

Course Accessibility Standards Policy

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Scope

Federal law requires that Universities provide equal educational opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities. This Course Accessibility Standards Policy provides guidance for ensuring that all course delivery methods utilizing technology (eLearning) are accessible to student with disabilities.

Background

Many of the courses offered at Kansas State University use technology to enhance course delivery, both on-campus and through distance learning (referred to as *eLearning*). The United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has stated that eLearning must be designed and delivered in such a way that all students, including students with disabilities, have equal access to course content.

In 2001, Kansas State University developed a memorandum detailing the University's responsibility for creating accessible administrative, college, and department web pages. Accessible templates were developed for this purpose. Since 2001 the use of websites, web-based course management systems, and various technologies to routinely provide instruction to students has grown exponentially. Therefore, the Course Accessibility Standards Policy extends beyond the 2001 Web Accessibility Memorandum to include distance education and instructional websites as well as all eLearning course content.

Legal Requirements

Collectively, State and Federal regulations require equal access to resources and materials for students who are otherwise qualified to enroll in the course. Furthermore, accessibility must be built into eLearning; OCR interpretation states that a University violates its obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act when it responds only on an ad-hoc basis to individual requests for accommodation. Finally, this instruction must result in a course-taking experience that is similar to that of students without disabilities.

Applicable legislation includes:

- Federal Law:
 - The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability
 - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which ensures that federally funded institutions such as Universities provide equal access to all services and programs, with or without accommodations.
 - Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, which requires electronic and information technology to be accessible to persons with disabilities

- State of Kansas Information Technology Policy 1210 – State of Kansas Web Accessibility Requirements. This document is based on the Priority levels developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) for developing accessible web sites.
- Kansas State University Memorandum outlining webpage accessibility requirements for administrative websites.-

Meeting Course Accessibility Standards for eLearning is best accomplished through the application of the principles of Universal Design to course development. Universal Design refers to the design of products, environments, and services to be “usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for specialized design.” Much like curb cuts benefit more than mobility-impaired persons, electronic curb cuts provide benefits for the larger student population as well.

Often, providing a single accommodation (such as a transcript for an audio course segment) provides benefits to many different persons with different disabilities and/or learning styles. The resulting Universal Access is effective for all students and is the best way for eLearning at Kansas State University to meet the needs of students with disabilities and to meet the demands of current and future technology.

Policy

This policy applies to all faculty and staff developing courses or course management systems for K-State or affiliates. All course delivery mechanisms and course content must be made accessible. This policy refers to new courses, new materials added to existing courses, and “retrofitting” of existing courses. In addition, software that is purchased and utilized in a course must also be accessible. Making courses accessible may include, such actions as saving documents in a universal format such as Microsoft Word, providing a written transcript of audio content, or embedding a text description of graphics inserted into a PowerPoint slide or website. By making courses accessible to students who are sight or hearing impaired, you are also making the same course accessible to students with a wide range of other disabilities.

Responsibilities

All University administrators, faculty, and staff who are involved in course development and delivery share the obligation to ensure that eLearning is accessible to students with disabilities. The Dean of each College will be asked to review for compliance with this policy any new course approval or course alteration. The Office of the Provost will make reasonable efforts to provide professional development, training, and technical support for faculty and staff involved in the creation of accessible eLearning.

Implementation

Faculty and staff who need technical help implementing this policy may contact Information Technology Assistance Center, or Disability Support Services.