Accessibility of Technology Services

Purpose

The University of Mississippi (UM) recognizes the importance and value of providing electronic and information technology (EIT) services that are accessible to everyone and that can be used on a broad spectrum of devices. By adhering to principles of "universal design," UM can ensure we equally meet the needs and expectations of people who use assistive technology to overcome physical disabilities as well as ensure a quality experience for everyone. Planning for accessibility can help create more intuitive and versatile displays when sites are viewed from small format devices such as smartphones or tablets. Federal laws require equitable use of educational technology including all programs, services, and communication systems, as well as online and digital environments. This policy details the accessibility requirements and standards for UM departments as they develop websites, computer labs, and all other EIT services. This includes, but is not limited to, learning management systems, audio and video files (podcasts and vodcasts), course software, and all course materials.

General Guidelines

The two most current and widely accepted IT accessibility standards are:

> (1) Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)
> (2) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA: [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#)

Section 508 is federal law requiring that a federal agency's EIT services be accessible to people with disabilities. While Section 508 is the standing federal law concerning software applications, telecommunications products, and personal computers, the more current WCAG 2.0 has been cited as the standard in recent court cases involving institutions of higher learning.

UM departments that deploy EIT services must become familiar with these standards and make reasonable efforts to adhere to them. The department head is ultimately responsible for ensuring that all EIT services deployed by their department are accessible. This policy applies to EIT services hosted locally, those offered "in the cloud," and those provided or supported by third parties. When negotiating contracts involving EIT services, UM departments must request a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) as a critical component in the procurement process. This VPAT will help the department acknowledge and confirm compliance with the accessibility requirements outlined in this policy.

When a technology-related service is requested by an individual with a disability, if that service is not already accessible in the manner required by the individual making the request, the department will promptly offer the service in an alternate, accessible format. The department will simultaneously seek a long-term solution to address any future cases. Extreme circumstances related to technology compliance should be addressed to the Accessibility Compliance Committee consisting of the Chief Information Officer, the Associate Provost for Outreach and Continuing Studies, and the Executive Director of Equal Opportunity and Regulatory Compliance. An example of an extreme circumstance might be a non-compliant hosted, online service that is required for accreditation and is offered by a single vendor. Initial inquiries may be made by sending email to it@olemiss.edu

Failure to comply may result in restriction of services for a department or other limitations as determined by the Accessibility Compliance Committee. Department heads and individuals providing EIT services are ultimately responsible for compliance. Deliberate indifference to this policy may subject individuals to disciplinary action. See the "Investigation and Disciplinary Action" section of the IT Appropriate Use Policy for the protocol in reporting cases.

The UM Accessibility Statement, http://www.olemiss.edu/info/access.html, offers points of contact for reporting barriers and complaints.

Specific Requirements for Official Web Pages

Official UM Web Pages must pass all error checks in the Wave Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool available at the address: http://wave.webaim.org in order to be minimally compliant. The Official Web Page Policy defines an "Official Web Page" to be "a Webpage presented on behalf of UM, sanctioned by the appropriate UM unit." That policy also requires an "Accessibility" link to http://www.olemiss.edu/info/access.html on the primary homepage for each UM unit.

Some websites are not conducive to evaluation by WAVE. Examples are websites that require a username and password or are highly interactive. These may be evaluated using other means but must meet the standards included in the WebAIM Section 508 checklist: http://webaim.org/standards/508/checklist. In extreme circumstances, where compliance is not technically possible or requires extraordinary measures due to the nature or the intent of the website, exceptions may be approved on a case by case basis by the Accessibility Compliance Committee. Failure to comply will result in having the page disabled from public viewing.

Resources

The following articles and websites offer valuable advice and additional details for deploying accessible EIT services:

1. "Universal Design for the Digital Environment: Transforming the Institution," by Cyndi Rowland, Heather Mariger, Peter M. Siegel, and Jonathan Whiting in the November/ December issue of EDUCAUSE Review (vol.45,no. 6).

http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Review/EDUCAUSEReviewMagazineVolume45/UniversalDesignfortheDigitalEn/218700

2.   Resources for Understanding and Implementing Section 508: Resources for Understanding and Implementing Section 508

3.   Web Content Accessibility Guidelines(WCAG)2.0: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

4.   Web Accessibility Initiative: Web Accessibility Initiative

5.   Wave Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool: Wave Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool

6.   Web AIM Section 508 Checklist: Web AIM Section 508 Checklist

7.   University of Mississippi Accessibility Statement: University of Mississippi Accessibility Statement

8.   University of Mississippi Policy for Official UM Web Pages:

http://secure4.olemiss.edu/umpolicyopen/ShowDetails.jsp?istatPara=1&policyObjidPara=10644177