

ACADEMIC SENATE
of
THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Item 13

AS-2700-05/FA
May 5-6, 2005

Students' Access to Academic Information Technology

- RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate of the California State University (CSU) reaffirm its commitment to the principle of equal opportunity for all members of the academic community and in particular, the obligation to provide access to persons with disabilities (that are "as effective as" that provided to non-disabled persons) as required by state and federal laws; and be it further
- RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate CSU recognize that the obligation to provide access to persons with disabilities includes not only the more commonly recognized removal of physical barriers but also the removal of barriers created by the use of technology inaccessible to persons with disabilities; and be it further
- RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate CSU recognize that meeting this commitment of providing accessible technology on the campuses will require proactive and anticipatory steps, soliciting the active participation of all segments of the campus communities, comprising an all-campus responsibility and commitment to accessibility; and be it further
- RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate CSU recognize that faculty teaching disabled students must be provided with the timely information, technology, training, resources (including work load adjustments and the available technology resources and related strategies), to enhance access for students with disabilities to course/learning materials; and be it further
- RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate CSU urge each campus to assess fully the extent to which barriers to disabled persons are created by the use of technology, and where such barriers exist, develop comprehensive policies and take the necessary action to remove such barriers, providing disabled students with the access and information required to promote the success of their academic endeavors; and be it further
- RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate CSU urge the campuses to familiarize faculty and students with the services of the CSU Center for Alternate Media.

RATIONALE: In the past few decades, concern about providing equity for persons with disabilities has been codified by federal and state legislation (e.g., the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 [ADA] and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and SB 302 in California.) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states among other things that "no qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall be excluded from, denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under" any program or activity that either receives Federal financial assistance. In short, the federal and state legislation

falls into the broad heading of civil rights law and has as its goal providing equity to the persons included in its language. Most if not all campuses of the CSU are, of course, recipients of federal funding.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act website “establishes requirements for electronic and information technology developed, maintained, procured, or used by the Federal government. Section 508 requires Federal electronic and information technology to be accessible to people with disabilities, including employees and members of the public.” SB 302 clarifies that CSU is required to meet the mandate to make information technology accessible.

An accessible information technology system is one that can be operated in a variety of ways and does not rely on a single sense or ability of the user. For example, a system that provides output only in visual format may not be accessible to people with visual impairments and a system that provides output only in audio format may not be accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Some individuals with disabilities may need accessibility-related software or peripheral devices in order to use systems that comply with Section 508.” <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/cguide.htm#anchor65310>

In the context of these laws, the chancellors of the California State University have issued a number of executive orders relevant to access issues, most recently Executive Order (E.O.) 926, dated December 2004, which focuses on how CSU might increase access to course materials for students with disabilities. Although well intended, the E.O. is unclear about some of the specific responsibilities of faculty, instructional technology officers, campus administrators, and other employees of the CSU, all of whom play roles in the academic success of students in the CSU. One result is that faculty may conclude that as individuals they bear a responsibility that they cannot meet; a second is concern about additions to already-heavy faculty workloads; another is that predictable occurrences are not accounted for--one example is last-minute assignments of faculty to courses in the various departments and programs, which may place a difficult if not insuperable burden on faculty with limited amounts of time to prepare course descriptions, reading lists, lecture notes, and class materials AND to make sure that these documents are accessible to or enabling for students with disabilities.

It is the intent of this resolution to ensure that all affected members of CSU campus communities understand that implementation of the laws and executive orders affecting students with disabilities will require collaborative and collegial interaction among those charged with implementation, and to prompt action on the campuses that will support their basic mission of creating healthy environments for teaching and learning.

APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY – May 5-6, 2005