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| Colorado Online @ |
| Student Support Services Committee Recommendation: |
| 5. Disability Services |

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| 3-23-2022 |

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# Introduction

The Student Support Services Subcommittee is charged with reviewing the student experience, identifying needs and pain points, and recommending improvements to student support processes. Brian Grewe, the Disability Services Director, led the development of the recommendation. The working group coordinated with the Technology subcommittee, the Learning Design subcommittee, the Accessibility and Disability Directors, and the OFIAC (Online Faculty and Instructor Advisory Committee) before finalizing the recommendation.

# **Deliverable 5: Disability Services**

**Create guidelines for consistency in and streamlining of accessibility services throughout the consortium – e.g., students request accessibility accommodations once and the accommodations are applied to courses taught by other colleges.**

# Recommendation

To provide greater consistency and streamline accessibility services for students across the consortium, the Student Support Services Subcommittee recommends establishing shared guidelines, protocols and/or processes in the following areas:

* Approving and communicating approved accommodations
* Access to assistive technology, including alternative format books and texts, support structures/services and access to course materials.

To develop, support, and maintain these processes, the subcommittee recommends adopting AIM software to support alignment and data management and hiring a Disability Services Director to provide systemwide coordination and support.

# Rationale

Implementation of Colorado Online @ will require the college disability offices, working with the system office, to address several challenges in order to ensure that students receive appropriate accommodations for online courses offered through schools outside of their home institution.

1. There is a lack of consistency when it comes to access to assistive technology throughout the system. While common technologies exist amongst some, the practice and use of specific technologies is not consistent. This leads to a different experience and potentially a loss of access when students take courses outside of their home institution. This is due to not having access to the same technology due to budgetary or need-based reasons.
2. The language used for accommodations are not consistent between the different offices. Each office offers a different layer of nuance that is specific to their institution and emerges from the deliberative process associated with accommodation building.
3. There is a lack of uniformity in what accommodation letters look like and the language being used to explain the process of accommodations. This can create confusion when a school receives multiple letters from different colleges.
4. Each college provides students with soft supports that are not considered accommodations, but still pertain to servicing the disabled community. Ranging from executive function coaching to subject matter tutoring to study hall hours, a student who is used to this level of support may not receive the same level of care when taking courses outside of their home institution.
5. Communicating between the colleges and CCCOnline has been difficult due to the differences between colleges. Recently, we’ve had a point of contact who has helped direct accommodation letters to the appropriate instructors and has acted as both a student and college advocate when questions regarding accommodations arise.
6. There is inconsistency in communicating clearly what accommodations are and how to best incorporate them for students with disabilities.

# Factors to Consider

## Recommendation: Adopt AIM for Alignment and Data Management Purposes

To fully or partially address C2 – C4, we believe the adoption of [AIM](https://www.accessiblelearning.com/) ([www.accessiblelearning.com/](https://www.accessiblelearning.com/)) which is a comprehensive accommodation, appointment and case management system would help us bring our 15 departments (13 colleges) into alignment in multiple areas. First, it would allow us to align the language being used in commonly prescribed accommodations (C2). As every student that a disability services office serves is unique, the meetings of student needs is served through a deliberative process. While it would not be possible or ethical to fully align all language for all accommodations, our offices do prescribe a considerable portion of our accommodations in similar ways.

While the functional director’s group has proposed this as a solution in the past, we’ve met resistance from the argument that we currently have software that can do this work. The reality that we are in is that each office balances the needs of their office through multiple programs (i.e. Banner, BDM, Navigate, Excel and Access). As each office has a different set of tools, we are very disconnected in how we meet the needs of our students. It is honestly not possible to meet all the needs of a disability services office with any single tool that is currently available and the added administrative time that each office uses to enter information into multiple sources adds to the increasing levels of burnout and frustration amongst our teams of specialists and office support staff. The challenge stems from a number of factors including the unique development of accommodation language by each DSO in response to their communities’ specific needs. Each campus has different access and availability levels of resources and each college’s faculty have responded differently to accommodations and how best to provide them. If we can centralize our accommodation language, we can bring some of these challenges into a better space for alignment.

Second, the various colleges and departments have differently worded and structured letters (C3). For example, ACC separates testing and classroom accommodations and provides modality for each accommodation type. Other colleges do not separate, nor do they provide modality. There are very well thought out reasons for both approaches and one is not necessarily better than the other. We also see a difference in the language used as supporting text in the letters and formatting is dramatically different. AIM would allow us to create one template that appears the same from college to college, with the only major difference being letterhead.

The third challenge this addresses involves soft support services (C4). Each college has different student support services and different levels that are provided. By centralizing our accommodation software, we can track soft supports through the case management software. This would allow the provision of soft supports to be continuous and consistent for students when enrolled in classes through other colleges.

## Recommendation: Create a Centralized Administrator Position

To address C1 – C3 and C5, we are proposing the creation of a centralized administrator to lead the area of disability services system wide. This position would help us better align and organize access to software and technology that disabled students use, but not all offices can access (C1). For example, schools with larger populations of students served often have access to software specific technology that is not available at other schools. This extends to physical hardware and technology that has been purchased to meet the needs of students with varying disabilities. Further, having someone who would negotiate licensing and service contracts at a system level would ultimately save colleges money and provide under-funded schools with access to technology that is not within departmental or institutional budgets.

The second challenge (C2) this solution may resolve supports our push for centralized language used within all the colleges. While AIM would provide us the ability to be consistent with our language, a centralized administrator would make appropriate decisions that would put the entire system into alignment. This would help bring together the ideological split that currently exists within the functional group and put us into a better position for alignment with the Association of Higher Ed and Disabilities’ (AHEAD) recommended best practices.

The recommended solution addresses the third challenge (C3) by providing an administrator who would help identify gaps and work collaboratively to align the language and structure of our letters of accommodation.

The fifth challenge (C5) speaks to the need to have a single point of contact to provide support, respond to questions and communicate concerns and challenges to. Having a centralized administrator would help to identify the gaps in support and provide a single point of contact for DS offices, disabled

Provide/require training in accommodations/accessibility for Instructors of Colorado Online @ courses.

students and faculty/instructors throughout the system. The previous arrangement that all the colleges had with CCC Online demonstrated a distinct need for this type of position.

The sixth challenge can be addressed by providing training to Colorado Online @ instructors on how best to implement specific types of accommodations in an online classroom. This training would provide consistency in implementing and deploying support services, accommodations, and aid for students, while clarifying and ensuring that each student is being provided equitable opportunities for access.

# Required Resources

* Funding and training for use of AIM Software
* 1 FTE Director of Disability Services, CCCS

# Next Steps

* Reconvene representatives from the Web Accessibility Group, Accessibility Directors Functional Group, and the Learning Design Subcommittee
* Develop implementation and communication plan