# AVCC

# Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee

*the council of Australia's university presidents*

## GUIDELINES ON INFORMATION ACCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH PRINT DISABILITIES

**November 2004**

# AVCC GUIDELINES ON INFORMATION ACCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH PRINT DISABILITIES

## 1    Context

More than 3% of Australians are blind, vision-impaired or have another form of print disability (that is, they cannot read, hold or comprehend print based material) which means that they need information in an alternative format such as braille, large print, audio or accessible electronic.

The number of students who require information in an alternative format is increasing and this trend is predicted to continue.

The **Disability Discrimination Act** and the subordinate **DDA Standards for Education** require universities to provide educational services in an accessible way.  This includes providing information to students in a format that they can use and which supports their learning.

In recognition that many universities were struggling to meet this challenge, in May 2002 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission convened a forum to discuss ways to improve the provision of information in alternative formats.  The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee then agreed to chair an Accessible Curricular Materials Steering Committee to implement the recommendations arising from the forum.

One of the recommendations identified as a priority by the Steering Committee was the preparation of guidelines for universities on policies and procedures on information access for students with print disabilities.

These guidelines are not a prescriptive list but are presented as advice on good practice, with the aim of assisting individual institutions to meet the needs of students with print disabilities through strategies and arrangements which are appropriate to their local circumstances. The guidelines relate to:

1    Provision of student assistance (administrative and academic aspects of University participation);
2    Teaching materials;
3    Internet access;
4    Encouraging inclusivity;
5    Equipment and technology;
6    Practical classes and practicum placements; and
7    Policy implementation.

## 2    General Principles

1.  Universities should aim to provide students with print disabilities with the opportunity to realise their individual capabilities and to gain access to and participate in University life, taking into account their obligations under anti-discrimination legislation to provide reasonable accommodations.  It cannot be assumed that because something is hard, it is therefore unreasonable.

2.  Universities should ensure that all their interactions with students with print disabilities are characterised by respect of their rights to dignity, privacy, confidentiality and substantive equality.

3.  Universities should seek to provide support services to students with print disabilities in the interests of equality of educational opportunity. Services may include alternative ways of accessing information and expressing knowledge and general support services. Universities would normally require students to obtain an expert assessment

of the functional implications of their disability on their academic access, so that appropriate support provisions can be negotiated.

4. Universities should give attention to the resources needed to provide the appropriate environment and support services to students with print disabilities. Universities are encouraged to pursue cooperative links with other educational institutions in their region and with community service providers in order to enhance access to highly specialised and expensive services.

# 3      Provision of Student Assistance

**3.1  The University has a timeline for students to inform appropriate staff of their need for assistance and for staff to contact the student and liaise with departments to discuss appropriate levels of support.**

*Examples of good practice*

❑   Information is accessible on, or prior to, admission through provision of appropriate services.

❑   Students are informed of their responsibility in relation to notifying the disability services of:
   o   their intention to enrol in specific course/subjects
   o   their needs for texts/course materials as early as possible

❑   Students inform their departments of their requirements as a matter of priority, allowing the maximum time for course materials to be prepared

❑   Students deliver materials to the disability unit or library contact (where required) as soon as possible.

**3.2  The University has guidelines for the provision of administrative information in an accessible format: general university information, enrolment information, email procedures, timetables, academic calendar, faculty course descriptions and handbooks. (This information is also available to Student Union staff and student organisations).**

*Examples of good practice*

❑   Staff understand the university's obligation under the anti-discrimination act to provide accessible format for people with a print disability

❑   It is standard practice for all University departments to be able to provide materials in accessible format

❑   The University liaises with student organisations to assist them to conform to the guidelines

❑   The University website is a major source of information regarding accessible formats and adaptive technology

❑   Any University websites identified as inaccessible by a student or staff member are made accessible according to identified priorities and in compliance with the World-Wide Web Consortium Guidelines on Web Accessibility. (W3C). Where this is not possible, alternative formats are provided.

❑   Both students and staff have an understanding of copyright as it pertains to information access

❑   A copyright undertaking is completed by students

❑   Staff have access to advice and assistance on the creation of documents which can be made accessible to students

**3.3  The University has a commitment to assist students to develop independent learning and research skills.**

*Examples of good practice*

❑  Students with a print disability are encouraged to acquire appropriate adaptive technology skills and core generic computer skills *prior* to commencement in their chosen course of study. (These skills can be acquired with the assistance of disability service agencies, VET or other appropriate training providers who receive funding to conduct this work as part of their core business.)

❑  All new students are made aware of the generic student services which may be of assistance to them, eg language / learning units, counselling service, housing services

❑  Library staff and staff managing the adaptive technology equipment provide support to new students, to enable them to settle in quickly and make effective use of the various facilities provided

❑  The university may provide some assistance with research skills in the initial phase but the aim is to develop the students' capacity to undertake their own independent research

❑  University transition programs (including transition to postgraduate study and transition to employment) specifically address the needs of students with a print disability.

# 4  Accessibility of Teaching Materials

**4.1  The University has guidelines for deciding in which formats materials will be provided (guidelines to provide for a range of relevant factors including student need, material complexity and subject matter).**

*Examples of good practice*

❑  Formats are decided on the ground of documented need and accessibility requirements

❑  Guidelines outline the responsibilities of both students and staff in relation to the preparation of materials in alternative format

❑  Guidelines explain the procedures for requesting materials in alternative formats

❑  Relevant staff are provided with information about the various formats, why they matter and the equipment which can be used by students with a range of print disabilities

The university follows good practice for deciding on appropriate formats for accessible teaching materials

**4.2  The University has clear timelines for the production and provision of materials.**

*Examples of good practice*

❑  Any accessible format materials prepared by the University are produced in accordance with the recognised Australian standards for example those developed by the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities (available at: http://e-bility.com/roundtable/index.php )

❑  University deadlines for the receipt of reading lists allow time for alternative format materials to be prepared prior to the commencement of semester

❑ Course materials (ie reading packs or course notes prepared by a lecturer specifically for the unit of a course - in contrast to lists of recommended readings, as in point 2.) are made available to ALL students prior to the commencement of the semester.

❑ Any additional materials introduced after the course has commenced are made available to the student 4 weeks prior to when the material is to be taught

❑ If these timelines cannot be met, the lecturer ensures that alternative strategies have been negotiated with the student, in liaison with the disability unit

❑ Textbooks are made available in the appropriate electronic format whenever possible

❑ Required textbooks are held by libraries in accessible format

❑ A schedule of dates by which the readings are expected to have been read is included with reading packs.

**4.3    The University has outlined standards for the production of course materials.**

*Examples of good practice*

❑ Course/subject readers use only first generation photocopies

❑ Reduced photocopies are not used

❑ All photocopies are correctly aligned

❑ Photocopies do not have any text 'chopped off'

❑ Pagination is included and clear

❑ Accurate and complete bibliographic details for all books and articles are included

❑ Procedures for producing and storing course materials in a common, accessible electronic format, for example, XML (a standard for marking up electronic documents to enable them to be accessed in many different formats) are followed

❑ Procedures incorporate ongoing W3C updates and set out how the University will update storage of materials so that they will still be accessible in the future

## 5    Internet Access

**5.1    The University has policies in place to ensure the University website is fully compliant with web accessibility guidelines.**

*Examples of good practice*

❑ The University has developed a Web Disability Action Plan or the institution's Disability Action Plan contains sections relating to web access

❑ The University website is compliant with both Priority 1 and Priority 2 World Wide Web Consortium guidelines  (AA compliance) and some comply with Priority 3

❑ The University website has a clearly-identified link to contact information for reporting web accessibility concerns or problems

❑ Web accessibility policy is monitored and updated regularly by senior staff.

**5.2    The University has policies in place to ensure software used in courses is compatible with adaptive software.**

*Examples of good practice*

❑    The University has procedures in place to ensure that the software used in course design can be used with the adaptive software technology currently used by students with print disabilities

❑    A reference to accessibility standards is included in the course approvals form

❑    Relevant staff are made aware of the guidelines and the importance of accessibility when choosing and purchasing new software.

# 6    Encouraging Inclusivity

**6.1    The University has processes in place to ensure that teaching staff, including casual staff, receive training in inclusive teaching methods and course design.**

*Examples of good practice*

❑    Staff induction procedures alert all teaching staff and relevant administrative staff to course design and accessible teaching practices which will assist students with a disability

❑    Strategies to support inclusive teaching practices are incorporated into university teaching and learning management plans

❑    Teaching staff are encouraged to contact the disability unit for advice if they encounter difficulty in teaching individual students with print disabilities

❑    More in depth training in the use of adaptive technology is provided to staff on a needs basis

❑    Guidelines on information access have been communicated to all relevant staff members and are available on the university's website

# 7    Provision of Adaptive Equipment and Technology

**7.1    The University provides appropriate adaptive equipment and software for students with print disabilities.**

*Examples of good practice*

❑    The University has committed funds to purchase equipment which is generally considered to be beyond the reach of individual students. For example, high quality scanners, Braille printer, speech synthesiser (the type and amount of adaptive equipment and software supplied for the use of students reflects the student population and needs)

❑    Adaptive equipment and software are updated as required

❑    The University allocates identified staff members with responsibility for managing the equipment library and for familiarising new students with the equipment available

❑    Communal and individual student rooms/carrels are provided to house equipment in a central location

❑    IT and Library divisions consider the needs of students with print disabilities when purchasing new equipment and software

❑    On-campus teaching facilities (including libraries and computer labs) are accessible on an equitable basis and are equipped with adaptive software and equipment

❑ Students are surveyed annually to assess the effectiveness of IT support.

## 8 Examinations

**8.1 The University ensures examination and assessment processes and conditions accommodate the needs of students with print disabilities.**

*Examples of good practice*

❑ Individual examination papers are produced in a format suitable for the needs of the student, taking into account the nature of the print disability, the complexity of the subject matter involved and the format of each examination paper

❑ Liaison between the student and teaching staff, as well as with disability services, prior to production of individual examination papers in a required accessible format ensures that student requirements are met

❑ The examination papers produced by the University are in accordance with guidelines for the production of these documents in various formats such as those produced by the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities. (See section 4)

❑ All academic staff are aware of the necessary procedures to ensure examination and assessment processes and conditions accommodate the needs of students with print disabilities.

❑ On enrolment, students with a print disability are provided with clear information setting out their responsibilities in regard to liaison with academic staff and disability services, to make provision for examination and assessment processes and conditions which accommodate the needs of students with print disabilities.

## 9 Access to Practical Classes and Placements

**9.1 The University has developed procedures which facilitate participation in the practical sessions or placements which form an integral part of many courses.**

*Examples of good practice*

❑ Where a student has a pre-existing print disability, consideration as to how the student will participate in practicums/practical sessions or placements (such as in Education, Nursing or Social Work) is undertaken with the course co-ordinators **prior** to admission, in consultation with the student concerned

❑ Processes are put in place to allow students to undertake these essential parts of their course, with the provision of their course materials in a timely manner (Procedures ensure that students undertaking practicum/placements are provided with all relevant materials in an appropriate format **at the same time** as other students)

❑ The University accepts responsibility for providing necessary adaptive technology to allow students to satisfy their placement requirements

❑ Where a student acquires a print disability **after** commencing a course, every effort is made to provide adaptive technology and other relevant support to enable the student to complete the course of study.

❑ Students are supplied with necessary adaptive equipment, software and technical support to enable them to have equal access to information.

## 10   Policy Implementation

**10.1   The University has put in place processes to ensure monitoring and review of the implementation of its policies and guidelines.**

*Examples of good practice*

- ❑ The policy and procedures are approved by the University's primary committee for overseeing matters related to teaching and learning and actively supported by senior University administration

- ❑ The University's guidelines are well-publicised and available on the website

- ❑ Policies encourage staff with responsibility for implementing these guidelines at their University to refer to their disability unit and appropriate external sources for advice and assistance as required

- ❑ An annual or biennial audit of the implementation of the guidelines is undertaken as part of the process of ongoing quality improvement

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**Resources**

It should be noted that for library services, the Australian Library and Information Association [ALIA] has also produced Guidelines on library standards for people with disabilities: http://alia.org.au/policies/disability.standards.html.

The AUTC has funded a project which aims to improve outcomes for blind and vision impaired students in Australian universities. The project will be completed in December 2004 and will provide a web resource which will identify effective professional development practices and improve access to practical information and resources.

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