

Minutes of the EDUCAUSE 2007 IT Accessibility Constituent Group Meeting

Thursday, October 25, 2007, 4:45-6:10 PM

Participants (listed in order of introduction)

- Terry Thompson, University of Washington and CG Leader
- Sara Clark, Missouri State University
- Laurie Harrison, University of Toronto
- Patrick McGee, Clemson University
- Lisa Fiedor, NCSU
- Greg Kraus, NCSU
- Saroj Primlani, NCSU
- Lois Johnson, Northern Arizona University
- Andrew Marker, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- John McCarragher, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- Aletia Morgan, University of Iowa
- Peter Shoudy, Widener University
- Blaire Bundy, UW-Madison
- Barbara Torney, Teachers College, Columbia University
- Henry Schaffer, NCSU
- Nancy Colyar, LSU
- Lida Larsen, EDUCAUSE and CG staff liaison

Background

This constituent group (CG) grew out of a roundtable of about 40 people that was held at last year's EDUCAUSE conference in Dallas. Only a few of today's participants were present at last year's roundtable and, similarly, few are on the CG's listserv. Each was invited to join the CG.

The CG is a member-driven discussion forum facilitated by a listserv and a meeting at the EDUCAUSE national conference. More information can be found at <http://www.educause.edu/ITAccessibilityConstituentGroup/13069>. The purpose of the group is to provide a forum in which participants can share ideas and resources, discuss issues, and help define best practices for IT accessibility in higher education. EDUCAUSE looks to the CG as a resource for information on IT accessibility for the community.

EDUCAUSE IT Accessibility Constituent Group Description

Programs, services, and resources at universities and colleges continue to expand exponentially, and delivery methods have become increasingly technology-centric. Unless these technologies are designed and deployed to support the access needs of all users, including those with disabilities,

universities and colleges risk excluding qualified students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders.

The IT Accessibility Constituent Group will help the EDUCAUSE community to assess the scope of issues of IT accessibility, identify resources and initiatives, develop best practices on policy and assistive program and service development, and in general focus on how to approach campus-wide universal access to information available via technology by engaging in dialogue across boundaries within and beyond the campus environment.

This group meets at the EDUCAUSE annual conference and uses the electronic discussion list to discuss issues throughout the year.

Terry asked how the CG might influence the conference program committee to provide more accessibility content. Lida Larsen suggested that influencing the program committee directly is not appropriate. Henry Schaffer discussed alternate ways to influence the committee. The primary one is to be more proactive and to demonstrate by our participation and support that there is deep interest in the topic.

Ideas to move the IT accessibility agenda out of the choir room include:

- Join the CG and work together
- Submit presentation and poster proposals for conferences
- Submit articles for higher education journals and news media
- Volunteer to serve on an advisory or program committee
- Volunteer to be an adjunct reader.
- Work collaboratively with librarians or web developers who often have similar agendas to further goals
- Move beyond “preaching to the choir”

Awareness and Action

- Uneven level of complaints on different campuses.
- Usability - accessibility – universal design – defining distinctions between these as many are confused as to what each is and the legal mandates that are in place. In some cases, people do not understand that there are ways to do it better
- The need for awareness training and rules we can point to.
- The need for an outspoken group to lead or the uninformed will just deal with what hits them at any time.
- It was noted that we have federal mandates and university accessibility commissions have power because of those mandates. In some cases there are state and local mandates as well. Terry noted that 3025 complaints of disability-related discrimination in higher education were filed with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights in 2006.

- Accessibility is everyone's responsibility regardless of whether it is in our job description or not.

Student support issues

- Faculty often say they "don't have time" even though they care about their students and access.
- Struggling with video access
- Popular vendor products that don't have accessible interfaces
- LMS may be accessible but the content may not be
- Purchasing: low cost is the driver, not accessibility
- Accessible technology is a moving target because of new and emerging technology tools.

Beyond student support

A university or college office of student disabilities does not always handle faculty or staff access issues. Many times it is the learning technology division that handles these. Collaboration is needed between these units regardless of where responsibility lies.

Areas in which to set goals

- 'Convincing' the university to do more than react
- Funding efforts for sustained support
- Awareness of issues across all sectors of the institution
- Universal design – and awareness of its potential impact
- Pedagogy/design to reach all the different learning styles

Things to do

- Create a demand for accessibility from the top.
- Create open forums and other events
- Bring a professional trainer onsite and charge to cover expenses
- Offer brown bag lunches with short presentations and discussion
- Establish campus interest groups
- Make sure the institution has a "president's commission" on accessibility/disability (and serve on it)
- Establish listservs on campus and regionally.
- Create and share PR and marketing collateral
- Assign an accessibility expert to each department
- Present at State-wide meetings
- Put accessibility in all other training modules
- Embed accessible features in the tools so it's transparent – get a content management system that is accessible.

- Work with vendors – put pressure on vendors
- Join ‘Access Technologists Higher Education Network’ (ATHEN) Currently has 35 member colleges, most of which are EDUCAUSE members. See information at [athenpro.org](http://www.athenpro.org). ATHEN is in the early stages of populating a wiki on IT Accessibility (<http://www.athenpro.org/wiki>)
- Regional groups – the [Committee on Institutional Cooperation](#) (CIC, a consortium of Ben Ten universities plus University of Chicago) is also developing a wiki on accessibility through its IT Accessibility and Usability Group
- Have support of your VP for your work
- Give vendors the reasons why they must be accessible
- Develop policies (based on state and national laws)
- Make accessibility a part of the procurement process
- Develop guides and skills for evaluating products
- Focus on Web 2.0 accessibility
- Attach accessibility to hot topics for programs
- Submit accessibility questions to panels at conferences.

Terry wondered if something could be done to identify vendors who promote their accessibility efforts - / this would require defined guidelines. Is there a role that this EDUCAUSE CG could play in doing this?

Opportunities

- Accessibility gold seal of approval identified on vendors (by EDUCAUSE CG group?)
- Supporting small institutions with their resource support re accessibility issues -
- Working on Universal Design for handhelds
- Help for selecting a learning management system that is accessibility approved -
- Create an annotated list of products and documents (guidelines and protocols) via a wiki (EDUCAUSE provides wiki/blog space at connect.educause.edu, or could simply link to ATHEN wiki)

Goals

- Promote accessibility within other CG groups
- DO Awareness - diversely (work for awareness across all sectors of our institutions)
- Link to Athenpro.org from CG website
- Promote vendor product accessibility
- Get CIOs on board