



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

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December 1, 2017

Dr. Ryan Carstens  
President  
Spokane Community College  
1810 N. Greene Street  
Spokane, Washington 99217-5399

Re: Spokane Community College  
OCR Reference No. 10172280

Dear Dr. Carstens:

This letter is to inform you of the disposition of the above-referenced complaint filed against Spokane Community College (College) with the U.S. Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR), on August 5, 2017, alleging discrimination on the basis of disability. Specifically, the complaint alleged that certain of the College's web pages are not accessible to students and adults with disabilities, including vision impairments. These include, but are not limited to:

- Homepage at <http://www.scc.spokane.edu>;
- Financial Aid web page at <http://www.scc.spokane.edu/Admissions/FinancialAid/home.aspx>;
- Financial Aid/Grant Information web page at <http://www.scc.spokane.edu/Admissions/FinancialAid/Grants.aspx>;
- Foster Youth web page at <http://www.scc.spokane.edu/Admissions/FinancialAid/FosterYouth.aspx>;
- Financing Your Education web page at <http://www.scc.spokane.edu/Admissions/FinancialAid/Financing.aspx>;
- A-Z Programs web page at <http://www.scc.spokane.edu/Programs/Programs.aspx>;
- Library at <http://www.scc.spokane.edu/Resources/Library/Home.aspx>;
- Disability Services web page at <http://www.scc.spokane.edu/Resources/DisabilityServices.aspx>;
- Resources for Current Students web page at <http://www.scc.spokane.edu/Resources/Home.aspx>; and
- About SCC web page at <http://www.scc.spokane.edu/College/>.

OCR is responsible for enforcing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), 29 U.S.C. § 794, and its implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. Part 104, which prohibit

*The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.*  
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discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of Federal financial assistance. OCR is also responsible for enforcing Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II), 42 U.S.C. § 12131 *et seq.*, and its implementing regulation at 28 C.F.R. Part 35, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities. As a recipient of Federal financial assistance and as a public entity, the College is subject to these laws. Accordingly, OCR had jurisdiction to investigate this complaint.

Based on the complaint allegations, OCR opened an investigation of the following issues:

- whether the College, on the basis of disability, excluded qualified persons with disabilities from participation in, denied them the benefits of, or otherwise subjected them to discrimination in its programs and activities based on disability, in violation of the regulation implementing Section 504 at 34 C.F.R. § 104.4 and the regulation implementing Title II at 28 C.F.R. § 35.130; and
- whether the College failed to take appropriate steps to ensure that communications with applicants, participants, members of the public, and companions with disabilities are as effective as communications with others, in violation of 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a).

### **Legal Authority:**

Section 504 and Title II prohibit people, on the basis of disability, from being excluded from participation in, being denied the benefits of, or otherwise being subjected to discrimination by recipients of federal financial assistance or by public entities. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4 and 28 C.F.R. § 35.130. People with disabilities must have equal access to recipients' programs, services, or activities unless doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of the programs, services, or activities, or would impose an undue burden. 28 C.F.R. § 35.164. Both Section 504 and Title II prohibit affording individuals with disabilities an opportunity to participate in or benefit from aids, benefits, and services that is unequal to the opportunity afforded others. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(1)(ii); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(ii). Similarly, individuals with disabilities must be provided with aids, benefits, or services that provide an equal opportunity to achieve the same result or the same level of achievement as others. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(2); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iii). An individual with a disability, or a class of individuals with disabilities, may be provided with a different or separate aid, benefit, or service only if doing so is necessary to ensure that the aid, benefit, or service is as effective as that provided to others. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(1)(iv); 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iv). Title II also requires public entities to take steps to ensure that communications with people with disabilities are as effective as communications with others, subject to the fundamental alteration and undue burden defenses. 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a)(1). In sum, programs, services, and activities—whether in a “brick and mortar,” on-line, or other “virtual” context—must be operated in ways that comply with Section 504 and Title II.

**Investigation To Date:**

To date, OCR has investigated this complaint by reviewing information provided by the Complainant and conducting a preliminary assessment of the accessibility of several pages from the College's website.

The complaint alleges that the College's website is not in compliance with Section 504 and Title II because it is inaccessible to individuals with vision disabilities, print disabilities, physical impairments, and hearing impairments. The Complainant used website accessibility checkers (PowerMapper and WAVE) and reported to OCR that the College's Homepage, Financial Aid, Financial Aid/Grant Information, Foster Youth, Financing Your Education, A-Z Programs, Library, Disability Services, Resources for Current Students, and About SCC web pages have accessibility issues for individuals with disabilities. She then provided OCR with a list of errors copied and pasted from the website accessibility checker that she used.

OCR conducted a preliminary examination of the web pages identified by the Complainant and found possible compliance concerns as to whether the College's online programs, services, and activities were accessible to individuals with disabilities. For example, several of the College's web pages lacked skip navigation or skip to content links. In addition, the homepage's main navigation bar had submenus that were inaccessible to keyboard-only and screen reader users. Nor was the same content in the submenus displayed when the main link was accessed. OCR also encountered low visual contrast issues with text on the homepage, a slide show which could not be controlled by a keyboard-only user, and a table that did not allow a keyboard user to tab to different sections in order to access information. Finally, the visual indicator for elements with keyboard focus was not present or was difficult to see on various web pages.

Prior to the completion of OCR's investigation, the College asked to resolve this complaint pursuant to Section 302 of OCR's *Case Processing Manual* (CPM). On November 9, 2017, the College submitted the enclosed signed resolution agreement (the Agreement) to OCR. When fully implemented, the Agreement will resolve the allegations in the complaint.

In light of the commitments the College has made in the Agreement, OCR finds that the complaint is resolved, and OCR is closing its investigation as of the date of this letter. OCR will monitor the College's implementation of the Agreement to ensure that the commitments made are implemented timely and effectively. OCR may request additional information as necessary to determine whether the College has fulfilled the terms of the Agreement and is in compliance with Section 504 and Title II with regard to the issues raised.

If the College fails to implement the Agreement, OCR may initiate administrative enforcement or judicial proceedings to enforce the specific terms and obligations of the Agreement. Before initiating administrative enforcement (34 C.F.R. §§ 100.9, 100.10), or judicial proceedings to enforce the Agreement, OCR shall give the College written notice of the alleged breach and sixty (60) calendar days to cure the alleged breach.

This concludes OCR’s investigation of the complaint and should not be interpreted to address the College’s compliance with any other regulatory provision or to address any issues other than those addressed in this letter.

This letter sets forth OCR’s determination in an individual OCR case. This letter is not a formal statement of OCR policy and should not be relied upon, cited, or construed as such. OCR’s formal policy statements are approved by a duly authorized OCR official and made available to the public.

Please be advised that the College may not harass, coerce, intimidate, or discriminate against any individual because he or she has filed a complaint or participated in the complaint resolution process. If this happens, the harmed individual may file a complaint alleging such treatment.

The Complainant may file a private suit in federal court, whether or not OCR finds a violation.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, it may be necessary to release this letter and related correspondence and records upon request. In the event that OCR receives such a request, it will seek to protect, to the extent provided by law, personally identifiable information, which, if released, could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.

OCR looks forward to receiving the College’s first monitoring report December 1, 2017 regarding its proposed Corrective Action Plan pursuant to section 3 of the Agreement. The College’s second monitoring report regarding its proposed notice pursuant to section 6 of the Agreement is due December 9, 2017. For questions about implementation of the Agreement, please contact Charlotte Cunningham, who will be monitoring the College’s implementation, by e-mail at [charlotte.cunningham@ed.gov](mailto:charlotte.cunningham@ed.gov), or by telephone at (206)607-1610. For questions about this letter, please contact Sukien Luu by e-mail at [sukien.luu@ed.gov](mailto:sukien.luu@ed.gov), or by telephone at (206)607-1629.

Sincerely,

/ s /

Sukien Luu  
Team Leader

Enclosure