UNBC | UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

UNBC Accessibility Plan
2024 - 2026

Contents

Introduction

Land Honouring

Since time immemorial, Indigenous Peoples have walked gently on the diverse traditional territories where the University of Northern British Columbia community is privileged to learn and work. We are committed to building and nurturing relationships with Indigenous Peoples, we acknowledge their traditional lands, and we are grateful to them.

The **Prince George** campus is situated on the unceded traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, part of the Dakelh peoples' territory.

The **South-Central** campus in Quesnel is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the Lhtako Dene Nation, Nazko First Nation, Lhoosk'uz Dené Nation, and ?Esdilagh First Nation. Lhtako, Nazko, and Lhoosk'uz are Dakelh peoples, and ?Esdilagh is part of the Tsilhqot'in Nation.

The **Peace River-Liard** campus in Fort St. John is situated in Treaty 8 territory on the traditional lands of the Dane-zaa peoples of the Doig River First Nation, Blueberry River First Nation, and Halfway River First Nation.

The **Northwest** campus in Terrace is situated on the unceded traditional Tsimshian territories of the Kitsumkalum and Kitselas First Nation. It includes a satellite campus in the coastal community of Prince Rupert, situated on the unceded traditional Tsimshian territories of the Lax Kw'alaams Band and Metlakatla First Nation.

Message from Leadership

It is with great pleasure that we present UNBC's inaugural Accessibility Plan, a significant milestone in our commitment to the principles of the READY Strategic Plan. Under the theme of Cultivate Curiosity one of our strategic goals is to nurture an inclusive and accessible University community. In this Accessibility Plan, we outline concrete steps and initiatives that will be implemented to improve equitable access for all members of the UNBC community. We value the input of our diverse community in shaping this comprehensive approach to accessibility. This reflects UNBC's dedication to not only envisioning but actively implementing positive changes for the future of our University.

At UNBC, we believe in the transformative influence of inclusive education that reaches out to everyone who aspires to learn, teach, and contribute. We acknowledge that diversity enriches our academic landscape, and we remain committed to ensuring everyone has equal access to the opportunities and resources that UNBC offers.

Our success as an institution is intrinsically linked to the achievements of students. Their relentless pursuit of knowledge, their ambition to create positive change, and their determined dedication to their studies inspire us all. UNBC students exemplify the very essence of UNBC, embodying the spirit of inclusion and excellence that we hold dear.

We look forward to the collective effort of the UNBC community in turning the Accessibility Plan initiatives into reality. Together, we will continue to cultivate curiosity, uphold the principles of accessibility and inclusivity, and mutually inspire one another on this transformative journey.
Sincerely,

Dr. Geoffrey W. Payne (he/him)
President & Vice-Chancellor
University of Northern British Columbia

Message from Committee Chair

I am happy to share UNBC's vision and plan for progressing accessibility and inclusivity. As the committee chair, I am deeply committed to this plan and am genuinely excited about its positive impact on UNBC and the community.

Accessibility is critical for students, employees, and visitors to UNBC's campuses. As we develop and implement accessibility initiatives and eliminate barriers, we are creating a space for deeper and more focused learning, a space for creativity and innovation, and a space to belong in higher education. This type of environment enriches learning and research and empowers each one of us to participate to our fullest potential.

We understand that progress takes time and effort, and this plan is committed to seeing accessibility initiatives come to fruition. We have a targeted and dedicated plan with specific timelines to achieve the accessibility goals necessary to create a more inclusive and thoughtful campus. No one should be left behind. Learning is for everyone, and it should function as such.

I want to thank the Accessibility Committee and community members who continue to provide feedback on accessibility at UNBC's campuses. This plan is a direct result of that feedback. Your insights and perspective are critical and valuable in the collective effort to make UNBC a more exceptional place to learn, teach, and research.

Thank you for being part of this transformative moment at UNBC and I am looking forward to what the journey brings.

With enthusiasm and gratitude,

Mindy Gobbi (she/her)
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist
University of Northern British Columbia

Executive Summary

The UNBC Accessibility Plan represents a pivotal milestone in our ongoing commitment to fostering an inclusive and accessible academic environment. The impetus behind the creation of the Accessibility Plan stems from requirements from the Accessible BC Act and the University's dedication to ensuring equitable access to education and resources for all members of the UNBC community in the READY Strategic Plan. Recognizing the priority to address barriers to accessibility, we began the planning process to enact meaningful change.

Through guidance from the Accessibility Committee and community feedback, we have identified overarching goals that guide the University's efforts, including enhancing physical and digital accessibility, promoting inclusive classrooms and workspaces, and fostering a culture of belonging.

In alignment with our commitment to tangible progress, we have outlined a series of initial steps to be implemented from 2024 - 2026. These include but are not limited to enhancing accessibility infrastructure on campus, expanding resources for students and employees with disabilities, implementing inclusive teaching practices, and providing comprehensive accessibility training for faculty and staff.

As we embark on the journey outlined in the UNBC Accessibility Plan, we are dedicated to effect positive change and dismantling barriers to accessibility. Through collaboration and innovation, we are READY to create a university community where everyone can thrive and succeed.

Committee Members

Jean Bowen	*Staff*
Kristi Boon	*Staff*
Shannon MacKay	*Staff*
Alana LaMalice	*Student*
Hannah Tench	*Student*
Lucas Middleton	*Student*
Dayana Terlesky	*Student*
Jelena Vidovic	*Student*
Annelise Dowd	*Faculty*
Kealin McCabe	*Faculty*
Clarence Hofsink	*Faculty*
Dr. Rheanna Robinson	*Faculty*

Accessibility Plan Guiding Frameworks

Areas of Focus & Objectives

Our Accessibility Plan is rooted in considering and enhancing the following areas of accessibility at UNBC:

Built Environment *(the built and natural environment):* To create an inclusive and accessible campus environment by incorporating Universal Design concepts into key aspects of the built environment, including but not limited to pathways, entrances, classrooms, washrooms, and overall access to UNBC buildings and structures.

Education: To actively reduce and eliminate stigma, stereotypes, and assumptions about and towards those with disabilities or accessibility needs by promoting awareness, consciousness, understanding, and a culture of inclusivity within UNBC.

Employment: To promote an inclusive workplace culture by minimizing barriers to employment for persons with disabilities, ensuring accommodations are promptly met, and promoting diversity and ongoing training opportunities for employees to support the full inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of employment at UNBC.

Information & Communication: To establish guidelines for information and communication that prioritize accessibility, providing a seamless experience for all members of the campus community. This includes implementing accessible digital platforms, creating inclusive communication materials, and promoting diverse communication methods.

Procurement: To explore accessible procurement practices and initiate procurement standards that meet accessibility and diverse needs.

Service Delivery: To ensure that all aspects of service delivery on campus are universally accessible, nurturing an inclusive environment where individuals with disabilities have equitable access to services on campus.

Transportation: To optimize transportation facilities and services on campus to eliminate barriers for

individuals with disabilities. This involves enhancing accessible parking facilities, ensuring reliable and inclusive transportation options, and creating accessible pathways that facilitate a reduction in barriers and an increase in access.

Principles

These principles are described as per Accessible BC Act legislation.

- **Inclusion:** All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equitably in their communities.
- **Adaptability:** Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.
- **Diversity:** Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience greatly inform the experiences of individuals. Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and the diversity within the disability community.
- **Collaboration:** Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. Accessibility plans should create opportunities for organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.
- **Self-determination:** Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.
- **Universal Design:** The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as "the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people…" An accessibility plan should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to interact with the organization.

Legislation and Existing Policies

This plan is informed by the following government legislation, UNBC's Strategic Plan, and UNBC policies:

- Accessible BC Act
- BC Human Rights Code
- Employment Standards Act
- UNBC Protection of Privacy Policy
- UNBC Hiring Equity Policy
- UNBC Respect in the Workplace Policy
- UNBC Harassment and Discrimination Policy
- UNBC Access and Accommodation for Students with Disabilities
- UNBC READY Strategic Plan

Accessibility Committee

The Office of Equity and Inclusion announced a call for interest in joining the Accessibility Committee on February 22, 2023. We had an overwhelming response from the UNBC Community. Ultimately, 16 committee members were selected in accordance with the Accessible BC Act requirements. With representation from staff, faculty, and graduate and undergraduate students. The Committee is co-chaired by two committee members. One of the co-chairs is appointed from the Office of Equity and Inclusion. The other co-chair is the Associate Vice President of People, Equity, and Inclusion. In addition to the committee members, all members of the University are welcome to attend committee meetings as community members.

Meetings of the Accessibility Committee are scheduled quarterly, with the chairs setting the meeting schedule in advance. The Committee has the flexibility to form working groups or special subcommittees to gather feedback, delve into specific topics, undertake specific tasks, or provide expert guidance in decision-making for the University.

The Accessibility Committee Terms of Reference can be viewed online.

Consultation

The consultation process is multi-phased and continuous.

- November 2023
    - Encouraging utilization of a University community feedback mechanism involved promoting it through internal emails and in-person tabling sessions. These sessions, conducted on November 21, 27, 28, and 30, engaged students, faculty, and staff at UNBC, informing them about the availability of the feedback mechanism. Accessibility committee members actively participated in these tabling efforts.
- January – April 2024
    - A draft plan will be reviewed by the President's Executive Council and the Accessibility Committee.
- May – June 2024
    - Promote plan to the University community including information on upcoming engagement sessions. Hosting engagement sessions and receiving feedback on the plan.

Feedback Mechanism

During the initial phases of formulating UNBC's Accessibility Plan a feedback mechanism was designed to support and inform the plan's further development and ongoing initiatives on campus.

The feedback mechanism is accessible through multiple forms; online, email, phone, and in-person. More information on the feedback mechanism can be found online.

All feedback through the mechanism is received by the Office of Equity and Inclusion. Any information shared with University departments regarding accessibility initiatives and recommendations is disaggregated and unidentifiable.

Our Plan

Internal Values, Service Commitment, and Vision Statement

At UNBC, we are committed to creating an inclusive and accessible environment for all members of our community. This committee is aligned with the university's **READY Strategic Plan** theme of **Cultivate Curiosity** and is grounded in the principles of equity and inclusivity and addressing ableism.

As we continue to reduce accessibility barriers and challenges, we aim to align our actions with the social model of disability. This model provides expansive and more inclusive views of access by confronting social perceptions and beliefs, in addition to barriers created by the built environment. In other words, this model sees disability as stemming from societal attitudes and physical structures rather than being solely a medical condition that needs to be "fixed." Based on the social model of disability, having a disability can be viewed as disabling when it inhibits someone from pursuing the things they desire or need to do. This perspective demonstrates and underscores the responsibility we have to each other to respond to accessibility barriers.

We will continually assess and enhance accessibility across our campuses, listening to the diverse needs of our community members. Our goal is to create an atmosphere where everyone can fully participate, engage, and succeed in their academic and professional pursuits. We are dedicated to removing barriers, promoting awareness, and promoting a culture of inclusivity.

Vision Statement for Accessibility Initiatives at UNBC:

Our vision for accessibility at UNBC is to create an environment where every person can thrive and contribute meaningfully. In our pursuit of academic excellence, we aspire to integrate accessibility as an inherent part of UNBC. Through innovative initiatives, ongoing collaboration, and a deep understanding of the diverse needs of our community, we aim to lead the way in championing accessibility and promoting a culture that celebrates the uniqueness of every individual. This involves the implementation of inclusive design principles, prioritizing accessibility in all aspects of the University, and thoughtful strategies that actively shape the University to be READY to reimagine how we educate, research, and learn so that we can lead.

Identifying Barriers

In response to valuable feedback received from students, faculty and staff, UNBC is committed to advancing accessibility across all aspects of campus life. Feedback is centered around the following barriers:
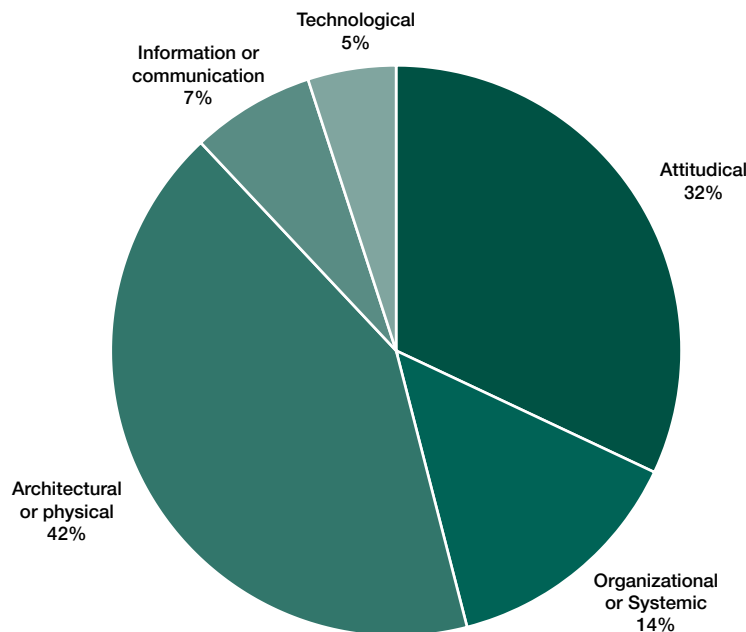
- **Attitudinal:** These are behaviours, perceptions and assumptions that discriminate against persons with disabilities. These barriers often emerge from a lack of understanding, which can lead people to ignore, to judge, or have misconceptions about a person with a disability.

- **Organizational or Systemic:** These are policies, procedures or practices that unfairly discriminate and can prevent individuals from participating fully in a situation. Organizational or systemic barriers are often put into place unintentionally.

- **Architectural or physical:** These are elements of buildings or outdoor spaces that create barriers to persons with disabilities. These barriers relate to elements such as the design of a building's stairs or doorways, the layout of rooms, or the width of halls and sidewalks.

- **Information or communication:** These are barriers that occur when sensory disabilities, such as hearing, seeing, or learning disabilities, have not been considered. These barriers relate to both the sending and receiving of information.

- **Technological:** These barriers occur when a device or technological platform is not accessible to its

intended audience and cannot be used with an assistive device. Technology can enhance the user experience, but it can also create unintentional barriers for some users. Technological barriers are often related to information and communications barriers.

These definitions can be found on accessiblecampus.ca.

As of January 2024, the feedback we've received through the feedback mechanism is primarily centered around attitudinal behaviour and built environment challenges. These early responses from the University community have fueled a targeted approach to addressing these concerns with a focus on resources, training, and assessments of the physical environment (see Chart 1). It is important to align our initiatives with legal requirements, specifically addressing service delivery and employment practices as mandated by the Government of British Columbia. Regular audits and monitoring of our efforts will ensure sustained compliance and continual improvement. UNBC's 2024-2026 Accessibility Plan can be found in Appendix B.

Chart 1: Barriers reported by type

Pie chart showing: Technological 5%; Information or communication 7%; Attitudical 32%; Organizational or Systemic 14%; Architectural or physical 42%

Monitoring and Evaluation

An annual review of accessibility initiatives and recommendations will be scheduled by the Office of Equity and Inclusion.

How to Give Feedback

We value your feedback. Share your thoughts and suggestions on how we can improve this plan and accessibility at UNBC. Feel free to provide feedback in any of the following ways:

- Email your feedback to accessibility@unbc.ca.
- Phone and leave a message at (250) 960-5711.
- Submit your feedback through an online form.

Provide feedback in person by booking an appointment with the Office of Equity and Inclusion. Email edi@unbc.ca to book an appointment.

Appendix A

Definitions

- **Ableism:** Ableism refers to the discrimination and societal bias faced by individuals with disabilities. It involves categorizing people based on their disabilities, deeming them inferior to those without disabilities. Ableism manifests through various means, such as biased ideas, assumptions, stereotypes, attitudes, policies and practices, and physical obstacles in the environment. It stems from the belief that conventional abilities are superior, perpetuating damaging stereotypes, misconceptions, and broad generalizations about individuals with disabilities.

- **Accessible BC Act:** The Accessible B.C. Act is a new provincial law, passed in June 2021, that establishes a legal framework to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to the full and equal participation of people with disabilities in B.C. by enabling the development of accessibility standards and introducing new accessibility requirements for government and prescribed organizations.

- **Accessibility:** Accessibility involves the deliberate design of products, content, processes, programs, activities, and environments to ensure equitable access and engagement for all individuals, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. Accessibility design takes a proactive approach, addressing the requirements of people with disabilities and other barriers to use or participation. It is a measure of the quality of an environment that facilitates ease of access for individuals.

- **Barrier:** A barrier is defined as a physical, structural, technological, socioeconomic, or cultural impediment, including those related to information, communication, attitudes, or perspectives, that restricts the complete and equitable involvement of an individual or a group of individuals in society. Barriers to access encompass circumstances or hindrances that impede individuals with disabilities from utilizing or reaching knowledge and resources with the same degree of effectiveness as individuals without disabilities. This applies to visible and invisible disabilities.

- **Disability:** Disability is a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, sensory, learning, or communication impairment, as well as functional limitations, whether visible or invisible, which can be of a permanent, temporary, or episodic nature. These conditions may impact the ability of an individual to complete and equitable participation in society, particularly when confronted with barriers.

- **Equity:** Equity means ensuring fair treatment, full participation, and inclusion for everyone, particularly those from historically marginalized groups. It acknowledges that not everyone begins from the same point and requires addressing imbalances by identifying and overcoming intentional and unintentional barriers rooted in bias or systemic structures. It emphasizes an ongoing process to create a more just and inclusive environment.

- **Inclusion:** The practice of using proactive measures to create an environment where people feel welcomed, respected, and valued, and to foster a sense of belonging and engagement.

- **Neurodivergence:** Neurodivergence refers to individuals whose brain functions differ from socially typical patterns in one or more ways. It serves as a non-medical umbrella term encompassing conditions like autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, learning disabilities, anxiety disorders, and more. Derived from the concept of neurodiversity, which acknowledges the uniqueness in the development of each person's brain, neurodivergence emphasizes that diversity in human cognition is a normal aspect of the human experience.

Appendix B

UNBC Accessibility Plan 2024-2026

Note: The following plan is fluid, ongoing, and changing based on accessibility priorities.

Barrier Type	2024	2025	2026
Built Environment	**Action:** Review and create a plan to repair and update washroom and door functionality/accessibility **Detail:** Identify the required budget and a workforce plan to support the repair and updates to current washrooms and door functionality/accessibility on campus. **Accountable Department(s):** Facilities and Capital Planning	**Action:** Repair and update washroom and door functionality/accessibility **Detail:** Prioritize repair and updates to current washrooms and door functionality/accessibility on campus. Establish and ensure a high accessibility and inclusivity standard. This includes door openers (internal/external) and inclusive washrooms. **Accountable Department(s):** Facilities and Capital Planning	
	Action: Review the Evacuation / Emergency Preparedness Plan (building by building review) **Detail:** This H&S committee will share the current plan and communication process (web, posters, onboarding, drills, etc.). The plan will be updated to include an accessibility lens that includes persons with disabilities. **Accountable Department(s):** Safety and Risk	**Action:** Assessment of the built environment for all UNBC campuses **Detail:** Conduct a thorough assessment of the built environment on campuses to ensure it is inclusive and accessible. Consider working with an external consultant, faculty, or students. The University will also need to consider the campuses shared with colleges. Plan for and prioritize necessary retrofits **Accountable Department(s):** Facilities and Capital Planning	**Action:** Develop a facilities accessibility standard for every campus based on the assessment **Detail:** Develop and implement a holistic facilities accessibility standard to ensure that all facilities on campus are accessible and inclusive, including all new buildings and construction, audit timelines, budget, etc. This is part of a longer-term item and work can begin in 2025. **Accountable Department(s):** Facilities and Capital Planning
	Action: Snow removal on campus **Detail:** Understand how snow removal on campus impacts access given a majority of the academic year is during the winter season. Share and implement ideas to improve current procedures. Facilities to share route planning and prioritization and provide avenues for feedback on decision-making and prioritization. The University will need to keep in mind the current constraints of budget/resources. Increase internal communications to understand the impacts on the University community for "off-routine" activities (procedures here will also be reviewed). **Accountable Department(s):** Facilities		
Education	**Action:** Accessibility resource bank **Detail:** Establish a resource bank that serves as a publicly accessible centralized repository of materials, tools, and information to support accessibility efforts on campus, accessibility learnings and best practices. Accessibility resources currently exist in the Office of Equity and Inclusion, Library, Access Resource Centre and Human Resources. **Accountable Department(s):** Led by the Office of Equity and Inclusion in collaboration with the Library, HR and ARC.		

Barrier Type	2024	2025	2026
Education	**Action:** Accessibility training for employees **Detail:** As accessible resources are created, develop an accessibility training schedule. This is also part of a larger EDI educational Framework. Part of onboarding and organizational development future state. Consider an asset to be shared with students as well. **Accountable Department(s):** Human Resources (guided by the Office of Equity and Inclusion)		
Employment	**Action:** Inclusive training program for onboarding employees (ongoing) **Detail:** As part of an Equity and Inclusion Educational framework, implement accessibility training at onboarding and as a part of continuous employee development. Training regarding accessibility will be focused on addressing attitudinal barriers faced by those with disabilities. Strategize in Year 1, Implement in Year 2. The University may want to consider a position-based training plan for employee groups. **Accountable Department(s):** Human Resources (guided by the Office of Equity and Inclusion)		
	Action: Equitable and inclusive recruitment practice audit **Detail:** Conduct a comprehensive audit of the organization's recruitment practices ensuring they align with principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, including a focus on accessibility. Confidentiality is critical and may require a third party. Consider in tandem with Applicant Tracking System implementation to ensure equitable practices are embedded into the system. **Accountable Department(s):** Human Resources (guided by OEI)		**Action:** Equity data project implementation **Detail:** As part of a larger University-wide equity data project, we want to initiate and implement the collection of equity-related data. This data will support the University's focus on fostering a supportive environment on campus and ensuring our decisions are strategic and intersectional. **Accountable Department(s):** Office of Equity and Inclusion to develop the project and work with appropriate university departments for compliance and reporting requirements
		Action: Audit accommodation practices **Detail:** Conduct a thorough audit of existing employee accommodations process to ensure they align with meeting employees' needs and legal requirements. Consider a centralized accommodation process and centralized fund. Creation of an Accommodation policy. **Accountable Department(s):** Human Resources	
Information and Communication		**Action:** UNBC website/digital accessibility **Detail:** Review and update UNBC's website functionality to meet current Web Content Guidelines Accessibility standards. Looking at a phased approach along with the addition to the Drupal training for web editors. **Accountable Department(s):** Communications and Marketing	
	Action: Accessibility webpage **Detail:** Develop and maintain an accessible website dedicated to providing comprehensive information, resources, and support for campus accessibility. This includes a campus accessibility map (information about doors and washrooms). Maintaining up-to-date resources, reviewing content, and adding resources. **Accountable Department(s):** Office of Equity and Inclusion, Communications and Marketing		
	Action: Develop campus accessibility guidelines **Detail:** Develop and disseminate comprehensive accessibility guidelines for various aspects of campus life, including classrooms, meetings, emails, and documents, to ensure a universally inclusive environment that focuses on the reduction of barriers. **Accountable Department(s):** Office of Equity and Inclusion		

Barrier Type	2024	2025	2026
Procurement	**Action:** Explore and implement accessibility procurement practices **Detail:** Research procurement best practices, and implement and communicate processes. The Federal Government has identified a number of accessible procurement guidelines the University can look to for this. **Accountable Department(s):** Contracts and Supply Chain		
Service Delivery	**Action:** Accessible intramural sports **Detail:** Partner with EngageSport and the Northern Adapted Sports Association to offer additional opportunities to students to participate in sports on campus. **Accountable Department(s):** Athletics, NSC, Student Life, Office of Equity and Inclusion	**Action:** Update standards of events on all campuses **Detail:** Implement an initiative and standard on campus to ensure that all campus events are accessible to individuals with disabilities and accessibility considerations. **Accountable Department(s):** Led by Office of Equity and Inclusion in collaboration with Athletics, Convocation, CES, Sustainability, Campus Operations, Community Liaison Manager	**Action:** Incorporate the social model of accessibility considered in standards of student and employee supports **Detail:** As the Government of British Columbia develops service delivery standards, we as a University can begin to implement universal design principles into supports on campus. **Accountable Department(s):** Led by Office of Equity and Inclusion in collaboration with community
Transportation	**Action:** Parking **Details:** Review accessible parking options on campus, understand where the barriers exist, and develop solutions to address the barriers to improve accessible parking on campus. **Accountable Department(s):** Parking, Facilities and Capital Planning		