I.4. Campus Climate and Support for Students with Disabilities

While this University is the leader in the country in research on disability-related issues and academic endeavors committed to disability studies, there remain challenges within our environment for fully integrating students with disabilities. Levels of inaccessibility at UIC are also largely due to the fact that for several generations students with disabilities were encouraged to attend more accessible campuses downstate. In addition, our current environment includes architectural and communication barriers due to the age of our infrastructure and location within an urban environment. This includes inadequate accessible information technology and accessible buildings and facilities. There is also insufficient accessible student housing to meet the needs of students with disabilities as well as lack of door-to-door accessible transportation to enable students to take advantage of the various services on campus. Other challenges include providing sufficient accommodation in the classroom and repairs of assistive technology equipment used by students as well as sufficient resources for text conversion for blind students.

To ascertain the effectiveness of the services provided to students with disabilities, UIC invited a campus visit by a group of three outside consultants in 2001 (see I.4.A.) and conducted a climate survey in 2002 with specific questions on provision of disability services. Both of these studies represent proactive efforts by the university to find out more about the adequacy of provision of services to persons of disabilities. Changes have been made and policies have been implemented based on the findings. Further improvement will be considered by the Disability Advisory Committee and the Disability Access Group.


A three-member team was brought to the University of Illinois at Chicago from March 13-15, 2001 and was comprised of experts in the area of disability services and programs. The evaluators were Trey Duffy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Brad Hedrick from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Sue Kroeger from the University of Arizona. The team observed the services and activities of the Office for Disability Services (ODS); interviewed campus staff, students, faculty, and administrators; and reviewed documentation of institutional efforts. The report was divided into six sections and focused on: Philosophy, People, Policies, Procedures, Programs, and Recommendations.

The consultants indicated that their visit gave them “a clear impression that UIC is committed to ensuring access for faculty, staff, students and guest with disabilities.” Where they found shortcomings, they gave a number of recommendations. Many of them have been adopted since their visit as listed below. With the effort from the recently established Disability Advisory Committee and Disability Access Group, the campus strives to make continued improvements in the evaluation and provision of campus
access, services and accommodations as well as programs for persons with disabilities at UIC.

I.4.A. i. Improvements Made in Response to the Consultants’ Report

- **Establishment of a Technology Access Group in 2001.** This group was created in 2001 as a subcommittee of the Access Group to identify, evaluate, recommend, and incorporate technology access on campus within major departments such as the computer center and libraries. The accomplishment of this group is described in more detail later in the best practice section of the report (see II.2.).

- **Establishment of an Advisory Committee in 2001.** In November 2001, the Chancellor charged an advisory committee with the responsibility of drafting a statement of commitment to equal access for persons with disabilities at UIC for her signature. The statement of Commitment to Persons with Disabilities was released about a year later. Implementation of this statement is to be guided by the Advisory Committee. It is comprised of faculty, staff, and students with disabilities, campus administrators, and two external experts. Named by the Chancellor, this Committee will identify gaps in services for persons with disabilities and recommend viable solutions. The accomplishment of this group will be described in more detail later in the best practice section of this report (see II.2.).

- **Release of the Chancellor’s Statement of Commitment to Persons with Disabilities in 2002.** The statement embraces universal design principles.

- **Development of a Checklist for Priority Snow Removal in 2002.**

- **Review of Transportation Policy in 2002.**

- **Creation of an Online Complaint Channel in 2003.** This online complaint form provides an instrument for persons with disabilities to voice their concerns and seek resolutions to them. This project is described in more detail as a best practice in Section II of this report.

- **Impending Change in Report of the Office of Disability Services in 2003.** The report of the Office of Disability Services is in the process of moving from the Counseling Center to the Dean of Student Affairs, as recommended by the consultants.
I.4.B. 2002 Climate Survey

In 2002, UIC initiated a campus climate survey conducted by an outside consultant. The aim of the survey was to learn more about the campus climate for various minority groups including persons with disabilities. It represents an additional proactive effort by the University to identify strategies for addressing challenges and supporting positive initiatives.

The results of the survey were released in the summer of 2003. Of the total respondents, about 50% are students and about 2% indicated that they had a disability. About three-quarters of the respondents find that the campus climate is accepting for persons with disabilities (with 21% not sure and 5% find it not accepting). Over half of the respondents think that the climate for persons with disabilities can be improved through awareness/sensitivity workshops/programs, classes focused on disability issues, or cultural events that recognize persons with disabilities.

The survey results with respect to disability services will be analyzed by the Disability Advisory Committee and the Disability Access Group for recommendations for policy changes and improvement of services and accommodations for persons with disabilities.