Public University Web Accessibility
Evaluation, Plans for Improvement, and Annual Reporting Requirements

Background

The information age has introduced new accessibility barriers to people with disabilities in the form of electronic resources such as Internet access to the World Wide Web (web). Institutions are rapidly making the web the primary, and in many cases, their only means of communication with students, faculty, and staff, for many types of administrative and educational information. The web has a tremendous potential to help people with disabilities to become more independent and provide them with a great number of opportunities in society, but only if the web resources are designed with their needs in mind.

To address the increasing need for user-centered web designs, a resolution adopted by the Illinois Board of Higher Education on October 5, 2004 directs the Board to

- encourage each public university to identify the current state of its web accessibility,

- encourage each public university to develop, between Fall 2005 and Spring 2006, a detailed plan to continuously improve the institution's Worldwide Web accessibility (including specific goals and activities; publicity, administration, instructional and departmental web service; and purchasing requirements for web services and tools), and

- require that institutions report on the status of their Worldwide Web accessibility as part of the annual Underrepresented Groups Report (beginning with reports submitted in the winter of 2006).

The remainder of this document outlines a plan for accomplishing these three objectives.

Current Status and Continuous Improvement Plans

To address the first two objectives, each public university will submit a report to IBHE **no later than May 1, 2006**. That report will consist of the following three components:

1) Accessibility Standard

   Institutional reports will identify the standards the institution is currently striving to comply with and why those standards were chosen. Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act outlines basic electronic and information technology accessibility standards that institutions are required to meet. However, the Board encourages institutions to strive to meet higher standards including, but not limited to, the Illinois Web Accessibility Standards (IWAS), W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, or other appropriate standards. Links to additional information about the aforementioned standards are provided in Appendix A.

2) Initial Evaluation of Institutional Web Pages

   Based on the standards identified, an initial evaluation of the extent to which institutional web pages meet those standards should be conducted. Institutions may choose one of the

following three options as the basis for this initial evaluation of current institutional web pages.

    a) Beginning with the institution's home page, evaluate that page and each institutional page linked from the home page, going only one link deep from the home page; OR

    b) Identify and evaluate the 25 most utilized web pages; OR

    c) Utilize another approach with approval from IBHE staff.

Institutions should also describe how these web pages will be improved if necessary. Supplemental information about common web page evaluation, repair, and development tools can be found in Appendix A.

3) Plan for Continuous Improvement and Annual Status Report on Web Accessibility
Each institution should describe a plan for continually improving the accessibility of institutional web pages. The plan should

    a) describe how the evaluation of current institutional web pages will be expanded and how accessibility will be improved if necessary, and

    b) describe how the institution will ensure accessibility of all future institutional web pages.

Institutional plans should include descriptions of any current or future policies, support programs, or purchasing requirements that relate to ensuring accessibility of institutional web pages as appropriate.

These plans should clearly identify what actions the institution will take and a corresponding timeline. This will be the basis for future status reports to be submitted to IBHE through the annual Report to the Governor and General Assembly on Underrepresented Groups in Illinois Higher Education (URG Report) reporting process. Beginning with URG Reports submitted to IBHE staff in January 2007, institutions will submit a status report on the goals and activities outlined in the Plan for Continuous Improvement, as submitted to IBHE in spring 2005. The status report should also include a description of any changes to the goals outlined in those plans and why such changes are necessary.

APPENDIX A

Accessibility Standards

    Section 508
        http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=12#Web

    IWAS:
        http://www.illinois.gov/iwas/standards/iwasStandards.cfm

    W3C:
        http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/

Evaluation Tools and Resources

    WEBXACT (formerly Bobby)
        http://webxact.watchfire.com/

    A-Prompt
        http://www.aprompt.ca/

    W3C HTML Markup Validation Service
        http://validator.w3.org/

    W3C css-validator
        http://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator/

    Usablenet
        http://www.usablenet.com/

Additional Resources

        Illinois Center for Instructional Technology Accessibility
        http://cita.rehab.uiuc.edu/

        Access through Adaptive Computer Technology and Website Design
        (IBHE-HECA Grant Project)
        http://www.siu.edu/~dss/Access/Web_Overview.htm