UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

College of Computational, Mathematical, and Physical Sciences

School of Computer Science

Computationally Speaking

Seminar Series

Title: **Creating Access *with* Communities of Practice**

Speaker: **Dr. Leon Lu**

Hosted by: Dr. David Flatla

Where: In-person (REYN 1101)

When: **Friday November 27, 2026, from 11am-12pm**

Abstract: Assistive technologies are most meaningful when they are shaped by the people who will use them. This talk reflects on three collaborative projects that brought designers, technologists, and disabled communities together to create access: work with the FMDG Music School, which supports blind and visually impaired musicians; ongoing work with the Canadian Helen Keller Centre (CHKC) and its deafblind community; and the Deafblind Everest project, which is developing wearable haptic devices that let deafblind people send and receive signals through vibration and touch. Across these projects, communities of practice were not just a source of feedback but active partners in defining problems, testing prototypes, and deciding what "access" should mean in each context.

The talk shares the methods that supported this collaboration, including co-design sessions, iterative prototyping, and building on existing communication practices. It also reflects honestly on the tensions and lessons that emerged: balancing technical ambition with everyday usability, working at the pace of relationships rather than project timelines, and sharing authorship of the outcomes. It closes with considerations for researchers and practitioners hoping to build lasting, community-centered approaches to accessible design.

About the Speaker: Dr. Lu is an Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream at ICCIT, who leverages human-computer interaction techniques and design research methods to understand how technological systems, including creative technologies, open-source hardware design, haptics and wearable technologies, can positively impact marginalized and underrepresented communities, including people with disabilities. Recently, Leon received the 2024 Bill Buxton Award for Best Canadian HCI Dissertation and has published research papers and journals at top tier HCI conferences including CHI, ASSETS and TACCESS.

