

The Importance of Accessibility:

Why Do We Need to Be
Accessible?

Reason 1: Accessibility Is the Right Thing to Do.

Approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population has some kind of disability, with one in 10 having a severe disability (US Census Bureau, 1997). Worldwide, there are more than 750 million people with disabilities.

In postsecondary education, the percent of full-time, freshmen that have disabilities has increased dramatically since the 1970s. In 1988, 16 percent of all college freshmen reported having some type of disability, and by 2000, the percentage rose to 40 percent (Henderson, 2001). This presents itself as a serious concern for making education available to this population, especially since the percentage is increasing.

To ensure that our information and service we provide are accessible for everyone, we should work on that. If the door is closed to anyone because of a disability, we must work to open it.

Reason 2: Legal and Policy Mandates

It is the law in many institutions.

Title II (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990)

"No qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity ..."

Title II (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990)

- Services provided must be
- as effective as those provided to other patrons.

- the same as those provided to others unless different services are necessary to obtain equal results

- provided in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of the individual

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is enforced by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) under the guidelines of the Department of Education. This legislation protects the civil and constitutional rights of people with disabilities. It prohibits organizations which receive federal funds from discriminating against otherwise qualified individuals on the sole basis of a handicap.

OCR ruling in CCC case (1998)

"If guidelines to ensure access are made available to colleges now, such information on how to structure distance learning programs and campus WebPages will not only ensure that colleges meet their legal obligations but will also enable colleges to save significant expense over the later cost of "retrofitting" these programs after substantial investment has been made in inaccessible structures."

OCR Concerns

Access to Examinations

- Access to Classroom Materials
- Access to Textbooks
- Access to Computer-Based Information
- Translating Limited Print into Speech/E-text
- Capacity to Translate Large Volumes of Print

OCR Concerns

- Access to Mainstream Computer Labs
- Considering Accessibility When Purchasing Mainstream Technology
- Access to Library
- Access to Distance Learning and Computer Networks
- Technical Assistance
- Translating Print into Braille

Section 508 (Rehabilitation Act, Amendment of 1998

508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires access to electronic and information technology provided by the Federal government. The law applies to all Federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology.

Section 508 (Rehabilitation Act, Amendment of 1998

While 508 applies only to the federal government, many people believe the law will trickle down to the private sector to increase Web accessibility overall. As written, 508 requires anyone contracting with the federal government make related information technology accessible.

Chancellor's Office Perspective

- Contracts and grants contain a provision requiring the contractor or grantee comply with section 508 regulations.
- Each district will be asked to certify that it complies with Section 508 as a condition of receiving funds for 2001-02 under the Technology and Telecommunications Infrastructure Program (TTIP).

New State Law: Senate Bill No. 105

It took effect on January 1st, 2003.

SB 105 of California State Legislation

"In order to improve accessibility of existing technology, and therefore increase the successful employment of individuals with disabilities, particularly blind and visually impaired and deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, state governmental entities, in developing, procuring, maintaining, or using electronic or information technology, either indirectly or through the use of state funds by other entities, shall comply with the accessibility requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. Sec. 794d), and regulations implementing that act as set forth in Part 1194 of Title 36 of the Federal Code of Regulations."

SB 105 of California State Legislation

"Any entity that contracts with a state or local entity subject to this section for the provision of electronic or information technology or for the provision of related services shall agree to respond to, and resolve any complaint regarding accessibility of its products or services that is brought to the attention of the entity."

California Assembly Bill 422

On September 15, 1999, California Governor Gray Davis signed into law Assembly Bill 422 which requires publishers of instructional material to provide the material at no cost in an electronic format for use by students with disabilities at the University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges. This law became effective January 1, 2000.

Reason 3: Accessibility offers benefit for all users

As with many improvements intended for individuals with disabilities, the enhancements of accessible design offer benefits for all users. For example, an accessible web site is often easier more readable, easier to navigate and faster to download.

Similarly, anyone who has pushed a shopping cart out of grocery store can attest to the value of automatic doors and ramps cut into curbs. So automatic door and ramp cut into curb are not only accessible for people with mobility impairments, but also easy and convenient for people with no disabilities.

Reason 4 and finally: Accessibility represents a growing market in need of software, hardware and design.

If agencies/entities are only able to purchase electronic or information technology that is accessible, then software and hardware developers will focus some resources on incorporating accessibility into the product.

Since more and more people are aware of the importance of accessibility issue, eventually our services for students with disabilities will be fully accessible.

Conclusion

Access can make learning easier for ALL people--not just disabled individuals.