The Making of an Accessible SUNY*Connect* Web

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When I first learned about the need for our Web sites to become ADA compliant, I felt relieved that I can eat, sleep, and breathe plain old HTML (hypertext markup language). Then I asked myself, "Where am I going to find the time to re-work the SUNY*Connect* and OLIS web sites by the end of September 2000?" and my stomach lurched.

My efforts to understand exactly what it takes to be "99-3" compliant helped in reducing my indigestion; these were my steps:

1) I examined the policy http://www.oft.state.ny.us/policy/99-3.htm

2) I spent some time reviewing the W3C's Web Accessibility Guidelines. My mission became much clearer when I read the Checklist of Checkpoints for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0 . For now, we need only to be Priority 1 compliant and the task at hand suddenly seemed less daunting and more manageable.

3) Tom Neiss gave me the information to join the e-mail discussion list Talk about Tech Policy 99-3 for Agency Liaisons (see instructions for joining below). A few months later, thanks to a tip from a colleague, I visited Higher Ed Web Professionals web site and joined their e-mail discussion list. From these lists, I received messages loaded with tips and resources for building and converting compliant pages. Subscribers readily shared their compliant sites and tips for software and evaluation tools to support the process of what I call "compliance conversion."

4) Next, I visited Bobby, a service of the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST). "Bobby is a Web-based tool that analyses Web pages for their accessibility to people with disabilities." Some members of the Higher Ed Web Professionals list do not recommend Bobby, and I admit that the first time I read a Bobby report I was very confused and overwhelmed. Once I learned to read the Bobby reports and distinguish between outright rejection for Priority 1 compliance approval, and suggestions for manually double-checking my page to assure compliance, I found, and still find, Bobby to be a good analysis tool. It feels good to be able to put the "Bobby Approved" logo at the bottom of a Web page.

5) I learned through the Higher Ed Web e-mail list that Priority 1 compliance does not guarantee that a page is easily readable in a text-only browser. I downloaded the Lynx browser and after each page passed Bobby, I looked at it in Lynx and adjusted the content accordingly.

Because compliance would necessitate altering the appearance of every page in

our existing web sites, my first approach was to build a separate web site that is ADA compatible. I did so and it is publicly available, http://www.sunyconnect.suny.edu/ada

I have learned from this experience, though, that a separate site is not efficient in terms of my time and publishing new content in a timely fashion. As soon as I am done writing this article, I will return to the task of retro-fitting the existing SUNY*Connect* and OLIS webs into an accessible format. When that task is accomplished, I will retire our separate compliant web site. Wish me luck!

How to Join Talk about Tech Policy 99-3 for Agency Liaisons

1) Create a new mail message addressed to listserv@mail2.goer.state.ny.us

2) Leave the subject line blank.

3) Create a one-line message using your actual first and last names:

subscribe techpolicy99-3 YourFirstName YourLastName

4) Delete any additional text from the body of the message such as a signature line.

5) Send the message.