CI recognized for web site accessibility for the blind

Camarillo, Calif. Dec. 16, 2010 - In a recent review of 183 university Web sites published in The Chronicle of Higher Education, CSU Channel Islands (CI) placed sixth overall in Web site accessibility for the blind and placed first for accessibility of online applications, with 98.2% of applications usable by the blind. Four of the top ten Web sites were from the CSU system.

Public colleges and universities are required to demonstrate that their technologies are accessible based on Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act or related standards. This is an overwhelming task for a college or university as not only Web site material but use of technology in the classroom has increased in volume and complexity. Every faculty and staff member needs to be brought up to speed as to what accessibility technology means. The project requires constant review and upgrading as these technologies continue their rapid evolution.

Michael Berman, CI's Chief Information Officer, explained that blind students use a screen reader with a keyboard instead of a mouse to access material. Every function has to be accessible to each person in the way that he or she can receive it. "Compared with other universities across the country, even though our budget and staff are small, we have been able to do some great things by pulling together and committing to this project," Berman stated. "Our approach is to do the best we can to make sure every Web user has equal access."

Peter Mosinskis, IT Project Supervisor and University webmaster from 2003 until 2010, said that CI was in a very good position in the accessibility arena. "When CSU Executive Order 926 took effect in 2005, we worked in coordination with the CSU to implement practices to make our Web content accessible. We were on board with the program from the very beginning." To illustrate why it is so difficult to achieve accessibility, Mosinskis stated that CI's content has increased over 330% since 2005. "Keeping up is hard with limited resources and a small staff but we remain committed," he said. Keys to their success include the accessibility training program implemented for all Web site developers of official University Web sites and the integration of accessibility evaluation into procurement practices. These techniques have helped CI keep up with growth and have reduced the amount of remediation required to bring campus systems and services into compliance.

Mosinskis praised student assistants who have participated in the process and have been invaluable in producing positive outcomes.

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CSU Channel Islands is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

CI Mission Statement
Placing students at the center of the educational experience, California State University Channel Islands provides undergraduate and graduate education that facilitates learning within and across disciplines through integrative approaches, emphasizes experiential and service learning, and graduates students with multicultural and international perspectives.