Research and Education in Accessibility, Design, and Innovation (READi)
Integrating Post-Secondary Training in Accessibility

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Introduction

• Approximately 1 in 7 Canadians is living with a disability [1]
• Aging population is shifting demographics, increasing the number of Canadians living with a disability
• Barriers can prevent people from fully participating in society, especially people with disabilities; barriers may be:
  • physical or architectural
  • information or communications
  • technology
  • attitudinal
  • organizational or systemic
• Accessibility refers to the design and delivery of products, facilities, and services to be independently used by people, regardless of ability

57% of all computer users can likely benefit from accessible technology, with this percentage increasing due to the ageing population [2]

Motivation

• Human rights
• UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
• Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
• Legal and regulatory obligations
• Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
• Emerging economies
• Economic
  • Adoption of design principles for accessibility also represents “a $2 trillion business opportunity for startups, entrepreneurs, and innovators” in North America [3];
  • In Ontario alone, increased participation of people with disabilities has the potential for increases in employment and economic activity of $1 billion and $11 billion, respectively [2];
• Opportunity for innovation, which can establish new clusters of accessibility-focused businesses [3][4]
• Social
  • Participating fully in community life, work, and art & leisure
  • Accessing information and education
  • Caring for themselves and their families

“Accessibility can no longer be considered an optional competency”
- RGD Accessible Design [6]

READi Training Program

READi is an integrated solutions-oriented training program employing applied and experiential learning. Through active collaborations with businesses, non-government organizations, accessibility experts, and people with disabilities, students engage in an interdisciplinary environment that includes a diverse number of end-users in co-designing.

The READi training program will develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to create an accessibility mindset that will stimulate innovation and support the growing number of global markets defined by accessibility requirements. READi will help elevate Canada as a long-term accessibility leader, and create a more inclusive society.

“[Accessibility] is the kind of knowledge universities should be adding to their design and engineering curricula. And it’s not just Yahoo — every Silicon Valley company is on the hunt for just these kinds of candidates”
- Larry Goldberg, Yahoo’s Director of Accessible Media [7].

An 8-month interdisciplinary experience, focused on “real-world” accessibility issues, identified by an external READi partner. Members from READi partners actively participate in the Action Team Projects (ATP), employing co-design rather than a traditional designer-client relationship. Action Team Projects are not expected to fully solve complex accessibility issues (they are often “weird problems”); rather, ideas and concept from the ATPs will help “move the needle forward”.

A primary purpose of the ATP is learning and training through problem-based and experiential learning (“learning by doing”).

Provides foundational knowledge, exploring interdisciplinary approaches for incorporating accessible, inclusive, and human-centered design principles into the research, design, and development of products, information, and environments that can be used by all people, regardless of ability. Introduces a range of current and evolving perspectives on disability and accessibility that are relevant to taking a lead in bringing accessibility to the forefront in the areas of engineering, ICT, and design.

Involves external organizations, active in accessibility, and READi members and partners to connect and exchange information. Includes students presenting the final ATP work and a summary of the their learning journey. A keynote speaker provides a unique perspective and insight on accessibility, nationally and/or internationally. For the new cohort of READi trainees, the symposium will enable them to immediately integrate and participate in the READi network.

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