

# Weber State University – Division of Students Access & Success

## Disability Services – Program Review Strategic Action Plan

### Introduction

As part of assessment for the Division of Student Access and Success, Disability Services underwent a program review in 2023-24. External review, Dr. Adam Meyer, and internal reviewers Dr. Melinda Russell-Stamp and Jonathan Zempter, evaluated operations and procedures and created a report of their findings. Disability Services staff reviewed their recommendations, prioritized items, and created this plan to implement specific recommendations. Much of the review content and recommendations align with existing DS initiatives that have been or are currently being addressed through annual assessment and departmental goals.

### Strategic Disability Initiatives

#### 1. Critical Personnel and Resource Needs

##### *Recommendations:*

- **Accommodate upgrade.** DS must invest in the Accommodate database enhancement. This step is the most urgent priority. Once enhancements have been made, the team should assess how things evolve over the next 6-12 months, and then a decision can be made whether to explore new staff positions. Should DS continue to experience annual increases of 200-300 students, another advisor may be necessary within two years.
- **Resolve the space concerns.** DS needs new and better space for a variety of reasons. The need is well-documented on campus. Action should be taken sooner rather than later. DS lacks sufficient space for the current staff. The aesthetics and overall vibe of the current space are somewhat subdued and perhaps limit the team's collective energy. DS must have noise-reduction materials to address significant student concerns. This should be a top priority.
- **Assess workload over caseload.** DS must assess their needs relative to workload completion rather than caseload assignments. Due to limited staffing, some or all disability office positions assume more enormous caseload responsibilities than required of their job descriptions to meet increased student accommodation needs.
  - DS will need to continue to monitor workload tasks such as case management responsibilities, testing administration, ASL and captioning coordination, accessible technology management, notetaking facilitation, campus outreach efforts, and more to determine what is essential to complete, reduce, or cease to complete the critical tasks for the office and the institution.
  - A director (or the primary lead) should have 0% caseload work with the ability to focus on administrative tasks, which may include handling student appeals and complaints.
  - Carefully consider the value of the transition outreach resources and DREAM. There may be space to increase transitions efforts again once the climate stabilizes. To maximize energy, any new initiatives should have a definitive purpose that advances critical goals.

- Cautiously add practicum and internship students, considering the time investment (onboarding, training, coaching, addressing innocent mistakes made, etc.) and staff time. These students should complement the work rather than serve a vital role.
- DS should assess if a physical presence remains necessary at Davis Campus. Virtual meetings and Davis Campus Testing Center could provide the necessary services.

*Response:*

- DS staff have explored and invested in a one-year upgrade to the Accommodate Symplicity system, which will student-facing and Banner-integrated applications, as well as faculty and accommodation support packages. The department is currently involved in critical IT implementation strategies. These upgrades should greatly reduce the total workload currently placed on DS advisors, increase efficiency in creating and distributing services to students, and enhance communication with all stakeholders. Once IT implementation is complete, DS staff will engage in five training meetings and progressive roll-outs of upgrades through Fall 2024. Evaluation and assessment of the upgrades will take place in Summer 2025, as well as a pilot implementation of faculty modules with a potential roll-out to faculty in Fall 2025.
- DS has engaged in extensive proposals and planning for a departmental remodel using space in the recently vacated Student Health Center. A number of external factors have affected how fully the project can be fully implemented, but we anticipate changes in the next year.
- DS will utilize enhanced Accommodate functions to better assess and understand workload associated with case management and other departmental tasks.
- DS will hire a new full-time advisor in Summer 2024 and will decrease the case management responsibilities of the Director and Coordinators.
- Transition services are being re-evaluated to align with DS student learning outcomes and campus outreach needs, reducing staff time spent out of the department and with new initiatives. DS has collaborated with Admissions, Dual Enrollment, First Year Experience, and other departments to reduce stand-alone activities and events. These changes will be re-evaluated in Summer 2025.
- DS has re-assessed and replaced the positions of practicum/intern students with part-time advisors who have sufficient training to provide workload assistance for case management. Practicum/intern students will provide support, but will no longer manage student cases.
- Starting Fall 2024, DS will provide testing accommodations at the Davis Campus on an appointment basis, and will work to collaborate with the Davis Testing Center to transition some proctoring, when appropriate. DS will no longer have regular, open hours at the Davis Campus, but will provide virtual services by request.

## 2. Modifications for DS Processes, Policies, Procedures, and Practices

*Recommendations*

- **Consistency of accommodation decisions.** Tighten the internal DS accommodation review process. DS must create a better process for how disability accommodation requests are reviewed and approved by the team.
- **Timeliness of student appointments.** A DS office should be able to see students within 2-3 business days excepting the 3-4 weeks before and after the start of the semester. Currently,

students must wait 1-2 weeks to get an appointment during the semester. DS must examine why this lengthy delay exists and make adjustments to improve.

- **Reassess the implementation of the AHEAD Guidance on Documentation.** DS should evaluate when and why additional documentation is sought from students, as some requests for more documentation may be contributing to unnecessary bottlenecks within the system.
- **Saying “No” as a valid and necessary part of the process.** DS must build the ability to say “no” to the process. Accommodations are provided IF and ONLY IF the student would not have equal access to the opportunity without that accommodation.
- **Carefully consider the role of temporary accommodations.** These should be approved only when valid, such as concussion or broken arm, and not as a mechanism to avoid saying “no.”
- **Accessible Grievance Policy.** Consider edits to the grievance policy and publish it in a direct, commonsense, “well-lighted” location.
- **External Consultation.** DS offices have found benefit in having an external consultant work on team mission and goals and support in developing processes for the office. AHEAD offers this as a resource for its members (for a fee).

*Response:*

- DS will develop an Advisor Handbook with a decision tree and review processes. Existing advisors will be trained in these new processes in Summer 2025, as ongoing as they are hired. Advising staff will all be supervised by the DS Case Management Coordinator to improve consistency and team decision making. The Case Management Coordinator is currently planning and implementing crucial Accommodate upgrades to better monitor advisor caseloads and workloads and improve efficiency. The DS advisement team will pilot a new structured availability schedule to increase appointment response time.
- Over the next year, the DS advisement team will reassess the use of documentation in decision-making processes and update information on the DS website to better align with current AHEAD recommendations. By Fall 2025, DS will implement fully updated practices for advisors and website information regarding decision making, information/documentation, processes for denying accommodations, and improved grievance procedures. These changes will be assessed in Summer 2026, and ongoing.
- DS staff will continue to engage in weekly professional development, and DS leadership will research and integrate helpful webinars, videos, and reading materials from AHEAD and other professional organizations.
- DS leadership will explore costs and availability of AHEAD external consultation and review team mission and goals. This is secondary to crucial Accommodate upgrades and will be considered for implementation in 2025-2026.

### 3. Disability Services Access and Accommodation Collaboration with Faculty

- **Faculty advisory committee and department liaisons.** DS would benefit from a faculty advisory committee. DS can share perspectives and get faculty insight into various aspects of the access and accommodation process through an organized faculty advisory group.
- **Faculty Involvement.** DS should reassess when to get professors involved in the process. For DS, any accommodation must be reasonable as a standalone concept relative to the disability. How

the accommodation might be applied, if at all, within the context of the course is a different discussion. DS should assess how to cut off situations where professors tell students that something will be approved if DS says “Yes.” DS and faculty should engage in proactive communication and outreach.

- **Internship/Practicum/Fieldwork.** DS should provide structured support and enhance faculty relationships with the accommodation process for internships, practicums, and other fieldwork experiences.
- **Faculty Communication.** DS should carefully craft email communication and eliminate what is not critical. DS should consider some edits/adjustments to the Accommodation Verification Letter.
  - Focus on campus design limitations, not student limitations;
  - Strengthen the excellent recommendation that faculty no deny accommodations without consulting with DS;
  - Clarify the letter’s purpose and intent.

*Response:*

- DS will repurpose staff hours from transition/DREAM to further develop training and outreach, including faculty collaboration. DS has already engaged in extensive work with faculty and faculty senate to assess current knowledge and attitudes regarding accommodation process. DS will use this information to establish vision, mission, membership, and goals for a DS faculty advisory group, to be started during Fall 2024. A subset of this advisory group will be a strategic taskforce for developing structured support for colleges and programs that provide internships, practicums, and other fieldwork experiences. These groups will assist DS in the piloting and implementation of Accommodate faculty applications over the next two years.
- In conjunction with advisor training and Accommodate upgrades, the DS advisement team will perform a thorough review of decision, accommodation verification, and email templates that serve as the primary communication tools for faculty and students. Proposed changes will be reviewed over the next 1-2 years by the faculty advisor group, and then implemented and assessed with faculty in a summer-fall-spring semester cycle. DS will establish an annual review and update of these documents.

#### 4. Disability Services Outreach Efforts

- **Disability accessibility is a campus-wide responsibility.** Overall, the current WSU posture may be to deflect “all things disability” to DS to resolve. DS does not have the expertise or capacity to initiate or serve as the front-runner for solutions. DS must explore ways to change the campus narrative, which will likely include framing situations in such a way that other stakeholders understand they must be part of, initiate, or lead the solution.
  - DS has been increasingly tasked to facilitate resources that do not align with the disabled student mission and purpose (i.e., Title IX, temporary health, immunization exemptions, language support, mental health and suicide prevention). WSU must develop other practices and policies within other units to address these non-disability needs.
  - The reviewers believe that consolidating accommodated testing within the general campus testing activities would be an efficiency gain for WSU. While DS will likely always

need to proctor a small number of exams that require more than extra time or the use of a computer, any tests that can be moved to the testing center will create a more inclusive experience for disabled students.

- **Universal Design a Collective Campus Responsibility.** Over time, the entire campus community must become more aware of the existing disabling barriers and how to remove those barriers through better design. Strong partnerships, ongoing dialogue, and short-and long-term strategic planning are critical for successful outcomes. Acknowledging and addressing the potential disability influence within distinct populations (at-risk students, veterans, first-generation, students with financial need, etc.) keeps disability and accessibility from being an invisible and overlooked matter. DS should also be represented on campus committees and initiatives about broad subsets of students with a comprehensive focus and where numerous stakeholders are involved (such as relevant presidential committees, faculty senate committees, academic affairs task forces, etc.)
- **Faculty Training.** Create a realistic, strategic plan for proactive faculty training, including the why, how, and what of the access and accommodation process (create an online course).
- **Reassess digital guidance for transition.** Differentiate between accommodations at the k-12 level and higher education.

*Response:*

- DS will repurpose staff hours from transition/DREAM to further develop training and outreach on campus. The DS leadership team will identify critical training groups and work with the faculty advisory group to schedule an annual rotation of training meetings accordingly. This schedule should be implemented following the completion of initial Accommodate upgrades and advisor training (potentially Summer 2025). In the meantime, DS outreach staff will use existing web content and videos to develop an education/outreach link on the DS website. Within a year, an effective Bridge online course will be available for faculty and staff.
- DS Director and Executive Director of Wellness will identify and prioritize current DS mission and scope of practice, identifying campus assignments that need to be transitioned to other departments or units. Additionally, the DS Director will work with campus leaders to identify areas where DS representation should be improved. This has already begun with multilingual student learners, New Student Orientation, Dual Enrollment, and Admissions. This will require the assistance of the VP of Student Access and Success and various campus-wide collaborations and discussions. This should continue, with an annual evaluation of progress, and in alignment with reassessment and updates to the DS mission and scope of practice. Each of these initiatives will require ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and education about disability access with campus partners, which is an ever-evolving and long-term process that should be assessed internally every year, and externally in alignment with SAS program review guidelines.
- The DS outreach team, in collaboration with campus marketing and communication, will create and update website links for event accessibility, transition guides, and various training needs. They will create a mechanism for annually assessing and updating campus training.
- DS recognizes the need for improved campus-wide responsibility for accessibility. Discussions about universally designed, accessible, and integrative testing services have begun with plans to transition services during and after a DS office remodel. DS recognizes that these changes require significant dialogue, resources, and support from appropriate administrators and

departments. Space and resources to effect change remain somewhat challenging. Sufficient space, training, staff, and collaboration between DS and Testing Centers is critical for improvement. DS has proposed retaining three of the five test proctoring rooms in their department. Testing Centers have committed to piloting some collaborative test proctoring in Summer and Fall 2024. Both departments recognize a need for improved communication and methods for verifying confidential student accommodation information. The DS accommodation team will create a campus vision for accessible testing services and will share this with campus partners in Summer 2024, which will provide a starting point for developing a strategic plan for changes in accommodated testing.

## 5. Enhancing Campus-Wide Disability Accessibility

- **ADA/504 Coordinator.** WSU must develop an ADA/504 Coordinator voice on campus. Consider making the DS Director the ADA/504 Coordinator. ADA/504 Coordinators have a broad range of responsibilities on a campus that have not been occurring at WSU in recent years. The DS Director has brought a much-needed purpose to the ADA/504 Coordinator role in the interim period, albeit in a reduced capacity given the dual responsibilities. WSU would benefit from making this merged position concept permanent. If the DS Director continues to assume the ADA/504 Coordinator role, then a Deputy DS Director should be hired to run the day-to-day operations within DS.
- **Create a Digital Accessibility Coordinator position.** A centralized point person, such as a Digital Accessibility Coordinator, would be a beneficial authority voice and quarterback of digital accessibility resources and collective efforts. As more information comes from the Department of Justice on what entities must do, WSU should be prepared to pivot to meet the established requirements.
- **Centralized Budget.** Create a centralized budget for student accommodations, separate from the DS operating budget. Create a centralized budget for faculty/staff accommodations.
- **Access Council.** Create goals for the Access Council.
- **Reporting Barriers.** Present a more public-facing barrier report form.
- **Universal Design for Events.** Create a guide for event accessibility.
- **Elevators.** Create a communication plan for broken elevators.
- **Campus Representation.** Give disability accessibility a voice and consideration at important campus tables. WSU should identify which committees and practices have a broad campus impact and ensure a voice for disability accessibility exists.

### *Response:*

DS staff have made similar recommendations to campus administration over the past few years and feel that these changes will occur with time and available resources. DS has reorganized positions and organizational structure to assist with the recommended staff transitions over time.

Enhancing campus-wide accessibility has been an ongoing effort by DS staff and leadership for many years, and we recognize the importance of an active, engaged ADA/504 Coordinator who has the capacity to enact change across campus. DS also anticipates new recommendations for digital accessibility that will require the expertise and commitment of a full-time Digital Accessibility

Coordinator position. This position was advocated for at President's Council, approved for hire, and then cut due to budget constraints.

The DS department has limited bandwidth and influence for many campus-wide accessibility initiatives, but continues to be proactive in advocating for change. DS understands that disability barriers often arise from a lack of awareness and understanding, and that ideal access should become a campus-wide choice to act rather than just something the DS department does to ensure compliance and non-discrimination. The DS Director, Accommodation Coordinator, and department specialists have created strong, collaborative relationships across campus to effect change in video captioning, event accessibility, universally-designed course materials, animal policies, many other initiatives. However, most disability access continues to rely heavily on the work of DS staff, which takes a toll.

Like the review team, DS recognizes that shifting a culture requires a significant undertaking and years to fully accomplish, and DS is committed to continuing this important work. DS affirms the program reviewers' statement that "this process is a marathon that cannot be won at a sprint pace. Strong partnerships, ongoing dialogue, and short- and long-term strategic planning are critical for successful outcomes" (p. 15). The DS Director will continue to engage in conversations with administration to improve campus accessibility and to enact these recommendations in partnership with campus stakeholders over time.