



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

400 MARYLAND AVENUE, SW
WASHINGTON, DC 20202-1475

REGION XI
NORTH CAROLINA
SOUTH CAROLINA
VIRGINIA
WASHINGTON, DC

May 4, 2017

President John J. DeGioia
Georgetown University
Office of the President
204 Healy Hall
37th & "O" Streets, NW
Washington, DC 20057

RE: OCR Complaint No. 11-17-2061

Dear Dr. DeGioia:

This is to advise you of the resolution of the above-referenced complaint investigation of Georgetown University (the University) by the United States Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The complaint, which was received on XXXX, alleged that the University is discriminating, on the basis of disability, because certain pages on its website are not accessible to persons with disabilities.

OCR enforces Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and its implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. Part 104, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities that receive Federal financial assistance from the Department.

Before OCR completed its investigation, the University expressed a willingness to resolve the complaint by taking the steps set out in the enclosed Resolution Agreement. The following is a discussion of the relevant legal standards and information obtained by OCR during the investigation that informed the development of the Resolution Agreement.

Legal Standards

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. 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—

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

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

During the course of the investigation OCR examined a number of pages on the University’s website to determine whether they are accessible to persons with disabilities. These web pages included:

- *Office of Student Financial Services* (<http://finaid.georgetown.edu/>)
- *Office of Student Financial Services’ Federal Grant* (<https://finaid.georgetown.edu/grants-and-scholarships/federal-grants>)
- *Office of Student Financial Services’ Scholarship* (<https://finaid.georgetown.edu/grants-and-scholarships/scholarships>)
- *Office of Student Financial Services’ How is Eligibility Determined?* (<https://finaid.georgetown.edu/how-aid-is-determined>)
- *Georgetown University Homepage* (http://www.georgetown.edu/#_ga=1.123866952.370314106.1476985297)
- *Georgetown’s Facebook* (<https://www.facebook.com/georgetown>)
- *Office of Disability Services* (<http://www.law.georgetown.edu/campus-life/disability-services/>)
- *Office of Disability Services’ On Campus Resources* (<http://www.law.georgetown.edu/campus-life/disability-services/campus-resources.cfm>)
- *Georgetown Law’s Campus Life’s Activities & Organizations* (<http://www.law.georgetown.edu/campus-life/activities-organizations/index.cfm>)
- *Georgetown Law’s Homepage* (<http://www.law.georgetown.edu/>)
- *Library* (<http://www.library.georgetown.edu/>)

OCR evaluated the above-listed pages and determined that important images were missing text descriptions, called “alt tags,” that describe the images to blind users who use special software; some important content of the website could only be accessed by people who can use a computer mouse, which meant that content was not available to those who are blind, many who have low vision, and those with disabilities affecting fine motor control; parts of the website used color combinations that made text difficult or impossible for people with low vision to see; and videos were not accurately captioned, so they were inaccessible to people who are deaf. These barriers

deny persons with disabilities access to programs, services, and activities offered on the website and may impede the University's communications with persons with disabilities.

Prior to the conclusion of OCR's investigation, the University expressed an interest in voluntarily resolving this case. In light of the University's willingness to address its website comprehensively without further investigation, OCR determined entering into a voluntary resolution agreement would be appropriate.

Resolution Agreement

Pursuant to Section 302 of OCR's *Case Processing Manual*, the University signed the enclosed Resolution Agreement on May 2, 2017 which, when fully implemented, will resolve the allegations raised in this complaint. The University committed to take actions such as:

- selecting an auditor who has the requisite knowledge and experience to identify barriers to access on the University website and conducting a thorough audit of existing online content and functionality;
- making all new website content and functionality accessible to people with disabilities;
- developing a corrective action plan to prioritize the removal of online barriers over an 18-month period;
- posting a notice to persons with disabilities about how to request access to online information or functionality that is currently inaccessible; and
- providing website accessibility training to all appropriate personnel.

The provisions of the Agreement are aligned with the allegations and issues raised by the Complainant and the information discussed above that was obtained during OCR's investigation, and are consistent with applicable law and regulation. OCR will monitor the University's implementation of the Agreement until the University is in compliance with the statute and regulation at issue in the case. Failure to implement the Agreement could result in OCR reopening the complaint.

Conclusion

This concludes OCR's investigation of the complaint. This letter 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. The Complainant may have the right to file a private suit in federal court whether or not OCR finds a violation.

Please be advised that the University must not harass, coerce, intimidate, discriminate, or otherwise retaliate against an individual because that individual asserts a right or privilege under a law enforced by OCR or files a complaint, testifies, or participates in an OCR proceeding. If this happens, the individual may file a retaliation complaint with OCR.

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

We appreciate the University cooperation in the resolution of this complaint. If you have any questions, please contact the assigned attorneys: Jan Gray at (202) 453-6028 or Zorayda Moreira-Smith at (202) 453-6946 or Zorayda.Moreria-Smith@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

/s/

Kristi R. Harris
Team Leader, Team IV
District of Columbia Office
Office for Civil Rights

Enclosure

cc: Rosemary Kilkenny