Huron

Centre for Undergraduate
Research Learning

CURL Accessibility Guidelines

Responsibility: CURL Steering Committee

Effective date: 25 February 2021

Supersedes: new

Approved by: CURL Steering Committee

Purpose and Scope:

The purpose of this document is to clearly, concisely, and publicly identify support for accessibility in the programming, opportunities, and operations of the Centre for Undergraduate Research Learning (CURL) at Huron.

This document is also intended to offer a set of guidelines that identify and fill gaps between existing institutional policies guiding accessibility in CURL, and specific accessibility issues arising in CURL programming and operations. The information in this document should not be considered a replacement for other relevant institutional policies.

CURL recognizes that people and the barriers they face are dynamic and shifting. CURL is therefore committed to updating accessibility policies, procedures, and communications regularly, and to seeking input and responding to feedback.

Accessibility Statement:

CURL values all students. CURL exists to serve students and foster their academic growth; this can only be successful if every student has an equitable and enjoyable opportunity to learn.

CURL acknowledges that educational institutions and their contained programs can perpetuate and renew the marginalization faced by the disabled community and people with non-normative access needs. CURL is committed to identifying and dismantling barriers and working to build a program that is logistically, financially, and academically accessible to as many students as possible.

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In order to welcome, encourage, and support all students, CURL will strive to ensure that students:
- have equal opportunity to access, engage with, and enjoy CURL programming every step of the way—from web content to funding opportunities and events,
- are offered whatever accessibility-related accommodations CURL can provide—without the validity of their needs being undermined,
- are treated in a manner that respects their intelligence, independence, and dignity, and
- feel welcomed, trusted, and valued by the CURL community.

Responsibility & Accountability:

CURL is made up of faculty, staff, and students at Huron who have a shared interest in participating in and supporting undergraduate research learning opportunities. Responsibility and accountability for CURL's commitment to accessibility is shared by all participants in CURL, but with different roles as follows.

The CURL Faculty Director and Steering Committee Members are responsible for setting policy and ensuring adherence to it, including supporting faculty, staff, and students in applying accessibility policies, developing a community of practice around accessibility in academic life at Huron, and seeking and responding to feedback relating to accessibility in CURL. The Steering Committee is ultimately accountable for upholding and advancing this policy.

Huron staff and student interns supporting CURL are responsible for proposing and implementing solutions to increase accessibility in CURL programming, events, and opportunities, including providing ongoing support and education around elements of accessibility for the CURL community.

Faculty mentors in CURL are responsible for discussing and implementing individual accommodations with students they are mentoring, seeking support from the CURL Faculty Director as appropriate, and for participating in and contributing to the larger community of practice around accessibility at Huron.

Student participants in CURL are responsible for discussing individual accommodations with faculty mentors and staff, as appropriate, for providing feedback on accessibility in CURL, and for abiding by accessibility guidelines provided.

Accessibility in Practice:

1. Programming

CURL programming will utilize Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices wherever possible. CURL will intentionally develop multiple access points for students. Programming and opportunities will incorporate a broad and inclusive understanding of undergraduate research, as per the Definition of Undergraduate Research Learning (see document below).

Students seeking individual accommodations in order to benefit from CURL programming will be supported by CURL staff and faculty. CURL will not require formal documentation in order to develop individual accommodations. When accommodations are required, CURL will follow the Senate Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities (see link below). CURL respects the privacy of its students. Staff and faculty will only disclose an accommodated student's identity and disability amongst each other if disclosure is required to ensure the accommodation request can be met or is otherwise used to improve CURL's accessibility-related resources.

2. Communications

Accessibility-related efforts relating to CURL communications (emails, websites, ads, etc.) will include, but are not limited to, the following:
- ads, website, emails, policies, etc. will be composed in plain language with minimal jargon,
- accessibility features such as video subtitles, image descriptions, and screen-reader-appropriate coding structure will be used on website and social media content, and
- print communications will be produced and distributed with attention to accessible formats.

3. Events

Accessibility-related efforts relating to CURL events (conferences, workshops, etc.) will include, but are not limited to, the following:
- event programs, registration packages, schedule posters, etc. will be located at heights that are appropriate for accessing from a wheelchair,
- event registration forms will include an optional space within which applicants can describe their personal accessibility needs,
- prior to conferences, CURL will provide student presenters with guidelines for creating accessible presentations, and
- during conferences, CURL will book a nearby room to operate as a quiet, sensory-friendly break space.

4. Funding

Accessibility-related efforts relating to CURL funding opportunities, including awards, bursaries, fellowships, etc., will include, but are not limited to, the following:
- application processes will, as much as possible, be transparent and open to ongoing revision in response to feedback,
- CURL student funding will include both competitive and non-competitive opportunities,
- student funding opportunities will be open to all current Huron students, and will not include grades or full-time course load as part of their eligibility requirements,
- individual requests for accommodation in an application process (such as alternate formats for application materials) will be accommodated as staffing resources allow,
- application forms will, as much as possible, be composed in plain language with minimal jargon, and will be regularly updated in response to feedback,

- where staffing resources allow, feedback will be offered to unsuccessful applicants,
- individual requests for accommodation, such as revised timelines once an award has been received, will be agreed on in an ongoing way between a student and faculty mentor, and
- CURL-funded student research outputs will be conceived broadly, as per the Definition of Undergraduate Research Learning.

5. Online Environment

An online campus environment in the context of COVID-19 presents possibilities and challenges in relation to accessibility. CURL recognizes that remote learning has the potential to exacerbate some existing barriers to access, to dismantle other barriers, and to introduce new ones. Accessibility-related efforts relating to how CURL operates in a remote learning context will include, but are not limited to, the following:
- events (workshops, conferences, etc.) will include asychronous components wherever possible to allow for flexibility in participation,
- deadlines will include some flexibility wherever possible to account for unpredictable circumstances including personal circumstances and technology access,
- support will be provided for student researchers and faculty mentors navigating multiple pathways through the online research environment,
- opportunities for learning new skills in the online environment will be supported (e.g. social media conference, research skills bursaries), and
- new opportunities for meaningful engagement in spite of the online context will be created.

CURL will revisit this when the remote learning context is past, considering what practices remain relevant and value-added in a return to an in-person campus environment.

Related Policies and Guidelines:

About Ontario's Accessibility Laws, including AODA

Definition of Undergraduate Research Learning

Huron's Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation – Customer Service Policy

Huron's Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation - Statement and Policy

Pichette, J., Brumwell, S., Rizk, J. (2020) Improving the Accessibility of Remote Higher Education: Lessons from the Pandemic and Recommendations. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

Western Senate Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities