

EALT Committee Report to the ITLC

March 24, 2011

I represent the Electronic Accessibility Leadership Team (EALT) formed in April 2010 to provide strategic direction for initiatives that enhance access to UC electronic resources for all individuals, particularly those with disabilities. We've assembled a cohort of accessibility champions from all the campuses, Agricultural and Natural Resources (ANR), the California Digital Libraries, and members who represent faculty, purchasing, campus bookstores and policy. We are seeking a representative for LBNL and the medical centers.

8.5% of the American population has a disability that affects computer use (U.S. Census 2000). For those ages 20-65, it's 20% of the population. For 65 and older, it's 50%. Our population is aging and more and more of us will develop vision or mobility issues that interfere with our ability to consume electronic material. "Technology needs to be the solution, not the barrier".¹ Many students suffer silently from learning disabilities. Providing accessible content proactively, rather than responding to complaints, helps our students to be as successful as possible. For example, transcribing audio can extend podcasts to not only the hearing-impaired community, but also to English language learners, and to those who learn best through reading vs. listening.

Our approach is to advocate for accessibility to be one factor of a universal design methodology – an element purposefully included at the beginning of a project lifecycle and not as an afterthought. Most accessibility problems are *usability* problems. This work ensures not only that websites are accessible, but that they are coded to standards and more likely to work on mobile and other wireless devices. It makes our websites more consumable by machines and thus more searchable. When accessibility is treated as an afterthought – or not at all – risk is introduced.

Last week the Department of Justice filed suit against two major universities for their use of Google Apps because it's inaccessible to the sight-impaired community. Last year, prompted by the National Federation of the Blind, the DOJ filed a similar suit against six higher-ed institutions over their proposed pilot of the Kindle for e-Textbooks. The settlement of the Kindle suit included an agreement from the institutions to not purchase the Kindle DX or any other e-Reader unless it was accessible.

Again, our guiding principal is not creating fear and solely about mitigating risk, but to follow the spirit of Pres. Yudof's July 2010 letter to "think systematically and creatively about how we serve the growing number of people who, with or without formally disclosing a disability, increasingly depend on a fully accessible electronic environment."

Our approach has five facets:

1. **Assessment:** To assess areas of greatest need, the EALT is constructing a model to use annually that would provide the ITLC a **snapshot of electronic accessibility** at UC. We're looking at what needs to be fixed first, and to create a roadmap and timeline for further corrections and monitoring to catch accessibility issues earlier. Key areas to examine include main campus and admissions websites, student and faculty/staff portals and publicly available media; what percentage of our audio and video has adequate transcriptions, captions and descriptions?

2. **Training:** Through two grants, earlier this month our team held a very well received web accessibility training session at UC San Diego. It was attended by 50 UC staff, including half who traveled from the southern UC campuses. We're repeating this training in Oakland in May. ITLC members' help in allocating training slots was key to participation. Northern campuses will see an inquiry in April from the EALT Chair, Christine Bagwell.
3. **Tools:** The Team is exploring tools that assist staff with conducting their own accessibility assessments. We hope to fund it through the remainder of the grants and your help.
4. **Policy:** Stephan Lau, Director of IT Policy at UCOP is spearheading the electronic accessibility policy effort. We are doing this under the auspices of the UC IT Policy & Security committee. It will draw from previous policy drafts and we hope it will be complete by calendar year's end.
5. **Consulting:** The EALT is working with UCOP to ensure common system-wide resources are accessible including mandatory training, benefits resources and system-wide communications. We are developing guidelines targeted for specific audiences that are posted on our website at ucop.edu ([EALT Website](#)). Our technical subcommittee provides guidance on software and hardware accessibility, conducting testing as needed.

Those of you who follow the Chronicle of Higher Education, might have seen the December 2010 story on the Best and Worst College Websites for Blind Students. While we disagree with the methodology used by the University of Illinois, in part because some of their remediation suggestions would make your sites more inaccessible, it didn't paint a favorable picture of UC as a whole. Out of 183 campuses, five of our campuses were in the bottom half, including two in the bottom 10%.

We find ourselves in the most difficult budget years most of us have seen. We're focusing on what is essential and on mission. Electronic accessibility is both. It needs to be baked into our work, in much the way we've institutionalized holistic information security practices. We're where we were 5-10 years ago with information security, before we had robust programs and dedicated campus managers. The difference is that we were caught off guard with security. We don't need to be blind-sided by electronic accessibility, certainly not the way NYU and Northwestern were with Google Apps or Case Western with their Kindle pilot. "The problems weren't created in 1-2 months or years and won't be solved overnight."¹ We don't have to fix everything at once. We can borrow the economics concept of the "refurbishment model." When we overhaul a web application or service, we should take the opportunity to bring it "up to code." The life cycle of a website is very short; most are less than five years.

What We Need from the ITLC

1. The EALT needs your continued support to **provide campus representatives**, not just for the one hour monthly call, but **to pitch in** on our policy, training and assessment projects.
2. **Consider accessibility in hiring.** Davis and San Diego are looking at including these skills in IT job descriptions.
3. When initiating an **RFP-driven IT initiative** include the EALT. The Chair can advise you on what support the committee can provide, not just with the RFP, but with validating vendor claims and ensuring usability for our system. We devised a model using the payroll initiative as a case study and are engaged with that project.
4. **Ask your procurement staff to consider electronic accessibility in purchases.** The EALT can provide step-by-step advice and Stephen Benedict from OP is prepared to help as well.

5. **Recognize a policy is forthcoming.** The most recent policy draft called for each campus to designate a coordinator to administer the policy, and that each coordinator establish a committee to oversee the implementation planning process and strategy.
6. **Fund Tools:** If we could purchase an enterprise, hosted license to provide you access to see the state of accessibility on your campus and for your developers to use for testing and monitoring, how many of you would buy in? The two front-runners are Deque's Worldspace and HiSoftware's Compliance Sherriff. We expect to make a collaborative funding proposal to the ITLC by July. Is \$2,500/yr per campus realistic?

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¹ Kareem Dale, President Obama's Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy.