



Institutionalizing Electronic and Information Technology (EIT) Accessibility to Empower Learners with Disabilities



The State University
of New York

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SUNY colleges and universities are consistently attracting and enrolling students with disabilities.

The self-identification of employees with disabilities at SUNY has also increased.

Accessibility



Accessibility – Doing the Right Thing

Access, Equity, Inclusion, Completion (icons)

SUNY is home to more than 25,000 self-identified students with disabilities – nearly 40% of all self-identified college students enrolled in NYS postsecondary institutions (NYSED 2H-2)!

In NYS, 18% of New Yorkers aged 21 – 64 years old with disabilities have achieved educational attainment of a Bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 39% of New Yorkers without disabilities (Cornell University’s Yang-Tan Institute, 2016).

Campus climate: Students with disabilities can experience implicit and explicit prejudice and discrimination based on their disabilities (ableism). Students with disabilities consistently feel less comfortable than their non-disabled peers (on campus, in their department, in courses), which can impact their educational and developmental outcomes.

- NCCSD Research Brief:

http://www.nccsonline.org/uploads/7/6/7/7/7677280/nccsd_campus_climate_brief_-_final_pdf_with_tags2.pdf

Although students with disabilities are entering higher education in greater numbers, high school graduates with disabilities complete a college degree at a significantly lower rate when compared to their non-disabled peers (National Center on Disability,

2015).

The next frontier...



Stairs that incorporate a ramp

I'd like to approach EIT Accessibility by starting with analogies with physical accessibility...

- This is something we're all used to seeing...door openers, curb cuts, ramps. No one complains about these now. While these features were created specifically to accommodate individuals with disabilities, these benefit many people without disabilities. In fact, we've come to appreciate things like curb cuts, as they help people in wheelchairs, parents pushing strollers, and those for whom have difficulty with their knees

This photo resembles the principles of universal design (in architecture) - a set of design principles with an emphasis creating flexible, adaptive environments that minimize barriers and meet the needs of all people.

Retroactively adding these features = waste of time and money, inequitable experience



Accessible paddle-buttons in an elevator at the Ed Roberts Campus in Berkeley, California, USA

These examples are easier for us (sighted, able-bodied) to understand. Online accessibility is more hidden...but still has huge implications for participation in our learning environments

Source: <http://www.globaldisabilityrightsnow.org/tools/usa/standards-behind-americans-disabilities-act>

EIT Accessibility: Key Terms

- ❖ Accessible
- ❖ Electronic and Information Technology
- ❖ EIT Accessibility

There have been revolutionary innovations for teaching and learning, with respect to effective communication and information shared by technology

These are not new concepts, but they are increasingly making headlines in higher education

Soon, it will be second nature

Think about everything you/students do online...

- Create digital content: Syllabus, handouts, readings, videos
- Purchase: digital content, adaptive learning platforms, student response systems, etc.
- Register for courses
- Engage with course materials & required technologies (e.g., LMS)
- Pursue resources at Library
- Submit homework

You are the creators and influencers of academia – you sell knowledge

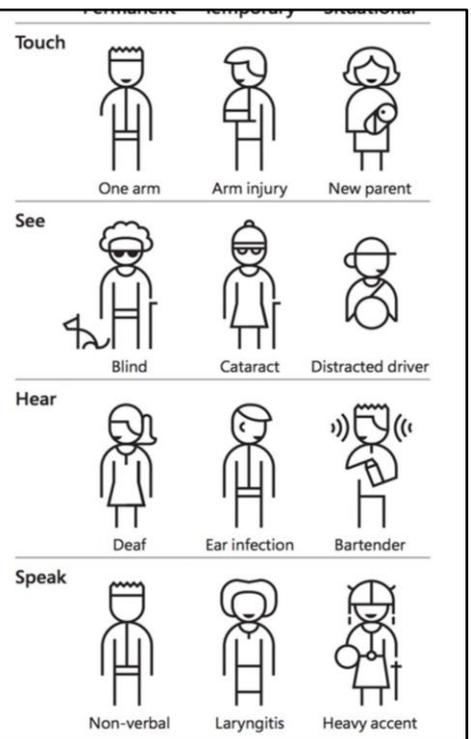
You sell this knowledge to students – all students

Think: How many of these things can you do without a mouse?

Similar to physical accessibility – retrofitting courses is inequitable and cost intensive

Who does online accessibility impact?

- ✓ Visual
- ✓ Hearing
- ✓ Motor
- ✓ Cognitive



Visual - Blindness, low vision, color blindness

Hearing - Deafness and hard of hearing

Motor - Inability to use a mouse, slow response time, limited fine motor skills

Cognitive - Learning disabilities, distractibility, inability to remember or focus on large amounts of information

Image: a visual demonstration of how individuals with permanent disabilities, temporary disabilities, and persons in situational contexts may benefit from inclusive web design.

- It really is more than just the 20%!
- <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/design/inclusive>

What if accessibility was thought of from the inception of design?

SUNY University-Wide Electronic & Information Technology (EIT) Accessibility Committee

- Establishment
- Charge
- Guiding Principles
- Membership
- Prospective Requirements
- Next Steps



[Key Issue in Teaching and Learning
EDUCAUSE 2015-2018](#)

Over the past 18 months, the federal Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has investigated many SUNY campuses for noncompliance with Section 504. Through these investigations it became clear that OCR uses WCAG 2.0 AA as the benchmark for minimal technical compliance. Recently, OCR has been more open about this standard. Although there is still no regulatory guidance on the matter, sub-regulatory guidance in the form of official presentations has been made available and confirms that WCAG 2.0 AA is generally viewed by OCR as the generic standard for minimal compliance with Section 504. **However, the lack of a formal adoption of WCAG 2.0 AA provides some flexibility for institutions to craft their own standards that are customized and adapted to their specific needs and goals.**

As a result of the OCR complaints, the University-wide Electronic and Information Technologies (EIT) Accessibility Committee was established. Began meeting in September, 2017.



Charge

- Develop a systematic approach to maintaining accessible electronic environments for campus community members with disabilities;
- Devise a SUNY-wide policy;
- Provide guidance for SUNY campuses; and
- Coordinate necessary training activities.

Guiding Principles

From the start, the Committee believed systematically addressing EIT Accessibility had the potential to:

- promote a more inclusive and welcoming digital environment, particularly for individuals with disabilities;
- enable campuses to address EIT accessibility barriers and reduce legal exposure;
- empower college students with disabilities to persist and complete their educational goals, due to an accessible EIT infrastructure;
- leverage the power of SUNY to influence third party vendors to conform to technical accessibility standards.

We are consistently attracting and enrolling college students with disabilities, and we're increasingly using technology to deliver programs, services, and activities

There are real equity issues, especially with respect to retention and completion for college students with disabilities in New York State. NYS is behind other states in EIT Accessibility.

Given that SUNY's mission promotes the broadest possible access, the Chancellor wishes to significantly expand online learning offerings, and that we aspire to be the most inclusive system of higher education in the country - we need to do better.

Combination of doing the right thing, assessing impact and risk – ultimately advancing equity and inclusion for prospective and current campus community members with disabilities

Campus Representation

- SUNY Adirondack
- Buffalo State
- SUNY Geneseo
- SUNY Delhi
- SUNY Oswego
- SUNY Cortland
- SUNY Fredonia
- SUNY New Paltz
- SUNY Broome
- SUNY Suffolk
- Mohawk Valley Community College
- Corning Community College
- University at Albany
- Binghamton University
- University at Buffalo
- Stony Brook University
- SUNY System Administration
 - Office of University Life
 - Office of General Counsel
 - Center for Professional Development
 - Open SUNY
 - U-Wide Information Technology
 - U-wide Procurement Office
 - Office of Library and Information Services
 - Open Educational Resources

Membership comprises broad representation across SUNY, representing all Sectors, including knowledge experts from Information Technologies, Librarians, Library Services, Center for Professional Development, Open SUNY, Disability/Accessibility Resources, Educational Technologies, Centers for Learning and Teaching, University-wide Procurement, Office of General Counsel, Office of University Life, Marketing Office, and Diversity Office, CCIO

Overview of Recommendations

- University-wide EIT Accessibility Policy
- Designate an EIT Accessibility Officer
- Create a Campus Accessibility Action Plan
- Use Standards devised by the EIT Accessibility Committee
 - Procurement Accessibility Conformance Standards (PACS)
 - Web Accessibility Standards (WAS)
 - **Digital Content Accessibility Standards (DCAS)**
 - Classroom Accessibility Standards (CAS)
 - Library Accessibility Guidelines (LAG)

SUNY should adopt a university-wide Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility policy to ensure appropriate campus and system-level commitment to support equal and integrated access to all its programs, services, and activities, particularly for individuals with disabilities, especially in the realm of electronic and information technologies.

The Chancellor and each campus president shall designate an EIT Accessibility Officer. EIT Accessibility Officers will be responsible for issuing, updating, and enforcing any requirements, standards, or guidelines supported by SUNY policy.

Each campus shall develop a Campus Accessibility Action Plan to promote ongoing, inclusive access for individuals with disabilities.

- Core elements of the Plan must include: Authority and Responsibility, Awareness, Design, Procurement, Monitoring Compliance, and Training
- The EIT Accessibility Officer is responsible for assuring the collaborative development of the campus Plan to be consistent with local shared governance processes.

For purposes of consistency and risk management, campuses are strongly encouraged to use Standards created by the EIT Accessibility Committee, to sustain accessible electronic and information technology environments.

- The EIT Accessibility Committee examined existing technical standards, including but not limited to WCAG 2.0 AA, and crafted its own minimum standards. The proposed standards are meant to maintain Section 504 compliance in according to OCR's guidance, ease the burden of adoption by conforming to the style and content used by our systems, and to allow SUNY campuses and System Administration to achieve its mission of access and its goal to become the most inclusive education system in the country.
- These standards provide a clear and consistent path to prioritize certain standards, and have a process in place to remediate inaccessible EIT upon request.
- Each campus should determine the applicability of the standards to relevant stakeholders based on their campus-specific policies, governance models, and technologies

These proposed recommendations are a shared responsibility for all institutions.

Think about what this means for your divisions 1 year, 3 years, and 5 years down the road.

- **Some SUNY campuses plan to designate or have already hired individuals to lead EIT accessibility.**
- **Many campuses have EIT Accessibility Committees and shared responsibility models already in place.**
- **Others have plans for new content in accordance with signed OCR resolution agreements.**
- **Purchasing processes will evolve...**

EIT Accessibility Committee Status

Where We Are

- Draft EIT Accessibility Report & Recommendations – Submitted to Provost
 - Draft Policy
 - Draft Guidelines
 - Draft Standards (5)
- Draft Implementation Guidance for each Standard

Next Steps

- Share Report with Campus Leadership, Faculty Governance, & key stakeholders
 - Campus Comment Period
- Submit Report to Board of Trustees
 - Policy Approval
- Rollout with Implementation Guidance - to be published on SUNY Accessibility Website

Implementation Guidance

- Comprehensive recommendations/models for achieving the goals of the EIT Accessibility policy/procedure
- Explains what each item in the Standard means, why it's important, how to meet/test for accessibility

SUNY Accessibility Website

- This website will be being designed as a resource for all campuses, with guidance on how to achieve the future Policy & Guidelines.

SUNY Resources

- Access MOOC: [Accessibility: Designing and Teaching Courses for All Learners](#)
- OSCQR
- Blackboard Ally
 - Adopted by 26+ Campuses
- SUNY CPD
 - EASI Training
 - Webinars
 - Handshake agreements (closed captioning)



All of these resources are catered to faculty and staff for designing and adopting digital content...I imagine that centers for learning/teaching, distance education, and possibly IT help desks may be contacted for help on these design principles

Additional resources are in the works!

Innovative Campus Initiatives

- Binghamton University: [Teaching Online Certification Program](#)
- SUNY Oswego: [Accessibility Fellows Program](#)
- Onondaga Community College: UDL Academy
- Buffalo State College: Accessibility Day (March 22, 2019)



Binghamton – TOCP

- Faculty are taught and paid to make quality, accessible online courses

SUNY Oswego

- Faculty fellows serve on workgroup on accessible teaching, participate in professional development on accessibility, update at least 1 course that is taught in 2019 to be fully accessible, & service as a coach and ambassador for other faculty
- Option for one course reduction or one course overload pay per year
- Trained Student Assistant
- Travel funding to either attend Accessing Higher Grounds Conference (or equivalent) OR Present on accessibility at a conference in their own discipline equivalent

OCC - UDL Academy

- Nancy was instrumental in creating it, along with a faculty member ([Christopher Hromalik](#))
- Provide stipends to faculty about UDL (only receive \$ once project is completed, as a result of training - designing a course that is UDL friendly)

Contact Information

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