Students with Disabilities and Online Access

The Law-The Rehabilitation Act Amendments (Section 508)

On August 7, 1998, President Clinton signed into law the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 which covers access to federally funded programs and services. The law strengthens section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and requires access to electronic and information technology provided by the Federal government. The law applies to all Federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology. Federal agencies must ensure that this technology is accessible to employees and members of the public with disabilities to the extent it does not pose an "undue burden." Section 508 speaks to various means for disseminating information, including computers, software, and electronic office equipment. It applies to, but is not solely focused on, Federal pages on the Internet or the World Wide Web. It does not apply to web pages of private industry.

The United States Access Board is a leading source of information on accessible design. The Board develops and maintains design criteria for the built environment, transit vehicles, telecommunications equipment, and for electronic and information technology. It also provides technical assistance and training on these requirements and on accessible design and continues to enforce accessibility standards that cover federally funded facilities.

The Board is responsible for developing accessibility standards for such technology for incorporation into regulations that govern Federal procurement practices. The net result will be that Federal agencies will have to purchase electronic and information technology that is accessible except where it would cause an "undue burden." The law also provides a complaint process under which complaints concerning access to technology will be investigated by the responsible Federal agency. For more information about the United States Access Board, please refer to http://www.access-board.gov/.

Additional Resources

Refer to the following link for Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: https://www.section508.gov/index.php

The University of Central Florida has a nice resource for online faculty dealing with ADA and 508 compliance: http://teach.ucf.edu/pedagogy/accessibility/

In addition, WebAim has created a checklist to see if your online classes are compliant: http://webaim.org/standards/508/checklist

EASI: Equal Access to Software and Information provides live Webinars, (both free and fee-based), and online courses that cover a broad spectrum of related topics. EASI is the premier provider of online training on accessible information technology for persons with disabilities. Anyone taking five of the courses can earn the Certificate on Accessible Information Technology. Visit http://www.easi.cc/ for more information.