Building a Foundation for System-wide Conversations on Universal Access and ADA

TLT Collaborative Project Proposal

Submitted by: NC State University Information Technology Division / Office of Equal Opportunity

Background

Ethically, pedagogically and legally, institutions of higher learning are responsible for providing access to instruction and to campus services for people with diverse physical and cognitive abilities. Campus technology implementations can enhance access and bolster student, faculty and staff diversity, or they can thwart access for certain individuals and groups and reinforce inequities in the academic community.

Two strands of terminology and meaning typically run through discussions of technology and access. One of these is the philosophy of universal access / design, which promotes the idea that all design activities—software design, instructional design, commercial, graphic or architectural design—should include accessibility as a goal of the design process. The other, ADA, is the shorthand term for the American Disabilities Act, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (P.L.103-218), and other US federal laws which mandate what we can or must to do to promote universal access. Recent legislation pertains to assuring that electronic and information technologies are fully accessible by persons with disabilities, although the full implications for state universities are not yet clear.

ADA / universal design issues are closely bound with the rising use of the internet to deliver instruction and services, particularly as web-based instructional and service systems replace traditional and well-understood systems.

Project Description

The goal of this project is to bring ADA /universal design considerations to the forefront of TLT planning, design and implementation within the UNC system. Our objectives are to:
- raise overall awareness of universal access / ADA issues in the UNC system;
- provide a common vocabulary in this area across the campuses;
- lay the groundwork for collaborative approaches to policy setting and implementation in ADA / universal access as it applies to TLT activities.

Our proposed strategy is to first provide shared training to three people (the director or designate of the campus TLT, IT, and Equal Opportunity organizations) from each campus, and then to create an opportunity for exchange among system participants. We propose that the collaborative fund the campus representatives to:

1) participate in an online EASI workshop, *Barrier-Free Educational Technology* , on adaptive technology in higher education;
2) meet for a full-day, moderated retreat to discuss campus ADA activities as related to learning technologies, successes and challenges, and to plan for future collaborations.

EASI (Equal Access to Software and Information) is a project of the TLT Group. Their mission (from the EASI website: http://www.rit.edu/~easi/) is "to serve as a resource to the education community by providing information and guidance in the area of access-to-information technologies by individuals with disabilities." The *Barrier-Free Educational Technology* workshop runs over the course of a month and is next offered in May (http://www.rit.edu/~easi/workshops/adaptit.htm). It was given high ratings by two NC State staff people who took it in February.

The function of the retreat would be to provide a focused opportunity for participants to identify their campus' strengths and deficits in the ADA arena, and to develop concrete perspectives and plans for implementing ADA requirements and universal design approaches into their own campus TLT activities. A knowledgeable facilitator could improve the quality and results of the experience. NC State is in the process of hiring an Assistive and Information Technology Coordinator who could potentially fill this role. The AT-IT Coordinator's job will be to assess, troubleshoot, and devise strategies to assure access to information technologies for individuals with disabilities. Alternatively, the TLT Collaborative might choose to hire workshop organizer Norman Coombs to facilitate the retreat.

Highly Provisional Budget

This proposal is a modest framework that could easily be modified and enhanced though discussion with the board so that it best suits the needs of the group. As we propose it the costs are approximately:

ITEM	NOTES	COST
Workshop	$225 per person x 3 x 16 = a maximum rate, probably less	$10,800
1 day retreat	Depending where, the $ will range, but let's say:	$5,000
Facilitator - NC State	If the NC State AT-IT Coordinator does it, I'd like to build in an honorarium and some support for materials development, including handouts and materials to be published on the Web:	$2,500
Facilitator - External	Would likely cover travel + a consultancy fee	$3,000
Participant travel?	Mileage and gas to and from the retreat? Max:	$4,800
TOTAL	This is a high-end estimate	**$26,100**