

DISABILITIES ISSUES COMMITTEE  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
NOVEMBER 14, 2001

[In these minutes:

Welcome and Introductions, Overview of Subcommittee Charges, Accessibility of Information Technology Policy Presentation]

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

PRESENT:

William Durfee, Chair, Paula Knutzen, Julie Sweitzer, James Carey, Harvey Carlson, Elizabeth Lightfoot, Virgil Mathiowetz, Ken Myers, David Wuolu, Jessica Voigts

REGRETS: Robert Copeland, Bobbi Cordano

ABSENT: Joe Reichle, Amanda Tempel

OTHER(S): Victoria Nelson

GUEST(S): David Fuecker, Philip Kragens

I). Professor Durfee called the meeting to order and asked those present to introduce themselves.

II). Professor Durfee announced the meeting schedule for spring semester. The Committee will meet on January 23, 2002, March 13, 2002 and April 10, 2002.

III). Professor Durfee provided Committee members with overviews of the subcommittee's charges:

1. Academics Subcommittee tasks include:

- Change the definition of "Cultural Diversity" at the University to include disability cultures.
- Identify and publicize courses that include disability culture as part of their curriculum.
- Determine feasibility of creating new courses, a minor degree program and/or a Disabilities Studies Center by identifying specific faculty or department heads that would champion these efforts.

2. Access to Information Technology tasks include:

- Help develop policy language.
- Identify a means to bring forth this policy to faculty, students and staff so it is not looked on as a burden.
- Identify negative ramifications of the policy and strategize how to minimize impact.

3. Construction Subcommittee tasks include:

- Investigate the design/build process as it relates to disabilities issues.
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Work to incorporate the language and the spirit of Universal Design into new and renovated construction projects at the University.

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Establish a formal process where Disabilities Issues Committee members receive periodic, written updates on current and planned construction projects as well as receive information on how Universal Design Principles are being addressed and monitored.

IV).

Professor Durfee introduced David Fuecker and Philip Kragnes of Disabilities Services who provided the Committee with a presentation on the Accessibility of Information Technology Policy.

Mr. Fuecker began by giving Committee members background information on the project. To date the working group has engaged in the following endeavors:

- Received a legal interpretation from the General Counsel's Office regarding the University's obligation under Section 508 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act. Section 508 stipulates that "federal agencies' electronic and information technology is accessible to people with disabilities, including employees and members of the public."

According to the General Counsel's Office the University of Minnesota is not considered a State entity, but rather is a unique arm of the State.

And, although the University is technically not required to follow Section 508 rules, it is strongly encouraged to do so.

- Composed a draft policy statement and an explanation setting forth the reason for the policy.
- Developed a comparison between University standards and those of W3C (Worldwide Web Consortium) and Section 508 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act.
- Sent an invitation to interested parties at the University who are being solicited for input into the policy's development.
- Established an e-mail list to facilitate communication concerning the Accessibility of Information Technology Policy.
- Reviewed the project with e-sponsors and e-management groups.
- Initiated exploration of funding options to aid in the implementation of this policy.
- Created a web site to assist interested parties with implementing the changes. The following URL was referenced: <http://cap.umn.edu/ait/>

Next, Mr. Kragnes of Disability Services and the creator of the website, familiarized Committee members with its features. Information contained on the web site includes:

- Web Accessibility Standards – Customized University standards that evolved from established guidelines of accessible web site design.

Each section of the guidelines has been given its own separate page, and each page has two to three sections.

First, the issue section provides an explanation of why a particular guideline is an important consideration for accessibility.

Then, following the issue section is the standard section and finally some pages also include an example section.

- Hardware and Software Accessibility Standards – these sections of the web site are under development.

It is the ultimate goal that all University of Minnesota web pages are accessible to everyone. It is not the intention of these standards to require departments to purchase all new equipment but rather to have a set of standards in conjunction with a policy statement that asserts "based on an entities normal replacement schedule these are the things that must be considered when purchasing equipment and software." Naturally there are exemptions to any policy and they are:

1. Undue Burden – The law states all resources must be available for this project. This exemption would be very difficult for the University to prove i.e. a department could not claim undue burden because it is part of the larger University.
2. Hardware and software tools specific to a research or development process in which no member of the research or development team requires accessibility accommodations.
- 3.

Hardware or software for which no equivalent accessible option is available (non-availability).

- Accessibility of Information Technology Policy
- Accessibility of Information Technology Frequently Asked Questions
- Resources and Tools – a place for interested parties to learn more about web accessibility with tools to evaluate their own site.

The working group will continue to meet weekly to discuss topics such as timelines and ‘enforcement.’ It is their goal to garner support on this policy issue so that implementation is not considered a burden, but rather as the ‘right thing to do.’

Further, the working group hopes to have a final policy statement by the end of December 2001 and implementation of the statement will hopefully become effective early 2002.

Mr. Fuecker and Mr. Kragnes fielded questions from Committee members concerning their presentation. Several questions concerning implementation arose and it was mentioned that resources will be available to assist departments with their compliance concerns. Resources include:

- Publication of funding sources to assist with compliance efforts.
- Disability Services and the Office of Information Technology will work on a ‘train the trainer’ program.
- High volume web site departments probably already have a web-master on staff, but student employees will be recruited to help meet compliance deadlines.
- The Office of Disability Services will serve as a resource for departments.

Disability Services and OIT will work with departments to make sure departments have a plan in place and are making a ‘reasonable’ effort to comply with the policy. Committee members were reminded that accessibility is a civil right and civil rights are un-funded mandates.

As far as the University of Minnesota’s performance, while the enthusiasm is high for this initiative, actual web pages leave a lot to be desired i.e. University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities Home Page. A big problem with many sites is the use of transparent graphics, images that can’t be seen but are used for spacing.

Mr. Fuecker requested a statement of support from the Disabilities Issues Committee that can be incorporated in the grant proposal when petitioning for funding for this project. In addition, Mr. Fuecker welcomed ongoing input and suggestions from Committee members. Professor Durfee noted the Committee unanimously supports the concept of the draft policy.

V). With no further business, Professor Durfee adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey  
University Senate