This illustrates very well the need to individualize the accommodation process. Access Service has a good process in place to assess the needs based on the individual situations and to recommend the suitable accommodation.

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<sup>13</sup> Debra Russell and Robin Demko, «Accommodating Students with Hearing Losses in Post-Secondary Settings, A Research Report Conducted for SDSS », Western Canadian Centre of Studies in Deafness and the David Peikoff Chair of Deafness Studies (July 2005) 8-9.

## **Methodology**

On our behalf, Access Service sent a questionnaire to those students who had identified themselves as having a hearing disability. Five students responded to the survey. This process was followed to protect the confidentiality of the students who had self-identified to SASS for accommodation purposes.

The questionnaire provided the students the opportunity to comment on all aspects of university life, academic and non-academic. The return rate is low, and we do not provide quantitative results from the questionnaires. We do not consider that the low response rate constitutes a barrier for the report. Our intention was to find areas of improvements, not rate services already available. However the low response rate indicates to us that for future such inquiries or surveys, the questionnaire format may not be the best means to reach students, and other approaches, such as discussion groups facilitated by interpreters may be more useful.

In addition to the questionnaire sent to students, we also communicated with a number of other Canadian universities to identify best practices.

We also interviewed a number of University and Student Associations officials who provide service to these students. We took into account the information that we collected while examining the complaints that had been brought to us by some students who are deaf or hard of hearing in the fall 2010.

### **a) Process to obtain financial support**

The complaints that were brought to our attention were in part related to the complicated process students had to follow to obtain the necessary funding from the provincial Ministries of Education, particularly for students from Québec. Since we began this review, Access Service modified and clarified the process and has simplified it significantly. SFUO's Centre for Equity and Human Rights provided feedback and suggestions to improve the process. At this point, we think that the University has done all it can within the constraints of the process imposed by the Ministry of Education in Québec in particular. We do encourage the University to approach the Ministry in Québec to negotiate a different arrangement similar to the one in Ontario, and similar to the process that other Québec universities have put in place. We have provided information to SASS on our findings from other universities in Québec to facilitate the negotiation of better arrangements with the Québec government. In the meantime, the process is simple enough and Access Service provides adequate support to allow all students to obtain the available funding with minimal paperwork and effort. The remaining irritant is related to the process followed by the Ministry of Education in Québec who funds the students directly, and then requires the students to remit that amount to the University. The Universities in

Québec are bypassing this process as it had caused them and the students numerous problems, including accumulated debts by students.

## **b) Communication**

It is not surprising that when we examine issues that are related to the full integration and participation of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, issues of communication emerge. Methods of communication that are based on written text are not problematic of course, but all other interactions where we rely on voice in the classroom and in all other aspects of university life must be considered and adapted. The role of professors is critical to the integration of these students, and they must carefully plan the delivery of the course and pay attention to all aspects of communication throughout the session. Access Service should be available to faculty and staff to help understand the accommodation needs and to provide advice and expertise and services when required. Effective communication between faculties and Access Service is essential to ensure that the accommodation needs are addressed; for instance, when a professor is replaced by another, a process should be in place to ensure that the new professor is made aware of the needs of the students. In ensuring good communication, attention should be paid to clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the process, Access Service team, the interpreters, Faculty members, etc... In the absence of clarity of roles, expectations are not well managed; processes are not followed resulting in frustrations and conflicts.

A good communication process includes a feedback or complaint handling process as well. When in place, it prevents the escalation of conflicts by resolving the matters as they arise. We have noticed that some of the problems encountered in the fall 2010 were in part caused by communication problems and a lack of a good feedback/ complaint process.

## **c) Training of personnel**

The Council of Ontario Universities has developed an elearning program, *Accessible Customer Service eLearning*, which has been made available to all University of Ottawa personnel. It is very easy to access, it requires about 90 minutes to complete and is a good tool to understand the obligations and the process of accommodation. As of December 22, 2010, 6.3% of Faculty, 22.8% of administrative academic personnel and 46.4% of university administrative personnel have taken this training.<sup>14</sup> Special attention should be paid to increasing the rate of completion of the training particularly by Faculty who, of all University personnel, one could argue, have the most contact with students and the most impact on their academic success.

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<sup>14</sup> Government of Ontario, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005  
[http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws\\_statutes\\_05a11\\_e.htm](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_05a11_e.htm) (accessed May 3rd, 2011)

#### **d) Observed gaps in accommodation and policy**

In its policy on Accessibility, the University of Ottawa states that it «complies with all applicable federal, provincial and municipal legislation on accessibility and with the standards specified under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA, 2005). »<sup>15</sup>. The content of the policy is minimal and in our view it is not sufficiently comprehensive to respond to the need to be more proactive. An earlier policy dating back to 1995 has been removed from the University website and has not yet been replaced. As well the last Accessibility Plan for the University dates back to 2007; it is likely that this plan needs to be updated. A more comprehensive policy is necessary to ensure that personnel are well informed of their responsibilities and that the institution takes a proactive approach.

The process to provide the required accommodation is a dynamic one, and requires the institution to regularly review its practices, listen to feedback from the students, and keep current on technological progress. It is a process that requires a proactive approach from both the University and the Student Associations. We did not examine all services offered to students to determine how accommodation was provided. Based on our discussions with officials, our own involvement in the resolution of complaints brought to us and a review of some services provided, we believe that both the University and the Student Associations should undertake a comprehensive review of its services to ensure that students who are deaf or hard of hearing are fully integrated in the University community. In order to mobilize faculties and services, policy and procedures should be published. These would be beneficial to clarify roles and responsibilities and ensure that students with a hearing disability no longer encounter situations where for example, those responsible to provide academic or non-academic type services are unable or unsure about their responsibility to find interpretations services or other necessary accommodation. The role of the Access Services' Learning Specialists in SASS is pivotal to the process of providing the required accommodation to the students and professors should be encouraged to consult these experts on matters related to accommodation. The collaboration between the students, the professor and the University's expert, the Learning Specialist in Access Services is key.

We provide the following examples to illustrate our views that more work needs to be done to achieve barrier free access to services and information:

1) The University uses its website [www.uottawa.ca](http://www.uottawa.ca) to communicate important information to students including its policies and regulations, frequently asked questions, as well as the location and services available to students. The website also contains some videos. We did not find any closed captioning of the videos; this means that many of the students with a

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<sup>15</sup> University of Ottawa, Policy on Accessibility <http://www.uottawa.ca/accessibility/policy.html> (accessed May 3rd, 2011)

hearing disability do not have access to this information. Alternative ways to reach the students with a hearing disability should systematically be considered when developing these kinds of tools. In our view, it is not sufficient to wait for a deaf student to ask for accommodation.

2) We tested accessibility by asking the question: how does a deaf student access Protection services? Our intention is not to single out Protection services but to use this as an example to support our recommendation that more needs to be done to ensure the full integration and participation of these students.

We had to call different people to obtain an answer to our basic question of how hearing disabled students can access protection and emergency services. We were told that a deaf student who is in an emergency can use the blue phone because it has a camera. This does not in our view provide the students with access to the protection services offered by the university to all its students. How do they communicate with the person at the other end of the camera-phone? How does that person give them instruction? We did not find satisfactory measures put in place to ensure accessibility for these students.

At the same time, Protection Services informed us that they are presently carrying out a test on a new emergency notification system that has the ability to email all students, send visual alerts to the screens of university computers (i.e. labs etc...), and have an audible messaging capability using the university's phone system. If such system is implemented, this would be a considerable improvement to ensure accessibility and implement the necessary measures. There will continue to be a need for a systematic review by Protection Services of all the accessibility of all their services to ensure inclusion.

Our intention is not to single out Protection Services, but to use this example to illustrate the point that there needs to be a comprehensive review of the accessibility of services on an on-going basis. For instance, when a video is produced, the question of how to reach students with hearing loss needs to be addressed automatically.

3) We looked at a sample service provided by SFUO, the How to get a Walk service. As was the case for the University, we did not want to single out this service in particular but to use this as an example only. The brochure for the Foot Patrol contains the following paragraph to inform the reader on how to access the service:

**“How to Get a Walk**

If you wish to be walked home during our operations hours, please stop by our office, call 6B-562-5800 ext 7433 or ask any team wearing Foot Patrol yellow vests. A Foot Patrol team will accompany you to or from any location, on or off campus, within a 45-minute walking distance.”

While I would expect that if a student who is deaf or hard of hearing walked into the office in person or approached a team wearing Foot Patrol yellow vests they would not be turned away, we think it is necessary to be more proactive and be specific on how services to deaf students are provided. For example, SFUO can ask Access Service to email its list of

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing clear instructions concerning this service at the beginning of each academic year. This proactive approach would ensure that the barriers are identified and addressed and that the students feel welcome to ask for the service. We refer to this approach as providing an “active offer” rather than waiting for a request.

#### **e) Sign interpretation**

Full integration and participation means barrier-free access to all services for students with a hearing disability. Sign interpretation, perhaps the most difficult to arrange because of the relatively small number of interpreters, is required by some students, and must be provided by the University and the Student Associations. There is evidence that this is not always happening in the most efficient way, leading to frustration and barriers for the students.

The Access Service of SASS is fully accessible for the students who have a hearing disability. Two coordinators are on staff on a part-time basis to ensure liaison and service delivery to students with a hearing loss, one used LSQ French and one uses English-ASL.

Their mandate is defined as providing accommodation for academic needs only; this causes problems when the students need accommodation in non-academic activities for services such as protection, students’ accounts, attendance at conference etc... Then there is confusion over who arranges the sign interpretation services and who pays. To obtain the services of sign interpreters, at times we were told to call the Canadian Hearing Society directly; sometimes to call the University coordinators at Access Service, at other times, the students helped us arrange the services.

Because this population is relatively small, it is essential in our opinion to centralize the provision of sign interpretation services for all academic and non academic needs. To leave it to each Faculty and each service areas does not work well. Good cooperation must exist between Access Service and the Faculty and staff, and we think that Access Service should become the Centre of Expertise and Service for all university related accommodation needs of these students. Of course, they must be properly funded to do so.

As far as Student Associations are concerned, SFUO has a Centre for Students with Disabilities with a budget in place to provide for access to all their services, including sign interpretation services and other accommodation needs. A levy from the general student population is raised to cover the cost. We were not able to find out how much of the budget is attributed to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. We think that it is essential that SFUO reaches out to these students to seek their input on how to better meet their needs, inform them of the funds available to them to ensure that they can access all SFUO services and activities. A more proactive approach is required.

#### **f) Orientation week as an opportunity**

Respondents stated that they did not receive an orientation when they first arrived at the University. They also stated that the only communication they have is with professors and support staff, that they did not participate in student mentoring, and rarely participate in student associations' welcome activities. Since we did receive only 5 completed questionnaires, we cannot definitely state that this is the experience of all or the majority of the students who have a hearing disabilities. We encourage the University and SFUO to examine its approach to orientation of new students to ensure that students with a hearing loss are not excluded from these activities because of barriers in communication.

We recommend that special effort be made by both the University and the Student Associations to reach out to these students to offer them better access to the orientation process. The numbers are small and it should be possible to individualize the approach to ensure better integration and participation.

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## BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER UNIVERSITIES

In our discussion with other Canadian universities, we did come across some practices which we believe are interesting and worth considering in pursuing the goal of full integration and participation of students who are deaf or hard of hearing at the University of Ottawa.

- The University of British Columbia distributes information kit to new students including basic information on the accommodation process for disability; most of the information is on line.
- Carleton University's accommodation Office, the Paul Menton Centre, provides a centralized access to accommodation services as well as a student and faculty handbook. Interpretation services are paid from the Centre's budget.
- The University of Mount Royal in Alberta also has centralized the funding for the accommodation cost.
- The University of British Columbia provides sign language interpretation in the classroom during the first hour of an exam, allowing the student the same access to questions and answers.
- Carleton University offers ASL sign language courses in the Linguistic and Applied Languages Studies programs in their regular curriculum.
- The University of Alberta offers a Master in Deaf Education and two faculties, Education and Arts accept courses in sign language as credits in their program. The Faculty of Medicine offers non-credit courses in sign language.
- The University of Alberta automatically provides for sign language interpretation services for its Convocation ceremonies.
- Carleton University has closed captioned over 100 videos in 2009-2010. Their Centre, The Paul Menton Centre, also manages a centralized budget for all students with disabilities. They work one on one with the professors to ensure accessibility of all course material.
- The University Western Ontario has a number of very well thought out policies on accessibility at <http://accessibility.uwo.ca/policies.htm> ; the website is very well designed and useful.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The University should develop a more comprehensive policy on Accessibility and Accommodation which includes roles and responsibilities and increases awareness of the responsibility of the institution to achieve the full integration and participation of students with a hearing disability. It should also update its 2007 Accessibility Plan.
2. The University should undertake a systematic review of all its services to ensure accessibility for students with a hearing disability and develop an accessibility plan of action. Gaps, such as those identified for Protection services should be addressed immediately.
3. The University should encourage staff and Faculty to complete the on-line training currently available to increase awareness and understanding of the accommodation process and of their responsibilities and establish a timetable to reach 100% completion rate.
4. SFUO should review how it reaches this student population to ensure that they receive the services they are entitled to by January 2012, as required by ADOA. We encourage SFUO representatives to adopt a proactive approach to this client population and to remedy accessibility gaps such as the one identified for the Foot Patrol service.
5. When using audio tools, such as videos on its website, the University should ensure that it has an appropriate alternative way to communicate the information to the students with a hearing disability.
6. A comprehensive and centralized service should be offered for all University-related services for students with hearing disabilities, both for academic and non-academic requirements. It would make sense to consider mandating Access Service to offer such a service, provided that it is properly resourced to do so. It should also be emphasized that collaboration and consultation between the students, the professors and Access Services' Learning Specialists is a key component to successful accommodation.
7. Access Service should adopt and communicate clear guidelines and procedures for accessing services for academic and non-academic services. The procedures should include a feedback mechanism with a simple and efficient complaint handling process.
8. The University should negotiate with the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec a simplified process to obtain direct funding instead of requiring the students to remit to the University.

9. SFUO and the University should reach out to students with a hearing disability to offer them a comprehensive and adapted orientation to the University upon admission with respect to their respective services.

## CONCLUSION

Accommodation is a shared responsibility between provider and recipient of the education service to identify needs and overcome challenges. Legislations identify clearly that education providers have a duty to accommodate students with disabilities including deafness in order to enable equal access to their services based on principles of dignity, individualization and inclusion.

We have consulted a number of different sources to frame a picture of how both the University and SFUO were integrating students with hearing disability. We have come across a number of very dedicated and helpful people who are committed to improving the situation of these students. There is no doubt in our mind that the gaps we identified point to the need to pay more attention and to be more proactive in achieving the full integration of these students and remove all barriers. Largely it would seem that the institution is relying on accommodating students following requests. We think that they need to move towards a more proactive approach, implementing the Ontario standards, mobilizing personnel, clarifying roles and responsibilities and reaching out to these students. In our view, it is not a lack of good will that is at issue, it is a lack of focus.

We hope that our report will contribute to support the full integration and participation of students with a hearing disability in the institution and in our society. We have been privileged to work with some students with a hearing disability and know that they want to participate and contribute fully.

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