Preamble
At McMaster University, students with disabilities can face additional barriers to accessing and succeeding in education. In order to ensure equitable access for all, it is important that steps be taken by the University and the provincial government to eliminate these barriers. The MSU believes that by making changes in various areas including physical barriers, universal design of learning and courses, student life, university transition, university services, and funding & financial aid, we can make McMaster University a more accessible university for all.

Principles
The MSU believes that:

● All students should be able to succeed in their academic pursuits and environments, free from any barriers or obstacles.
● All needs of students with disabilities should be taken into account in the development of courses at McMaster University.
● Informed discussions surrounding disability theory create a community of ideas and work to reduce stigma at McMaster.
● All aspects of student life extending beyond academics should be accessible to all students, including (but not limited to) extracurricular seminars, skill-building workshops, mentoring opportunities, etc.
● Adequate information on Student Accessibility Services (SAS) should be available and publicized to all prospective students throughout the University registration process.
● It is the duty of the McMaster University to provide accommodations to students who require them.
● Students should not be forced to disclose any diagnosis (including mental health diagnoses) to McMaster University in order to receive accommodations.
● Students should not be mandated to disclose that they have a disability unless necessary to academic accommodations.
● Students should be making informed and autonomous decisions surrounding the accommodations they receive.
● Students should be able to access support and resources from SAS in a timely manner particularly when they involving changing or accessing new accommodations.
● Academic accommodations should be centralized throughout the University so there is no confusion when attempting to access them.
● Students should have access to timely and sufficient mental health care on campus offered through the University.
● Students with disabilities must be provided with additional financial assistance to meet the higher costs associated with obtaining their education and documenting their disability.
● Student Accessibility Services should be equipped to adequately ensure the success of all students on campus with disabilities.
Concerns
The MSU is concerned that:

● Inclement weather conditions pose significant transportation barriers for students with physical disabilities.
● Students with disabilities struggle with physical campus accessibility barriers that prevent this demographic from learning effectively.
● DARTS bus drivers are unaware that the MSU Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) Bus Pass is compatible with DARTS.
● The course instruction delivered by course instructors and teaching assistants is not uniformly accessible to students.
● Given that methods of online learning, including designs and deliveries, are often incompatible with diverse learning styles, students with disabilities struggle to thrive in these models.
● Faculty and course instructors are not required to upload course syllabi online, which impedes student access to essential course information.
● There are currently no formal opportunities at McMaster for education on disability theory.
● Students with disabilities often struggle to participate in events hosted by faculties, University working groups, Student Affairs, Student Success Centre, Residence Life, and more, due to barriers of structure and engagement.
● Information on Student Accessibility Services and relevant summer transition programs like the Shifting Gears Program are not effectively communicated to incoming students.
● Students often avoid disclosing their disabilities due to the stigma associated with disabilities.
● Forced disclosure of a diagnosis to SAS is a barrier to accessing accommodations.
● There are several barriers associated with the current letter signing process that prevent students from accessing their accommodations or create unsafe situations.
● Students cite that they were unaware of an accommodation offered through SAS that would have benefited them had they known about it sooner.
● Yearly intake appointments for individuals are often unnecessary and increase the wait time for students who more regularly see their SAS counsellor.
● The process for retroactive accommodations is currently unclear and varies from faculty office to faculty office creating confusion.
● Over 22,000 undergraduate students, as well as additional graduate students at McMaster are serviced by the Student Wellness Centre. Students experience extensive wait times.
● There is a lack of funding available for which to hire additional counsellors and mental health professionals.
● There are additional costs associated with receiving education at McMaster University as a student with a disability.
● Many students are unaware of scholarships for students with disabilities.
Wait times and cost for psychosocial assessments can prevent some students from receiving accommodation when they need it.

Student Accessibility Services often grapples with insufficient resources and excess demands.

**Recommendations**

- Where possible, McMaster University should strive to create proactive solutions to weather-related barriers on campus.
- Students with disabilities should register for their classes on MOSAIC before students without disabilities.
- The University should communicate effectively with students when there is an accessibility barrier on campus, such as deep snow on a ramp.
- There should be full compliance with all provincial accessibility laws and legislations at McMaster University.
- DARTS should increase their number of approved drop-off centers on campus.
- DARTS should ensure that all bus drivers are aware that the MSU Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) Bus Pass is compatible with DARTS.
- Methods and modules of online learning should be accessible for students with disabilities.
- All course instructors at McMaster University should upload course syllabi online where all students can easily access the documentation.
- McMaster University should adopt a universal instructional design philosophy when appropriate where accessibility is built into instructional standards and campus infrastructure outside of traditional spaces for students with disabilities.
- Disabilities studies courses should be taught at McMaster University.
- Professors and teaching assistants should have formalized training on classroom accessibility and disability theory.
- University bodies need to embrace best practices surrounding accessibility in all events being offered to students, by following accessibility best practices.
- Both a University representative from Student Accessibility Services (SAS) or from the Office of Human Rights and Equity Service (HRES) and a MSU representative from MSU Maccess should hold a seat on the Welcome Week Planning and Implementation Committee (WWPIC).
- McMaster University should send information on disability services, summer transition programs, and disability accommodation requirements to all students in the acceptance package.
- McMaster University should ensure that Summer Transition Programs meet existing best practices and cater to the needs of all students with disabilities.
- McMaster University should pursue comprehensive training strategies for faculty and staff to help reduce or eliminate stigma as a barrier for students accessing services.
● Student Accessibility Services should provide accommodations based on barriers to learning.

● SAS should not mandate students to discuss their accommodation plan directly with their professor through the letter signing process instead options should be presented and the student should decide which plan is the best for them. Options should include: the student may email their letters to the professor, SAS may email the letters to the professor, the student may deliver the letters in person.

● Information about accommodations should be available on the SAS website and an optional form should be circulated on the SAS website and in office that asks questions to help students consider what supports would be useful to them ahead of time, so they can make an informed decision after being aware of the available options.

● Retroactive accommodations for students registered with SAS should be provided by SAS and not faculty offices.

● There should a University wide policy on what circumstances qualify for retroactive accommodations and how they are offered.

● The University should implement a minimum ratio of one to one thousand counsellors to students/appointments.

● The University should hire a greater number of support professionals available on campus during times of high stress.

● The provincial government should provide additional funding to McMaster University to hire more counsellors and mental health professionals.

● There should be greater support for students with mental illness and complex mental health diagnosis through increased availability of professionals with specialized skills.

● The University should introduce formal policy on student leave for mental health concerns.

● McMaster University should offer additional funding or supports for students with disabilities who require the use of Personal Support Workers to succeed as students at McMaster University.

● The government should increase the amount of funding provided to OSDs (Student Accessibility Services) to better reflect their time and resource demands and to increase the outreach efforts necessary to connect all students with recognized or self-identified students.

**Further Reading:**
For more information about University Accessibility, visit the General Policies section of the MSU website to read the full Policy Paper.