

## Notes from the Field: Building Campus Capacity to Achieve & Maintain Electronic Accessibility

By Anne Gravel Sullivan

A university or college campus' electronic accessibility policy should be comprehensive, addressing all parts of [Section 508](#)—the accessibility of a campus' Information Technology (i.e. software and hardware) as well as its campus Web sites and digital document collections.

### **The *Web Accessibility for All* Project makes four specific recommendations that will strengthen and deepen campus/institutional policy documents:**

1. Policies should include the recommendation that each unit's/department's strategic plan include a specific element that addresses accessibility—including current status and plans for improvement.
2. Policies should include as members of key decision making/policy groups one or more students and/or staff with disabilities.
3. Policies should make explicit reference to making libraries' electronic documents and other digital collections, such as those in museums, accessible.
4. Policies should include reference to accessibility determination procedures as part of the university's hardware/software acquisition process.

### *Electronic Accessibility Policy Teams, Implementation & Progress Measurement Plans*

Campus policy should be developed by a team of stakeholders from across key units procuring, maintaining and using electronic documents and information technology resources: librarians, public relations/marketing, services for students with disabilities (they have the most knowledge

of Assistive Technologies and how they can be combined for the purposes of accommodation). The reason it's important to include representatives from all these stakeholder groups is that the accessibility not only a campus' external Web, but its intranets and all its IT resources (hardware, software) must be evaluated for their accessibility under the Section 508 Guidelines—and a campus' policy and plan should make this explicit.

The *Web Accessibility for All* project urges campus planners to include at least one person with a disability on a campus' Electronic Accessibility Team, ensuring that at least one person with a strong vested interest in bringing this initiative to fruition is part of the policy development and implementation process. Such a team member can provide insights into issues, processes and attitudes that others without disabilities cannot. This is a practice promoted by national and international organizations, including National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research, the American Federation of the Blind, the Association Higher Education and Disability and WebAIM.

An exemplary policy addressing all three areas of electronic accessibility exists for campus stakeholder to emulate: the University of Minnesota's Accessible Information Technology Policy at <http://www.fpd.finop.umn.edu/groups/ppd/documents/policy/webaccesspol.cfm>.

For further guidance on who/which units to include, see WebAIM's "Organize a Web Accessibility Committee" at <http://www.webaim.org/coordination/implementation/3#q>. For a good model team, see the University of

California at Fresno at <http://www.csufresno.edu/webaccess/workgroup/members.htm>.

The Project Team at UW-Madison's *Web Accessibility for All* recommends developing an implementation plan that integrates information on [how](#) a specific campus is going to review the progress being made to build and maintain accessible electronic technology. As it stands, most Implementation Plans focus narrowly on only Web documents and not the other electronic documents and information technology also included under the Section 508 Guidelines. While such a focus can serve the Web Coordination team well, given the specificity of technical elements it provides, it does not provide information necessary for all creators of electronic documents and purchasers of information technology to make their electronic resources accessible.

For a simple but comprehensive report on the results of an electronic accessibility needs assessment that can serve as a template for developing a campus progress measurement plan, visit Canadore College Library's Web Accessibility plan at <http://www.canadorec.on.ca/Services/StudentServices/SpecialNeeds/AccessibilityPlan.cfm>.

### *Libraries and Digital Collections*

One of the issues raised by the Section 508 Guidelines is the need to address the accessibility of electronic documents such as those found in large digital collections such as those commonly found in campus libraries and museums.

While this may seem a

daunting task, the reality is that it is law that such electronic documents be made accessible. University and college campuses should determine whether there are collective efforts underway among state libraries and museums to address these issues, such as professional organizations seeking to establish common standards for the production and online storage of digital documents. Earlier this year, for example, the Digital Planning Summit convened by the Wisconsin Heritage Online group, met to begin the long-term work of establishing common standards and practices for developing and handling digital documents. Among their working groups, one of which is devoted to electronic accessibility, are a dozen-plus librarians from UW System campuses. Stakeholders such as the librarians and IT staff charged with the responsibility of addressing accessibility issues can take advantage of such existing opportunities to collaborate with other professionals as they seek to set standards and meet Section 508 requirements.

Nationwide, the Center on Applied Special Technology (CAST) has set standards for use by developers of digital documents so that their formats are compatible across all and any media used for instructional purposes. The technical protocol document/product developers need to be familiar with are known as the Digital Accessibility Information System (DAISY) standard.

What libraries and collection managers more likely need to be familiar with are which of their vendors follow the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS), the format which specifies the *application* (i.e. in functional combinations, such as audio and partial text; full text and some audio) of the DAISY elements in-

structional texts need to follow in order to make accurate and reliable print texts accessible to all users of electronic information.

For more information about the DAISY standard, visit: [http://www.daisy.org/publications/docs/20040510214528/DAISY-in-Brief\\_final.htm](http://www.daisy.org/publications/docs/20040510214528/DAISY-in-Brief_final.htm)

For more information about NIMAS and how it relates to the DAISY standards and XML (extensible markup language), visit the Data Conversion Laboratory at: <http://www.dclab.com/idea.asp> and [http://www.dclab.com/xml\\_file\\_format\\_blind.asp](http://www.dclab.com/xml_file_format_blind.asp) for an explanation of how XML levels the educational playing field for the visually impaired.

Explicit mention of digital collections and libraries in a University or College Electronic Accessibility policy and plan is advisable, as it reflects a campus' commitment to work toward electronic accessibility, which itself helps mitigate charges that a campus is not doing what it minimally can to promote accessibility without placing "undue burden" on the resources of its constituent units. For an exemplary policy that mentions digital documents as well as all campus IT (hardware and software), visit the University of Minnesota's Electronic Accessibility Policy online at <http://www.fpd.fino.p.umn.edu/groups/ppd/documents/policy/webaccesspol.cfm>.

Note that while campus administration may choose to place responsibility for developing a campus-wide Section 508 implementation plan on the IT/Web Unit, ultimately it has to be those most familiar with library/collection operations, including purchasing, maintenance and training procedures that will need to be involved in making digital collections accessible. We strongly encourage campuses to include an administrative librarian on their elec-

tronic accessibility team (even if only informally) to consult with about issues facing those working with digital collections.

### ***Determination Procedures: Purchasing and Vendor Product Accessibility***

A second issue is the need to develop a procedure for evaluating the accessibility of IT hardware and software purchased by campus stakeholders. Many campus policies do not include a plan to develop such determination procedures, failing to address the need for individual unit/department acquisition personnel and managers across the campus to assess the accessibility of the software and hardware they purchase. There is already a useful resource for assisting purchasers make informed decisions, the Vendor Product Accessibility Template, which the Federal government commissioned the Information Technology Industry Council to develop for its vendors and purchasers. While it does not offer a sample procedure, it provides a list of criteria and issues decision-makers need to look for when evaluating prospective software and hardware purchases.

In conjunction with the development of purchasing procedures for a campus, the Web Accessibility project recommends conducting an assessment of the accessibility of its existing IT and Assistive Technology (AT) resources. While this needn't be written into a policy, it provides a baseline measurement of a campus' IT accessibility across units and generates an awareness between stakeholders that might not otherwise communicate with each other about existing and prospective issues (as well as resources). This baseline measure and identification of prospective issues can significantly enhance the functioning

of services to students with disabilities and communication among campus support services. The *Web Accessibility for All* project has resources for conducting an evaluation, including the Accessibility of Campus Computing for Students with Disabilities Scale developed by Catherine Fichten and her colleagues at the Université de Montréal's National Center for Disability Services. The *Web Accessibility for All* project has permission from the Association for Higher Education and Disability to distribute copies of the scale and article in which it was first published to University of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Technical College System campus administrators. For a copy of the article and scale, please contact *Web Accessibil-*

*ity for All* at the email address or phone number below. Once such a campus-wide assessment has been completed, it becomes much easier to build in criteria specific to the purchases/users of different departments and units.

### Endnotes

These recommendations are intended to provide university and college campuses with the information its leaders need to move the campus toward full compliance with Section 508. Please feel free to contact our project staff with any questions and comments at (608) 265-3171 or [agsullivan@education.wisc.edu](mailto:agsullivan@education.wisc.edu).

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## More Notes from the Field: Building the Capacity of your Educational Institution's Electronic Accessibility

By Anne Gravel Sullivan

### Needs Assessment

#### *PHASE ONE: DEVELOP CAMPUS ELECTRONIC ACCESSIBILITY POLICY, TEAM AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN*

1. Does your campus have an electronic accessibility policy and implementation plan? If so, who is/was responsible for drafting and/or implementing it?
2. Does your campus policy acknowledge the need to address the priorities below, which are covered under the Section 508 Guidelines?
  - The accessibility of libraries' electronic documents and other digital collections
  - The accessibility of the Information Technology, including hardware and software, available to employees and students on campus
  - Developing and including accessibility determination procedures as part of the university's hardware and software acquisition process
3. Does your campus policy articulate the rationale and spirit behind the Section 508 Guidelines in order to better elicit compliance from all stakeholders?
4. Does your campus have an existing group of stakeholders charged with the responsibility for looking into and/or addressing electronic accessibility and the Section 508 Guidelines?
5. Does your campus electronic accessibility Team include stakeholder representatives from the following stakeholder groups?
  - Administration (Vice Chancellor, Dean, Provost)

- Faculty
  - Library
  - Web Development
  - Web Management
  - Information Technology
  - Student Services for Individuals with Disabilities
  - Purchasing
  - Marketing/Public Relations
  - Students with Disabilities
  - Specialist in Assistive Technologies
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. Does your campus implementation plan:
    - Articulate target goals for years one through three of implementation?
    - Provide target dates for reaching goals/compliance?
    - Provide Team contact information and/or stakeholder contact information for persons needing more information on electronic accessibility?
    - Make the recommendation that each unit's/department's strategic plan include a specific Make reference to including one or more students and/or staff with disabilities as members of key decision making/policy groups?
    - Have an element that addresses accessibility—including current status and plans for improvement?

#### *PHASE TWO: ASSESS CAMPUS STAKEHOLDER KNOWLEDGE OF SECTION 508 AND ELECTRONIC ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES*

7. Have campus Administrators and IT Directors assessed their own levels of knowledge about electronic accessibility issues?

- Are IT/Web management administrators and/or digital document creators familiar with the HiSoftware accessibility tools (such as AccVerify and HiCaption, which are available to all University of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Technical College System faculty, staff and students in the state)?
- Are IT/Web management administrators and/or document creators familiar with the Digital Accessibility Information System and National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standards?
- Have IT/Web management administrators and/or document creators considered options for meeting electronic accessibility requirements, including open source content management systems, extensible architecture systems and XML?
- Have campus purchasers and administrators, document management administrators, and personnel responsible for making decisions regarding the purchase of digital documents and the information technology needed to use them, used the Vendor Product Accessibility Template commissioned by the federal government to evaluate Vendor products and the accessibility of IT and digital/Web documents?
- Have the above stakeholders received/reviewed any documentation of these tools/standards?
- Have any of the stakeholder groups listed had any training in any of the above tools/standards?

- If so, which stakeholder groups and in which tools/standards?

**PHASE THREE: ASSESS THE ACCESSIBILITY OF CAMPUS ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

8. Has your campus conducted a campus-wide assessment of your institution's Information Technology (hardware and software) and identified:

- Where they are located and who manages their use and purchase policy (e.g. CIO, local department System Administrator)?
- Who is responsible for monitoring and providing IT upgrades?
- Who is responsible for purchasing hardware and software programs (e.g. Desktops, course management systems)?
- Whether there is a campus-wide purchasing policy or if purchasing decisions are made locally?
- Whether the Information Technology complies with the Section 508 Guidelines and are accessible to students, patrons and employees with disabilities?
- Whether campus leaders are familiar with the Accessibility of Campus Computing for Students With Disabilities Scale (ACCSDS) and the *Web Accessibility for All* Electronic Accessibility Needs Assessment for Faculty?

9. Has your campus conducted a campus-wide assessment of your institution's Web sites and identified:

- Where they are located and who manages them?
- Who is responsible for placing content on the Internet?
- Who is responsible for purchasing Web and the associated software programs (e.g. Office publishing, database)?
- Whether the Web pages/sites

comply with the Section 508 Guidelines and are accessible to patrons with disabilities?

- Whether the Web management administrators and/or electronic document authors/editors use an accessibility checking and/or repair program such as Bobby or the HiSoftware accessibility tools (AccVerify and HiCaption, which is available to them through the UW System)?

10. Has your campus conducted a campus-wide assessment of your institution's digital documents and identified:

- Where the largest collections of digital documents are located and who manages them?
- What format (digital or otherwise) they are in?
- Whether they comply with the Section 508 Guidelines and are accessible to patrons with disabilities?
- Who is responsible for placing them on the Internet and/or for purchasing Web and database electronic resources housing electronic documents (e.g. EbscoHost, ProQuest at the library)?

11. Have campus leaders assessed staff levels of knowledge about the Section 508 Guidelines?

- Are Information Technology management, Administrators and electronic document designers and editors familiar with the Section 508 Guidelines (as applies both to information technology (IT) and Web pages/sites)?
- Do campus leaders have a plan to address and implement electronic accessibility of digital documents under their purview?
- Have campus Services for Students with Disabilities and ADA Compliance Staff been informed about the Section 508 Guidelines?
- Have campus Services for

Students with Disabilities Staff familiarized and/or trained campus stakeholder groups (e.g. faculty, librarians, student advisors) in the Assistive Technology available to students with disabilities on campus?

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