



Annual Report 2002 - 2003

ACCESSABILITY RESOURCE CENTRE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO AT MISSISSAUGA

**Prepared by Elizabeth Martin, Manager
Prepared for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities**

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This document is available in alternate formats
(electronic, large print, Braille, audio cassette).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an annual submission to give the Ministry of Education and Training, Colleges and Universities, an overview of the achievements and challenges the *AccessAbility* Resource Centre experienced in 2002-03. It also informs the Ministry of initiatives put in place in 2002-03, upcoming initiatives for 2003-04 and service issues the Centre may face in the upcoming year.

The *AccessAbility* Resource Centre is a student service, academic service and equity office for the University of Toronto. It is located in the main building (South) on the UTM campus in close proximity to other student services.

In 2002-03 the Centre continued to provide academic accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities enrolled in courses at UTM. The Centre also continued to consult with staff, faculty, student groups and committees (UTM and tri-campus) on providing inclusive services and environments for students who have disabilities.

Highlights for 2002-03 included:

- ❖ The addition of a new Learning Strategist/Assistive Technologist position in the Centre. Funding for the position was provided by the Learning Opportunities Task Force, Enhanced Services Funding. The position was created to work specifically with students who are registered with the Centre and have a diagnosed specific learning disability. The Learning Strategist/Assistive Technologist position was filled in October 2002 and in its first year the service exceeded the number of students expected to participate.
- ❖ The Centre, in partnership with a number of faculty members in different departments, revised how students receive academic accommodations in certain courses at UTM. The Centre assisted faculty so that they were able to provide academic accommodations in class and also for tests and final examinations.
- ❖ A space was dedicated to *AccessAbility* to build a test and examination centre. The space was renovated over the winter and was used for the April/May 2003 final examination period.

The University of Toronto is required to provide academic accommodations to students who have a disability and provide appropriate documentation. The *AccessAbility* Resource Centre is unable to set a limit as to how many students it will accommodate and will often be required to stretch space, resources and staff time to their limits as more students register for accommodations.

Due to a funding shortfall, the Centre continued to face significant challenges in the areas of its staffing complement and functional available space. The funding dilemma affected the Centre more than in previous years due to a significant growth in the student population requiring accommodations (see Appendix A). There was a considerable increase in students with mental health disabilities and visual disabilities, resulting in more contact hours with staff for students with mental health disabilities and an increased need for assistive technology for students with visual disabilities. There was also a significant increase in students with comorbid conditions.

The upcoming double cohort year will place further stress on already stretched staff and resources.

OVERVIEW OF 2002-03

The Centre continued to provide academic accommodations and services to students enrolled in courses at UTM and consulted with staff, faculty, student groups and committees on inclusive practices in both the academic and co-curricular environments.

The number of students receiving services through the Centre rose significantly in 2002-03. In 2001-02 the total number of students registered with the Centre was 141. In 2002-03 this rose to 188, an increase of 47 students.

Students registered with the Centre received the following services:

- Disability management and advising
- Access to bursaries
- Orientation to the Centre and UTM
- Access to assistive technology
- Test and examination arrangements
- Onsite psycho-educational assessments
- Access to the Learning Strategist/Assistive Technologist (Students with Learning Disabilities only)
- Liaison with faculty, staff and community
- Scribes
- Notetaking services
- Personal assistance
- Library research assistance
- Sign language interpreting, computerized notetaking, attendant care
- Diagnostic screening for learning disabilities
- Liaison with Laidlaw for access on the intercampus bus
- Mobility training for orientation to the campus
- Readers for students with visual disabilities
- Access to materials in alternate format
- Assistance with addressing barriers to participation in university life (e.g. physical, attitudinal, informational, policy/procedure)
- Referrals to on and off campus resources

DISABILITY MANAGEMENT AND ADVISING

For many students, especially first year students, learning how to manage their academic supports is a significant transition. Students with disabilities are moved from an extremely supportive high school environment where special education teachers and parents/guardians are key in the setting up and delivery of accommodations, to the university where the student is considered an adult and is responsible for seeking out and managing the supports available to them. The Centre was aware of this and ensured that the Centre's presence on campus was communicated using various mediums (web, bulletin boards, campus publications, mailings to UTM departments) to incoming and already enrolled students.

Students continued to meet with Centre staff for support when needed including individual meetings with the Manager when unsure how to disclose their disability to faculty. In order to ensure students are receiving appropriate services they must each have an individual appointment with the Manager. This assists the Centre in updating the student's file, reviewing the student's accommodations and making referrals to university and community services.

All students were also reminded to use the Centre as a referral/information centre when they are not sure what department or service to contact for various issues.

In 2002-03 the Manager met with 188 students with a number of them having ongoing appointments for advising/support.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES

In 2002-03 the Manager contracted a computer consultant to build a database that would meet the needs of the Centre. Together the Manager and Consultant developed a case management system that would track/generate the following:

- Student Personal Data
- Accommodations
- Financial Information
- Referrals
- Test and Examination Scheduling
- Volunteer Requests and Coordination
- Reports and Statistics

The database would also assist the Test and Examination Officer as it would be used to create the tests and examinations schedule and assist in the organizing of volunteer services.

OUTREACH

Prospective and Incoming Students

The Manager sent outreach packages to the secondary schools in the UTM catchment area which resulted in an increase in contacts from parents, students, special education teachers and guidance counsellors. The most often asked questions pertained to the services provided to students, assistive technology on campus and documentation requirements.

The outreach package included information about the Centre, documentation required for registration, transition tips and the services available for students with learning disabilities from the Learning Strategist/Assistive Technologist.

The Centre's webpage also has a section specific to new students.

Current Students and UTM Community

Outreach to the campus community was done through the use of:

- Bulletin boards
- Flyers to residence
- Participation in first year orientation “diversity” session and student events, section in the Medium’s orientation edition
- Information sections in the university publications including UTM’s Academic Calendar and “Faculty Guide to Services” and the Equity Issues Advisory Group’s brochure
- Centre’s webpage

ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES TO STUDENTS

Test and examination accommodations, volunteer services (e.g. notetakers) and in-class accommodations (e.g. sign language interpretation) were provided to registered students depending on their individual needs.

This year a number of UTM faculty members accommodated their students for tests and examinations. This greatly benefited the students as they were able to have access to their instructors if they required clarification about a question on their test/exam.

Learning Disability Program

In October 2002, the Centre hired a Learning Strategist/Assistive Technologist (LS/AT) through Enhanced Services Funding provided by the Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF). The LS/AT is required to work only with students who have specific learning disabilities. The services provided include, screening for learning disabilities, learning strategies, demonstrations and training on assistive technology (e.g. Kurzweil 3000, Inspiration).

The LOTF funded the position as a .8 FTE and UTM contributed funds increasing the position to 1.0 FTE. This additional funding from UTM gave the LS/AT the opportunity to also provide services to students with ADD/ADHD and acquired brain injuries.

It was originally determined that 15 students with specific learning disabilities would utilize the service however, the final 2002-03 statistics verified that 37 students received services from the LS/AT. This position was renewed by the LOTF for 2003-04 at 1.0 FTE.

The Centre continued to provide UTM students with on-campus psychoeducational testing completed by a Registered Clinical Psychologist. Students with learning disabilities often required updated psychoeducational assessments to ensure the Centre was working with current information as many students were assessed while in elementary school. Testing was also available to students who exhibited learning difficulties that were consistent with learning disabilities. Again in 2002-03, the entire process for an assessment took two weeks from the initial assessment to receipt of the report. The psychologist was also available to the students if they had questions about their assessment after their feedback meeting.

The Manager, LS/AT and Registered Clinical Psychologist met throughout 2002-03 to discuss the assessment process and implementation of strategies for students with learning disabilities.

Volunteer Services

The Centre again recruited, trained and supervised over 100 volunteers in 2002-03. The involvement of volunteers is key to the Centre's provision of accommodations to students in and out of the lecture room.

Requests for volunteer services from registered students increased substantially in 2002-03 resulting in increased staff time spent on coordinating the services.

The volunteers provided the following support:

- Notetaking
- Personal assistance
- Library research assistance
- Special events assistance

Students who were previously registered as volunteers in 2001-02 and students who had heard of the Centre's volunteer opportunities approached the Centre prior to the start of classes in September to sign up.

Bursary Assistance

The Manager continued to oversee and approve students' requests for the Bursary for Students with Disabilities provided through OSAP.

As a number of students were not eligible for OSAP and therefore not eligible for the bursary, the Manager assisted the students in looking for alternative financial supports to purchase essential products (e.g. assistive technology) and services (e.g. psychoeducational assessment).

All psychoeducational assessments completed in 2002-03 were covered by either the OSAP Bursary or the UTM College Bursary.

Students were also referred to the Financial Aid Counsellor in Registrarial Services to obtain more information about scholarships and bursaries for which they might be eligible.

Assistive Technology

The Centre continued to provide assistive technology for student use in the Adaptive Technology Room located in the UTM Library.

As in previous years, the ATR was also used as a test site for the Centre to accommodate students requiring the use of assistive technology, Zoomtext software (text enlargement) was installed on computers in three computer labs on campus.

The Centre also purchased a Smartview CCTV for students who have visual disabilities and placed it on the main floor of the UTM Library.

Partnerships

The Manager continued as a member on UTM and university-wide committees however, due to limited staffing and a substantial increase in students in 2002-03, was often unable to attend due to service needs (e.g. filling in for absent invigilators or volunteers, ensuring the Centre is open during student drop-in hours).

The Manager continued membership on the following committees:

- Phase 7 Residence Implementation Committee
- Student Centre Management Board (assessor)
- Principal's Advisory Committee on Access for Individuals who have a Disability
- Quality Service to Students (QSS) Committee
- Student Affairs Posse
- Volunteerism Committee
- Joint Health and Safety Committee
- Equity Issues Advisory Group (university-wide)

Workforce

In 2002-03 the Centre added a new position to its staff complement. A Learning Strategist/Assistive Technologist was hired in October 2002 and provided services to student with specific learning disabilities.

The Centre also had casual clerical assistance from October 2002 to December 2002. The position was not continued in 2003 due to funding difficulties.

A work study student assisted the Centre in updating the resource files by contacting and obtaining current information from departments at the University of Toronto and organizations in the Toronto, Peel and Halton Regions.

A computer consultant, who specializes in database development, consulted with the Centre and started to build a database to assist with file management.

Professional Development / Memberships

Professional Development

The Manager and Learning Strategist/Assistive Technologist attended training sessions hosted by the Learning Opportunities Task Force at the Ministry of Training in Toronto, ON.

The Manager attended the Inter-University Disability Issues Association professional development days and the Annual General Meeting held in St. Catharines, ON.

Professional Memberships

IDIA	Inter- University Disability Issues Association (ONTARIO)
CADSPPE	Canadian Association of Disability Providers in Post-Secondary Education (CANADA)
AHEAD	Association on Higher Education and Disability (U.S.A)
NEADS	National Educational Association of Disabled Students (CANADA)
CACUSS	Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CANADA)

Listserv Memberships

IDIA	Inter- University Disability Issues Association (ONTARIO)
DSSHE	Disabled Student Services in Higher Education (U.S.A.)
DAWN	Disabled Women's Network (CANADA)
CSNNET	Canadian Special Needs Network

ACCESSIBILITY AT UTM

In 2002-03, the University of Toronto was the recipient of a national award for initiative in accessibility for people with disabilities. The Canadian Foundation of Physically Disabled Persons presented the award to the University of Toronto at their Valentine Gala held in February 2003.

Access for students, staff and faculty with disabilities was again reviewed and a number of projects were completed in 2002-03 including the installation of automatic door openers, installation of detectable guards under open stairwells, washroom renovations and the implementation of assistive technology (hardware and software) in the public computer labs and computer classrooms.

The Principal's Advisory Committee on Access Issues for Individuals who have Disabilities met during 2002-03 to review completed access projects and discuss areas of concern. These areas were prioritized by the committee and will be addressed in the upcoming year.

The Manager continued to participate on the Phase 7 Implementation Committee as a resource for questions around accessibility, reviewed new spaces and renovations with Department Heads to ensure the environment is usable, welcoming and inclusive to people with disabilities.

REVIEW OF CHALLENGES

The Centre is charged with ensuring that the legal obligations of the university are met when providing appropriate and reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities. The service demands the Centre faced in 2002-03 significantly challenged its ability to meet this obligation.

FUNDING ISSUES

In 2002-03, the Centre continued to experience difficulties in providing services and accommodations to students with disabilities due to an inadequate staff complement and limited funding. The Centre had a deficit of 64,155 in 2001-02 that was carried forward to 2002-03. As a result of this and even though UTM contributed 21,480 to the Centre's expenditures, the Centre ended the year in a 90,946 deficit which will be carried forward to 2003-04. Due to the deficit, the Centre's request for additional staff to assist with increasing student numbers has not yet been approved resulting in further difficulties with provision of accommodations and services.

INCREASE IN ACCESSABILITY STUDENT REGISTRATION

The University of Toronto is required to provide academic accommodations to students who have a disability and provide appropriate documentation. The *AccessAbility* Resource Centre is unable to set a limit as to how many students it will accommodate and will often be required to stretch space, resources and staff time to their limits as more students register for accommodations.

With the increase in the student population served by *AccessAbility* (see Appendix A), there was significant strain on the staff and the Centre's resources to ensure accommodations and services were provided appropriately and in a timely manner. Students and their parents were more persistent this year in ensuring that they received appropriate accommodations similar or identical to those they had received in secondary school.

Initial intake meetings with first year students incorporated an information component for parents to explain the accommodations and services the Centre can and cannot provide as well as answer any questions the parents may have. This meeting with family assists in reducing contact from concerned family members regarding how the students' needs are being addressed and allows the Manager to discuss the Centre and university policy regarding confidentiality of student records and information. This area has been problematic in the past as parents and guardians were often very involved in the setup of accommodations their child received in the secondary school system. While this parent component has assisted in reducing contact through the year it has increased the duration of the initial intake meeting placing another strain on staff time.

2002-03 also saw an increase in students with visual disabilities who had high assistive technology needs, students with multiple disabilities and mental health disabilities who required increased staff support. The resources and staff time required overextended staff on many occasions resulting in accommodations and services being hurried and implemented just in time with limited time to ensure that the accommodation or service was most effective for the student.

SPACE ISSUES

The main offices (Manager and Test and Examination Officer) of the *AccessAbility* Resource Centre are housed on the lower level of the South Building. The Centre did acquire an office on the third floor of the South Building for the Learning Strategist/Assistive Technologist and a Test Centre in the North Building which was formerly two small classrooms. The Test Centre was being constructed throughout 2002-03 and used for final examinations in April-May 2003.

The lower level where the Centre is situated has safety concerns for students using mobility aids (e.g. wheelchairs, scooters) as only one exit on the lower level has a readily accessible path in case of an emergency. Spigel Hall, the campus cafeteria also has one exit that is semi-accessible (ramped with no automatic door opener) however the cafeteria is at times locked (e.g. during the final examination period, during the summer months, weekends). If a fire were in the vicinity of the only readily accessible path, the students, staff and faculty members would have no readily accessible route out of the building. This has been identified by the UTM Joint Health and Safety Committee and is being addressed.

The size of the space the main offices of the Centre occupies is inadequate as at busy times the small lobby will often become crowded especially when students using mobility aids are waiting to meet with either the Manager or Test and Examinations Officer. The space also does not allow for uninterrupted communication between the staff and students. The campus telephone and computer lines are housed in a small room at the back of the Centre resulting in electricians and telephone service people interrupting confidential meetings to get to the back room.

The Centre does not have adequate office space to hire workstudy students or casual staff. We have attempted to use the Centre's storage room located next to the electrical/telephone room behind the Test and Examination Officer's office however again there are issues with confidentiality and students being comfortable discussing their situations with another person passing through the area.

The Test Centre for *AccessAbility* was completed at the end of the 2002-03 academic year and was utilized for final examinations. While it provided the Centre with a dedicated space and will significantly assist the Centre in scheduling tests and examinations, its location in the North Building added another strain on already severely limited staff time as staff will at times have to close the main offices and address situations in the Test Centre. (e.g. student having a panic attack).

INADEQUATE STAFF COMPLEMENT

The increase in registered students had a significant impact on staff, more so than in previous years. Due to the complex needs of students and their expectations the staff were at times unable to find the time and resources necessary to provide appropriate accommodations and services.

The staffing complement of the Centre consisted of:

- Manager 1.0 FTE
- Test and Examination Officer .8 FTE
- Learning Strategist/Assistive Technologist (.8FTE funded by Learning Opportunities Task Force, .2 FTE funded by UTM) – A new position to provide enhanced services to students with specific learning disabilities. The position began on October 15, 2002 with specific duties and student eligibility outlined by MET.

- 20 Invigilators (casual)
- 1 Workstudy Position

The front line staff complement has not increased since 1997 except for high need times where a casual person was hired to assist with administrative tasks. Due to funding and space limitations the duration of the casual position was limited to the months of October and November as these are busy months.

The services provided by *AccessAbility* require that accurate and confidential documentation be maintained. The documentation kept includes detailed test and examination schedules and student files which consist of medical records, reports and case management notes. Ensuring that all relevant and important information is documented is very important and many staff hours were dedicated to recording and keeping accurate files. The increase in students resulted in staff spending more time than the previous year dealing with issues and accumulating overtime hours attempting to keep up with the documentation needs.

In 2002-2003, the Centre recruited a large volunteer pool of 103 individuals who assisted the Centre in providing accommodations to students with disabilities (e.g. notetaking in class). While the participation of volunteers was very important, the Centre experienced difficulty supervising the large number of volunteers due to the increased number of registered students and their complex needs. The two front line staff (Manager and Test and Examination Officer) were required to fill in for volunteers who did not show up for their volunteer time (e.g. student with limited mobility requires assistance in the lecture room). This 'filling in' was often in conflict with another task the staff person was engaged in (e.g. intake appointment with a new student) which resulted in students not receiving timely services on occasion.

The Centre did employ one student in the Workstudy Program who was responsible for updating *AccessAbility's* university and community resources and contacts. Due to space and confidentiality issues the student worked mainly in the public computer labs or at his/her home.

ACCESSIBILITY AT UTM

Although access projects were completed in 2002-03, new barriers to access and inclusion were encountered through campus renovations. The Manager worked with department heads and other campus groups to assist them in developing a welcoming and inclusive environment however, there continued to be newly built and renovated spaces on campus that challenged and disabled individuals with medical conditions, hearing and vision difficulties, processing difficulties, mental health conditions and mobility difficulties.

PROPOSED INITIATIVES FOR 2003 - 2004

Administrative Processes

- ❖ Continue to develop case management database with an outside consultant. The database will assist in maintaining student files and will generate the test and examination schedules.

Workforce

- ❖ The Manager will continue to request additional staff for positions to assist with case management and to assist with administrative duties. These positions are essential to providing appropriate and reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities so that the University of Toronto at Mississauga fulfills its legal obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Services/Programs

- ❖ Notetaking workshops for students who have learning disabilities and their matched volunteer notetakers will be held at the start of each session. The Learning Strategist/Assistive Technologist will instruct the participants in developing and refining how they take notes in a lecture.

Space

- ❖ The completion of the CCIT building will create vacant space as departments move into their new offices. As space becomes available the Manager, with the Dean of Student Affairs, will review available spaces on campus in order to resolve the current space issues the Centre is faced with.
- ❖ The Manager will review current space on campus to determine what is available to assist with the projected overflow from the test centre. During the final examination period the test centre was at capacity or near capacity. The increase in UTM's enrolment and student registration with the Centre as well as their complex needs will increase the number of students requesting accommodations for tests and examinations.

Partnerships

- ❖ Library – The Centre will continue to work with the library in integrating assistive technology in all areas of the library.
- ❖ Office of the Registrar – The Centre will work with the Office of the Registrar in developing a presence in their recruitment presentation to secondary schools and their communications with incoming first year students.
- ❖ Residence – The Centre will continue to work with Residence staff in establishing support services (e.g. attendant services, mobility training) for students who have disabilities.
- ❖ Facility Resources – The Centre will continue to work with Facility Resources in creating accessible and inclusive spaces on campus.
- ❖ Student Affairs Posse – The Centre will continue to collaborate with the Student Services at UTM in providing inclusive programming and services.
- ❖ Equity Issues Advisory Group (EIAG) – The Manager will continue on as a member of the EIAG, promoting and participating in equity initiatives at the University of Toronto.

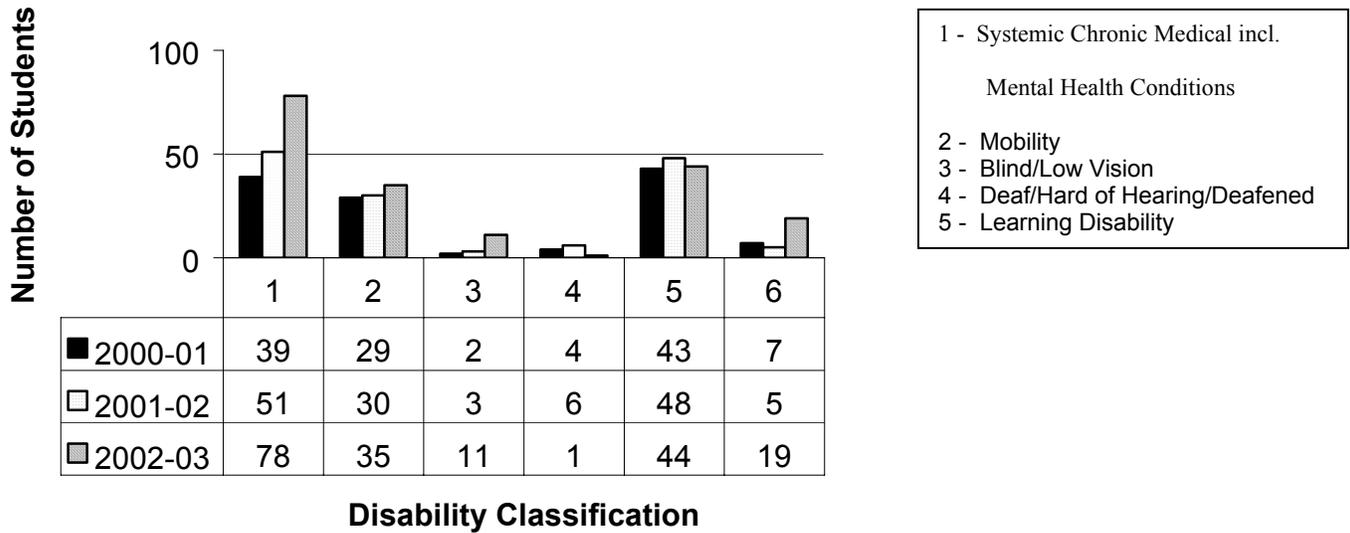
- ❖ University of Toronto Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA) Planning Committee – The Manager will continue on as a member of the ODA Planning Committee as Co-chair of the Attitudinal Barriers Sub-committee.
- ❖ Tri-Campus Managers Meetings – The Manager will continue to meet with the Managers at AccessAbility Services (UTSC) and Accessibility Services (St. George) to collaborate on access and inclusion initiatives at the university and discuss maintaining service processes that allow students to receive academic accommodations in a timely manner at UTM, UTSC and St. George.

ACCESSIBILITY

- ❖ The Ontarians with Disabilities Act legislation that was passed in 2001 specifies that all universities in Ontario must have an ODA Plan in place by September 30, 2003. The Manager and the Dean of Student Affairs & Assistant Principal, Student Services will review the current mandate of the Principal's Advisory Committee on Access Issues for Individuals with Disabilities and determine how the incoming ODA legislation will impact the committee.

APPENDIX A
SERVICE STATISTICS

**Students by Disability Classification
Three Year Comparison**



2000 - 2001 141 students	2001 - 2002 141 students	2002 - 2003 188 students ↑ of 47 students from previous year
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- the significant increase in students with mental health disabilities put incredible stress on staff time
- total number of students with learning disabilities are also represented in the multiple category
- demands from students for specific reasonable accommodations increased this year and put considerable stress on staff and resources
- the substantial increase in students with visual disabilities strained the Centre's ability to accommodate due to limited assistive technology and transcription issues

APPENDIX A
SERVICE STATISTICS

Test and Examination Statistics
2002 – 2003

Month	Number of Tests/ Exams Written	Number of Students Who Wrote Tests/Exams
May 2002	11	8
June	26	18
July	8	7
August	31	26
September	3	3
October	149	67
November	78	52
December	191	115
January 2003	15	14
February	152	70
March	59	40
April	204	124
May (until end of final examination period)	78	60
<u>TOTALS</u>	1005 ▪ Increase of 186 tests/exams written from 2001-02	604 ▪ Increase of 86 students from 2001-02

Volunteer Statistics
2002 – 2003

<u>Notetaking</u>	
Number of Students	45
Number of Volunteer Notetakers	69*
Number of Courses (where notetakers were requested)	121
<u>Other Volunteer Services</u>	
Number of Volunteers who provided services as Library Research Assistants, Readers, Participation Assistants	34

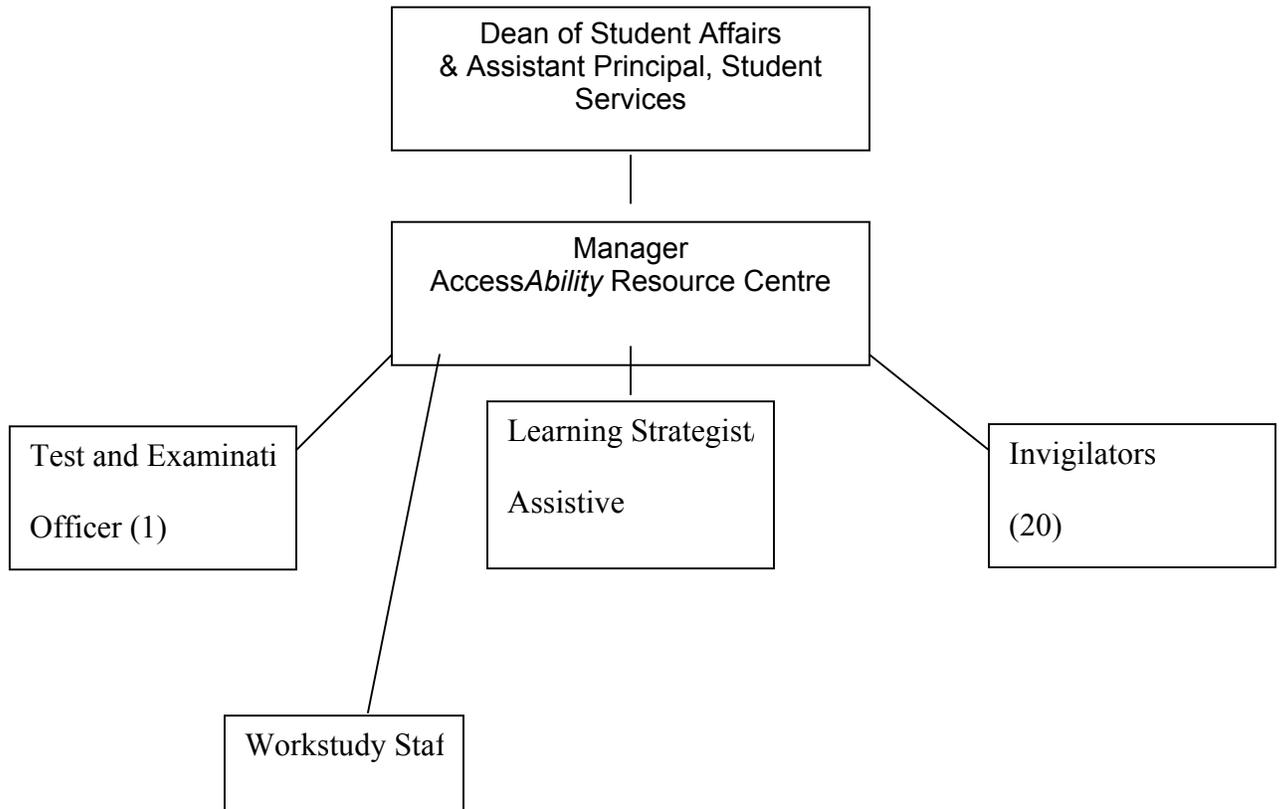
* There was a decrease in volunteer notetakers in 2002-2003 as more instructors posted their notes on the internet and a number of students requested use of a tape recorder in lectures with the permission of their instructors.

Sign Language Interpretation
2002 - 2003

Number of Students	1
Number of Courses	1

APPENDIX B

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



- Clinical Specialist (Adaptive Equipment / OT) – Services contracted as required
- Registered Clinical Psychologist – Services contracted as required

APPENDIX C

TECHNOLOGY / EQUIPMENT REPORT

Software

- Jaws for Windows (Screen Reader)
- Inspiration (Organizational)
- Naturally Speaking (Voice Recognition)
- Kurzweil 3000 (Scan and Read Colour)
- Zoomtext Xtra

Hardware

- Desk top computers
- Lap top computer
- 21" monitors
- Scanner
- Printer

Ergonomic Equipment

- Adjustable desks (manual and electric)
- Obus Forme chairs
- Footrests
- Task lights

Other

- Smartview CCTV (2 units)
- Alphasmart Pro
- TTY