



New Era of **Digital Accessibility**

Support by **VitalSource™**

VitalSource has been delivering learning content, electronic textbooks, and customized curriculum beginning in 1999. Since then, we have delivered tens of millions of titles to millions of users through our publishing partners, channel partners, and directly into students' hands. For more than a decade this delivery has included a commitment to mainstream accessibility.

What do we mean by “mainstream” accessibility? We define this simply as providing accessibility using the same content, the same platform, and the same channels as any other content. We ensure content is available where and when users want it. (This is one of the reasons we deliver native applications for Windows, Mac, iOS, Android, Kindle Fire, and Chromebooks that allow users to download and access content offline.) The need for access at the same time as everyone else is especially true for users requiring accessibility accommodation.

VitalSource has a long-standing commitment to accessibility (blog.vitalsource.com/accessibility-vitalsource-part-1 and blog.vitalsource.com/accessibility-vitalsource-part-2) and we recognize the unique requirements around learning content within higher education. To us, and we hope to the rest of the community, this means ensuring accessibility not just in the learning content (textbooks, for example), but also in the platform used to deliver that content (epubtest.org/testsuite/accessibility) and in the channel where the learner obtains the content via an LMS integration or through a purchase (www.vitalsource.com/vsaccess). We even ensure metadata about the accessibility of titles is available to the instructor during the content selection process. Dealing with accessibility in one part of this is beneficial, but we cannot rest there. **We must make sure that the needs of all learners are not overlooked in the various parts of the larger ecosystem.**

In the following pages, as well as in our blog posts (blog.vitalsource.com) and on our website (www.vitalsource.com/accessibility), we will help you understand what to expect, what to require, and what we can do to help you in this fundamentally important area.



Rick Johnson
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Introduction

Colleges have for years been required to make their programs accessible to people with disabilities. That's why sign language interpreters are available. That's why staircases to enter campus buildings have ramps. All of that is still true.

But increasingly discussions of accessibility are about digital tools – which with planning and care can make courses and materials not only accessible but easy to use for many with disabilities. But without planning and care, digital tools can effectively close off courses and material to many with disabilities. For educators, moral issues overlay their use of digital tools. Legal issues loom, too – lawsuits brought by students and government agencies have forced changes at many institutions.

The articles in this compilation explore some of the legal and practical issues surrounding this topic and accessibility issues more generally in higher education. *Inside Higher Ed* expects these issues to become even more central in the years ahead, as more people with disabilities enter higher education. We welcome your reactions to this compilation and your ideas for future coverage.

--The Editors
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THE 4 KEY COMPONENTS TO ADDRESSING END-TO-END ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

VitalSource has a long-standing commitment to mainstreaming accessible content. For more than a decade, we have been committed to providing accessible access to learning content for all users on all of our platforms, helping publishers employ best practices for marking up their content according to the WCAG 2.0 standards, and maintaining a 100% score on the industry's fundamental accessibility tests.

We want every user to be able to access content when, where, and how it works for them.

1



THE CONTENT

Format selection (EPUB vs. PDF)
Standards (WCAG, 508 refresh)
Accountability & transparency

2



THE PLATFORM

Anytime, anywhere accessibility
epubtest.org
Longevity (journey vs. destination)

3



THE CHANNEL

Working with partners
Alternative channels
(VitalSource Access)
Importance of metadata
(schema.org)

4



THE ADOPTER

Search, sample, adopt
Emerging standards
The importance of
community

News

A selection of articles by *Inside Higher Ed* reporters

New Era for Disability Rights

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

As higher education turns increasingly digital, disability rights advocates turn to legal measures to address the challenges facing students with disabilities.

Miami University in Ohio in October 2016 became the latest institution to [overhaul](#) its accessibility policies for people with disabilities. Within a year and a half, students there will receive personalized accessibility plans and encounter course materials, learning platforms and websites that conform to accessibility standards.

The university agreed to the overhaul as part of a settlement with Aleeha Dudley, a blind student who -- with the help of Disability Rights Ohio, a local advocacy group -- in 2014 [sued](#) over a lack of accessible course materials and trained assistants. In 2015, Dudley gained another powerful ally: the U.S. Department of Justice.

Disability studies scholars and legal experts say lawsuits like Dudley's

against Miami represent a shift in activism, where high-profile cases help raise awareness about the challenges facing students in an increasingly digital world. More than two decades after the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 was signed into law, advocacy groups are pushing to clarify how it and other laws that prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities apply to technology that at the time seemed like science fiction but now has become reality. At the same time, those and other groups are pushing for new legislation, keeping one eye on the upcoming process to rewrite the Higher Education Act.



JoAnna Hunt, an accessibility manager at Blackboard, said the last five years in particular have featured large advocacy groups -- such as the National Federation of the Blind and the National Association of the Deaf -- as well as students and their parents taking a "harder look" at higher education.

"Without a doubt, there's been an

increase in formalized, organized advocacy,” Hunt said in an interview. “In addition, there’s a lot more smaller, more organic, more grassroots things happening. ... Students are pushing a little more for what they believe to be their civil rights to equal and equivalent educational experiences.”

Of course, since the ADA was enacted (and even before), students with disabilities pushed colleges to deal with physical barriers (such as sidewalks without curb cuts and buildings one could enter only via stairs), for sign language interpreters or other accommodations that would allow them to fully benefit from all that higher education offers. While most college officials now know better than to build facilities that some students can’t physically enter, many routinely overlook the accessibility issues raised by technology.

Miami is far from the only university to face legal action over accessibility issues. In recent years alone, several colleges and education companies -- Atlantic Cape Community College, edX, Harvard University and the University of Phoenix, among [others](#) -- have either been sued or settled complaints about inaccessible websites or content. And like at Miami, the Justice Department has occasionally involved itself to reach a settlement.

Lennard J. Davis, a prominent disability studies scholar based at the University of Illinois at Chicago, said those lawsuits highlight a trend of the last 10 years of accessibility

lawsuits shifting from focusing on physical to digital spaces.

“The web and technology associated with sensory impairments are where it is at right now,” Davis said in an email. “The virtual and digital world has replaced the physical world as the locus for discrimination and barriers.”

Visual Web Brings New Challenges

Lainey Feingold, a disability rights lawyer, has worked on web accessibility issues since the late 1990s. In an interview, she said the focus of the lawsuits has changed as the Internet has matured. Initially, an inaccessible web was an absolute “showstopper” for blind people, she said, but as more and more online content is being delivered in the form of video, the lack of adequate captioning has brought more attention from groups advocating for the equal rights of deaf people. Also, with more knowledge and new technology, digital content can be displayed in ways that make it accessible to those with visual disabilities, but typically only if colleges put thought into the issue.

“There are a lot of initiatives for increased access due to the growth of online education and the tireless advocacy by the NAD and sister advocacy organizations,” Zainab Alkebsi, policy counsel for the National Association of the Deaf, said in an email. “These initiatives are being pursued because there is still a lot to be desired, and the NAD and other civil rights groups will continue to fight for equal accessibility on

the web.”

The University of California, Berkeley, is another example. It, like MIT and so many other institutions, offers free audio and video lectures on platforms such as edX, iTunes U and YouTube.

Following an investigation that determined “significant portions” of the content were inaccessible to people who are deaf due to a lack of captions, the Justice Department in August [concluded](#) the university was violating the ADA.

The department issued a series of remedial measures, including paying damages to students affected by the inaccessible content and ensuring existing and future content meets the “AA” level of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, developed by the World Wide Web Consortium, a standards organization.

Facing what it called “extremely expensive measures,” the university [openly contemplated](#) a different solution: delete everything.

“We believe that in a time of substantial budget deficits and shrinking state financial support, our first obligation is to use our limited resources to support our enrolled students,” Catherine P. Koshland, Berkeley’s vice chancellor for undergraduate education, said in a statement. “Therefore, we must strongly consider the unenviable option of whether to remove content from public access.”

The NAD is also backing a class action lawsuit against the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

for not captioning many of the free video lectures it makes available online through massive open online courses and other sources. MIT has argued the case should be thrown out, as being required to caption everything would “impose an unreasonable financial or administrative burden, or require a fundamental change in the good at issue.” A federal district court on in November rejected that argument and allowed the case to proceed.

Critics, Feingold included, have chided Berkeley for the tone of its response to the DOJ’s findings. A group of the university’s own faculty members even [published](#) a response to the response, saying the threat to pull all free online content conflicts with the university’s long history of work in the field of disability studies.

“The DOJ letter is an opportunity for us to acknowledge that we can do better,” the faculty members wrote. “We must comply with the law, but rather than being defensive and operating from a place of fear, we can be constructive and work towards our mission of public education.”

Hunt, of Blackboard, also applauded the DOJ for paying attention to accessibility issues and working with universities to settle disputes. “There have been too many years of uncertainty and gray areas in terms of what regulations apply in higher education,” she said.

Doing the ‘Right Thing’

The Berkeley and Miami cases are examples of what the National Fed-

eration of the Blind has previously described as its “university by university” approach to ensuring that the digitization of higher education doesn’t leave students with disabilities by the wayside.

But the NFB’s approach could soon receive a boost – at least when it comes to web accessibility. New [rules](#) that have long been in the works at the Justice Department would require all public universities (and indeed all public entities) to follow many of the same accessibility measures Miami and Berkeley are being required to take up.

The department has since 2010 worked on formulating technical requirements governing how public entities should offer services online. In 2015, it decided to tackle the issue of web accessibility on its own, but the process has extended into the final year of the Obama administration. (The NFB [issued](#) a scathing statement in response to the delay, calling it “deplorable” and an “example of inexcusable foot-dragging on the issue of web accessibility.” The organization did not respond to a request to comment for this article.)

Thirteen higher education organizations – including the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the American Council on Education, Educause, and the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities – in October 2016 came together to [comment](#) on the proposed rules. Their comments generally favor some form of standard for web accessibility, though with several cave-

ats and exemptions for college and universities.

Summed up, the associations argued that colleges are not like DMV offices. “[A] university’s online presence is far more than just transactional,” the comments read. “To take just a few examples, content posted on university websites includes scholarly works posted directly by authors or hosted in open-access repositories; research data; instructional material with a limited target audience; library resources licensed from third parties; archival material; multimedia recordings of nonpublic hosted events; and faculty blogs.”

The associations argued colleges shouldn’t be punished if someone at the college, like a student, posts content to the university website that doesn’t conform to accessibility standards. Likewise, they said the requirements shouldn’t apply to content that serves a small audience. They also asked for more time – three years to come up with an accessibility plan and five years to put it into action, as opposed to the proposed two years.

Jonathan S. Fansmith, who works in government relations for ACE, said in an interview that the associations are looking for a middle ground with regulations that ensure core university functions – registering for classes, paying tuition and so on – are accessible to anyone but don’t stifle university research output.

“We want to do the right thing here,” Fansmith said. “We want to do it the right way. We want to have

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cognizance of a process that's thoughtful, deliberate and can actually be achieved so you don't get schools that say, 'Look, this is going to be so costly, so burdensome.' "

The National Association of the Deaf is pushing back against claims that the price tag is holding back accessibility initiatives at colleges,

however, pointing instead to inadequate training and a lack of openness, among other factors. Alkebsi, the policy counsel, said colleges shouldn't view updating content and websites as a cost, but an investment.

"Researchers who have studied the problem of inaccessible Title II

websites have not found cost to be a factor for inaccessibility," Alkebsi wrote.

"The NAD asserts that once web accessibility standards are clear in the mandate to include full accessibility for everyone, all higher education entities will incorporate these standards without difficulty." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/11/07/disability-rights-advocates-shift-strategies-ensure-equal-rights-digital-age>



THE CONTENT

Nothing works without accessibility markup being in the content. This is critical for the rest of the ecosystem to provide users with accessibility.

- Format selection. While it is possible to make PDF content accessible, the dominant standard that has emerged is the EPUB format. It has accessibility features built in, and provides support for advanced accessibility markup as well. Choose EPUB for all your content. (See www.idpf.org/epub/a11y/accessibility.html)
- Standards play a critical role in ensuring accessibility. WCAG 2.0 A and WCAG AA, along with the recently updated 508 refresh, have become the recognized standard. You should demand compliance with these standards.
- Accountability & transparency are where we all benefit. There is work underway now to provide the industry with objective means to evaluate accessibility claims for content. You can learn more at inclusivepublishing.org/. VitalSource is actively working to implement and encourage publishers to adopt these standards.

New Baseline for Accessibility

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

Disability rights experts say an update to the Rehabilitation Act creates new expectations for accessibility standards in higher education.

A long-awaited update to a federal rule ups the pressure on colleges and universities to ensure that their information and communication technology services are accessible to students with disabilities, experts say.

The federal government in January 2017 finished work on [updating](#) section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which details the accessibility standards federal agencies, contractors and employers must meet both online -- like on a public-facing website -- and in person, like an information kiosk at the DMV.

Section 508 is now almost two decades old -- it was amended to the Rehabilitation Act in 1998 -- an eternity in the world of information technology. An advisory committee in 2006 recommended that section 508 be refreshed, and work on updating the rule continued throughout the Obama administration. The final rule was published in the *Fed-*

eral Register on Jan. 18 -- two days before the presidential transition of power.

The rule goes into effect Jan. 18, 2018, giving federal agencies a year to prepare.

Section 508 doesn't directly address accessible technology in higher education, but it still affects colleges and universities. Some colleges have determined on their own that they are covered by the law. A handful of states (and therefore sometimes their public colleges and universities) have used the law as a blueprint for accessibility. And some federal grant programs also come with accessibility requirements based on the law.

More importantly, according to accessibility experts and groups that advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, the law helps set the tone for what the federal government sees as a baseline for accessibility policies.



"What this does is it draws a line in the sand," said Kevin Rydberg, senior accessibility consultant with Siteimprove, a website optimization company. "For those who have used the excuse of 'We don't know what the rule change is going to be, so we can't design for it,' that excuse is now gone."

That development is particularly important at a time when lawsuits are [becoming an increasingly common strategy](#) to compel colleges to ensure equal access to higher education for students with disabilities.

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Atlantic Cape Community College, Miami University in Ohio and the massive open online course provider edX are just some of the education providers that have in the last few years faced legal action from advocacy groups and students.

In the cases where those lawsuits have been resolved through settlements, many colleges have agreed to follow the accessibility standard that the federal government now has established as its baseline. The updated rule requires agencies to comply with the AA level of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, a widely recognized standard developed by the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative.

While the U.S. Department of Justice under President Obama sometimes involved itself in accessibility lawsuits against colleges, it is not

certain if the department will take such an active role under Senator Jeff Sessions, Republican of Alabama, who has been nominated to serve as attorney general.

During the one-year window until the updated rule goes into effect, Rydberg said colleges should re-examine their design processes to ensure that accessibility is a central part of them -- not an afterthought. He recommended that colleges pay particularly close attention to digital resources and webpages intended to serve a wide audience and ensure that they conform to the accessibility standard.

"You have to have these processes built in from day one," Rydberg said. "The time is now. Don't wait until the deadline is looming."

Advocacy groups such as the National Federation of the Blind welcomed the updated rule, even while

pushing for education-specific accessibility guidelines. In November the NFB held an event in Washington, D.C., to push for the passage of the Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education (AIM HE) Act, which would authorize the creation of a committee to produce voluntary guidelines for course materials.

"We feel very strongly that specific guidance is needed in the area of education," Christopher S. Danielson, director of public relations for the NFB, said in an interview. Until new regulations that deal specifically with higher education are approved -- such as under Title II of the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 -- he said "the [section] 508 regulations are going to be the accessibility regulations that people look to to see what the government thinks accessibility looks like." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/02/03/experts-say-rehabilitation-act-refresh-sets-new-baseline-accessibility-standards>

University May Remove Online Content to Avoid Disability Law

By SCOTT JASCHIK

U.S. Justice Department finds that Berkeley MOOCs and YouTube content don't meet federal requirements.

The University of California, Berkeley, announced in September 2016 that it may eliminate free online content rather than comply with a U.S. Justice Department order that it make the content accessible to those with disabilities.

The content in question is all free and is for the general public to use. "The department's findings do not implicate the accessibility of educational opportunities provided to our enrolled students," said [a statement](#) on the situation by Cathy Koshland, vice chancellor for undergraduate education.

While the university has not made a final decision, she said, it may not be able to afford complying with the Justice Department's recommendations on how to make the online material accessible.

"In many cases the requirements proposed by the department would require the university to implement extremely expensive measures to continue to make these resources available to the public for free," she wrote. "We believe that in a time of substantial budget deficits and

shrinking state financial support, our first obligation is to use our limited resources to support our enrolled students. Therefore, we must strongly consider the unenviable option of whether to remove content from public access."

The announcement added that Berkeley hoped to avoid that path through additional discussions with the Justice Department.

The material in question involves courses provided by Berkeley through the edX platform for massive open online courses, and videos on YouTube and iTunes University.

The Department of Justice found that much of this online material is in violation of the Americans With Disabilities Act, which requires colleges to make their offerings accessible to people with disabilities.

The department investigation followed complaints by two individuals who are deaf -- one of them a faculty member at Gallaudet University and one at its school for elementary and secondary school students. Both said that they are unable to use



Berkeley online material because it has not been formatted for use by people with hearing disabilities.

Berkeley released [the Justice Department letter](#) finding the university in violation of ADA. The letter outlined numerous concerns about issues related to those who are deaf as well as those who have visual disabilities:

- Many videos do not have captions.
- Many videos lack "an alternative way to access images or visual information (e.g., graphs, charts, animations or URLs on slides), such as audio description, alternative text, PDF files or Word documents).
- Many documents "associated with online courses were inaccessible to individuals with vision disabilities who use screen readers

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because the document was not formatted properly.”

- Some videos that had automatically generated captions were “inaccurate and incomplete.”

The review of online material involved 16 MOOCs available in March and April 2015 and another 10 in January 2017. The Justice Department also based its analysis on reviews of 543 videos on Berkeley's YouTube channel, and on 99 lectures in 27 courses on iTunes U.

The letter noted that Berkeley makes resources available to those creating online content who want that content to be accessible. But

the letter faulted Berkeley for not requiring such steps.

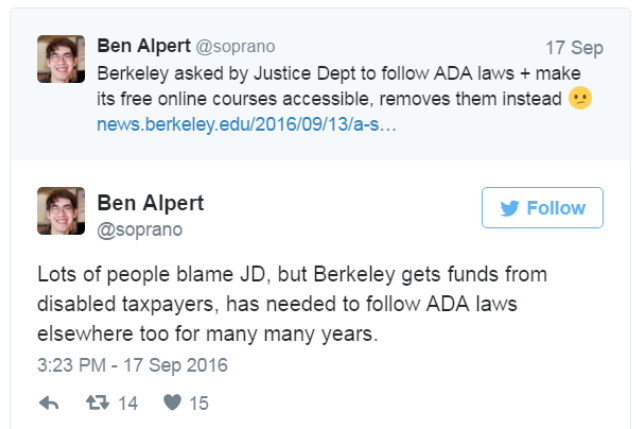
A quick search of YouTube videos on various college and university channels suggest that there are many videos without captions.

As word has started to spread of the Justice Department findings, many criticized the Justice Department.

The blog of [Reason](#), a libertarian magazine, wrote, “Special thanks to the DOJ -- fulfilling its role here as the Handicapper General -- for ensuring

equal access to public education, where ‘equal access’ is defined as ‘no access for anybody.’”

But some on social media defended the Justice Department. ■



<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/09/20/berkeley-may-remove-free-online-content-rather-complying-disability-law>

THE PLATFORM

Having accessible content is just the start; you must have a platform (reading system, application, etc.) to open the content that is also accessible.

- Anytime, anywhere accessibility is an expectation with today's users. If a user is working from a browser on a shared machine, or a dedicated app on their phone, online with connectivity, or offline during a commute, the platform they use should provide access and accessibility.
- As with your content, accountability & transparency are required here. The industry has provided a means for you to evaluate vendors claims about their accessibility at epubtest.org/testsuite/accessibility/. Clicking on the columns will let you sort, and see that **VitalSource applications are the only ones 100% compliant with the accessibility tests.**
- When selecting a platform and vendor, look for one that offers more than just accessibility support for today. With emerging standards, updated platforms, new assistive technology, and new devices, you need a partner who is committed for the long term. Accessibility compliance is never something that is “done.” It is a journey that is committed to over the long run. VitalSource has a proven track record not only in providing the 100% solution, but in demonstrating the longevity and commitment that is required.



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By the Book

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

A coalition of disability studies scholars formulate guidelines to help publishers produce accessible books.

A group of renowned disability studies scholars are seeking to clarify what makes a book accessible with a set of guidelines that authors can use to help publishers make their books readable by anyone.

The guidelines, a one-page template [letter](#), read a little like an ultimatum. The letter opens by asking a publisher to confirm in writing that print books and accessible formats will be made available simultaneously, then launches into an explanation of how publishers should handle everything from digital rights management to authoring software.

Lennard J. Davis, professor of English at the University of Illinois at Chicago, said the letter is meant less to threaten a boycott and more as a public service announcement. Some authors may not budge from the demands in the letter, he said, but others are likely to use it to spread awareness about accessibility.

"Most of us understand this is a process," Davis said. "Just the way that curb cuts, wheelchair lifts on buses and captioning on TV are part of our everyday lives, nobody notic-

es them anymore -- but they had to be fought for. This isn't really any different."

Davis and his co-authors, Catherine Kudlick, Margaret Price, Melissa Helquist and Jay Dolmage, have settled on the popular standard EPUB as the desired format for accessible ebooks. Their guidelines recommend publishers waive digital rights management restrictions for readers with disabilities so the restrictions won't interfere with accessibility software.

The guidelines also come with pointers on how to make content accessible. They suggest making text resizable and available as text-to-speech, labeling all photos and illustrations, and using line styles instead of color to distinguish between different data in charts.

The guidelines, Davis said, are meant to promote universal design principles -- meaning anyone, regardless of disability, can use the books.

"Accessibility is always a multi-pronged issue," Davis said. "When you talk about disabilities, you're talking about so many different



Lennard J. Davis, professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago

groups."

So far, the Society for Disability Studies and the Canadian Disability Studies Association have endorsed the guidelines.

Davis said he expects more organizations -- including professional associations -- to sign on and make the guidelines available to their members. The National Center on Deaf-Blindness, for example, helped Davis and others write the guidelines.

A spokesperson for the Association of American Publishers did not immediately respond to a request for comment. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/06/16/disability-studies-scholars-present-accessibility-guidelines>

Software Accessibility Suit

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

The U.S. Department of Justice seeks to join a blind student's discrimination lawsuit against Miami University in Ohio. The university denies the allegations.

The U.S. Department of Justice in May 2015 filed briefs to seek to join a blind student's lawsuit against Miami University in Ohio, saying the institution's website and licensed software from vendors such as from Turnitin and Pearson are inaccessible to students with disabilities.

Aleeha Dudley, who is blind, sued the university and its president in January 2014, alleging it violated Title II of the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990. The law requires state entities such as public universities to provide equal access to students with disabilities.

Dudley enrolled at the university in 2011 to study zoology, but says her grades suffered because of "Miami's selection of software programs that gratuitously exclude[d]" her from equal access to accessible course materials, according to the complaint. Examples include digitized textbooks described as "nearly useless and vastly inferior to the printed text," software not designed to be used with screen readers, and "unusable" tactile graphics.

The department launched an in-

vestigation of the university in April 2014. Its findings, released that June, suggested the university had violated the ADA. The department has since attempted to resolve the case, but in May 2015 it [moved](#) to intervene.

The department will sometimes file a statement of interest in a case, explaining a specific matter without taking a formal position. If the department's motion to intervene is granted, however, it would join Dudley in suing the university. The case is filed in a federal district court in Ohio.

"We are pleased that the DOJ is taking this case and the issues that it presents so seriously," said Chris Danielsen, director of public relations for the National Federation of the Blind. The organization is assisting Dudley in the case.

The university in a statement said it "continues to deny the allegations. We take our obligations under the American Disabilities Act very seriously. Miami provides extensive resources and accommodations for our disabled students, and will con-



tinue to do so."

Miami is the latest university to draw scrutiny from the federal government over its use of technology in the classroom. In [2013](#), the department reached a settlement with Louisiana Tech University over an issue that also involved students with vision impairments. The department settled a case with massive open online course provider edX, which committed to making its platform accessible to users with disabilities.

While the list of colleges and universities finding themselves in

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legal trouble over accessibility issues continues to grow, advocates for students with disabilities said they continue to wonder how many examples are needed before it becomes a high-priority issue in higher education.

“The macro problem here that we’re currently having to address, sort of university by university, is that the technology and content providers are not doing what they need to do to make their stuff accessible,” Danielsen said. “Currently the only mechanism that we have to address this is to go after the colleges and universities, because they are the ones with the buying power. They are the ones that can say, if they will, to a provider that we will not purchase, we will not deploy

your product if it’s not accessible.”

The organization is working with institutions and vendors to determine which regulations both sides can agree on, Danielsen said.

The ADA covers colleges and universities, but not their software vendors, said Daniel F. Goldstein, a lawyer who specializes in disability rights law. He pointed out that institutions can influence the market by requiring companies that respond to requests for proposals to detail how they will make their software accessible to students with disabilities.

“Accessibility becomes a competitive edge once there’s a tipping point of enough schools saying, ‘excuse me, but is your software accessible?’” Goldstein, who also serves as

counsel for the National Federation of the Blind, said. “To get this fixed, it’s going to need college and university presidents saying this matters.”

The department’s proposed complaint lists a number of vendors whose software it found to be inaccessible. In addition to the university’s website, video platforms Vimeo and YouTube, and word processor Google Docs, the complaint also lists course work management software from LearnSmart, Pearson, Sapling, Turnitin, Vista Higher Learning and WebAssign. The companies have contracts with many colleges and universities, so it is unlikely that Miami is using products not broadly found in higher education.

The companies did not respond to requests for comment. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/05/14/justice-department-moves-intervene-disability-discrimination-lawsuit>

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THE CHANNEL

How a student gets their content used to be a simple process. In today’s higher education environment, however, there are many options. The important thing to remember is that accessibility support for the channel is equally as important.

- At VitalSource, we work with many partners to provide content on a campus, as well as provide direct access in many cases. To support all of your learners on campus, you should ensure that the points of access they use to get the content are accessible.
- Alternative channels and business models have emerged in which content is included with the course and accessed through an LMS. VitalSource Access (www.vitalsource.com/vsaccess) is our solution to reduce costs and improve outcomes for students. VitalSource Access makes it easy to help the bookstore deliver accessible, affordable, critical course materials directly to the students.



'Please Just Be Nice to People'

BY JAKE NEW

An Iowa State student with disabilities was mortified to find social media posts mocking her for using a three-wheeled scooter to get around. She went public.

It had been a challenging first semester at Iowa State University for Brittni Wendling. Wendling has Larsen syndrome, a condition that means most of her joints are dislocated; she describes it as like “not having knees.” Along with the typical adjustments one makes when starting college, the freshman said she spent her first few months learning how to navigate the university’s large campus without being able to bend her legs.

She began using a three-wheeled scooter called a Triad to get around, and as the new term began in January 2016, Wendling said she “felt like things were starting to fall into place.” Then, a video of her riding her Triad was posted publicly to the photo-sharing app Snapchat.

The video contained little commentary, but its mocking tone was clear.

“The moment I saw this video, my heart dropped, and I felt absolutely horrible,” Wendling wrote in an open letter [posted to Facebook](#). “Embarrassment, shame and utter sadness

swept through me, and I watched the video over and over, constantly worrying how many thousands of people saw it. I just couldn’t understand why someone would take the time to make me feel bad about a machine that I need to help me get around instead of even asking me about the situation if they were curious.”

Students with disabilities face a number of challenges when going to college, including accessibility and transportation issues. But even when a college offers accommodations and lessens the impact of any physical hurdles on campus, emotional and social obstacles can remain. Sometimes, the accommodations themselves become the focus of ridicule from other students.

Amanda Kraus, deputy director of disability resources at the University of Arizona and an expert on disability issues, said this kind of behavior doesn’t often manifest as “active or direct bullying,” but it is still damaging.

“I wouldn’t say that it is typical for



disabled students to be blatantly bullied on college campuses, but it certainly happens,” Kraus said. “I think so often folks feel pity for disabled people, so they do not approach them with anger or criticism, but I would also say that disabled people are often doubted, misunderstood and considered to be liars who take advantage of accommodations. Think about exam accommodations and parking spots. Rather than seeing these as options that create access, they are often per-

ceived as extra or unnecessary.”

Wendling said she tried to put the video out of her mind, though she now felt embarrassed riding her Triad to class. She kept her head down, she said, hoping to avoid seeing any stares. Days later, her Triad again drew undesired ire from students.

As Wendling recalled, two students confronted her as they passed on the sidewalk. They

told her she shouldn't "have that thing on the sidewalk," and accused her of riding the Triad just to "stand out."

"With tears forming in my eyes, I just kept scooting across campus to get back to my dorm," she wrote in her open letter.

"I've definitely never been in such a cruel situation like that before, and that comment combined with being on the ISU Snap story truly broke me and majorly affected the way I felt about being at the school. Sadly, being physically handicapped and riding a machine that is not well-

known isn't exactly a great way to make friends easily, but these two situations made me feel even more isolated and different."

For the next few days, she said, she wasn't sure she wanted to stay

tions, said. "That's not representative of our welcoming environment at Iowa State.

It's important to note that Iowa State's Student Disability Resources office, and faculty and staff across campus, do everything possible to support and accommodate persons with disabilities. We want to ensure every student has access to educational resources

“ The moment I saw this video, my heart dropped, and I felt absolutely horrible. Embarrassment, shame and utter sadness swept through me, and I watched the video over and over, constantly worrying how many thousands of people saw it. ”

and the ability to succeed.”

in college. But she decided she couldn't "wallow in self-pity," and she posted her lengthy open letter. The letter has since been shared more than 700 times on Facebook. The company that manufactures her scooter responded to the note, calling her "a brave and beautiful soul."

Campus police saw the post, as well, and forwarded it to the university's Dean of Students Office.

"It's unfortunate that a small group of people would make critical comments and assumptions about Brittini," John McCarroll, Iowa State's executive director of university rela-

and the ability to succeed.”

Wendling said she hopes the popularity of her letter can help other students in similar situations, as well as help educate those who might otherwise make ignorant comments about people with disabilities.

"The moral of the story is: please, please, please just be nice to people," she wrote. "I am taking this experience and turning it into an opportunity to increase awareness for everyone at Iowa State, colleges everywhere, and just to people from around the world." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/02/29/iowa-state-student-disability-battles-bullying-open-letter>

Opinion

A selection of essays and op-eds

Section 508, WCAG 2.0, Oh My!

BY TRACY MITRANO

Accessibility and more.

In January 2016 when I announced this mini series on standards, one might have assumed that I would consolidate the information offered in previous blogs about what standards for which technologies/applications and why I endorse them. One would not be wrong. But I also intend to add two qualitative points to this discussion on standards. The first is grist for the mill today about a challenge specific to higher education accessibility. The second, to be written down the road, is on the special nature of standards in technology and how that special nature creates an interesting feedback loop to law and policy of the Internet.

About accessibility for higher education in the United States: I am concerned that our institutions have two sets of standards with which to comply and how higher education

might respond to that fact. The first are section 508 standards of the Rehabilitation Act. These are the standards that came out in 2000 and are in a near-completed cycle of being refreshed. They apply to the federal government but have also served as the default for a number of vendors, institutional policies and state governments.

The other set is that of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines or “WCAG” 2.0. WCAG is a practice group within the World Wide Consortium, true to its name, although heavily influenced by the developers in the EU. In the 1.0 format these standards represented more a set of guidelines than specifics. In some instances, the guidelines rose above section 508, and, depending on how one interpreted them, sometimes below 508, which

tend to be rather static and detailed. WCAG 2.0 has levels that drill down to greater specifics. Its “AA” version tend to be the minimum that entities use in policy and implementation procedures.

The Rehabilitation Act, which was first promulgated in 1973, applies to students. It is the legislation that has long required schools to make accommodation for students with disabilities. For example, while a private institution in let’s say 2005 did not have to implement full-scale web accessibility, as did the Federal government and its agencies after section 508 came out, it did have to accommodate individual students. In terms of web content, section 508 created a baseline of standards by which a private institution would demonstrate compliance.

Congress promulgated the Amer-

icans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Title III applies to all colleges and universities, public and private. It applies to students as well as to faculty and staff, and, in some cases, even the public attending a lecture or other such event on a campus. It was not until about five years ago or so that case law firmly established that the law encompassed the Internet, web space and information technologies.

Because the question then emerged, “what standards demonstrate compliance,” the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in the Department of Justice recently used the administrative process to designate WCAG 2.0 AA as the standards that apply to the federal government and its agencies. It is assumed that OCR will commence a process by which those same standards will become the foundation for Title II (state governments) and Title III (which includes higher education among other entities that offer services to the public).

How will higher education demonstrate compliance in light of these two sets of standards that both apply to it? It is in the face of such quandaries that I can appreciate higher education’s general resistance to regulation. Having to comply with both sets is truly an interesting challenge to say the least.

But it is not an insurmountable one. That observation would be especially true if instead of hiding behind its tropes of “don’t regulate us!” higher education took the initiative on both the legislative and implementation fronts. Government Officer(s) should proactively begin to address this question with its contacts in the associations and federal government.

The conversation be around how higher education wants to be compliant and believes it has an active role to play in accessibility. Let’s work together with consumer and advocacy groups either to have information ahead of regulatory process that harmonizes section 508

(especially in its refresh format) and WCAG 2.0 AA. And make that harmonization the foundation of the legislative and/or administrative process.

Web accessibility standards play an extraordinary role in global disabilities rights. By the very nature of technology, standards incentivize vendors to integrate standards across the board of their products; that fact greases the wheels of procurement; and these standards create a level playing field for people with and without disabilities who use the Internet. These opportunities explain the enthusiasm for standards in this web and technology space and should not be dampened by unduly complicating factors such as different nation-state sets, US, the EU or anyplace else. Rather than hanging back and wishing that the issue would go away (it won’t), higher education should take the lead in creating a cross nation-state discussion on this topic. By helping the world, it can help itself. ■

Bio

Tracy Mitrano is an Inside Higher Ed blogger and an IT consultant.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/law-policy-and-it/section-508-wcag-20-oh-my>

Teaching Tips For an UDL-Friendly Classroom

BY NATASCHA CHTENA

Advice for implementing strategies based on Universal Design for Learning

Over the past few years, I've taken TA training courses in a number of departments across campus (four, to be exact) and while their approach varied slightly depending on the discipline, they had one thing in common: they prepared me to teach the average student. But what I realized soon enough, was that there was no such thing as the "average" student.

Our classrooms are highly diverse in terms of student background, personality, cognitive style, ability and interest. For many students I encounter, English is not their first language. Some have disabilities (oftentimes, [invisible](#)) that affect their abilities to see, hear, pay attention to, or participate in activities the same ways as their peers. Some are visual learners, others are auditory learners, and some are hands-on learners. And each student has preferred ways of expressing their knowledge (mine, for instance, is through writing).

What we are told during our TA training is that we "must accommodate" students with documented



disabilities, which usually translates to extra time on a test or the use of a computer. We are also taught to be "mindful" of cultural, religious and other differences. But creating a truly [inclusive classroom](#) takes so much more than that.

Adapting the curriculum to the needs, capabilities and interests of ALL learners, instead of adjusting it as needed, is a good place to start. The former approach, called [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#), banishes the notion of designing instruction for the average student and aims to provide a greater variety of options for how learners are taught information, how they ex-

press their knowledge and how they are engaged and motivated to learn more.

So, how can one use UDL to create an inclusive classroom for diverse learners?

Online

- Provide handouts ahead of time, in accessible electronic format. For more information on creating accessible documents, see [here](#).

- If your teaching is lecture-based, provide students with guided notes. Guided notes are handouts that outline lectures, audiovisual presentations, or readings, but leave blank space for students to fill in key con-

cepts, facts, definitions, etc. For information on how to create guided notes see [here](#).

Lectures

- Create slides with a solid background (e.g., white text on black background) and use a sans serif font, such as Arial or Verdana (they are the easiest to read) with a minimum size of 24 points. Bear in mind that not all built-in designs offered in PowerPoint have 'accessible' color contrast or other design elements (I learned this the hard way!). See [here](#) for more information.

- Read key information presented on slides, blackboard etc. aloud to ensure effective communication to all, including those with visual impairments, auditory learners and students sitting with obstructed views

- Make a conscious effort to speak slowly so that ESL (English as Second Language) students can understand you.

- Face class when speaking to allow students with hearing impairments to read your lips. This will also encourage engagement and interaction with all students.

- Avoid common oppressive words such as "crazy", "lame", "handicapped", "brain damaged," etc., as they can be extremely painful for people with disabilities. Instead, speak in a way that puts the person before the disability. See [here](#) and

Bio

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/teaching-tips-udl-friendly-classroom>

[here](#) for examples of People First Language.

- Reinforce key points using a variety of formats (e.g. verbally, graphically, or through demonstration) and explain why they are important.

- Use open-ended questions to check for comprehension. Before calling on someone allow students enough time to formulate a response either by pausing for a count of ten, having students record their responses on a piece of paper or electronic device, or having them share responses with their neighbor.

- Find out what your university's policy is for recording of lectures and consider allowing students to record the class. This can be particularly useful for ESL students who struggle to keep up.

- If using videos, make sure they are captioned or contain a text transcript available for students with impaired hearing and those lacking listening comprehension.

Classroom Activities

- Throughout the course, provide multiple means for student participation and engagement. For example, encourage classroom discussion through the use of small group activities, role-play, debates, think-pair-share, case studies, one-minute papers, or other activities that give students more than one way to interact in class.

- When possible, offer students

opportunities to make decisions about their learning. For example, you could give them a choice between multiple essay prompts for an assignment, or give them the option of working solo or in groups to complete an in-class exercise.

Assessment

- If you're lucky enough to be designing your own course, use a variety of assessment methods (e.g. papers, learning journals, presentations, tests, quizzes, oral exams) throughout the semester to allow/encourage multiple ways of demonstrating learning.

- Alternatively, consider providing students with the opportunity to complete an assignment in various formats (i.e., a paper, podcast, class presentation etc.).

Additional Support

- Take the time to regularly check in with students with disabilities on a one-on-one basis to discuss their progress and answer questions they may have.

- Personally followup with students who seem to be struggling and encourage them to seek support through your school's counseling office, writing center, etc. Struggling students are often not aware of campus resources available to them, particularly if their previous experiences have been in a different education system (e.g., homeschooled, international). ■

Invisible No More

BY NATASCHA CHTENA

Supporting students with invisible disabilities.

A while ago, a struggling student (let's call her Jane) walked into my office to discuss her performance in my German class. Jane was a shy student who rarely participated in class discussion, and her performance on the quizzes and midterm was below average. As I usually do with underachieving students, I asked Jane some questions about her goals, program and current commitments.

We were talking about her study habits, when Jane brought up dyslexia. She only mentioned it offhandedly, and wasn't making excuses or apologies. I was surprised to hear about it, to say the least, as neither she nor the school's disability counselor had gotten in touch with me to inform me of her condition and to request accommodations. When I asked her whether she was registered with our school's disability office, she said that indeed she was. When I further asked her why she hadn't asked for special accommodation, she said that she "didn't want to be a problem," and went on to give me examples of faculty who

had questioned her sincerity or refused to take her seriously when asking for an accommodation.

Her feeling was, Jane said, that "many professors are more willing to accommodate students with 'tangible' disabilities," such as those who are blind, deaf or use a wheelchair. Students with invisible conditions like learning disabilities, clinical depression or ADHD were often "put on the pile of 'boutique disabilities,'" i.e. outright dismissed or begrudgingly accommodated.

There may be several students in your classroom like Jane. Like Jane, some of them will not share their condition with you or request special accommodation, either because of previous negative experiences or because they fear being seen as "lesser" or stigmatized as "pathological." Some may be unaware that they have a disability in



the first place or may be unaware that their condition qualifies as a disability. Most people I know don't think of chronic illness, brain injury, neurological disorders, mental illness, or oxygen impairment as a "disability."

The fact that invisible disabilities are in fact "invisible" poses a challenge for us TAs. If a student doesn't reach out to us, an entire semester can go by without us noticing or providing the tools that student

needs to succeed. So in a way, we are failing the students who need us most, even without intending or realizing it.

For those who aren't familiar with the term, "[invisible disabilities](#)" aren't obscure, rare or merely currently "en vogue." In fact, they are the [most common type of disability among college students](#). Since students whose disabilities are invisible far outweigh those with visible ones, if our goal is to create a truly [inclusive classroom](#), we must do a better job of understanding 1) who those students are, 2) what obstacles they face and, ultimately, 3) how we can support them to achieve their full potential.

Here are a few steps you can take to create a safe and welcoming environment for students with invisible disabilities:

1. Educate yourself. If you've never heard of the term "invisible disabilities" or are only marginally familiar with it, do some [background reading](#) to get an idea of what constitutes an invisible disability and what living with such a condition may look like. You may also want to contact your school's disability office to inquire about campus resources for students with invisible disabilities, and potential training opportunities for instructors working with them. It's also a good idea to talk to a disability counselor about the legally correct and ethically appropriate ways to work with such a student. If you're thinking about going one step further, I recommend looking at research done by the [Society for](#)

[Disability Studies](#), which examines disability as a category of identity rather than purely as a medical construct.

2. Let them know you are invested in their success and committed to supporting them. Dedicate a few minutes on the first day of class to addressing students with disabilities (visible and invisible), and let them know that you are there to accommodate them to your fullest ability. Don't just read the standard disability statement you copy and pasted on your syllabus, but use the knowledge from your research (see point 1) to ensure that they are feeling seen and welcomed. If you too have an invisible disability, consider [coming-out](#) to them. In my own experience I have found that students who feel accepted and/or understood are far more willing to request appropriate accommodations and to engage fully in classes compared to when they feel overlooked.

3. Be discreet, but don't be afraid to ask questions. Many students feel embarrassed or uncomfortable about their disabilities and avoid talking about them. Students with invisible disabilities sometimes even more so, because the severity of their condition and/or their sincerity is often questioned. Some students may choose not to disclose the exact nature of their disability and/or may have their disability counselor contact you requesting an accommodation instead of doing it directly. While I do believe that student privacy is important, I also think it's useful to know the nature of their disability

and how it interferes with their work. Often these students [need more support than a laptop or extra time on a test](#) and that's something disability offices usually don't encourage. The only way we can provide that support is through direct and honest conversation with students. I wouldn't encourage pushing students to disclose information they don't feel comfortable sharing, but I would suggest explaining to them that a better understanding of their disability can help you improve their learning experience and, possibly, their performance.

4. Believe them. Sometimes we have our own ideas about how a person with disability should look like or what they should be able to accomplish for their condition to be "real" or "significant." Don't make judgment about what a student may be able to do based on how they look and don't add to their stress by questioning their accommodation request. Appearances can be [highly deceptive](#), especially among people with invisible disabilities. For some of them just staying upright can be a fight all day, every day.

5. Ask for their input. Part of offering an inclusive learning experience is meeting the needs of the individual learner, and there is no one who understands a condition and the challenges it poses better than the person affected directly by it. Without wanting to underestimate the value or significance of disability offices, I have found that they tend to have a rather specific idea of what constitutes an accom-

New Era of Digital Accessibility

modation, which often isn't enough or appropriate for a given student. Ask students which aspects of your course are working for them and which aren't, and ask for recommendations on how you can better meet their learning needs.

Their feedback will likely be eye-opening and make you reconsider the way you conduct lessons and deliver content.

There has been so much talk about campus diversity recently, but, so far, students with disabilities have been [largely left out](#) of that conversation. Invisible disabilities,

meanwhile, are completely overlooked, much to the detriment of many students.

I believe as instructors we have the responsibility of bringing these students out of the shadows, supporting them and even advocating for them, at least until they feel comfortable enough to advocate for themselves.

Additional Resources

Here at GradHacker we've thought and written a lot about disability over time, both from a student and educator perspective. If you're look-

ing for additional resources on how to make your classroom more accessible for students with all types of disabilities, check out Liz's [post](#) on inclusive instruction.

If you're interested in reading more on the topic of invisible disability specifically, you can check out Brianne's [post](#) on navigating grad school with learning disabilities and ADHD Leslie's [post](#) on navigating chronic illness.

Are invisible disabilities discussed at your college? What can we do as educators to support students with such conditions? ■

Bio

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/invisible-no-more>

THE ADOPTER

Often overlooked in this discussion, 'end-to-end' accessibility on a campus starts with the selection of the content. When an instructor is deciding which textbook and materials to use, understanding the accessibility of the content and the platform on which the materials are delivered are important considerations.

- VitalSource enables any instructor to search for new content, sample that content, and then adopt their chosen content.
- Emerging standards are helping in this area as well, providing standards that describe the accessibility of content in metadata that allow discovery (idpf.github.io/a11y-guidelines/content/meta/schema.org.html).

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THE ADOPTER

4

Wanted: Disabled Faculty Members

BY JAY DOLMAGE AND STEPHANIE KERSCHBAUM

For many disabled scholars, the choices they face when negotiating job market accommodations are deeply complex, fraught and risky, argue Jay Dolmage and Stephanie Kerschbaum.

When one of us -- Stephanie -- was on the job market for the first time more than 10 years ago, she agonized over whether and how to mention her disability (she is deaf) in her job materials. She knew from past experience that by not saying anything, she ran the risk of creating potential misunderstandings during interviews.

When she managed to secure more than a dozen interviews at the Modern Language Association conference, where English departments perform much of the preliminary interviewing for hires, she set to work. In addition to helping arrange for interpreters in a city where she and most of the hiring departments meeting with her had few contacts, she opened every interview by taking time to explain who the interpreter was and how committee members should interact. In addition, before MLA, she spent time ensuring that every single department had contacted the interpreter, arranged payment and logistics, and so on.

While all that work might sound almost impossible to candidates

who don't have to jump through such hoops, the fact is that, for many disabled scholars, the sorts of choices they face around disclosure and negotiating job market accommodations are deeply complex, fraught and, above all, risky. And for none of them is the process easy, uniform or predictable.

Stories like Stephanie's -- and dilemmas around disclosing a disability or requesting accommodations while on the job market -- are endemic. Almost every academic we know with a disability has a story about accommodations gone wrong, an inaccessible interview situation or a thoughtless ableist comment.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Many organizations such as the Modern Language Association and the National Council of Teachers of English have [general guidelines about disability and the job market](#). The MLA's guidelines, for instance,



ask departments to make sure that interviews are held in accessible locations and to take steps to create a welcoming environment during the interview. We offer a few additional suggestions to help search committees and hiring units to avoid disability discrimination in the hiring process.

The Job Ad and Interview Invitation

The ad and interview are the first steps and, as a search committee or hiring unit, you should:

- Examine the boilerplate text. Recently, the boilerplate text included in job ads has been changing in

sometimes subtly yet often overtly ableist ways to add physical and sensory requirements that rarely have anything to do with the job itself. If you are writing a job ad, read [David Perry's work on this discriminatory language](#).

- Clearly identify whom applicants should contact to request accommodations. You should also ensure that there is a confidential process by which those accommodations can be negotiated. Search chairs and committees need to inform candidates of this process in advance in the interview letter, and the contact person for negotiating accommodations should not be the chair of the search committee or a faculty member in the department. Instead, a clear channel should be identified through which a candidate can request accommodations that may be needed. A useful model here is the way disability services offices inform faculty of accommodations that need to be made in their classroom without disclosing a student's disability. The system in place should not require a candidate to open a conversation with a search committee member or department chair that reveals personal health information or specifics about their disability.

The Responsibilities of the Hiring Committee

The hiring committee or unit should be well-versed in issues surrounding interviewing and hiring candidates with disabilities. You should:

- Discuss how to preclude any

disability discrimination in determining finalists for positions. That might mean, among other things, anticipating how candidates might move, react or perform differently at different stages of the interview process. You should also consider the significance accorded to certain kinds of performance. For example, a person who learns names quickly may make a good first impression, but that hardly is a prerequisite for success in academic work. [These and other tacit social tests](#) should not be part of the hiring discussion.

- Consider how different interview processes might disadvantage certain candidates. Committees should work to minimize any disadvantages interviewees who have different communication, social and interpersonal styles might experience. In such discussions, the focus should be on how hiring units, search committees and job candidates might generally make the hiring process not just more accessible but also more effective. For example, if first-stage interviews have only been conducted via Skype or by telephone as accommodations, committees might consider offering all interviewees in the pool a choice as to their preferred modality. That move avoids signaling one choice as the "typical" interview setting and the other as a ["special" accommodation](#).

- Educate yourselves on how disability disclosure may be (illegally) compelled in conversation. Don't ask after health conditions or comment on people's bodies. Don't

assume either that anybody whose physical appearance does not reveal a disability is able-bodied. When possible, give candidates options and information that may make it possible for them to address issues that arise. (For example, candidates with dietary needs may be able to determine if a restaurant's menu will suit their needs.) Engage in conversations with applicants that make clear when there is flexibility should they have any accommodation requests.

- Be aware of common forms of disability microaggressions. People often act amazed by what a disabled person can do, assume that a disabled person needs help doing other things, ask overly personal questions, compare the candidate's disability to other forms of disability perceived to be "good" or "bad" and so on. In the context of a job interview, such comments and questions can be especially harmful and difficult to handle.

Setting Up the Interview

It's important that disabled candidates -- in fact, all candidates -- receive as much information as possible about the interview location and situation. To that end, you should:

- Communicate as much information as possible about interview settings and procedures. That information might include how the interview will proceed and in what formats. Offer detailed information about buildings and locations where meetings may happen. Are all the buildings wheelchair accessible? Are there accessible restrooms in

the building? Will interviewees be asked to move across large campus spaces to get from one meeting to another? When disabled academics don't have full information about the spaces in which they may be giving a job talk, teaching a class or conducting a meeting, they may not know whether accommodations are, in fact, needed, or how to effectively craft or adapt their delivery and presentation.

- Offer applicants choices. Where possible, we encourage committees to offer interviewees some choices. What technologies and resources will they have available or need to use for their job talk or teaching demonstration? What kind of food will be offered? When might they have opportunities for physical and mental breaks? Will there be an

office available to them or a room where they will have privacy? Can they choose when something like a public talk will take place in the day? Can they choose where to sit if they are being interviewed or met by an entire department? These may seem like insignificant choices, but they could allow candidates to meet medical and other needs throughout the process.

Finally, we want to emphasize that the culture of academe itself contributes to disability discrimination. The current neoliberal climate for higher education puts pressure on all academics to be ever more flexible and adaptable. In such an environment, many highly qualified academics may fear that requesting any kind of accommodation might be interpreted as inability to perform, leading

them to take their chances without the accommodations that have enabled their success. To ensure that faculty members can request and receive the accommodations they need, committees should openly indicate that access and accommodation are on their radar and proactively signal awareness of disability as important to diversity.

We hope our suggestions will encourage department wide and institutional conversations that can build awareness and promote accessible practices while avoiding disability discrimination. Our recommendations can be read, applied, circulated and expanded upon in a very practical way as we head into hiring season. Is your department hiring? Send this article to the search chair and start the conversation now. ■

Bio

Jay Dolmage is associate professor of English at the University of Waterloo, and Stephanie L. Kerschbaum is associate professor of English at the University of Delaware. They are both committed to addressing forms of institutional ableism and challenging disability discrimination through their research and scholarly activism.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/10/31/advice-hiring-faculty-members-disabilities-essay>

An IDEA Colleges Should Appreciate

BY RACHEL ADAMS

If you think the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act has nothing to do with higher education, think again.

In 2015, much fanfare greeted the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including a reception at the White House and parades, speeches and gatherings across the country. By comparison, the anniversary of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – which came into being the same year – came and went without public recognition.

The IDEA might seem tangential to those of us involved with higher education because its legislative reach extends only through secondary school. But as my classes get underway this fall, I'm reminded of its powerful impact on the current generation of college students, disabled and able-bodied alike.

The IDEA, which replaced 1975 legislation called the [Education for All Handicapped Children Act \(EAHCA\)](#), mandates a “free appropriate public education” to all students from pre-K through high school. Before the passage of the EAHCA, many states had laws barring children with disabilities such as deafness, blindness, emotional distur-

bance and other cognitive delays from public education.

According to a [research study](#) completed in 1970, only one in five children with disabilities had received an education in school.

The 1975 law changed that by requiring schools to place them in the “least restrictive environment,” meaning, to the greatest extent possible, they would be included alongside nondisabled peers. The IDEA of 1990 expanded the age range of protected children, added measures to support families and included new provisions for adaptive equipment and services. Its new name also signaled an important shift away from “handicapped children” (which implied children were defined by their disabilities) to the people-first language of “individuals with disabilities” (which implied that disability was just one aspect of a child's identity).

The life writing of people with disabilities tells harrowing stories of what it was like to go to school before the passage of the EAHCA. Animal scientist Temple Grandin,

whose autism made it hard for her to converse socially, was teased and ostracized by her peers. The parents of Stephen Kuusisto, director of the honors program at Syracuse University, refused to enroll him in a school for the blind and sent him to a school where he received no accommodations for his low vision. Deaf scholar Brenda Brueggemann describes the awkwardness of going with classmates to movies where she was unable to hear or understand the dialogue.

Reading these accounts, I'm reminded that the students with disabilities I find in my classes are the beneficiaries of a very different system. The IDEA ensured that most of them received an inclusive education, and it required the schools they attended to provide adaptive technologies, assistants and support services that would allow them to succeed in classes with their nondisabled peers.

Less often acknowledged is the impact of the IDEA on nondisabled college students. By including larger numbers of students with disabil-

ities in elementary and secondary schools, the IDEA changed how nondisabled kids understood the meaning of disability. It is far less common for today's students to have attended a school where the "special" kids arrived on the stigmatized "short bus" and marched off to a separate classroom. Having those kids in class -- along with their wheelchairs, canes, adaptive communication devices and assistants -- naturalized disability in a way that would not have been possible in more segregated environments.

Many of today's students grew up with the assumption that children with disabilities belong in the same classroom and have the same right to an education that they do. Research shows that having kids with disabilities in class [teaches valuable lessons](#) about acceptance, patience and diversity. As people with disabilities increasingly participate in the workforce, inclusive education also prepares the current generation of students for a diversity they will likely encounter in their professional lives.

In case I sound overly cheery,

let me be clear that the IDEA is no panacea. I'm well aware that many schools still have special classrooms for children deemed too disabled for inclusion. New York City, where I live, is home to [District 75](#), reserved for segregating those "special" kids from their typical peers. On the other end of the spectrum, some of my students attended ex-

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Research shows that having kids with disabilities in class teaches valuable lessons about acceptance, patience and diversity.

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clusive private schools that are exempt from the requirements of the IDEA. Their experience of kids with disabilities is limited to the service learning projects that round out their stellar college applications. And despite the law, the families of students with disabilities are often exhausted by fighting for services they are entitled to.

That said, I'm still convinced the law provides a valuable foundation that is worth building on and that should be celebrated.

I'm never more aware of the impact of the IDEA than when I tell

my students that I'm the parent of a child with Down syndrome. Because of the IDEA, my son attends second grade at an inclusive elementary school. More than one of my students has responded to this disclosure by saying, "My best friend has Down syndrome!"

In the generation before the IDEA, this scenario would have been virtually unthinkable. If they went to school at all, children with Down syndrome were tucked away in special classes where they learned life skills because nobody thought they were

capable of reading and writing. Seeing them banished in this way, their typical peers learned that people with Down syndrome were not worthy of inclusion.

Certainly the world is a better place for my son: ample research shows that people with Down syndrome [learn better in inclusive settings](#). But it is also a better place for his peers, who, thanks to the IDEA, learn to recognize him as a person deserving of respect and friendship. That recognition is high on the list of lessons I'd like my students to learn before entering college. ■

Bio

Rachel Adams is a professor of English and director of the Center for the Study of Social Difference at Columbia University.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/10/02/value-idea-colleges-and-their-students>

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