

DISABILITIES ISSUES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING

March 21, 2012

Morrill Hall Room 238A

[In these minutes: computer accommodations program; disability services update; disabled student cultural center update; assessment and disabilities education resolutions]

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Dale Branton, Sherry Gray, Mary Kennedy, Peggy Mann Rinehart, Amber Mayer, Brian McAdams, Julia Robinson, Kimberly Simon,

REGRETS: Chrispin Behnke, Donna Johnson, Victoria Nelson, Susan Rose, Frank Symon, Joanie Tool

ABSENT: Hayley Bemel, Joanna O'Connell, Clare McCormick, Carla Tabourne

GUESTS: Phillip Kragnes, M.S., computer accommodations resource specialist, Disability Services; Chad McGuire, Disabled Student Cultural Center

Professor Dale Branton called the meeting to order and asked for introductions.

Computer Accommodations Program

Phil Kragnes, computer accommodations resource specialist, Disability Services stated the Computer Accommodations Program (CAP) is a partnership between Disability Services and the Office of Information Technologies (OIT) and is located in the Disability Services Office. The purpose of the program is to ensure access to information and information technology for students, faculty, staff, and visitors with disabilities. Some of its functions and services include:

- Accessible Web design presentation, training, assessment and consultation.
- Adaptive technology demonstration, evaluation, assessment, installation, training and support.
- Information Technology accessibility policy development, consultation, and support.
- Assessment, training, and support of university students and employees with disabilities.
- Consultation and support to ensure accessibility of technology use, acquisition, and development.

- Identification and resolution of University information and information technology access issues.
- Consultation and presentations to University and non-University groups, organizations, and individuals regarding adaptive technology, Web site accessibility, and related issues.

Mr. Kragnes focused his remarks on three areas:

- HiSoftware Compliance application to aid web developers in creating accessible sites
- E-text book study
- Accessibility.umn.edu website

Mr. Kragnes went on to state that there are over one million web pages at the University. Web developers attempt to educate themselves using CAP, but it is difficult to be proficient in web accessibility. So Disability Services has purchased a one-year [HiSoftware Compliance Sheriff](#) application site license for use by the University of Minnesota web community. The software aids in identifying accessibility issues, provides information on the importance of accessibility features, provides resources for understanding and resolving accessibility issues, and highlights accessibility issues in both the rendered view and the source code. Mr. Kragnes stated two benefits of this tool are it identifies the problems in the source code and places a red box around them in page view, and it educates the web developer about why there is a problem. Mr. Kragnes stated further, that this software would check word and pdf documents, but it has some problems with scanning cascading style sheets. CAP would like the software to eventually be centrally supported by OIT.

Sherry Gray asked if the software could easily be used by a layperson. Mr. Kragnes replied that it is geared to the medium level html user. It identifies specific code that is inaccessible and provides links to resources on how to fix the code. The software is available free of charge to anyone at the University seeking to improve the accessibility of their web presence, and all web designers can request an account and scan their site for accessibility.

Mr. Kragnes noted that he teaches a one-hour seminar on web accessibility. CAP provides training as requested and workshops are provided on accessible document creation.

Mr. Kragnes next discussed the e-text book application “course load” that is being evaluated by several members of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation including the University of Minnesota. He stated that it is designed to allow students to access textbooks and instructor content on-line. However, he stated although the application’s interface is accessible, the text itself is not accessible. He has not yet determined if the course load software or the e-text is causing this problem. He stated that CAP is currently working with students with disabilities to determine which students are able to access the e-text.

He noted further that resources from Disability Services may be required to allow students with disabilities to have equal access to e-texts, and that the University of Wisconsin is currently developing a set of requirements for providing accessible e-text documents.

Peggy Mann Rinehart, associate director, Disability Services, added that the pilot project to evaluate the use of e-text books involves 700 students using textbooks in eleven classes. Disability Services involvement is in looking at the accessibility of e-text books for students with disabilities. Two goals of the project are to explore and understand how students (with and without disabilities) access, and navigate text directly from the publisher, and how they navigate texts through provided “course load” software.

The project has a three-pronged protocol. The first is a participatory action component. The second is identifying students with a variety of disabilities and working in a focus group with each of the students to determine if they can participate. The third prong of the evaluation is the professional evaluation of the software.

Ms. Mann Rinehart stated that the pilot is the first of this type of e-text evaluation. The report generated from the pilot will address what the e-materials need to do, and inform the development of e-text materials for the University and publishers. The study will be completed in June, and because it is a collaborative study, Ms. Mann Rinehart believes it will have a large impact.

Next, Mr. Kragnes showed the committee the accessibility.umn.edu website. He explained that the site contains information for making all of the components of teaching accessible such as creating accessible web pages, word documents, and multimedia presentations. He stated it also has general information on the laws, policies, and guidelines regarding accessibility.

Ms. Gray stated she had received an e-mail from a student regarding the use of software that was not accessible for a class project, and asked Mr. Kragnes if there is a place that lists accessible formats and technologies recommended by the University.

Mr. Kragnes responded that CAP does not make recommendations because this might infringe on professors’ academic freedom to select their teaching methods and tools. In the seminars he teaches on web accessibility, he only offers information about the technology and software that is available.

Ms. Mann Rinehart noted that Disability Services provides information on the learning technologies that the University supports. Sherry Gray responded that the University receives federal funds and is subject to the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires equal access for students with disabilities. She noted further that it would be helpful to instructors if Disability Services provided a list of accessible software and a list of difficult-to-use software on their website. Ms. Mann Rinehart pointed out the difficulty of this due to the large and constantly changing number of applications as well as the potential liability from providing inaccurate information on the website.

Chad McGuire stated that it was necessary to have at least one or two accessible platforms to provide equal access to all students, and that Disability Services should at least inform instructors which platforms and applications are recommended. He strongly expressed his opinion that academic freedom should not trump the right to access.

Ms. Mann Rinehart responded that the CAP website implies which platforms and applications are accessible and everyone at the University who is provided with a computer receives a list of University approved software.

Disabled Student Cultural Center (DSCC) Update

Mr. McGuire provided the committee with an update on DSCC's work. Highlights included:

- The DSCC and the Deaf Ambassadors are sponsoring an international hip-hop artist who uses sign language.
- The DSCC is assisting the Deaf Ambassadors who are attending the Knowledge Bowl.
- The DSCC is sponsoring a speaker who invented an application that calls the walk signal at intersections.
- The DSCC is co-sponsoring the Mental Health Awareness Day.
- The DSCC was awarded its full fees request from the Student Services Fees Committee.
- The DSCC has a small but committed core group of members.

Disability Services Update

Ms. Mann Rinehart provided the committee with an update on Disability Service's work. Highlights included:

- DS provided proctoring services for 400 mid-term exams. This is a growing area of Disability Service's work and additional staff were recently hired to assist with this area.
- Sign language and interpreting services have been level.
- Captioning use in the classrooms is increasing.
- Disability Services made several national presentations in February including a presentation at the National Curriculum Conference.
- Presentations were also made to several units at the University such as the Technology Learning Counsel, the Medical School, and the College of Food Agriculture and Natural Resource Sciences.
- A video on the role of Disability Services is being developed.

Program for Students with Brain Injury

Professor Mary Kennedy provided the committee with a report on her work on the College After Brain Injury Program. She stated that she specializes in working with individuals who have brain injuries, and improving rehabilitation practices. Currently, she is directing a program that assists brain-injured students for two years of college.

She stated there are very few programs in the nation that provide this type of assistance. She explained one of the unique aspects of the program is that it uses a coaching and team approach that integrates best practices from cognitive rehabilitation and supported education. Self-regulation is emphasized so that students learn to make their own decisions and become persistent, and resilient. She stated that when University of Minnesota students with traumatic brain injuries were surveyed the three domains for assistance they reported were learning, management, and social skills. The strategies and support provided are based on these domains of need.

Only students for whom completing college is a realistic goal are accepted into the program. The program is very individualized and based on each student's intake and assessment. Intensive support is provided in the first academic year with less support in the subsequent year. Students are instructed in problem based learning for complex academic tasks. Some skills learned by program participants are self-assessment, establishing deadlines, and using technology to assist in learning and studying.

She noted it takes a long time for those with a brain injury to understand how their brain works after that injury. She noted further that self-advocacy is critical, but many students do not realize they need this assistance. For instance 48% of students with brain injury have never been or have only been once to Disability Services, and do not view themselves as having a permanent disability.

Ms. Mann Rinehart commented that it is not unusual for students to delay in seeking accommodations.

Professor Kennedy stated that she is hoping for continued funding for the program next year through a grant, and noted that Donna Johnson, director, Disability Services had written a letter of support for the program.

Kimberly Simon asked how students learn about the program. Professor Kennedy responded that there is a website and students can contact her directly. Most students come through Disability Services, the Courage Center, or the Hennepin County Medical Center. The program is also listed on the Vocational Rehabilitation Services website. However, the program's finances are limited and it can only handle four students per semester. The program has not, therefore, been widely marketed.

The program is available to graduate and undergraduate students and she expects the need for it will continue to grow.

Subcommittee Work

Professor Branton provided the committee with three documents

- Proposed Resolution on Faculty Training in Disabilities Issues
- Proposed Resolution on Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Disability Services
- List of Potential Questions for those Who Have Interacted with Disability Services

He indicated he would like the Needs Assessment and Education Subcommittees to work on these resolutions between the March and April meetings, and that he would like to provide Disability Services with a record of the committee's concerns. He further indicated that he would contact the committee members via e-mail regarding the documents.

Ms. Simon noted that members of the Education Subcommittee had met with Ms. Johnson and Susan Aase and started a list of topics that should be included in any fundamental training on disabilities provided to faculty. She stated she would follow up on this work.

Professor Kennedy asked if the *List of Potential Questions for Those Who Have Interacted with Disability Services* had been shared with Disability Services. Professor Branton stated it had not yet been shared. Ms. Mann Rinehart noted that Disability Services is currently undergoing an evaluation process, and the questions on the list might not all be included. Professor Branton explained that he had just provided the questions to the committee and it needed an opportunity to discuss them before they are formally presented to Disability Services.

Professor Julia Robinson noted the importance of different groups looking at information and stated there does not need to be a convergence between Disabilities Issues and Disability Services on the list of questions. The committee can present the questions to Disability Services as a point of reference.

Ms. Mann Rinehart noted that outcomes are not included in the list of questions. Professor Branton stated that these questions are not intended to replace the Office for Equity and Diversity's broader evaluation. They are just a list of questions the committee believes are important.

Hearing no further business, Professor Branton adjourned the meeting.

Dawn Zugay
University Senate