

SUNSCAD Questions for Accessibility Learning Strategist

Description of Document

Below is an introductory paragraph followed by a list of 6 questions collected by SUNSCAD. Questions 1 –5 have been answered by Jess Johnson (Accessibility Learning Strategist) and reviewed by Jennifer Abrahamson (Interim Director of Opportunity and Belonging). Question 6 has been answered by Jennifer Abrahamson.

Questions are written in black, and answers are written in dark blue to help readers visually organize the information.

Meet Jess (she/her)

Jess is NSCAD's new Accessibility Learning Strategist and works with students who require accessibility support, with or without a diagnosis.



Jess is passionate about universal design and eliminating stigma around disability and illness. Because she has lived experience navigating post-secondary accessibility services, she understands that accessibility is integral to learning. With Jess, students can have conversations about their needs and concerns regarding accessibility, obtain a Letter of Accommodation outlining their personalized accommodations, or explore funding for services and equipment relevant to accommodations.

Image Description: A picture of Jess, a young woman with blonde hair, wearing a yellow cardigan and jeans. Jess is standing in the Anna Leonowens Gallery, with artwork visible in the background.

Question 1

"Will accessibility send out our accommodation letters for us, or do we have to continue to do so?"

Answer to Question 1

With student consent, Accommodation Letters will be sent via email from accessibility@nscad.ca directly to instructors and technicians. If the student wishes to obtain a copy of the Accommodation Letter and deliver it to instructors and technicians themselves, students may do so. Students and instructors must sign and return the accommodation letters to accessibility@nscad.ca

To view the Accommodation Letter template, please follow the link below, and on page 7 of the Academic Accessibility Policy, please click on option "c" under "Appendix".

<https://navigator.nscad.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Accessibility-Policy-2.pdf>

Question 2

"What about the accessibility mess that is Fountain campus?"

Answer to question 2

I appreciate the question and want to acknowledge that the answer is multifaceted as accessibility and universal design are not only addressed by accessibility services but must be considered at all levels of institutional operation.

The Office of Opportunity and Belonging acknowledges and regrets that Fountain campus is inaccessible. We understand this poses challenges and can limit or prevent a student's participation in courses, meetings and activities held at the Fountain campus. The inaccessible built environment is not reflective of NSCAD's fundamental belief that all students deserve to have equitable access to education; therefore, NSCAD is working toward a long-term solution by relocating all NSCAD campuses to an accessible and unified Port Campus location by 2030. The short-term solution is to address student accessibility needs through accommodations and working with the applicable departments such the learning commons and facilities, to allow students to access the campus where possible. I will do my best to advocate for change where possible and to think creatively when there is not a straightforward solution.

The accessibility office is in the Office of Student Experience at Fountain campus on the 2nd floor. The office will move to the 3rd floor soon. Students can book appointments online or in person; however, I can also meet students in an accessible to them location. Please contact me at accessibility@nscad.ca to arrange an in-person appointment outside of Fountain campus.

Below I have described several accessibility features and barriers to getting to the current accessibility office at the Fountain Campus. Please email me at accessibility@nscad.ca if you have further questions.

Question 2 continued below

Physical Accessibility

- Duke Street entrance (5163). There is a slightly uneven, raised threshold between Duke Street sidewalk and the entrance to NSCAD. After turning off the sidewalk toward NSCAD entrance, there is a slight incline. The entrance has double doors that are automatically opened with the push of a round, large button located at an accessible height. The doors open outward. There is no middle divider between double doors.
- There is a non-fixed shoe mat placed behind the double doors and in front of the mechanical lift.
- There is a mechanical lift from the entrance, that carries the user downward several feet.
- There is a slight declining ramp to exit the mechanical lift.
- Several feet from the mechanical lift is an elevator. In front of the elevator there is a non-fixed shoe mat.
- To reach the accessibility office, the rider will need to press floor 2. The Elevator buttons are at an accessible height.
- The staircase has 43 steps to the second floor, with a railing on one side only.
- The Office of Student Experience is directly in front of the elevator opening on floor 2.
- The flooring is slightly uneven but not raised.
- A non-fixed shoe mat is placed in front of the door to the Office of Student Experience.
- The door is not automatic and has a lever handle. The door is weighted, requiring the user to hold it open. The door opens inward.
- The door to the accessibility office has a lever handle and is not weighted.
- Most doors to get to the Accessibility Office are 2 feet 10 inches wide.

The Accessibility office will be relocating to the 3rd floor soon. Upon exiting the elevator on the 3rd floor, the new office will be nearby and there will be no raised or lowered floor transitions to access it.

Question 2 continued below

Sensory Accessibility

- There is fluorescent lighting throughout the building. My current office has a large window, letting natural light through. The future 3rd floor office will also allow natural light through.
- The noise level in the building may vary. In my current office space, you may hear muffled voices outside of the office, fans, air conditioning, etc. (with the door closed). In my office you will often hear muffled noises from activities outside (vehicles, voices, construction), which on occasion may be loud. Overall, the noise level is typically low, but rarely completely silent. The new office space on the 3rd floor is expected to be quieter than the current space.
- The current office has air conditioning which can easily be turned on or off.
- NSCAD has a scent reduced policy.
- In my office, I have a few fidget toys and pencil grips available for use during appointments.

Wayfinding/Directions

- When you enter the Fountain Campus through Duke Street, there is a Floor plan and a Directory of Offices, however there are some errors in the current directory as some office names and locations have changed. There is a full-time security guard located at the Duke Street entrance who can assist students with wayfinding.
- There is some signage throughout the building. Most office spaces are labeled with a name and number in white font on a dark blue background. The office signs are small (6.5 inches by 5 inches). The signage regrettably does not have braille.
- The Accessibility Office is currently housed in The Office of Student Experience, which is located on the 2nd floor and is labeled "Office of Student Experience, D-200". The letter before the number indicates the building that the office is housed in. The Office of Student Experience is in the Duke building of the Fountain Campus.

Question 3

What will students with accommodations need to know about changes to policy?"

Answer to question 3

NSCAD's Academic Accessibility Policy has been revised as of May 2023. Overall, the revised policy has updated definitions, language, references, and protocol. Please see the revised policy at <https://navigator.nscad.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Accessibility-Policy-2.pdf>

Below is a list of major changes in the policy:

- Addition of the supplementary document titled 'Accessibility and Accommodation Protocol' which outlines responsibilities of students, faculty, and accessibility office. Readers can find this document in the policy appendix, next to "A," or via link <https://navigator.nscad.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Accessibility-and-Accommodations-Protocol.pdf>
- The option for the accessibility office to send Accommodation Letters directly to faculty.
- Change of language from "Disability Resource Facilitator" to "Accessibility Learning Strategist".
- Students can book an accessibility appointment to discuss accommodations anytime throughout the year (not just within the first two weeks of classes).
- There is a significant change in the required documentation section. Students do not need an official diagnosis or psycho-educational assessment, nor does documentation need to be within the last 3 years. The revised policy states: "Documentation should be recent (completed within the last five years), or since the individual was aged 18 or older."
- Updated and detailed information regarding the duty to accommodate, undue hardship, and the appeal process.
- Addition of confidentiality outline.

Question 4

" What are the job duties for Jess's role? "

Answer to question 4

Jess will work individually with students with disabilities to address barriers that impact their full participation in learning.

1. This process starts with Jess engaging in outreach efforts to new and existing students by:
 - a. Sending emails to new students who indicate on their application that they need accessibility services and to students currently registered with accessibility services.
 - b. Attending and participating in Orientation events.
 - c. Visiting classroom and studio spaces to give a brief introduction when possible.
2. Jess will review disability related documentation submitted by students and request students book an appointment in person or online.
3. Jess will meet with students to determine the following:
 - a. Personalized accommodation needs, based on the students lived experience and disability related documentation. In collaboration with the student, Jess will consider personal strengths and challenges, environmental factors and task related factors that may affect the student's full participation in learning at NSCAD.
 - b. Options for funding services and equipment relevant to students' needs and accommodation.
 - c. Learning strategies, study skills and education success planning.

Other duties involve:

- Recruitment and scheduling of ASL interpreters, tutors, exam proctors and/or note-takers, as necessary.
- In collaboration with the Director of Teaching and Learning, Jess will support faculty by sharing best practices for an inclusive learning environment. This may take the form of meeting with faculty; sending surveys; presentations; and correspondence via emails.
- Oversee the implementation of the recently launched accessibility policy and corresponding documents, collecting feedback for future reviews and updates.

Question 5

" How would the presence of an Accessibility Learning Strategist benefit us? What would that look like?"

Answer to question 5

The role of Accessibility Learning strategist has been redeveloped from previous roles under the names of "Disability Resource Facilitator" and "Accessibility Resource Facilitator." The Accessibility Learning strategist position has been designed to facilitate and advocate for students' full participation at NSCAD.

As a registered occupational therapist, I have experience and education in topics such as universal design, adaptive equipment and technology, and an understanding of how our abilities to participate are supported or hindered through the environment (social, physical, political, attitudinal, economic, etc.) and activity demands. For each student I work with, I want to understand how the environment and activities can be adapted to match the student's needs. I am here to listen to students' lived experience and offer my professional recommendations for classroom adaptations and accommodations.

At any point throughout their time at NSCAD, students can reach out to me to voice their accessibility needs and/or concerns related to learning and participation at NSCAD. I will work to address any needs or concerns to the best of my ability with the available resources and in accordance with legislative regulations and University policy pertaining to accommodation practices.

Please read the answer to question 4 for a more thorough understanding of my role.

Question 6

"Does she [Jess Johnson] have the same responsibilities as Jennifer Abrahamson?"

Answer to question 6

Since January 2022, Jennifer has been assisting NSCAD students with disabilities. During this time, Jennifer mostly provided accommodation letters, arranged notetakers, and helped students access funding for assessments and services and equipment grants. Jennifer has lived experience with disabilities and her counselling background allowed her to create what she hopes was a supportive and empathetic approach to supporting our students with disabilities while the office and opportunity and belonging searched for the Accessibility Learning Strategist!

Now with my role as an addition to the team, Jennifer can refocus primarily on the Director of Opportunity and Belonging (O&B) role, offering support to the O&B team as needed, responding to instances of sexual violence and other student concerns and complaints, and initiatives to improve inclusivity and a sense of belonging for NSCAD students. If you read question 4, you will see the aspects of my role that differ from the support Jennifer was providing.