The University of Iowa  
Facilities Accessibility Plan  
June 16, 2011

INTRODUCTION

Since the passage of the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the University of Iowa (UI) has made continued progress toward improving the accessibility of its campus buildings and facilities. All new buildings and facilities, as well as renovations to existing structures when practicable, are designed to meet current ADA standards. The decommissioning of some older buildings also has helped the University make gains in providing an accessible environment. However, the University continues to face accessibility challenges.

The University of Iowa has more than 120 major buildings 1 consisting of approximately 13.5 million total square feet. Buildings are comprised of various architectural styles and vintages originally built in years ranging from 1840 to the present. The buildings are located throughout a 1900-acre campus that includes the 500-acre UI Research Park located five miles northwest of the main campus. The University also maintains 23 miles of roads and drives, and 34 miles of sidewalks and bike paths. The physical features of the campus terrain vary from flat to steep hillsides.

Individuals with wide-ranging interests are served by the University. The campus population, with more than 50,000 students, faculty and staff, is large and transitory, and the UI has more than a million visitors annually. These numbers are growing. In addition, planning assumptions take into account several changes in the population. Nationally, studies document that the number of students reporting disabilities in 2004 has more than doubled since 1996. Looking ahead, the number of disabled veterans is expected to quadruple within four years; and advances in modern medicine are allowing people to live longer and survive better.

To meet the needs of future populations and transform The University of Iowa into an inviting, supportive and universally accessible environment requires the University take a long-term view that is guided by a planning framework and informed by current assessments.

The UI Facilities Accessibility Plan represents a more structured and disciplined approach than previous institutional strategies. The Plan is built around four objectives:

- Accommodating the Needs of Employees
- Ensuring Access to University Services
- Providing a More Accessible Campus Environment
- Improving Building Accessibility

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1 This report does not include spaces managed by The University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics.
And four strategies:

- Identifying and Assessing Accessibility Challenges
- Developing and Employing an Accessibility Decision-making Framework
- Implementing Commissioning and Verification Measures
- Funding and Resourcing the Objectives of the Plan

The plan will be accomplished over the very long-term; there is no definite end date for completion at this time. The purpose of the Facilities Accessibility Plan is to create the policies, procedures and framework necessary to ensure steady and significant progress toward providing a welcoming, supportive and universally accessible environment.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE FACILITIES ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The four objectives of this plan form steps toward universal accessibility. These steps include accommodating employees, ensuring access to services, providing a more accessible campus environment, and improving building accessibility.

Accommodating the Needs of UI Employees

The University of Iowa has had a longstanding practice of responding to employees requiring physical accommodations in the work environment. From the parking lot to the work station, the University makes it a priority to modify the physical environment to enable the conduct of all UI employees’ work. Examples of workplace considerations include:

- Accessible Route – corridor width and wheelchair passing and turning spaces; clear doorway widths; compliant door hardware (levers and door closers); vertical transportation; handrails and guardrails; non-protruding objects; signage, detectible warnings, audible and visual alarms.
- Accessible Use of Space – wheelchair spaces in the work environment; accessible millwork; office layout and workstation configuration; table and seating heights; and accessible kitchen/kitchenettes.

Although sometimes viewed as “special” accommodations, the request merely triggers the reprioritization of UI’s list of accessibility projects.

Funding has never been an impediment to providing accessibility to employees; however, time has been a problem. Physical modifications generally take longer than desired. This can cause a disruptive beginning to an individual’s employment. Historically, Facilities Management has waited to be notified of a need and then has reacted to accommodate persons with disabilities.
To reduce the response time, Facilities Management will work closely with Human Resources to put into effect a proactive system where incoming employees are asked if they need or desire physical accommodations in their work place. Similar notification systems will be pursued for existing employees who find themselves now needing accommodations. A coordinated campus-wide communications effort that identifies needs for those with disabilities and promotes awareness will help to advance a workplace culture that supports an accessible campus.

**Ensuring Access to University Services**

Another objective of the plan is to focus on accommodating access to the services provided by the University. “Services” in this context include education, health care, dental care, housing, athletics and arts entertainment, professional development and personal enrichment. Accessibility to University services includes travel to and use of the physical destination.

Where employment accommodations can be tailored to an individual, accommodation in public access will span a wide range of potential needs. Examples of the evaluation considerations are expanded from those listed for employees in the previous section:

- **Accessible Route** – corridor width and wheelchair passing and turning spaces; clear doorway widths; compliant door hardware (levers and door closers); vertical transportation; handrails and guardrails; non-protruding objects; signage, detectible warnings, audible and visual alarms.

- **Accessible Use of Space** – wheelchair spaces in classrooms, lecture halls, etc.; accessible reception and service counters; sightlines and placement of accessible seating in large performance or athletic venues; accessible millwork; accessible dressing and fitting rooms; width between library stacks; and table and seating heights.

The public service side of the physical environment will be assessed and modified against a “universal accessibility” standard. A physical assessment will be followed by the prioritization and execution of specific improvement projects. In addition, and similar to the systems and procedures to be put into place to identify employment needs, Facilities Management will work proactively with Office of the Provost and the division of Student Life to identify and implement physical accommodations specific to individual student needs.

**Providing a More Accessible Campus Environment**

Where the first two objectives target populations with specific reasons for being on campus, this step will improve accessibility for all who are entering and traversing the campus. The scope of this objective goes beyond the current ADA standards by extending accessibility from the point
of entry onto the campus to the parking lot or bus drop-off and the pathway to and into the building for the purpose of making the entire campus more inviting and welcoming to all.

Considerations under this objective include the following:

- **Path of Travel** - Width, slope, evenness, surface composition, and protruding objects; handrails and guardrails; curb ramps and detectible warnings; and floor gratings.
- **Parking and Transportation** - Available resources and needs of accessible transportation; parking and passenger loading zones; and signage.
- **Building Entrances** – Proximity to accessible parking, clear doorway width, power assist door operators, signage indicating accessible entrances, compliant thresholds and floor mats.
- **Way-finding and mapping.**

### Improving Building Accessibility

This final objective focuses on the accessibility improvements that can be achieved within the building. This step looks at those spaces that were built before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines.

A little more than one-third of the space has been constructed since the enactment of ADA; it is considered to be in compliance with ADA Accessibility Guidelines. Another significant portion of campus space has been renovated over the past 20 years and brought into compliance. Yet there remains much campus space that was built before the passage of the ADA that would not be compliant if built today. Over time, these spaces with accessibility deficiencies have been, and will continue to be, remedied. Examples of building improvements include:

- **Room Access** – clear doorway width; compliant door hardware (levers and door closers); and signage.
- **Restroom Fixtures and Layout** – wheelchair turning space; wheelchair accessible stall; grab bars; compliant plumbing fixtures; lavatory clearances; controls and operating mechanisms; and mirror and shelf heights.
- **Drinking Fountains** – Bi-level, clear floor space

The University has evaluated its existing accessibility conditions comparing new construction ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities standards to the existing environment. This inventory of accessibility challenges will continue to inform the scope of building renovation projects. Over time, the UI has, and will continue to make steady progress in modernizing aged buildings to current accessibility standards.
THE STRATEGIES OF THE FACILITIES ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The Facilities Accessibility Plan identifies four strategies to help the University reach its objectives: identifying and assessing accessibility challenges; developing and employing an accessibility decision-making framework; implementing commissioning and verification measures, and funding and resourcing the objectives of the plan.

Identifying and Assessing Accessibility Challenges

In 2004 Facilities Management began conducting a periodic Facility Condition Analysis, which has included, among other considerations, some assessments of facilities accessibility. Building on those assessments, the UI engaged ISES Corporation, the campus planning consulting firm that UI has utilized extensively in the past for evaluating facility condition, to return to the campus to conduct a comprehensive assessment of accessibility. The resulting study consists of accessibility issues relating to facilities and sites. The study was completed in August of 2010.

ISES reviewed all buildings as if they were built after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This identifies any requirements in buildings that currently may be viewed as ADA-compliant that will need to be addressed when space is modified. The inventory prepared by ISES is useful for determining the scope of project work when pursuing the four objectives discussed previously in this plan.

The immediate remedy of the accessibility deficiencies in the 13.5 million square feet of buildings and general campus grounds of the ISES inventory is estimated at more than $71 million. Of that, the most significant portion is within the residence hall system, where narrow doorways, space-stingy restrooms, and resident room layouts represent extensive, if not structurally impractical, remedial challenges.

As part of the Facilities Accessibility Plan, the University will keep the information prepared by ISES current, and remove identified deficiencies as they are remedied. Any technical deviations from ADA Accessibility Guidelines (e.g., structurally impracticable) will be vetted with the UI’s Disability Planning & Action Committee (DPAC), and removed from the ISES inventory, or re-categorized accordingly.

Developing and Employing an Accessibility Decision-making Framework

Historically, the University has taken a case-by-case stance on new and renovated spaces, without the benefit of a decision-making framework for accessibility. The UI has relied heavily on design consultants, who are generally well informed about the requirements of the ADA, but may not be challenged to go beyond the minimum requirements. As a result, the newly
constructed facilities generally have been in compliance with the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), but some facilities have fallen short of satisfying institutional objectives or meeting the spirit of universal design. For example, automatic door openers are not required under ADAAG for major entrances, but the UI has a policy to equip our major entryways with the power assistive devices which has not always been included in the design.

Renovation work has faced greater challenges. Most of the decisions were left to the project team, resulting in inconsistent considerations about whether to expand the scope of work to include items such as the restroom improvements. As an example, the renovation of an office suite may physically exclude the restroom that lies adjacent to the renovated space.

Under this plan the University will develop a decision-making framework that addresses accessibility upgrades and improvements in both new and renovated facilities. It will use a collaborative model, seeking broad expertise, input and advice. Policies, principles and procedures, where possible and appropriate, and technical design solutions and preferred hardware will be identified and added to the Campus Design Standards.

**Implementing Commissioning and Verification Measures**

There are no barriers, financial or otherwise, that stand in the way of a newly constructed or renovated facility achieving and exceeding full compliance with ADA Accessibility Guidelines. In general, major projects completed on the campus since passage of the ADA have been compliant. However, the ISES review uncovered inadvertently created deficiencies. For example, a bathroom mirror was hung six inches too high. Even if the design was proper, it would not be uncommon for construction workers to miss the height restriction. Similar examples can be found in almost every major project.

Heretofore, the UI relied on design consultants to interpret and comply with the ADA Accessibility Guidelines, and on contractors to install to the requirements of ADA and to the details of the design. This approach has resulted in deficiencies that are discovered years later. The University then has the responsibility to correct the deficiency, which comes at a cost to the UI and creates inconveniences for the occupants.

Under this plan, Facilities Management will employ an ADA Facilities Coordinator to (1) help guide the scoping decisions, (2) verify design compliance with ADA Accessibility Guidelines and UI Design Standards, and (3) field inspect under a commissioning process to make sure that the installations are fully compliant. To assist with this, Facilities Management has developed a project scoping and assessment model entitled Measuring Accessibility Points Plan & Standards (MAPPS). The model includes an extensive checklist of accessibility considerations and provides an excellent framework for scoping a project design. It also offers a rating system,
similar to the U. S. Green Building Council’s LEED ratings, to aid understanding the relative extent of a universal design.

**Funding and Resourcing the Objectives of the Plan**

Funding for accessibility improvements will come from a variety of sources. Existing funding sources include deferred maintenance/capital renewal allocations, regulatory compliance allocations, capital project budgets, auxiliary enterprise accounts and institutional sources. In addition, the backlog of accessibility projects will be reduced by the future decommissioning of some obsolete facilities and by ensuring that all facility project renovations comply with the Campus Design Standards and ADA accessibility guidelines.

One objective of this plan, accommodating employees, is a long-standing practice at the University. The UI remains committed to immediately funding and implementing work-place accommodations for employees.

Additionally, a funding strategy will be developed for remedying access barriers to University services. Utilizing the ISES assessment and knowledge of campus circulation and access, Facilities Management will develop a list of projects that eliminate the remaining challenges of access to education, services, entertainment or other areas of public engagement. The list will be annually reviewed and updated for an allocation of funds that will help ensure continued advancement of this plan’s objectives.

Similar to the methodology outlined for access to University services, Facilities Management will create tactics to advance UI’s pursuit of a more accessible campus and building environment. Funding for projects meeting the third and fourth objectives generally will occupy a lower priority than the funding sought for the first two objectives (employment and access to services) under this plan. Nonetheless, the University should be able to take advantage of opportunity to advance these efforts to create a universally accessible campus.

Finally, under this plan the University will fund the position of ADA Facilities Coordinator. The ADA Facilities Coordinator will have the responsibility for maintaining policies, procedures, design guidelines, and building inventories; overseeing the development of project lists and requests for funding; managing efforts for employment accommodations; developing progress reports; performing design reviews and commissioning efforts; keeping accessibility maps and data current; enforcing the removal of temporary or transient obstructions in accessible pathways; advising the administration on the changing and evolving nature of accessibility; and serving as a central resource to the Disability Planning & Action Committee (DPAC) for all inquiries related to campus and building accessibility.
SUMMARY

The University of Iowa is entering its second phase of elevating the accessibility of the campus and buildings by moving into a more proactive position. The highlights of the 2011 Facilities Accessibility Plan include:

- Funding an ADA Facilities Coordinator to manage all facets of the Facilities Accessibility Plan
- Developing a notification system for the identification of employee needs for physical accommodations in the workplace
- Developing a notification system for the identification of student needs for physical accommodations.
- Adopting “universal accessibility” for public access to UI services
- Maintaining current information in the ISES database of identified deficiencies
- Removing or re-categorizing accepted or remedied deficiencies in the ISES inventory
- Creating and using a decision-making framework that incorporates ADA and UI standards for scoping upgrades and improvements
- Moving from a prescriptive to a collaborative decision-making and scoping model
- Incorporating UI’s technical solutions and preferred hardware into the Campus Design Standards
- Establishing verification methods for ensuring design compliance with ADA Accessibility Guidelines and UI Design Standards
- Implementing a commissioning process to ensure installations are fully compliant
- Developing funding strategies for accessibility improvements
- Creating and maintaining a list of priority ADA projects recommended for funding
- Creating tactics that will help the UI accelerate the progress toward a universally accessible environment

The execution of this plan will transform the University into one that truly prides itself on diversity and provides universal accessibility to all students, staff, faculty and visitors.