The President's Commission on People with Disabilities

Minutes
January 13, 2015; 2 pm
Multicultural Center
Hardge Forum Room, 1ˢᵗ Floor

In Attendance and Introductions: Joanne Eichinger, Adam Moore, Annette Bourbonniere, Joannah Portman Daly, Pamela Rohland, Tammy Bolotow, Christine Sullivan, Meredith Clarke, Roxanne Gomes, Steve Baker, Leslie Mahler, Bridget Ruemmele

1) Approval of Minutes from December 15, 2014: Unanimously   approved

2) New Business - Discussion to determine Agenda for first meeting with the President and VP Thompson (TBD February 2015) and recommendations to Upper Administration Team. The document that will be presented follows:

Members of the Presidents Commission on People with Disabilities have discussed three concerns as priorities to consider for the URI Community:
- Curriculum Accessibility,
- Transportation and Parking,
- Safety and Evacuation

Outline for proposed February 2015 discussion (to be presented to the Upper Administration Team by Naomi Thompson):

A. Curriculum Accessibility:
  a. Definition: Accessible curricula and equal opportunity are required by law. Students who have disabilities, students with English as a Second Language, student veterans, non-traditional age students, etc. must be able to participate in courses in a manner equal to their peers. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in all on-line and traditional courses is often used to facilitate learning for ALL students.
  b. Nature of concerns or problem: Some faculty are unaware of UDL principals. Others may be resistant to changing course formats or attending to course accessibility (i.e. video captions or captioned online lectures or accessible classroom environments). UDL training cannot be mandated because of union contracts. Enforcement is also time-consuming and difficult.   The university is vulnerable to civil rights litigation when courses, computer labs, and other academic services are not accessible to ALL students.
  c. Recommendations for solution(s):

      i. Top-down mandate that course content must be accessible to all students to avoid personal liability for professors and liability for URI as a whole (from Office of Civil Rights, Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Justice).

      ii. Implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in all on-line and traditional courses as part of the course standards for course approval.

      iii. Require online UDL training for faculty, which has already been developed and is available through the Department of Assessment and Learning and on numerous websites.

      iv. Department Chairs demonstrate the value of accessibility by assigning online courses only to instructors who adhere to UDL principles.

      v. Identify resources to support time-consuming tasks such as captioning (funding, staffing, RFP for outsourcing captioning, use of student employees to encode with software, etc.).

      vi. Only purchase accessible films or course modules (which puts pressure on publishers to make accessible products).

      vii. (Note: students are also responsible to provide reasonable advance notification of the need for these and other accommodations.)

      viii. Ask faculty who are Disability Resource Mentors (from the previous Changing the Culture grant) or Online Faculty Fellows (Dept. of Online Learning and Assessment) to voluntarily provide UDL mentoring to new and veteran faculty in creating accessible course and classroom environments. Disability Services for Students is also such a resource.

d. Priority or timelines to be addressed:

      i. Fall 2016: 18-month grace period to be up and running with fully accessible courses.

e. Recommendation for who might be involved:

      i. Academic Diversity Task Force for enforcement and assistance.

      ii. Provost and Vice Provosts.

      iii. Voluntary UDL Faculty Mentors (from groups such as Online Faculty Fellows, Disability Resource Mentors).

      iv. Office of Online Education.

      v. Disability Services for Students.

      vi. Commission on People with Disabilities.

B. Transportation and Parking

a. Definition: Physical accessibility of the campus is mandated by the ADAAA (Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act), which, with state statutes, provide guidelines about the distribution and locations of accessible parking spaces (resource: RI Governor's Commission on Disability). Campus transportation to and from campus and within the campus and campus parking must have resources enough to accommodate all students, faculty, and staff, including those with disabilities or other mobility needs.

b. Nature of concerns or problem:

      i. There is inadequate availability of close parking per each building.

      ii. There may be an inadequate number of disability-marked spaces in areas where they are most needed, (e.g. some disability parking spots may not be near the accessible entrance to a building).

      iii. The current transportation system does not address the needs (timing and distance of transportation) of many people with a variety of disabilities even though all busses are technically wheelchair accessible.

c. Recommendations for solution(s):

      i. Evaluate funding sources for parking and transportation; collaborate with a consultant (to be determined) for evaluation of campus needs.

      ii. Reestablish disability parking near all buildings (including areas previously removed by green-space planning)

      iii. Distribute ADA Guidelines for parking and transportation to campus community members.

      iv. Reestablish the URI Parking Committee (by University Manual).

      v. Reevaluate the current RIPTA Contract to incorporate ADA RIDE Services for faculty, staff, and students with qualifying disabilities. (this will enhance point-to-point transportation between classrooms for faculty and students with disabilities).

      vi. Conduct a study of specialized inner campus parking, such as disability parking and the appropriate number of spaces per building (e.g. 5 per building; or in library parking lot, accessible entrance is locked at night).

d. Priority or timelines to be addressed:

      i. Spring 2015: RIPTA contract amendment: ADA-RIDE Vans could supplement current available transportation.

      ii. End of Spring 2015: Conduct an audit of available disability spaces.

      iii. Spring 2015: Reestablish Parking Committee.

      iv. Fall 2015 through Fall 2016: Hire proposed parking/transportation consultant, complete campus evaluation.

      v. Spring 2016 or as determined by URI Parking Committee: Implement parking and transportation solutions.

      vi. As changes are implemented: notify URI community.

e. Recommendation for who might be involved:

      i. Parking and Transportation Services.

      ii. Department of Campus Planning and Design.

      iii. Representation from Commission on People with Disabilities and/or Disability Services for Students.

      iv. Human Resources.

      v. Parking and Transportation Committee (to be reestablished).

      vi. Department of Public Safety.

C. Safety and Evacuation

a. Definition: URI has, in response to threats of violence nationwide, begun a planning process to keep all URI community members safe in the face of gun violence, fire, bomb threats, etc. URI's well-made "Run, Hide, Fight" video garnered a response from the President's Commission on People with Disabilities.

All URI community members should have equal access to safety and evacuation in the face of gun violence, fire, bomb threats etc.

b. Nature of concerns or problem: URI has begun a planning process to keep all URI community members safe in response to threats of violence nationwide. The strategies encouraged by the video may in some cases not address the particular needs of certain persons with disability (i.e. those who use wheelchairs, those who are blind, etc). Examples of situations that may need to be anticipated (the following bullets are an excerpt from the 7/22/14 letter to President Dooley from MJ Klinkhammer):

    i.   A student who uses a wheelchair is on the Quad when her cell phone alerts her that a person on campus is threatening others with a knife. Where should she go? Who will help her get there?

    ii. A visually impaired staff member is in his office when a fire alarm sounds. Can he exit the building by himself? Who will help him if he can't?

    iii. A faculty member who uses a wheelchair is teaching a class when shots are heard from outside the building. What should she and others do?

    iv. A combat veteran hears shots fired and begins to experience flashbacks. What can be done to help him/her and others nearby?

    v.   A student using a wheelchair is in the library looking for a book when a fire alarm sounds. Who will know that the person is there if she/he needs to be rescued?

    vi. A student whose family was killed in a house fire sees fire coming from one of the residence halls and becomes traumatized. What resources will there be to help him, and when?

    vii. A staff member who uses an automated wheelchair is in her office when a fire alarm sounds. Official policy currently is for the person to wait in a stairwell until fire personnel arrive. Who will know that the person is there? What if the fire starts coming down the hallway and the person is alone, terrified and unable to escape?

c. Recommendations for solution(s):

    i.   Establish phone stations on each floor of each building near areas of refuge (or escape).

    ii.   Establish areas of refuge in every building.

    iii. Establish a "buddy system" for people with disabilities in each building.

    iv.   Ensure that buildings with areas of refuge have adequate signage to indicate their locations.

    v.   Establish communication and training with first responders regarding the established policies for people with disabilities.

    vi.   Establish training procedures and practice drills, specific to each building, for appropriate evacuation of the building; practice drills must include evacuation of people with disabilities.

    vii. Complete the program to allow lockdown of classrooms from the inside.

    viii. Establish annual safety inspections per building.

    ix.   Expand the system whereby people with disabilities can identify their needs during an emergency situation.

    d.   Priority or timelines to be addressed:
          i. Ongoing: Regular annual training regarding personal protective action per building.
         ii. Fall 2015: Establish evacuation drills per building.
       iii. Ongoing: act on the established building priority for designing areas of refuge. First are Davis Hall, Morrill Hall and Woodward Hall – per Capital Projects plan.
       iv. Ongoing: Establish annual safety inspections per building
    e.   Recommendation for who might be involved:
          i. Department of Public Safety, Divisions of Emergency Management and Fire/Life Safety
         ii. Capital Projects

Next Meeting: TBD in February after review of today's results with VP Thompson