ADA TASK FORCE

The purpose of this task force was to review technology utilized by the University Libraries to provide access to library services and facilities for users with disabilities. We used the guidelines set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act as criteria for the recommendations that follow.

Access to computers and electronic resources provided by the library:

There is presently a program which is widely used in academic institutions to evaluate Home Pages in order to determine their accessibility quotient for users with disabilities. We have obtained access and used this program on the libraries’ system. Our library Home Page failed to pass the lowest level of accessibility for users with disabilities, although by only a small margin. Administrators of the Center for Students with Disabilities have extended and offer to consult with our libraries’ electronic services librarian on bringing the library Home Page to at least the minimum level of accessibility for users with disabilities. Assistant Director for Assistive Technologies, Teresa Wells, recommends that we bring our Home Page up to the second level. The reason for this goal is twofold. First, the improved accessibility is helpful to all computer users to some degree. Secondly, an accessible Home Page is an advertisement for recruiting new prospective students with disabilities in the process of choosing where to attend college. Presumably based on similar reasoning, we understand the Computing Services will use a product called RED DOT to evaluate all its general access computer labs in order to insure that they are accessible to users with disabilities.

We also recommend including web resources for common disabilities on our library Home Page. The resources would include sites for spinal cord injury, blindness, and deafness. The Assistant Director for Assistive Technologies at the Center for Students with Disabilities has agreed to advise the library on choosing the best web resources for this proposed initiative.

Assistive Technology which enhances the effectiveness of library computers and equipment:

An assistive technology which will enhance blind patrons’ effective use of our resources is a tactile map for the library. Such a map can increase the accessibility presently in place in our building in the form of braille signage in our elevators, bathrooms, and emergency/fire exits. Web sites for vendors of tactile map products are included in the appendix to this document.

Overall, the library’s offerings for assistive technology are worse than they were five years ago. At that time we had a dedicated large screen terminal in the Reference area equipped with a track ball mouse. There were some simple adaptive programs loaded on all library research terminals. Our review reveals that the library’s reference department track ball mouse was stolen numerous times and finally not replaced. The large screen monitor was moved to the Audio Visual
Department on the assumption that its student workers were already trained on all their
department’s machinery and the large screen terminal from Reference would represent only one
further addition to their present training. The adaptive programs formerly loaded on all library
research terminals have simply gone by the wayside during re-imaging of the terminals. This
may have been related to a turnover in staff of the Systems Department. The Audio Visual
Department used to train its students in operating the Visual Tek machine for low vision readers
and on the large screen monitor relocated two years ago to that department for use by special
needs patrons. It no longer includes this information in training its students. In fact, currently
there is only one paragraph in the Audio Visual Department’s Public Service manual concerning
services to patrons with disabilities and nothing that concerns specific duties of Audio Visual
Department personnel. The Audio Visual Department’s track ball mouse was stolen by a patron
years ago and has not been replaced. We recommend reinstatement of regular student training on
all adaptive machines housed in the Audio Visual Department and the replacement of the lost
track ball mouse for the large screen terminal located there. This time the track ball mouse
should be available for checkout with an ID from the Audio Visual public service desk. Since
many patrons with disabilities using the library would benefit from a track ball mouse, we
recommend two be purchased and made available for check out from the Circulation Desk as
well.

Our task force feels that since the library computer lab is widely perceived by students as an
extension of Mullins Library itself, some comments on the equipment in that lab are appropriate
here. Computer resources the library computer lab currently offers include only the following
adaptive software programs:

- **Jaws**, 
- **Microsoft Magnifier**, 
- a scanner

All computer labs at the university including the one in the library formerly offered additional
adaptive programs: **ZOOMtext**, **Open Book**, **Dragon Naturally Speaking** as well as a track ball
mouse for users who need it. All these resources have been removed. Technicians for the
library’s computer lab responded that some of the formerly-available programs were dropped
because of duplication in what they offered. The trackball mouse was not replaced after it was
stolen. After discussing this with Teresa Wells of the Center for Students with Disabilities and
Kelly Coppennoll of Computing Services, the decision seems to have been a poor one. For
instance, **Microsoft Magnifier** which supplanted **ZOOMtext** is described by the company that
produces it as only a “stop-gap measure” for users of text enlargement software. Our task force
recommends reinstatement of **ZOOMtext** and the **Open Book** adaptive software (or its equivalent
offered by the Kurzweil company). We also strongly recommend the replacement of the track
ball mouse as it is essential for users with some disabilities.

**Recommendations of needed equipment and software to meet ADA guidelines:**
The task force recommends looking at the space in Audio Visual, where some assistive
technologies are presently grouped, with an eye toward modifying an existing workstation in the
area to be a wheelchair-accessible workstation. It should be equipped with swing arms to allow
easy raising and lowering of the terminal for wheelchair users, and by other users who have very
little upper body strength. Swing arms are available that can be purchased separately. They can accommodate a variety of common size monitors. See appendix for recommended swing arm specifications. Current student workers in the Audio Visual Department should be re-trained in the operation of the adaptive machinery in that library service area and this training should again become part of basic public service instruction for working in that department.

An especially important issue is the improvement of wireless access for library users with disabilities: such access should be available throughout our building. Wireless access has a greater impact on students with some disabilities for whom navigating the library physically is difficult. It resolves the issue of needing a terminal physically near the collection being used which will be important for some disabilities. Wireless access in study carrels also is a greater necessity for users with mobility problems. More and more students come to the library nowadays with their own laptops. Provision of wireless access by the library is all that is needed to turn these laptops into personal library terminals while the student is in our building.

With regard to equal access to our building’s resources, we presently offer only one study carrel for users with disabilities. According to information collected by our library’s facilities coordinator, this carrel is seldom used. Our committee feels that the present usage reflects a lack of awareness and promotion rather than a lack of need for accessible study carrels in the library. We recommend increasing the awareness of this study carrel by including mention of it in hand-outs and promotional material available on campus. Small modifications in some of our other carrels would enable their use by patrons with disabilities. We suggest a few faculty carrels located close to the southwest stairs and elevators be provided with accordion style doors to enable wheelchair use. Many of the library’s study carrels simply cannot be modified for wheelchair use due to their location. It will be useful in future to ask on our carrel application form whether the user for that year has any special needs. With such a list, we can make sure through evacuation procedures to check these carrels since audible alarms would not be heard by deaf users and wheelchair users may require assistance exiting the building during an emergency.

In addition, Mullins needs to make public access terminals available to users with disabilities in the stacks area of both EAST and WEST sides of our building. Presently, patrons with mobility restrictions must go across to the extreme west side of the building on three of our four floors in order to access a public service terminal. Terminals presently available on the east side are seldom working and are set on low tables which prevent their use by patrons in wheelchairs.

The committee also recommends the creation of a safe holding place for emergency evacuation of persons with disabilities on the West side of Mullins. The library is too large to expect blind or wheelchair patrons caught in the West side of the library during a fire alarm to find their way across to the East side of the building in order to receive help in being evacuated. We have identified the library’s sorting area as a location on the West side near elevators and stairs which can be identified with signs and used for a safe holding spot for patrons needing emergency assistance to exit that side of the building. Note that safe holding locations do not take up any appreciable space except in the emergency occasions when they would be actually used. This recommendation will not affect present use of the sorting area.
**Technical Support for technology employed:**

As Assistant Director of Assistive Technologies for the Center for Students with Disabilities, Teresa Wells has wide, documented experience with assistive technologies and adaptive machinery. As an extension of her work with the Center, Ms. Wells has offered to act as consultant with the libraries’ Systems Department staff as needed in order to take advantage of her years of experience in providing technical support for adaptive technology.

The improvement of our wireless environment we recommend will require technical support. However, according to our understanding, the wireless initiative underway for the whole campus will require added positions for managing technical support and some of that support will come from positions added to the Computing Services staff. There may be no need to add a position within the library.

**Collaboration with other campus departments and service programs:**

We have discussed with a University Computing Services’ staff member a collaboration effort with Computing Services to develop a campus access map for students/staff/faculty with disabilities. The proposed map would be electronically available and include accessible routes to classrooms and other important buildings based on individual disabilities as well as an Internet resources page organized by disability. For instance, a wheelchair-oriented access map for persons with mobility issues would identify where “curb cuts” for wheelchairs are located on campus sidewalks, as well as obstacles such as the large statue several yards outside the west entrance to Mullins which currently blocks ramp access by wheelchair to a major North-South thoroughfare for wheelchair users on campus. Our task force made initial inquiries about its possible relocation and the response from the Administration has been a request to leave the statue’s location unchanged until 2005. This seems an unusual choice for a school which ostensibly wishes to make the campus accessible to users with disabilities. However, it is evidently not subject to discussion with those who have authority to relocate the artwork. Signs are currently needed on both sides of this common area west of the library to advise anyone needing such access that this route is blocked until the year 2005.

Another collaborative effort we have explored is asking qualified staff members of the Center for Students with Disabilities to offer training each semester for library staff and student workers on how to best assist patrons with disabilities in the library. To test this idea Elaine Contant coordinated such a session this May through the library’s Employment Development Group. If the library determines that these sessions are useful Dr. Teresa Wells would like to have it continue each semester as an extension of the work of the Center for Students with Disabilities. Training our staff and students to be more sensitive and comfortable with patrons who have disabilities is the cheapest and most effective step we can take to make our library user-friendly for these patrons.

**Physical access issues in the building and its entrance:**

Doors to most of the library’s graduate carrels are not accessible by wheelchair. We propose
either remodeling some existing carrel doors to allow for wheelchair use or providing one or two locations for individual study by patrons with special needs in Audio Visual, where we have recommended placing other adaptive equipment.

The improvement of wireless access in the library so that users with disabilities can have computer access throughout our building will contribute greatly to physical access for those users with vision and mobility issues.

The task force recommends including information about emergency exits, areas of rescue assistance, and other safety information on our library’s informational brochures and web pages.

Concerns in Branch Libraries

The Fine Arts Library has an automatic door at the library’s entrance, but no physical access at all to the first floor for wheelchair users. Presently, materials from that level are retrieved for patrons with disabilities but this should be improved if possible. Most patrons with disabilities will be uncomfortable asking library staff to make multiple trips downstairs to retrieve materials for them. Also, access to computer terminals in the Fine Arts Library should be looked at. The present configuration is difficult for patrons using wheelchairs.

The Chemistry Library in Room 211 of the Chemistry Building has no wheelchair access to the second floor where the library is located except by going into the nearby Biological Sciences Building, using their elevator, and then crossing over on the second floor into Chemistry. This seems awkward at best and is arguably an obstacle to equal access for people with mobility restrictions.

Review of current policy statements:

The University Libraries needs to amend our hand-out of Services to Patrons with Disabilities in order to reflect changes over time in information regarding room numbers, phone numbers, and contact persons’ names. We recommend proceeding with that right away.

Earlier we noted that adaptive software which had formerly been available on all library research terminals has disappeared. We believe regular re-imaging of the terminals and transitions in the systems staff over a period of time may have contributed to this. This problem is being addressed immediately by Systems staff who will reload those programs and make them available again on all public terminals.

We recommend at least three track ball mice be purchased for check-out by patrons needing them for the main library. This check-out arrangement should do much to remedy the thefts of track ball mice our institution has suffered in the past in both Reference and Audio Visual Departments. This small expenditure will noted and appreciated by students needing access to this tool because of problems with their hands. Finally, the Services by Department portion of our Services to Patrons with Disabilities hand-out should add Audio Visual Department’s services to patrons with disabilities since that department presently houses our library’s only large screen monitor and track ball mouse for public use. The Audio Visual Department’s public
service manual and training policies should be amended to provide the training on adaptive machinery kept in that area for use by patrons with disabilities.

Appendix

Specifications for Tactile Maps recommended:

http://www.clickandgomap.com/

Specifications for swing arm monitors recommended for Audio Visual:

http://www.lcdmonitorarm.com/lcd_arm_8.htm


http://www.ergotron.com/6_General_Info/PDFs/PDF_files/05-036.pdf

Specifications for tables and lifts:

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