Faculty Senate Distance Education Committee  
Thread on Access Policy

Ron Stewart, February 25, 2005

Here is the proposed language I would like us to discuss today, sorry it is probably not going out in time for today's meeting. I will bring hard copy and offer my apologies to those folks in Bend.

OSU Distance Education, including all E-Campus programs, will develop clear and concise standards to insure, to the maximum extent possible, the full inclusion and participation by persons with disabilities in the complete aspects of all programs, services and operations. OSU seeks to be at the forefront in the creation of a complete and compelling learning experience. Therefore, it is the intent that the educational and programmatic focus will be on equitable use by persons with disabilities, not simply compliance with the typically accepted standards.

Deborah Healey, February 25, 2005

Here are my suggestions. Changes are in blue and brackets, in case the blue doesn't show up.

OSU {distance education}, including {every} E-Campus program, will develop clear and concise standards to {ensure}, to the maximum extent possible, the full inclusion and participation by persons with disabilities in {all} aspects of all programs, services and operations. OSU seeks to be at the forefront in the creation of a complete and compelling learning experience. Therefore, {an} educational and programmatic {goal for OSU distance education} will be {full and} equitable use by persons with disabilities, not simply compliance with the typically accepted {ADA} standards.

Ron Stewart, February 25, 2005

Just one minor correction to your correction, I used square brackets. The are not ADA standards they are accessibility standards. The ADA applies primarily to employees and customers, we actually serve our program participants under Section 504 of the Rehab Act, and in a minor way under the ADA.

... not simply compliance with the typically accepted [accessibility] standards.

Bill McCaughan, February 25, 2005

Sorry I had to leave the meeting before this discussion occurred.

Question: If the institution currently does not meet (my assumption) the “typically accepted (ADA) standards,” are there institutional resources available to enable the institution to establish and meet a higher set of standards?
Also, as we had previously discussed, does the committee want to put out its “recommendation” for standards prior to the release of the guidelines being finalized by the committee appointed by the Provost to address this item?

**Ron Stewart, February 25, 2005**

Just my opinion here, and the very commonly held understanding in the accessibility field. First I would agree with your assumption in regards to OSU’s distance offerings. However I would suggest you seek clarification from AA/EEO and/or Legal on the University’s stand on this issue. It would also be my opinion, which I have expressed before, that E-Campuses self-supporting status has no bearing on this issue.

As you know the responsibility for access to all programs and services is an unfunded legal mandate that is part of the cost of doing business for any public institution. As far as I been able to determine, through a variety of sources, OSU really does not budget for accessibility costs related to program or service development. They do budget for costs directly related to providing student accommodations. Secondly under applicable disability law all resources created, developed or allocated at OSU are institutional resources, this also includes grants and donations. Thereby if we are going to be financially prudent, the cost of the accessibility for any program or service really needs to be included in the costs for the development of that program or service.

I also have always operated under the practice of we do not retrofit, unless to serve a specific student accommodation need, but need to design accessibility into all new programs and services. My professional opinion on your first question would be no, not in any practical sense.

My program is funded to provide support to campus units on how to make things accessible, this includes E-Campus, but not to actually do the accessibility piece for them unless it is part of a direct accommodation to an enrolled student. The way I operationalize this is, if we have a student who is blind enroll in one of our many inaccessible distance based courses then we will (TAP) help provided the needed resources to make that course accessible or provide a reasonable alternative accommodation. For example the several web based courses we have had to print out and scan back into the computer to produce an accessible electronic version of the website, and did not bill E-Campus for the related costs.

As to the policy piece and why I decided to bring this back up, other than it being my responsibility as a disabilities advocate. Given the time projections that I have heard on how long it is going to take to get this proposed set of "guidelines" through the faculty senate (a year perhaps if not more), and not getting any response from the chair of the IT Access committee that was charged by the Provost prior to our meeting, I thought it was important to at least look at draft policy language dealing with accessibility. In particular since it does not seem to be just "my" issue, but one that was endorsed by other members of the committee as needing policy direction.
The DE policy language, as it is currently being considered, is general enough in nature and does not speak to a specific set of standard. As currently worded could be used to endorse the IT Access Guidelines, or any other set of nationally accepted best practices depending on the decisions of the distance education entity involved.

Debbie Coehlo, March 18, 2006

Since I will not be able to attend the next meeting, I just wanted to add a few comments to the ongoing discussion for assuring distance education is accessible to all without discrimination due to ability. My background is in assuring children receive equitable education following the IDEA law, so some of my thoughts may not apply to adults. However, the IDEA was based on an expansion of the ADA in part. The key terms we use in primary education is accommodation and adaptation. All educational plans for individuals identified as having a disability or condition that interferes with education must include how the institution will provide accommodations (allowing more time for test taking for those with learning disabilities) and adaptations (for example, providing audio tapes for required readings or exams).

The other question I would like considered is who are we talking about, exactly? Are we responsible for assuring our distance courses are available to all, or just those students admitted as OSU degree seeking students? OSU degree seeking students must meet minimum requirements (GPA, SAT scores, etc.), whereas E-Campus does not require admission into OSU as a degree seeking student before taking courses. The group of potential students for E-Campus may be much larger, and abilities more varied, than those students admitted as OSU degree seeking students. My guess is that we must be accessible to all as a public institution, but I am not familiar with laws guiding admission criteria.