

## Accessibility of Distance Learning Courses for Students with Disabilities

In planning or revising a distance learning course, it is important to be aware of possible accessibility concerns that may arise for students with disabilities and to be aware that planning at the front end can result in a class that reflects the principles of Universal Design. This means that the class is designed to be usable and accessible to all students.

Ensuring accessibility expands the market for distance learning classes and supports the open enrollment policies of the California Community College system. In addition, there are policy and legal mandates regarding access. The following are relevant legal requirements:

<b>Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504</b>	Prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in educational settings which receive Federal dollars
<b>Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 508 (revised)</b>	Requires equal access to telecommunications, which is defined to include services and programs delivered via the internet. The State Attorney General for the CCC has ruled that Section 508 applies to distance learning offered by the CCC system schools.
<b>Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)</b>	Requires programs and services, including educational programs to be accessible to qualified persons with disabilities. Requires also that all telecommunication must be equal and equally effective.
<b>California Title V</b>	Prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability.

### CCC Chancellor's Guidelines:

In 1999, the Office the Chancellor for the Californian Community College System issues a document entitled, [Distance Education: Access Guidelines for Students with Disabilities](#). The document is available at:

[http://www.htctu.net/publications/guidelines/distance\\_ed/disted.htm](http://www.htctu.net/publications/guidelines/distance_ed/disted.htm) or  
[http://www.htctu.net/publications/guidelines/distance\\_ed/distedguidelines.pdf](http://www.htctu.net/publications/guidelines/distance_ed/distedguidelines.pdf)

The guidelines are comprehensive and include strategies for addressing access concerns with all distance learning formats, including on-line education.

### Highlights include:

- All new [developed after 8/99] courses or DL components of courses must be accessible to students with disabilities in their initial design.
- All existing DL courses or DL components of courses must be made accessible when they are updated.
- Existing DL courses or DL components of courses must be made accessible if a qualified student enrolls in the class and makes a request.
- All existing [before 8/99] DL courses or DL components of courses must be made accessible at the time of the course review (6 year cycle.)
- All DL classes and DL components of classes will be accessible at the end of the 6 year period following the issuance of the guidelines (8/05).
- Content from external links provided by the instructor, if essential elements of the class, must be made available in an accessible format for students with disabilities if the website linked to has access problems.

### Examples of Distance Education Access Issues and Possible Solutions

<b>Media</b>	On-line
<b>Access Concern</b>	Students who use assistive technology may not be able to access online information, depending on the design of the course web pages. Multimedia content need special attention to address access concerns. Some web technology does not currently have an accessibility strategy.
<b>Solution(s)</b>	Follow accessibility design guidelines for Section 508. Do not use technologies that have no current accessibility solution. (Example: Java Based Chat.)

<b>Media</b>	Print
<b>Access Concern</b>	Students who are blind or visually impaired will not be able to read standard printed materials.
<b>Solution(s)</b>	Braille, e-text, large print, audiotape.

<b>Media</b>	Audio Conferencing – Telephone
<b>Access Concern</b>	Students who are deaf or hard of hearing can't hear it. Students with speech problems can't respond over the system.
<b>Solution(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Text Telephones (TTY).</li> <li>▪ Telecommunication. Devices for the Deaf (TDD).</li> <li>▪ Telephone Relay System (TRS).</li> <li>▪ Web based "live chat" programs with "real-time" transcription.</li> </ul>

<b>Media</b>	Video Conferencing/ Video Transmission (Live), which may include real-time two-way video and audio or one-way video/two-way audio.
<b>Access Concern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Blind/low vision can't see it.</li> <li>▪ Deaf/hard of hearing can't hear it.</li> <li>▪ Those with speech impairment can't readily participate.</li> <li>▪ Supplemental print materials inaccessible to blind/low vision students.</li> </ul>
<b>Solution(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Real-time closed or open captioning of broadcasts. (Deaf/HOH)</li> <li>▪ Use of Sign Language Interpreter in small window on video screen. (Deaf /HOH)</li> <li>▪ Use of Sign Language Interpreter in location of the student.</li> <li>▪ Descriptive captioning (Blind/Low Vision),</li> <li>▪ To facilitate communication, a TTY link to the classroom or studio, TRS, and/or live web-based chat.</li> <li>▪ Supplemental print materials in appropriate alternate format.</li> <li>▪ Real-time descriptive narration or descriptions by the instructor of visual objects which have significant instructional content as a part of the course dialogue/lecture</li> </ul>

<b>Media</b>	Video Transmission (Pre-Recorded)
<b>Access Concern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Blind/low vision can't see it.</li> <li>▪ Deaf/hard of hearing can't hear it.</li> <li>▪ Supplemental print materials inaccessible to blind/low vision students.</li> </ul>
<b>Solution(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Closed or open captioning of broadcasts. (Deaf/HOH)</li> <li>▪ Use of Sign Language Interpreter in small window on video screen. (Deaf /HOH)</li> <li>▪ Use of Sign Language Interpreter in location of the student.</li> <li>▪ Supplemental print materials in appropriate alternate format.</li> <li>▪ Real-time descriptive narration of significant visual elements.</li> </ul>