

Where We Go From Here...

The Future of the High Tech Center Training Unit

By Carl Brown

The High Tech Center Training Unit has begun its next five years of service to the California community colleges. While many of the program's resources and services will remain unchanged, several new ones will be added. The reasons for those additions and changes will have been obvious to anyone attending the recent CAPED conference in San Jose, California.

California community colleges are in the midst of a major revolution in educational technology and the delivery of on-line instruction. Enhanced funding for the purchase of advanced campus network infrastructure, computer systems, faculty technology training, web based instructional resources and improved Internet access are changing the face of campus computing. At the recent CAPED conference, participants had an opportunity to hear Thomas Nusbaum, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, as well as other high-level staff from that agency, describe projects which are now operational or just starting up that will revolutionize the way teaching, learning, and communications will occur between and among our colleges. Participants listened to legal authorities from various agencies describe the implications of the Americans with Disabilities Act as they apply to access for both campus computing technology and web based instructional resources.

Access Responsibility

By the second day of the conference, what was becoming apparent to most was that the question about the scope of access to campus computing and web based instructional resources by students with disabilities had been decisively answered through recent OCR opinions and court cases. Institutions of public education have a clear responsibility under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act to provide equal access to technology and instructional resources no matter the form in which they might appear. From an institutional standpoint, the implications of these findings are enormous. In addition to its respon-

sibilities for providing reasonable access to campus computing technologies, colleges have a concomitant responsibility to develop web sites which are accessible to persons with disabilities.

In support of this responsibility, representatives from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office shared with participants their plans to include very specific ADA compliance requirements with all Chancellor's Office grant dollars used for the purchase of hardware, software or the development of instructional resources. Chancellor's Office staff identified a number of existing fiscal resources available to campuses which could be used for the purchase of assistive computer technology and faculty training in development of accessible Web pages. Most significantly, Chancellor's Office staff made it abundantly clear that community college DSP&S programs are not responsible for providing assistive computer technologies in mainstream computing labs or for managing the development of accessible Web pages.

So, in this round-about manner, we come to the reasons for changes and additions to some services at the High Tech Center Training Unit. Over its past

twelve years of operation, the HTCTU has largely focused its support and training efforts on DSP&S faculty and staff. This year, for the first time, the Center will also provide limited services to California Community College librarians, learning center staff, technical support staff and faculty directly involved with providing computer access services for students with disabilities.

Training Opportunities

In order to address the needs of this new constituency, the Training Unit has created a number of new training opportunities. These include:

- A one-day assistive computer technology overview intended for mainstream community college, California State University, and University of California faculty, staff and administrators;
- A two-day training in the use of core assistive computer technologies necessary for library access by students with disabilities;
- A three-day training in the creation of accessible Web sites;
- A one-day training intended for campus technical support staff in the installation, maintenance, and troubleshooting of assistive computer technologies in networked and stand-alone campus computer systems.



Carl Brown, Director of the High Tech Center Training Unit

Additional Services

High Tech Center Training Unit staff are actively involved with several Chancellor's Office initiatives and committees intended to address issues of access in campus libraries, production of accessible distance learning resources including instruction delivered by television, WWW, live satellite broadcast, videotape, CD, DVD and other forms of transmission as well as committees concerned with developing methods for producing text in alternative formats such as Braille, electronic text and large print. Additionally, High Tech Center Training Unit staff are working with international organizations such as the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) to formulate general Web access guidelines for national adoption.

In the midst of these new activities, the HTCTU continues to offer its established array of trainings in the use of core assistive computer technologies for Windows 95/98, screen reading systems, speech recognition, reading, writing, and math tools as well as a changing selection of advanced and specialized trainings. The HTCTU Web site at <http://www.htctu.fhda.edu> continues to develop as a rich and expanding library of computer access related resources, guidelines and on-line training guides.

Among the newest additions to the web site is Book

Exchange, an on-line database of text in alternative formats available for exchange between segments of California higher education. Book Exchange can be found at <http://bookex.htctu.fhda.edu> Colleges from all segments of California higher education are encouraged to register materials available in Braille, electronic text, audio tape or other formats which they are willing to share with other colleges in the state.

The various list servers provided by the High Tech Center Training Unit are used frequently. In particular, list servers which support DSP&S Program Directors, High Tech Center staff and Learning Disabilities Specialists are most active. Subscribing to High Tech Center Training Unit list servers is easy and painless. Simply go to the High Tech Center Training Unit web site, select list servers from the home page, click on the list server to which you would like to subscribe, type subscribe in the Subject field and send the email. In a very short while you will be in daily communication with colleagues around the state who share similar interests.

As always, HTCTU staff will continue to schedule site visits with community colleges around the state. The Director of the program will also continue the practice established last year of visiting each of the DSP&S regions throughout the state.

Summary

In summary, the California Community College system is now, and forever will be, changed by the integration of technology and instruction. I am pleased to report that there appears to be a growing awareness, acceptance and even enthusiasm on the part of mainstream faculty for designing virtual learning environments which are accessible to the broadest and most diverse student audience possible. It is essential at this critical moment in the development and evolution of technology based instruction that DSP&S program directors, faculty and staff be well informed and active advocates on their respective campuses. It is essential that you have a voice on campus technology decision-making committees. It is essential that our individual colleges, and systems of higher education as a whole, develop a coherent and manageable set of guidelines for producing web based resources which

are accessible to students with disabilities.

The High Tech Centers Training Unit, California Virtual University training sites and local campus training resources will be working actively in the coming months and years to provide support for this endeavor. We at the High Tech Center Training Unit look forward to working with faculty and staff to achieve these important goals.

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