



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

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February 20, 2018

Stephen V. Sundborg, SJ  
President  
Seattle University  
900 Broadway  
Seattle, Washington 98122-4340

Re: Seattle University  
OCR Reference No. 10182008

Dear President Sundborg:

This letter is to inform you of the disposition of the above-referenced complaint filed against Seattle University (university) with the U.S. Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR), on October 13, 2017, alleging discrimination on the basis of disability. Specifically, the complaint alleged that certain of the university's web pages are not accessible to students and adults with disabilities, including vision impairments. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Homepage-<https://www.seattleu.edu/>;
2. About-<https://www.seattleu.edu/about/>;
3. Admissions-<https://www.seattleu.edu/admissions/>;
4. Lemieux Library- <https://www.seattleu.edu/library/>;
5. Financial Aid-<https://www.seattleu.edu/financial-aid/>;
6. Academics-<https://www.seattleu.edu/academics/>;
7. Student Life-<https://www.seattleu.edu/student-life/>;
8. Jesuit Tradition-<https://www.seattleu.edu/jesuit-tradition/>; and
9. Athletics-<http://www.goseattleu.com>.

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 discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of federal financial assistance. As a recipient of federal financial assistance, the university 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 issue:

- whether the university, 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.

*The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.*

[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

### **Legal Authority**

Section 504 prohibits 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. See 34 C.F.R. § 104.4. Section 504 prohibits 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). 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). 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). 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.

### **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 university’s website.

The complaint alleges that the university’s website is not in compliance with Section 504 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 university’s homepage, about page, admissions page, Lemieux Library page, financial aid page, academics page, student life page, Jesuit tradition page, and athletics page 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 university’s on-line programs, services, and activities were accessible to individuals with disabilities. For example, on the university’s homepage a number of images and links do not have descriptions for blind or visually impaired users and some videos and links on the page do not have closed captioning for deaf and hard of hearing users, the Jesuit tradition page also includes images that do not have descriptions, the student life page includes images that do not have descriptions, the athletics page has images that do not have descriptions and videos that do not include closed captioning, the academics page has images that do not have descriptions and a video without closed captioning, the financial aid page has images without descriptions, the admissions page has images without descriptions and a google map that does not include text description or audio option, and the Lemieux library page has images that do not have descriptions and a google map that has no text or audio option.

Prior to the completion of OCR’s investigation, the university asked to resolve this complaint pursuant to Section 302 of OCR’s *Case Processing Manual* (CPM). On February 13, 2018, the university submitted the enclosed signed Resolution Agreement (Agreement) to OCR. When fully implemented, the Agreement will resolve the allegations in the complaint.

In light of the commitments the university 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

university'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 university has fulfilled the terms of the Agreement and is in compliance with Section 504 with regard to the issues raised.

If the university 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 university 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 university'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 university 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 university's first monitoring report by **February 28, 2018**. For questions about implementation of the Agreement, please contact Claudette Rushing, Attorney, who will be monitoring the university's implementation, by telephone at (206) 607-1606 or by e-mail at [claudette.rushing@ed.gov](mailto:claudette.rushing@ed.gov) or. For questions about this letter, please contact me by telephone at (206) 607-1612.

Sincerely,

Paul Goodwin  
Supervisory

Enclosure: Resolution Agreement

cc: Legal Counsel (Via E-Mail)