Georgia State University Policy

7.20.13 Web Accessibility

Policy Summary

The objective of the Web Accessibility Policy is to assure that university web-based materials are available to all who attempt to access them, in full compliance with the legal and ethical responsibility to do so, and consistent with the protocols of Universal Design and the university’s anticipated full conversion to an enterprise content management system.

Full Policy Text

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Administration of Policy

Mandating Authority:
Administrative Council

Responsible Office(s):
Information Systems and Technology, 13th floor, Commerce Building, 3-4357

Responsible Executive(s):

Policy History

Approving Body: Administrative Council

Rationale or Purpose

Georgia State University is committed to providing all students, staff and faculty access to academic, cultural and recreational opportunities, a commitment that includes accessibility of Georgia State Web-based material. This policy is a natural extension of the university's existing commitment to nondiscrimination and inclusivity. Universal Design refers to the idea that Web sites should be designed so that anyone using common web browsing technology (within two versions of the most current) will have full access to the information contained there, as well as the full and complete ability to interact with the site-flexible enough to accommodate the needs of the broadest range of users, computers, and telecommunication equipment.

The benefits of universal web design extend beyond the community of persons with disabilities; it
also expands access for persons with access only to older technologies. For example, more persons are now accessing the web via cell phone and other non-graphic means. As educators there is an institutional responsibility to reach out to those who seek to learn. These developments require a policy that is flexible, regularly reviewed and updated, and which anticipates to the extent possible changes in the learning environment.

Consistent with the University System of Georgia commitment (enacted June 2001) to bring all units into compliance with the Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and to assure alternative (especially text-based) formats, this proposed policy lays out recommendations for the university in establishing a plan to assure all its Internet based materials are in compliance with the law as currently interpreted. Web materials prioritized for compliance review and prompt upgrade should include but not be limited to: all Web material associated with administration and services, course descriptions, departmental programs, and institution sponsored activities.

**Additional Information**

**Standards**

**Priority One Compliance** The university should adopt a plan, whose adoption should not extend past three years, for bringing all Internet sites and on-line courses into Priority One compliance with W3C guidelines (http://www.w3.org/WAI) or to exceed them. The university should also allocate resources and service providers to assist instructors, departments and colleges in implementing this plan. Main web pages potentially serving all students (such as financial aid and course registration sites), which are time sensitive (such as pages containing application materials), or that are explicitly addressed to serve students/users with disabilities should be reviewed first to assure Priority One compliance. All new unit websites must be constructed in an accessible format complying with at least the Priority One guidelines established by the World Wide Web Consortium (see appendix A).

**Document Accessibility** First-generation documents, which include those generated in HTML for posting online, are covered by ADA requirements; so-called *second generation* documents (which include all those generated in other formats - course-related Excel, Word, PowerPoint, pdf files, etc. - whether posted online or not) are not currently held to ADA compliance legal requirements. In both cases, however, the University should provide continuing training opportunities to faculty and staff engaged in website or instructional material development so that new materials posted online will be accessible. Guidelines should be disseminated so that those posting so-called *second generation documents* can do so in a way most accessible for the full range of users.

**Compliance** Responsibility for assuring accessibility starts with the unit posting materials. Pages maintained by the enterprise content management system should include a link to the university’s accessibility statement. Difficulties in accessing material should be conveyed to the Office of Disability Services so that requests can be tracked and data collected regarding accessibility. The Office of Disability Services, working with IS&T, university auditors, and other departments as appropriate, should also work to monitor overall compliance by overseeing regular reviews of Web sites, organizing training for faculty and staff where appropriate, keeping units apprised of recent legal developments impacting ADA compliance, and annually reporting on accessibility progress to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the University Senate IS&T committee. Whenever a user notifies a unit of an inability to access material, the unit must either redesign site materials to address the issue or make its content available in alternative form, or (in the case of external sites that are not under control of gsu.edu) intermediate on behalf of the user to provide reasonable access or delivery of the required information, as soon as practicable. In the case of course materials,
"users" refers to enrolled and registered students.

**Instructional Material** Faculty members posting instructional materials online or utilizing course management software (e.g., uLearn) should plan to assure their accessibility. Academic departments connected to such courses should perform annual reviews to assess accessibility, produce unit plans to bring such materials into full compliance to be integrated into their annual reporting, and consistent with available resources prioritize efforts to produce compliance starting with materials connected to required and core courses. As an informal guideline, units should plan to annually bring at least 15% of unit-linked pages into Priority One compliance.

**External Development** Web and course design contractors hired from outside the university must produce accessible materials consistent with the relevant governing legal requirements and university Internet policies.

**Student Technology Fee** Stage One technology fee proposal forms will be revised to highlight the necessary elements of ADA compliance. Proposals with web components are expected to comply with these standards or state provisions to provide reasonable alternative access or delivery of information.

**Policy Reviews** The University Senate IS&T committee should annually conduct a "best practices" review of other available university policies for the purpose of updating Georgia State University accessibility activity and surveying faculty usage of the Web (including web-based instructional programs such as uLearn), with specific attention to the regularly updated accessibility recommendations produced by the Georgia Institute of Technology Center for Assistive Technology and Environmental Access (CATEA). Annual review should also assure continuing compliance with the relevant law, Georgia State policy and University System of Georgia policy.

**External Linkages** Links to Internet sites and materials published and controlled by non-Georgia State University entities should be carefully considered for accessibility before inclusion. When non-accessible information is presented, an accessible alternative should be offered: "Think before you link."

**Training** All university provided or sponsored training involving Internet technologies should include instruction covering Level One compliance and accessibility. University staff and faculty should be notified of this policy and training in its use made a regular part of accessibility-related training activity.

**Exceptions** The university CIO should oversee the production and implementation of an exception policy, whereby Web site content and design personnel may petition if making their materials accessible produces an undue burden or significantly distorts curricular content, or impedes the academic mission of the unit in question. Exceptions should only be authorized when consistent with those exceptions permitted under the most current interpretations of governing law.

Please contact the Responsible Office for Procedures.

Originally approved and made effective by Administrative Council August 8, 2007

**Additional Helpful Resources**