

April 3, 2000

TO: Superintendents/Presidents
Chief Instructional Officers
Chief Student Services Officers
Academic Senate Presidents
Librarians
Affirmative Action Officers
Bookstore Managers
Discrimination Complaint Officers
Disabled Student Programs and Services Coordinators
High Tech Center Specialists

FROM: Thomas J. Nussbaum
Chancellor

Subject: Guidelines for Producing Instructional and Other Printed Materials in Alternate Media for Persons With Disabilities

Synopsis: As you know, in 1996 the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education (OCR) began a systemwide review of the extent to which print and electronic information is accessible to students with visual impairments in the California Community Colleges. OCR issued its findings in January 1998 and required the Chancellor's Office to take a number of steps to bring the system into compliance with the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). OCR found, among other things, that many colleges do not have in place effective and efficient procedures for providing printed materials in alternate media (such as braille or large print) to students with disabilities or members of the public who cannot use standard printed materials. Most colleges do assist students with disabilities to obtain books recorded on audio tape, but as OCR notes in its report, there are many instances in which an audio recording is not an adequate alternative. As a result, OCR asked that we develop and disseminate to the districts a set of guidelines for production of materials in alternate media.

Although the legal requirements for accessibility have been in place for a number of years, the task of identifying specific methods for making materials available in alternate media has proven to be technically challenging. The Consultation Council established a special field-based workgroup, with representatives from many of the groups participating in Consultation, to develop these guidelines. The draft developed by the workgroup was then reviewed by the Disabled Student Programs and Services Regional Coordinators and the High Tech Center Training Unit Advisory Committee. The resulting final guidelines are attached. The guidelines have also been posted on the Chancellor's Office website and, of course, are available upon request in braille and large print from the Disabled Student Programs and Services Unit in our office.

The guidelines contain a wealth of detailed information about the policies, procedures, equipment and staffing that colleges will need to have in place to address requests for materials in alternate media. Anticipating that full implementation of these guidelines will require additional resources, the Chancellor's Office submitted a Budget Change Proposal to obtain additional funding in fiscal year 2000-2001 to assist in this effort. Our request was partially funded in the Governor's Budget and, if the Governor's recommendation is approved by the Legislature, we will be able to provide an augmentation to your DSP&S allocation to cover the cost of purchasing braille production equipment. We will also be able to establish a statewide Alternate Media Center to handle projects which are too large or complex for colleges to manage. In addition, we will continue to work through the legislative budget process to obtain funding for staffing at each college to handle production of alternate media and help campuses address other issues related to access to technology for persons with disabilities.

However, districts bear the ultimate responsibility under federal law for ensuring that they can respond to requests for materials in alternate media, regardless of whether the state does or does not provide additional funding. The purpose of these guidelines is to assist districts in understanding how they can go about meeting this responsibility. If the statewide Alternate Media Center is funded, we may issue supplemental guidance to colleges about how to take advantage of the services it will offer. However, these guidelines have been written so that much of the information they contain will continue to be relevant regardless of whether or not separate state funding becomes available.

Finally, I want to emphasize that providing material in alternate media is not just a problem to be addressed by DSP&S or staff in your High Tech Center. As the guidelines point out, this is a college-wide responsibility because members of the public who have disabilities may need access to materials in your library or to college publications. Moreover, providing instructional materials in alternate media for students with disabilities in a timely and cost efficient manner will require the involvement and cooperation of a variety of groups including Chief Student Services Officers, Chief Instructional Officers, Academic Senates, curriculum committees, librarians, bookstore managers, staff in learning resource and media centers, etc.

Action/Date Requested: Please review and disseminate the guidelines as necessary to ensure prompt and effective implementation.

Contact: Questions regarding legal issues should be addressed to General Counsel Ralph Black at (916) 327-5692. Technical questions should be directed to Carl Brown, Director of the High Tech Training Center Unit at DeAnza College at (408) 996-6047. If you need the guidelines in alternate media (large print, Braille or computer disk) or have general questions about services for students with disabilities, you may call Scott Hamilton, DSP&S Coordinator, at (916) 327-5892.

cc: Cabinet
Scott Hamilton, DSP&S Coordinator
Alternate Media Workgroup
High Tech Center Training Unit Advisory Committee
Paul Grossman, OCR Chief Regional Attorney
Sarah Hawthorne, OCR Staff Counsel
Carl Brown, High Tech Training Center Unit Director