

Weber State University

Division of Student Affairs

Program Review Strategic Plan

Services for Students with Disabilities

Introduction

As part of Assessment for the Division of Student Affairs, Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) underwent a program review. An outside reviewer and two staff members from Weber State University evaluated SSD operations and procedures. The SSD staff met to prioritize the items and discuss how we will implement these suggestions into our office operations. This report is our response to the recommendations provided to us.

Key Initiatives

During our review process, we determined that many of these recommendations would be addressed through four initiatives which had already been adopted by the department or were currently in various implementation or planning stages. Accordingly this is where we will begin the discussion.

Accommodate Database/Scheduling System

This has been an ongoing effort by SSD staff and leadership over the past several months. Our highest priority has been to implement the new Symplicity database as soon as possible. This new system will help reduce the total workload placed on our advisors, improve overall accuracy in recording student information, increase efficiency creating and distributing accommodation letters, and enhance our communication efforts with our students. The new system will also be integral in assessment of SSD office operations. Student information will be easily available for data collection and evaluation. We also anticipate that the Accommodate system will simplify many routine processes, such as registering for services, scheduling exams and appointments, and requesting accommodations.

Timeline: After an extensive proposal and bidding process which began in May 2014, the system has been purchased. We are currently in the training and set-up stages with an expected “go live” date near the first part of December 2014. The system will be gradually “spun up” through the spring semester and fully implemented by March 2015 in time for registration for Summer and Fall semesters of 2015-2016. Evaluation and assessment of the Accommodate system will take place at the end of the next Fall semester (December 2015) following a full year of implementation.

ADA Compliance Committee

Through a joint effort with the office of the ADA Coordinator (AA/EO) and Human Resources, SSD is leading a taskforce which will propose necessary and long overdue revisions to PPM 3-34. Included in this project is a restructure and “reboot” of the ADA Compliance Committee. The committee will provide guidance across campus on issues of disability and access, as well as serve in some capacity for student grievances and complaints related to these issues. Another aspect of this effort is to develop a closer tie between SSD and the office of the ADA Coordinator to improve communication, efficiency, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other related laws.

Timeline: The core of this group started meeting in September 2014. A number of factors will affect how quickly this project can be fully implemented, but we anticipate proposing specific changes to the PPM in Spring 2015.

Math Accessibility and Substitutions

This is a joint effort involving several departments across campus. The overall goal of this group—which includes SSD, the Math Department, the Developmental Math Department, the Student Success Center, and the Dean of Science—is to directly address the accommodation needs of students with disabilities as they attempt to meet the Quantitative Literacy requirements for General Education. This group is formalizing the QL substitution process and developing advisement strategies for those students who do not meet the criteria to receive substitutions.

Timeline: This group is up and running as of October 2014. It has formalized the QL substitution process and developed appropriate internal procedures. A new webpage has been created through the SSD website. This group will meet twice each semester going forward and will be developing specific assessment tools in the next meeting in February 2015.

Training and Information Sharing

The fourth and final initiative SSD is currently implementing is to improve our overall information delivery processes and to increase our efforts toward training WSU faculty

and staff on issues related to disability and access. This effort will include aspects of the previous discussed initiatives as well as new or improved processes in other areas. Highlights will include the development of a web-based FAQ and other training instruments, such as a faculty training and student responsibility videos. The Accommodate system will improve notification efforts, among other things, with certain email capabilities built in. The ADA Compliance team will also be involved in developing faculty and staff training opportunities. The Math Access group is one example of several in which SSD staff are reaching out to specific departments and entities all over campus to raise our profile in the campus community and improve understanding of our office and issues related to disabilities.

Timeline: This is an ongoing initiative with various interlocking pieces. It is also dependent upon the full implementation of other projects described above. In many ways, this effort is always in process. What follows are a few key implementation goals in addition to those already described.

- Website Redesign (Including FAQ): Fall 2015 (August)
- Faculty Training Video: Begin Spring/Summer 2015
- Student Responsibility Video: Begin Summer 2015
- eWeber Accommodation Requests: Spring 2015

Resources/Staffing

The report submitted by the Program Review committee included a number of items specifically related to funding, space, and staffing. In general, SSD has limited control on such matters. We also recognize that we have a good working space and excellent support from our administration and division leadership. We have some “built-in” possibilities for increasing staff while recognizing the limitations of space, such as shifting part-time staff to full time if needed. Some of the initiatives discussed earlier are designed specifically to decrease workload on some staff, or redistribute that workload where it makes sense to do so. Space is a premium on any college campus and that is certainly the case at WSU; still, SSD will keep a “hand in” where appropriate to attempt to acquire additional space for our program if warranted and, more importantly, if it is even available.

Reponses to the Recommendations

The remainder of this report will respond to the various recommendations put forth by the Program Review committee. Any specific recommendations that we feel are addressed by the major initiatives outlined above will be identified as such, including which initiative(s). The remaining recommendations will be discussed in brief within each section.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE ONE: MISSION

Recommendations:

- Inclusion and promulgation of the Principles of Universal Design and disability scholarship as encouraged by the CAS Standards as well as the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD).
- At the present time, SSD does not have an active role in architectural plan review for access. *ADA Committee*

Response:

The SSD staff is currently writing an improved mission statement. The new mission statement will reflect the goals of Weber State University and the Division of Student Affairs. It will also adopt certain aspects of the Universal Design concept where appropriate. While not specifically mention by the review team, SSD may also be contending with a minor identity issue related to the title of the office. The title itself is awkward and possibly dated. As SSD revises the department's mission, we will also be considering a title change for the program.

Timeline: We will propose the mission statement to the Vice President for Student Affairs in the Fall of 2015. This will coincide with any name change for the program. Once approved, SSD will put the new mission statement on the website and incorporate any title change into our literature, publications, and online presence.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE TWO: PROGRAM

Recommendations:

- While faculty indicated that they felt much supported by the office they suggested the following would be beneficial:
 - A faculty guide that would include frequently asked questions (FAQ). *Training and Information*

- A retreat or workshop similar to the one held with Arts & Humanities where case studies are presented that discuss effective strategies and interventions to assist students with disabilities and understand more about the resources that are available to them.). *Training and Information*
- Additional staff to assist SSD with the work load. *Resource/Staffing*
- Increase capacity through additional resources, especially at the Davis campus.
- More proactive role on campus regarding ADA issues, particularly for staff and faculty, to create more awareness about legal obligations.). *ADA Committee & Training and Information*
- Provide support and information regarding accessibility in the preparation of course structure and instructional delivery as well as learning technologies. *ADA Committee & Training and Information*
- Create a faculty advisory board or a campuswide ADA Task Force. *ADA Committee*
- Develop a Course Substitution Policy that provides appropriate academic adjustment but assures academic rigor and scholastic standards are maintained. There is some perception that students with disabilities are given unfair advantages and in some cases over accommodated. An advisory board and a collaborative effort to develop the course substitution policy would help to mitigate this impression. *ADA Committee & Math Access*
- Students expressed some confusion with regard to an understanding of their rights and access to accommodations and services. Information should be provided in multi-modal formats that enhances their knowledge of the program. *Training and Information*

Response:

Each of these recommendations will be addressed through the initiatives described earlier. The SSD staff views training of faculty and staff about disability and SSD services as a high priority. It is important that faculty members are confident about properly facilitating accommodations in their courses. The SSD website currently states we are willing to provide ADA training to any departments that request it. We are working on a more in-depth online training for frequently asked questions and other faculty inquiries. SSD staff will continue to do trainings in person with any department that requests ADA training.

The SSD staff also sees the need for additional resources and increased staffing, especially at the Davis campus.

A course substitution procedure for Quantitative Literacy has been implemented. This has been a collaborative effort between several departments on campus to insure academic standards are upheld. SSD also agrees that creating a campuswide ADA task force or advisory board would increase knowledge about providing accommodations

and disability-related topics. This task force would also be integral in making certain any course substitutions (math or otherwise) are acceptable and reasonable.

All members of the SSD staff believe it is important for students to feel confident in knowing and articulating their rights and any services they require in an academic setting. The advisors try to help students learn to communicate their accommodation needs with faculty. As a staff, we will continue to work on this recommendation through communicating directly with students, as well as providing information on the website for students to use.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE THREE: ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

No recommendations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE FOUR: HUMAN RESOURCES

Recommendations:

Additional funding to provide additional professional development on a regular basis.

Response:

All SSD staff members participate in online webinars to help increase our understanding of disability law, new technologies, best practices, and other related topics. We subscribe annually to a series of training webinars offered by Salome Heyward and Associates, leading authorities in the field of disability services in higher education. Each year, staff members attend the in-state, Utah AHEAD (Association on Higher Education And Disability) conference. Staff are also encouraged to identify specific workshops, conferences, and other training opportunities offered either locally or nationally. As a staff, we continually apply for Staff Development funds and we have increased our travel budget each year. As a staff, we do our best to utilize any available funds to attend trainings and events to increase our professional development.

Timeline: Beginning in 2014-15, SSD has adopted internal policies requiring all staff to participate in at least 50% of the Salome Heyward webinars each year (or another alternative series of trainings should SSD determine another product better fits our needs). Staff members will also be required to attend one additional conference (or similar offering) bi-annually or once every two years. If needed, SSD leadership will pursue additional funds through appropriate avenues.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE FIVE: ETHICS

Recommendations:

- Annual training for all staff on ethics as articulated in the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) Code of Ethics.
- Publication of the Code of Ethics on the SSD website. *Training and Information*

Response:

SSD staff will include ethics topics in annual retreats each year. When available, SSD leadership will attend training opportunities via webinars and other venues.

Timeline: Immediate.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE SIX: LAW, POLICY, & GOVERNANCE

Recommendations:

- It was noted on several occasions that SSD resolves disputes very well at their level and they rarely rise to the vice president or formal complaint level. However, the landscape is becoming increasingly complex and may require more specific policies and procedures that clearly delineate rights and responsibilities of all constituents, particularly with regard to a formal grievance procedure. It should be clear to students that if they are dissatisfied with a decision made by the SSD that they have the right to contact the Director of Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity or file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights. There are multiple mechanisms for students to access this information. *ADA Committee & Training and Information*
- SSD should have a very collaborative and deliberate relationship with the Director of Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Office. *ADA Committee & Training and Information*
- Review all current policies to assure that they comply with the CAS standards. *ADA Committee*
- Staff should receive training on response to campus active shooter emergencies.
- The staff should be apprised of the institutional compliance with all of the requirements with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 2008, including all audits and climate surveys. *ADA Committee*

Response:

Creating a more detailed guide to delineate rights and responsibilities of all parties involved in providing accommodations and services to students is vital. Students may have grievances only because they are not aware of the details of the SSD and university policies. In consultation with the ADA Coordinator, SSD will create and

publish a formal grievance procedure so students know the correct line of authority to follow when they are dissatisfied with a service.

Timeline: This procedure will be publicly available on the SSD website within this academic school year, by June 2015.

The adoption and application of relevant CAS standards will be considered as SSD reviews and revises our mission statement. We will actively consult with the ADA Coordinator and appropriate administration during this process.

Timeline: SSD will begin a top-down review of existing policies and procedures as they relate to CAS standards beginning in Spring of 2016 (or upon finalizing the SSD mission statement).

The active shooter issue is actively addressed via ongoing campus security training and exercises. SSD currently has no plans to pursue training beyond what is already available.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE SEVEN: DIVERSITY, EQUALITY, & ACCESS

Recommendations:

- Respond to the requests for more faculty training and development. *Training and Information*
- Assure that all staff is culturally competent to maintain an inclusive and welcoming environment.
- Promote disability as a diversity issue on campus to advocate for sensitivity and social justice concerns. *ADA Committee & Training and Information*

Response:

SSD is willing and available to provide any ADA or general disability training to any department that requests it. Disability is no respecter of ethnicity, culture, gender, or sexual identity. Every race and diverse population will be affected by disability. We will continue to support diversity events in creating awareness of disability as a diversity issue on campus. As a group, the SSD staff is quite diverse and we will continue to hire people of diverse backgrounds and situations. As a staff, we actively seek to be knowledgeable about diversity and to create an inclusive, welcoming environment.

Timeline: Our current goal is to have 100% of our staff members be involved in a diversity event by June 31, 2015.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE EIGHT: INSTITUTIONAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Recommendations:

- Develop a liaison system for staff with various university departments, as well as role on various committees and organizations on campus to create a visible presence and provide relevant information to colleagues and faculty about working with people with disabilities and how to keep their needs in mind when creating programs and policies and procedures. *Training and Information*
- Presentations to academic departments, student groups, etc. regarding legal rights and responsibilities and providing accommodations while maintaining program academic integrity, etc. help promote the work of the SSD and remind everyone of the appropriate way to access services. *ADA Committee & Training and Information*
- Continue Development of the Peer Network. *Accommodate System*
- Assure that timely and accurate information regarding access and accommodations are available on the website. *Accommodate System & Training and Information*

Response:

Each student associated with our office works directly with an advisor to work out accommodation needs for the current semester. When a faculty member has a question or needs clarification about a student's accommodation, they are encouraged to use that student's advisor as a liaison with SSD. The SSD will do a better job in heightening awareness of which advisors are specialists in our office. For example, Roxanne Holbrook is our testing coordinator and works with visually impaired students. Any questions about testing would be directed to Roxanne. These specialties are critical in helping our office run efficiently.

SSD sees the increasing need to train and inform departments on campus regarding legal rights and responsibilities of students, faculty and staff as a high priority. As a staff, we are willing to do presentations and trainings to any department or group that requests it. It is listed on our website and through other channels that we are able to do these trainings.

The peer network, Creating Achievement Through Transition, is closely associated with SSD. We often work with them on financing and supplies. We plan to incorporate scheduling with this mentor program into the new database while continuing to maintain student confidentiality.

Timeline: Each of these items/issues is either addressed in the previously discussed initiatives or actively being implemented.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE NINE: FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Recommendations:

- There was almost consensus regarding the need for additional funding for the SSD. *Staffing/Resources*
- The Davis campus may require facilities upgrade, increasing the professional staff person to full time and providing support staff. This is an important consideration to assure that the same level of service is being provided to students at Davis that is available at Ogden. *Staffing/Resources*
- Interpreting and transcription services for students who are deaf and hard of hearing are variable and difficult to budget for; capacity should be built into the budget to prepare for a time when sufficient resources may not be available. Increasing the staff positions to full time would be one consideration. *Staffing/Resources*
- While the implementation of the [Accommodate] system may ease some of the administrative burden on staff, there is the need for addition professional staff. At present, everyone on staff is a generalist. It would be beneficial to have specialists with background in working with students with learning disabilities and mental health issues. Staff feel very supported, have tremendous respect for their director and enjoy working as part of the team but admit to being overloaded and do not have sufficient time to follow up with students and devote time to being more proactive. *Staffing/Resources*
- Consider presentation to the fee committee in order to create funding for unexpected accommodation expenses or build capacity for student needs. *Staffing/Resources*
- Increased staff development funding in order for staff to participate in activities on a more consistent basis. *Staffing/Resources*

Response:

As a unit, SSD is aware of the ongoing need for more room and resources at both the Ogden and Davis campuses. We also strive to assure the same level of service is provided to students at both campuses. The Davis campus continues to grow, as does our need for increased facilities, equipment and staffing in the SSD Davis office. We are currently maximizing our effectiveness with the facilities and staff we have. When we have additional funding, SSD can direct appropriate resources to the Davis campus.

Planning a budget and allocating the required resources for deaf and hard-of-hearing students is remarkably challenging. Support at the state level, through the Board of Regents, helps to defray some of these costs. We will work with appropriate administrators to investigate our budget needs for times when demand and cost exceed available resources.

Timeline: Summer/Fall 2015

Additional staff is needed for almost every department across campus and SSD is no exception. We, like everyone else at WSU, are limited by issues of funding and/or space. Increasing staff may be ideal and even necessary in some areas but will remain dependent upon available funds and space. SSD will make every effort to be included in any discussion within Student Affairs related to the redistribution of physical space and/or increasing funding. One immediate solution that could significantly alleviate some space needs would be to acquire space across the hall from our existing office suite if and when that space becomes available. SSD may also call upon student fees to supplement our existing funds for certain special projects depending on the priorities identified within the department.

Timeline: SSD staff will meet in December 2014 to identify any critical funding issues or projects which could be addressed through student fees. Appropriate proposals will be made to the student fee committee either for the upcoming funding cycle or the next.

Each of our staff advisors has a specialty area where they normally work: deaf/hard-of-hearing students; visually impaired students; mobility issues; and psychological disabilities. Each person is more inclined to work with students within that specialty area. However, students with psychological disabilities are one of the main types of students our office deals with regularly. This would overload one advisor, so each of the other advisors helps balance the workload by helping with students that may be outside of their particular specialty.

Staff development funding is available to an extent to allow for staff to participate in conferences and other educational activities. We pursue staff development funding in order to allow staff members to go to conferences and other activities. The staff tries to rotate going to different large events to allow for each staff member to increase knowledge in general, as well as specific areas they tend to specialize in. We also utilize webinars to watch together as a staff. We will continue to use webinars and other options to watch in our office as we go forward.

Timeline: See response above under Principle Four: Human Resources

GUIDING PRINCIPLE TEN: TECHNOLOGY

Recommendations:

- Create a more deliberate relationship between Student Affairs IT and SSD Technology in order to avoid duplication of service and to assure optimal service delivery to students.
- Develop a line item budget that assures consistent funding for ongoing IT needs. Student needs and technology are constantly changing and technology has become an integral part of some accommodation requests.

Response:

SSD has recently increased our involvement and interaction with Student Affairs IT. In part, this is a result of the implementation of the Accommodate System. We will continue this relationship to maintain our technology and equipment in a satisfactory manner. We will also work directly with Student Affairs Technology on budgeting for any changes and/or upgrades in technology needed for accessible technology and office support systems.

Timeline: Immediate

GUIDING PRINCIPLE ELEVEN: FACILITIES & EQUIPMENT

Recommendations:

- Consideration should be given to additional space for the SSD to expand within its current location. As previously noted, it is optimally [situated] on campus near appropriate campus resources. *Staffing/Resources*
- All professional staff should have private, accessible space to meet with students. Given that the current space is not sufficient and growth appears inevitable plans should be developed for expansion. Although the [Davis] Campus was not assessed in person, similar considerations should be given to adequate space. *Staffing/Resources*
- Appropriate and adequate testing space is another concern. Sufficient space should be available. Additional “sound proofing” may be afforded by providing earplugs, noise cancelling headphones, or white noise in testing areas.

Response:

It is critical that we move or expand our office location at the Davis campus as student population grows. We see the need for more space as a necessity, particularly if the need for increased staffing continues. Even though more space is needed, the department has limited funds and space for additional staff. Expansion would require

moving to a different location or expanding to a space that is near the current office. The option of moving locations in the future would need to be approved through administration so they could find spaces for possible relocation. Each professional staff member that works directly with students has their own room for appointments. Hiring another staff member would lead to space problems and, quite possibly, the need for relocation.

Timeline: There are no immediate plans for higher additional staff. Current part-time staff maybe shifted to full time if and when funding is available, depending on existing needs and department priorities.

Sufficient space is critical for facilitating testing accommodations in our office. We currently have five dedicated testing rooms, with some optional space available in the multipurpose room. These rooms are meant to be used for testing with minimal distraction and reduced noise. The rooms are not completely sound proof and need some improvement. SSD has been providing earplugs for students to use during tests. Other measures have been discussed, such as hanging sound-absorbing panels inside each testing room, as well as on the walls lining the hallway of the testing rooms. Decreasing noise in the testing rooms is a budget priority in our department. In order to consider any dramatic changes to building design, we will need to meet with Facilities Management to discuss options. Depending on building codes and architectural design, changing the materials in the ceilings or walls may not be a viable option.

Timeline: Develop additional soundproofing strategies for testing areas by December 2014. Purchase/install/implement these concepts during Summer 2015 (or earlier if possible).

GUIDING PRINCIPLE TWELVE: ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

Recommendations:

- [Accommodate], the new database, is critical for reporting purposes and will streamline administrative functions. *Accommodate System*
- In addition to student satisfaction surveys, faculty and staff should be assessed to determine their satisfaction with programs and services offered through the SSD. *Accommodate System*
- Student satisfaction surveys should seek additional information about the types of accommodations provided and satisfaction with the delivery. *Accommodate System*

Response:

The implementation of the Accommodate Scheduling/Database System will simplify and organize much of the burden put on SSD staff associated with data collection and other routine processes, including surveys and assessment. Accommodate will put the student in control of scheduling appointments, initializing the accommodation process and scheduling tests. We also anticipate using the system for student satisfaction surveys for accommodations and services provided. This will aid in streamlining information for data collection. Once the system is fully implemented, SSD will create an assessment tool specifically targeted for faculty. We plan to build these satisfaction surveys for students, faculty and staff directly into the database.

Timeline: As per the Accommodate System initiative detailed above.