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CU grad returns to campus as head of IT accessibility initiative

By [Haley Ritchie](#) November 29 2012.

Tags: [accessibility](#), [Carleton Access Network](#), [David Berman](#), [Haley Ritchie](#), [Rafik Goubran](#), [Research Education Accessibility and Design Initiative](#)



Berman was the Charlatan's design director from 1982 to 1984. (Photo courtesy of David Berman)

A Carleton graduate is returning to campus to chair the Carleton Access Network, a committee focused on making information technology accessible, according to a university press release.

David Berman said he started his career in the field of graphic design and IT accessibility when he attended Carleton for computer science and worked as design director for the *Charlatan* from 1982-84.

The Carleton Access Network is a part of the university's Research, Education, Accessibility and Design (READ) Initiative.

When Carleton's READ Initiative was formed last August, Rafik Goubran, dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Design, said in a press release the "initiative will combine design with human rights. Projects affiliated with the READ Initiative will breach new horizons for accessible design."

"I'm passionate about the power of design to create a better world," he said.

After graduating, Berman became an author, worked with the United Nations, and travelled to over 30 countries speaking about the importance of universal accessibility, according to his website.

"Essentially the key to making documents or websites accessible is that we can't assume that all people have all their senses available," he said. "If someone has a faculty that isn't available, we either swap in another one, or amplify one."

Examples of this might include software that can read website text aloud for those who cannot see the screen, or allowing hard-of-hearing web visitors to turn up the volume. According to Berman, many assistive technologies are useful even for those who do not experience accessibility challenges.

“We don’t even think of glasses as an assisted technology, but it is,” Berman said.

“Siri on your iPhone was based on technology that was designed for people who needed to use voice recognition in order to be able to communicate with a computer.”

“When we design for the extremes, everyone benefits,” he explained, focusing on the fact that students with disabilities are not the only ones benefiting from making everything more accessible.

The Ontario government is leading the way when it comes to promoting the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) through legislation, Berman said.

As part of the READ Initiative, Berman gave a one-day crash course last week on how to meet these new standards, titled The New Standard on Web Accessibility: WCAG 2.0.

“What we want to do is make sure that as many of the folks at Carleton who are involved in the web are aware of the accessibility standards,” READ acting director Dean Mellway said.

Mellway said the new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act mandates that organizations with over 50 employees will be required to make content accessible.

“You can’t be a great example of accessibility if you’re not accessible yourself. Accessibility starts at home, so our first priority for this committee is to move Carleton forward so it’s actually living up to a higher standard.”

Berman agreed, and cited Carleton’s work with the Paul Menton Centre and Paralympic games as examples of the leadership role the school has taken.

“All these things come together to say that Carleton could really be the ultimate accessible university and I’m just thrilled to be a part of that.”