Chapter VIII

Web Accessibility at University Libraries and Library Schools: 2002 Follow-Up Study

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ABSTRACT

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates that library programs and services must be accessible to people with disabilities. In an era in which much information resides in digitized form on the World Wide Web, the ADA’s mandate must be interpreted as applying not only to physical space but also to cyberspace. Just as in the physical world, proper design is a crucial issue. Only accessibly-designed Web pages ensure that all people, including those with print disabilities, have access to Web-based information. Previous studies indicate that a large proportion of campus, as well as the main libraries on these campuses. This study looks at all 56 North American ALA-accredited schools of library and information science (SLIS), as well as the main libraries on these campuses. Accessibility data collected in February 2002 are compared to 2000 data. The findings continue to give cause for concern: It is reasonable to assume that low Web page accessibility at the nation’s library schools reflects a lack of awareness about this issue among the leaders and trainers in the library profession.

INTRODUCTION

About 20% of the U.S. population, some 54 million individuals, have some level of disability. For 26 million Americans, the disability is severe (McNeil, 1997). In 1997–98, an estimated 428,280 students with disabilities were enrolled at two and four-year postsecondary educational institutions in the United States (Lewis & Farris, 1999); for Canada, current enrollment figures are estimated to exceed 100,000 (Fichten, Jennison, & Barile, 2001, p. 55). Enrollment figures for people with the types of disabilities particularly pertinent in the context of this article vary from study to study: 29 to 46% of people with disabilities have a learning disability, 4 to 16% are blind or visually impaired, and 14 to 23% have mobility or orthopedic impairments (Horn & Berktold, 1999; Lewis & Farris, 1999). Despite recent increases in enrollment, people with disabilities are underrepresented in postsecondary education. Longitudinal data indicate that those with high school diplomas are less likely to enroll in public four-year colleges, and that those who do enroll are less likely to graduate (Horn & Berktold, 1999). As Gadbow and Du Bois (1998) point out, the large majority of people under the age of 65 have the intellectual capacity to succeed in postsecondary education, yet most have not attended institutions of higher learning.

With over half a million students with disabilities enrolled in North American colleges, and with many more that could benefit from postsecondary schooling, accessibility to campus and library resources is an important issue. Prodded by landmark laws such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), institutions of higher learning have worked hard to make their campuses physically accessible. Architectural barriers have been removed, assistive technology provided to those in need and a broad range of accommodations put in place where deemed reasonable. The burgeoning library literature on the ADA in the early 1990s (Mendle, 1995) reflects the vigor with which the library community sought to comply with this new law.

Recent developments in telecommunication—particularly the coming of age of the Internet—have had a strong impact on our universities, including our university libraries. Over the past decade, the way information is disseminated in the campus environment has undergone drastic changes. Increasingly, print-based information is being substituted with its digital equivalent. Today, the Web, along with e-mail, provides the main, if not the sole, channel for a variety of education-supporting resources: official campus Web pages with crucial administrative information, class syllabi, course readings and Web-mediated distance education programs. In the midst of this digital revolution, libraries, with the purpose of storing and providing access to information, are the most affected. The shift from the physical to the virtual permeates almost every aspect of its operation. There is hardly a single type of library resource that has not shifted, to at least some extent, to a digitized, Web-
Interactive Videoconferencing in Educational Settings: A Case in Primary Education
www.igi-global.com/article/interactive-videoconferencing-in-educational-settings/192086?camid=4v1a