

Meeting of the Electronic Accessibility Policy Review Group

Oakland, CA

March 16, 2007

Participants:

- Kristine Hafner, Associate Vice President, Information Resources and Communications, UCOP
- Simao Avila, University Counsel, UCOP
- Julie Conner, Legal/Policy Advisor, Geisel Library, UCSD
- Jacqueline Craig, Policy Director, Information Resources and Communications, UCOP
- Elizabeth Gibson (for Pete Siegel and Dennis Shimek), Director, Mediaworks, UCD
- Deepa Goraya, Student, UCLA
- Sarah Hawthorne, Assistant Provost, Academic Compliance and Disability Standards, UCB
- Karl Kocher, Librarian, Library Systems, Shields Library, UCD
- Kathy Molini, Director, Office for Students with Disabilities, UCLA
- Yvonne Tevis, Executive Assistant, Information Resources and Communications, UCOP
- Shel Waggener, Associate Vice Chancellor and Chief Information Officer, Information Systems and Technology, UCB
- David Walker, Director for Advanced Technologies, Information Resources and Communications, UCOP
- Susan Willats, ADA Compliance Officer, UCSC

Summary of Discussion and Followup Actions

Policy Rationale. Simao Avila presented legal arguments for pursuing an electronic accessibility policy initiative, including compliance with the ADA, which states that public entities must take appropriate steps to ensure that communications with persons with disabilities “are as effective as communications with others,” and commitment to a community standard in California, the Section 508 standards. Issuing a policy now allows UC to develop a program that works best for our environment, rather than having a program imposed upon us externally. Pragmatic reasons for supporting an electronic accessibility policy at UC include standardization, utility, and cost efficiency. The Web Accessibility Initiative (<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>) presents the business case (Three Carrots and a Stick: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/bcase/>) for accessibility.

Standards and Best Practices. Section 508 standards, while reasonable, do not reflect the changing information technology environment. The federal government is rewriting the standards, which could be outdated upon publication since technology evolves so quickly. Nevertheless, there is value in following the federal standards. In addition, Shel Waggener suggested that UC identify and publish recommended best practices that would be updated periodically by a subcommittee appointed by the IT Leadership Council.

Accessibility and Usability. The group acknowledged that the University cannot commit to making information and services accessible to users of *all* technologies, including old technologies that are no longer supported. It will be important for UC to fold accessibility into an information technology architecture that acknowledges that people use technology to access content in varying ways (screen size, latency of data, fast users, small keypads, diversity of skill) and that the data that forms that content comes from multiple sources outside our control. Further, accessibility should be part of a life-cycle management program for all our systems, which defines which technologies are supported at the campuses. The Information Technology Architecture Group of the UC IT Leadership Council will be tasked with incorporating accessibility in that group's recommendations. The Fluidity project proposal (<http://colin.atrc.utoronto.ca/fluidproject/FluidProjectTechnicalOverview.pdf>) was cited as an example of an architecture that would incorporate accessibility. It seeks to architect the structure, separation, and platform independence that allows for flexibility and easy customization and provide a framework for easing the effort in designing fully accessible, usable, and internationalized user interfaces.

Purchasing. Vendors do not focus on implementing Section 508 because the market is not sufficiently large. UC purchasing staff need to require vendors to provide and improve accessibility functioning. Currently, RFPs for UC systemwide agreements have begun to include the VPAT (Voluntary Product Accessibility Template to determine fulfillment of the guidelines outlined in Section 508) as a question to be answered (not a requirement). This practice started with the HR Learning Management System RFP which went out last August.

Resources. The group discussed possible resources that could be made available to campuses to help drive the Web accessibility initiative. Ideas included certification for Web development staff that receive training in this area; training for developers, such as through purchasing a systemwide license for WebAIM online training or an on-site conference/training session for developers; a "programmers café" to work on and develop solutions to problems. It was recognized though that Web developers need an incentive to do the training, and policy may provide that incentive.

Policy Initiative. IR&C will announce an electronic accessibility policy initiative to focus attention on the University's commitment to ensuring accessibility in communications and the need to incorporate accessibility into the context of the evolving management of information technology. Development and review of the proposed policy will be an avenue for educating the UC community about accessibility. Campus leaders are encouraged to communicate with their constituencies about the initiative. From a legal standpoint, priority for accessibility initiatives should be given first to official, centrally generated Web sites along with systems/software procurement.

Timeframe for policy development: Announce initiative in April. Request feedback by June 15. Reconvene the policy review group in the summer. Aim for Academic Senate approval in the fall.

Followup Steps:

- Create a listserv for the Electronic Accessibility Policy Review Group
- Communicate with campus counsels

- Include initiative on the April UC IT Leadership Council meeting agenda. Discuss strategy for promoting the initiative on campus. Discuss strategy for developing UC standards, including designation of a best practices group of technologists and users to make technological recommendations and report to the ITLC.
- Include initiative on agenda of the IT Architecture Group, with discussion on incorporating accessibility into the UC IT architecture plans and recommendations.
- Edit draft policy and guidelines based on input from the meeting; send draft back to the group for review and comment.
- Develop a Web page for the IT accessibility initiative Web page that describes goals, invites suggestions, and links to drafts of the policy.
- Pursue systemwide license for a Web accessibility testing tool.
- Coordinate communications, including a session at the UC Computing Services Conference this summer to present and discuss the initiative.