

Cornell University
Graduate and Professional
Student Assembly

GPSA Resolution 13: Cornell Commitment to Web Accessibility

Sponsored by: Alex Loiben, Voting Member for the Physical Sciences

Whereas there are 285 million people worldwide with visual impairment¹, 360 million people worldwide with disabling hearing loss², and many more with physical, speech, cognitive, neurological disabilities; and

Whereas Cornell University’s global community both includes and interacts with many of these people, as well as many people with a limited understanding of English, all of whom could benefit from web technology that meets accessibility standards; and

Whereas modern accessibility standards benefit all individuals by making websites more accessible through mobile devices, in locations where sound is not permitted or cannot be heard, from areas with slow internet connections, or through text-based browsers such as Lynx; and

Whereas in 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)³, a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in areas of public life, was passed; and

Whereas Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973⁴ states, “No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States...shall...be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency...”;

Whereas under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973⁵, federal agencies are required to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities, and standards are provided; and

Whereas the Cornell motto reflects our inclusive goal of “... any person ... any study”; and

Whereas the University’s Equal Education and Employment Opportunity Statement⁶ declares that Cornell is “committed to assisting those persons with disabilities who have special needs related to their educational pursuit or employment” and prohibits discrimination on this basis; and

¹ <https://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en/>

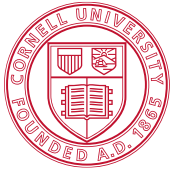
² <https://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs300/en/>

³ https://www.ada.gov/2010_regs.htm

⁴ <https://www.dol.gov/oasam/regs/statutes/sec504.htm>

⁵ <https://www.section508.gov/content/learn/laws-and-policies>

⁶ <https://hr.cornell.edu/our-culture-diversity/diversity-inclusion/equal-opportunity-and-affirmative-action/equal-education>



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35 *Whereas* the Campus Master Plan states that, “Cornell campus will support and cultivate academic
36 success and growth, providing high quality open, collaborative and adaptable environments for
37 teaching, research, service and outreach, the exchange of ideas and the nurturing of innovation...”⁷;
38 and

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40 *Whereas* Cornell’s websites are one of our most visible communications tools, and any site on the
41 Cornell.edu domain is a representation of the university, reflecting our competency, values, and
42 standards; and

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44 *Whereas* the University Assembly passed a similar resolution on April 11, 2017, and the Employee
45 Assembly passed a similar resolution on December 21, 2016; and

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47 *Whereas* on April 12, 2017, President Hunter Rawlings responded to the Employee Assembly’s
48 resolution by “charging a working group to research and address web accessibility issues... [which
49 will be expected to submit] a final report to the Office of the President on or before March 1, 2018”;
50 and

51

52 *Whereas* an inaccessible website can exclude faculty, staff, peer researchers, prospective and existing
53 students, and their families, due to their abilities or the method they use to access the web; and

54

55 *Whereas* in order to meet our stated institutional commitment to accessibility, our web
56 administrators, content providers, and developers need institutional support and a set of published
57 standards to work from when creating new websites and remediating legacy sites; and

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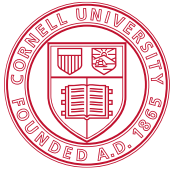
60 *Be it therefore resolved*, that the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly petitions that by March 1,
61 2018 the Divisions of University Relations, Cornell Information Technologies, and Human
62 Resources set, publish, and disseminate to all levels of University personnel an Accessibility Policy
63 for all websites on the Cornell.edu domain which will:

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- 65 1. Set a baseline standard to meet the WCAG 2.0 AA Standard, established internationally by
66 the World Wide Web Consortium.
- 67 2. Require all newly created sites to conform with University standards.
- 68 3. Require all legacy sites to be remediated for conformance upon any major update.
- 69 4. Using the model for IT Security exemptions, provide a process for exemption of sites for
70 which conformance would impose an undue burden;

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⁷ <https://masterplan.cornell.edu/>



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71 *Be it further resolved*, that the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly asks the Cornell
72 Administration, in consultation with the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity, the
73 ADA Coordinator Team, the Divisions of University Relations, and Cornell Information
74 Technologies, to name and/or identify an office or person(s) as a point of contact on campus to
75 handle reporting, assist with procedures, and periodically assess the resources needed to ensure
76 successful implementation of the policy;

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78 *Be it further resolved*, that the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly petitions for the Divisions
79 of University Relations and Cornell Information Technologies to:

- 80 1. Revise the Brand Book by January 1, 2018 to include accessible templates for items including
81 but not limited to presentations, videos, posters, and digital media.
- 82 2. Provide and make readily available information on making digital information accessible and
83 using automated tools to check the accessibility of content.
- 84 3. Provide guidance, incentive, and encouragement to all University academic, administrative,
85 and business units, aiming for the highest level of conformance in all possible cases.
- 86 4. Provide tools to all University academic, administrative, and business units to perform
87 standardized evaluations of conformance.
- 88 5. Compile annual surveys from all University academic, administrative, and business units for
89 their level of conformance, making the survey results available to the Assemblies. The first
90 survey is to be completed before August 1, 2018.
- 91 6. Set a goal for domain-wide conformance exceeding 85% within 5 years.
- 92 7. After this goal is reached, refer any non-exempt sites falling below 75% conformance to the
93 administrator for remediation or exemption.
- 94 8. Re-evaluate exemptions at least once per year.

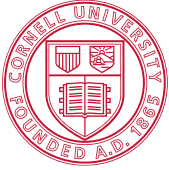
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96 *Be it finally resolved*, that we ask Cornell University to prioritize those pages relevant for course
97 registration, finances, and admissions, and require compliance from those pages by August 1, 2018.

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99 Respectfully submitted,

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101 Alex Loiben
102 Chair of the Student Advocacy Committee
103 Voting Member for the Physical Sciences, GPSA

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105 Aravind Natarajan
106 Chair of the Diversity and International Students Committee

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108 Anna Waymack
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- 110
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