Cornell University Disability Access Management Strategic Plan

July 1, 2011–June 30, 2012

Executive Summary

Since 2004, Cornell University has holistically addressed the needs and interests of its students and workforce with disabilities by:

1) incorporating the needs of individuals with disabilities into the university’s overall work/life strategy;
2) implementing a disability accommodation process for students, faculty, and staff with disabilities;
3) creating and filling a facilities-based Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator position;
4) incorporating disability issues into diversity planning efforts; and
5) developing a long term disability strategic plan to increase accessibility of the university’s campus and programs.

Cornell University has provided an overall commitment to accessibility in the adoption of the Commitment to Disability Access for Ithaca Campus Faculty, Staff, and Students (http://www.cornell.edu/disability/docs/disability-commitment-report.pdf), which is updated annually with the university’s accomplishments in addressing accessibility.

Disability compliance and a commitment to incorporating disability access into an overall diversity and inclusion initiative are addressed through four offices and departments at Cornell University: the Office of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity and the Office of Medical Leaves Administration in the Division of Human Resources and Safety Services, the Office of Student Disability Services in the Division of Student and Academic Services, and the Department of Maintenance Management in the Division of Facilities Services. The university has designated an ADA Coordination Team consisting of the associate vice president of the Office of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity, the director of the Office of Student Disability Services, and the Division of Facilities Services ADA coordinator.

This team is responsible for the implementation of the disability strategic planning process. The university has also established an Executive Disability Access Steering Committee consisting of the vice president for the Division of Student and Academic Services, the vice president for the Division of Budget and Planning, the vice president for the Division of Facilities Services, the vice president for the Division of Human Resources and Safety Services, the vice provost for Undergraduate Education, the vice
president for the Division of University Communications, the interim executive director of Cornell Information Technologies, and the director of the Department of Maintenance Management. This committee ensures the university complies with disability laws and regulations and carries out its commitment to addressing the needs of students, faculty, staff, and visitors with disabilities.

The disability strategic planning effort is designed to:

1) continue the university’s efforts to incorporate disability access into the university diversity and inclusion initiatives;

2) establish shared accountability and responsibility for addressing program and physical accessibility for individuals with disabilities;

3) provide educational opportunities to improve the university community’s understanding of disability issues and the university’s obligations in disability compliance; and

4) expand the university’s commitment to community relations with organizations that advocate for individuals with disabilities.

These efforts are accomplished by addressing disability access in six priority areas: physical accessibility of the campus, educational programs and services for students and employees, technology, communication, employment, and emergency preparedness and evacuation.

The disability access management strategic plan is the university’s roadmap for disability access that will enhance the university’s compliance with disability laws and regulations, and provide best practice recommendations for creating a climate that embraces individuals with disabilities. To the greatest extent possible, the implementation of the 2011–2012 strategic plan will take place within existing university administrative departments as part of their ongoing work. In addition, university-wide committees have been established to help vet and disseminate information about disability compliance responsibilities and to establish a dialogue about disability access best practices.

**Compliance:** The university is fully committed to meeting the intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), Section 504, and NYS regulatory compliance obligations. In accordance with our ADA obligations, all new construction and renovations will be fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. At the same time, we agree to remove existing barriers to accessibility of current programs, services, and activities, as required by the ADAAA, to allow equal opportunity in the most integrated setting.
2010–2011 Accomplishments

In its second year of the strategic planning process, Cornell University continued to focus on meeting the compliance requirements of various disability laws and regulations and began addressing disability access from an inclusiveness perspective. Despite continued budget constraints, the university worked to provide greater disability accessibility by: incorporating these efforts into the university’s diversity and inclusion initiatives; establishing greater shared accountability for disability access; increasing awareness of disability issues and challenges on the campus; working with community groups committed to addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities; and making incremental, but significant, progress in addressing disability access in the six priority areas identified in the Executive Summary.

What follows are highlights of the year’s accomplishments.

Incorporation of disability access into the university diversity/inclusion initiatives

For the 2010–2011 year, the Division of Facilities Services’ Diversity and Inclusion committee developed a strategic plan that included physical access as one of its priorities. Four goals for increasing access for employees with disabilities within the Division of Facilities Services were established: 1) greater communication about accessibility; 2) incorporating disability access into transportation resources; 3) corresponding with the Office of Medical Leaves Administration about its disability accommodation policies; and 4) sharing information about the inclement weather policy as it relates to addressing access for individuals with disabilities.

Cornell’s Faculty Institute for Diversity, coordinated through the Center for Teaching Excellence, was held in June 2011 to assist faculty in creating a more inclusive curriculum. This year, the institute incorporated information on disability access into the program with a presentation by Wendy Harbour, executive director for the Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education at Syracuse University.

Established shared accountability and responsibility for addressing program and physical accessibility for individuals with disabilities

The university is working toward a fully accessible campus using a multifaceted approach. There were four accomplishments in this area this year.

• The Project Approval Request form was revised to include language to describe ADA impacts for projects that are in excess of $100,000. This will require anyone requesting funding to think about how ADA compliance will be impacted by projects they are initiating.
• When publicizing open events, there was an increase in the number of event planners who included contact information for event-goers who may need disability access.
• The *Guide to Planning Accessible Events* was completed and shared online with the university community.
• The university completed its online, interactive accessibility map with information on accessible routes, parking, and entrances.

**Provided education about disability access to the university community to improve the understanding of disability issues and the university’s obligations in disability compliance**

• In October 2010, the Office of Student Disability Services, in conjunction with a student group, the Cornell Union for Disabilities Awareness, hosted a disability awareness event with T.V. Raman ’94. Raman, a visually impaired computer scientist and engineer from Google, shared how accessibility was factored into the design of smartphones. Also in October, the Disabilities Services Team held an educational program for student leaders on disability awareness.
• In November 2010, the Office of Workforce Diversity and Inclusion hosted its annual diversity update meeting for more than 100 faculty and staff, including members of the Higher Education Recruitment Consortium. The meeting included a workshop on addressing disability issues in the workplace.
• In April 2011, the ADA Coordination Team published an article in both the Chronicle and Pawprint to provide an update on the university’s disability strategic planning progress.
• In May 2011, the United Spinal Association conducted a training session on the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design. More than 75 people participated in the four-hour program, including individual college and unit personnel, facilities services personnel, and other members of the Cornell community.
• In addition to these university-wide programs, a number of units on the campus, such as Residential Programs, conducted disability access awareness sessions as part of ongoing staff development.

**Continued the university’s commitment to expanding community relations with organizations that advocate for individuals with disabilities**

• For the 12th year, Cornell University chaired the Central/Western New York Industry Liaison Group, an organization that focuses on affirmative action compliance, including compliance with disability affirmative action laws. One of the quarterly meetings featured a presentation on disability access.
• For the third year, Cornell University chaired the Central/Western New York Business Leadership Network (CWNYBLN), an organization of employers committed
to hiring individuals with disabilities. The CWNYBLN, with approximately 45 members, hosted two meetings to discuss how to best incorporate individuals with disabilities into the workforce.

- At the fall 2010 and spring 2011 Central New York Disability Services Council (CNYDSC) meeting, Cyrus Hamilton of Cornell’s Office of Student Disability Services conducted a workshop on document conversion techniques to make documents accessible for students with print-related disabilities. At the spring CNYDSC meeting, Andrea Haenlin-Mott of Cornell’s Division of Facilities Services spoke to the council on barrier removal and ADA compliance approaches.

- In June 2011, Cornell and the ADA Coordination team were recognized for their efforts in advancing accessibility for people with disabilities on campus by the New York State Disabilities Services Council.

- There have been a number of collaborations and activities related to disability access with the Cornell Union for Disability Awareness (CUDA), a disability advocacy student organization. CUDA students and the Cornell Food Science Club prepared and hosted meals with children from the Franziska Racker Centers. CUDA also hosted a showing of the film Murderball, a documentary about quadriplegic athletes who play wheelchair rugby.

- CUDA set forth a resolution to the Student Assembly to raise awareness about accessibility on campus at student organization events, in an effort to ensure that basic rights for people with disabilities are met. The resolution provides that student organization events need to be accessible to people with disabilities in the Cornell community. The proposed addition to the Student Assembly Finance Commission funding guidelines will require all student organizations to complete a Statement of Accessibility document prior to all events.

**Addressed Disability Access in Priority Areas**

For the 2010–2011 plan year, the university’s efforts focused on addressing compliance-related issues in four of the six priority areas: physical access, educational programs and services, employment, and communication. For the remaining two priority areas—technology and emergency preparedness and evacuation—there were meetings held to provide the foundation for the development of action steps for the 2011–2012 plan year.

1. Physical Accessibility

A number of advancements were made in addressing physical access on the Ithaca campus.

- The Project Approval Request form now includes ADA considerations for any project on campus in excess of $100,000. This prompt makes project managers address accessibility impacts for projects they are proposing, including how accessibility may be impacted during the construction of the project.
• Three accessibility protocols were finalized: 1) the physical access review of all new construction and renovation projects, which includes an accessibility examination of these projects during the planning stages; 2) the implementation of accessible parking for all temporary events on campus; and 3) the campus-wide designation of accessible parking spaces in lots on campus, rather than a lot-by-lot designation.

• The university made progress in following the ADA regulations for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal. A more accessible route to Ho Plaza (near Gannett) was established, and access to the Arts Quad near Morrill Hall was improved. Path of travel improvements were made along Sage Avenue in front of Carpenter Hall, between Duffield Hall and Carpenter Hall, and for the accessible entrance into Olin Hall. A feasibility study was conducted to upgrade access routes for Willard Straight Hall and another feasibility study is in progress to construct accessible restrooms at Barton Hall. Audible pedestrian signals were installed at Campus Road and College Avenue, and at the Thurston Avenue Bridge. Accessible restrooms were constructed in Uris Library and Guterman Laboratory.

• An accessible map, indicating accessible routes, parking, and entrances on the campus, was made available to the Cornell community through a link on the university’s home page.

• As part of our ADA obligations for planning the removal of physical barriers on campus, we integrated our access reviews into the Facility Physical Needs Management System (FPNMS)—an initiative for the Division of Facilities Services that tracks all building maintenance needs across campus. This allows us to effectively track and plan our barrier removal needs along with the development and implementation of our Facilities Accessibility Compliance Tracking (FACT) system—a program that is used in conjunction with FPNMS to prioritize projects and initiatives. To date, all endowed buildings and contract college facilities have been assessed for accessibility and the data collected regarding the accessibility deficiencies is being noted for the FPNMS system.

2. Educational Programs and Services
Progress was made in embedding disability awareness into the educational services Cornell provides.

• The Guide for Planning Accessible Events was developed and posted to the disability information website.

• The disability information website (http://www.cornell.edu/disability/) has been updated and includes more information and resources for the Cornell community.

• The Office of Student Disability Services’ Faculty Handbook: A Resource Manual for Providing Reasonable Accommodations to Students with Disabilities has been updated to include more information on web accessibility and captioning of YouTube videos used in instruction.
• The Office of Student Disability Services’ grievance procedure has been revised to involve the university’s discrimination grievance procedure, Policy 6.4. This change will provide consistency in addressing disability complaints.

• Cornell Career Services and the Office of Student Disability Services participated jointly in the Higher Education Collaboration Project sponsored by New York Makes Work Pay. This collaboration resulted in a year-long effort of programming and training for staff and students to improve employment outcomes for Cornell students with disabilities.

3. Employment

There were seven accomplishments in addressing disability access in the employment of faculty and staff at Cornell.

• Campus Life instituted a pilot program in which it hired employees from Challenge, a nonprofit, vocational services organization for individuals with disabilities. The employees were placed in dish machine operator positions in the Willard Straight Hall dining program.

• In an effort to increase awareness of the employment disability accommodation procedure, individuals requesting an accessible parking permit were informed about the option to request a work-related disability accommodation when they received their HP permit and letter.

• Adding to the university’s existing diversity recruitment strategies, Cornell became a registered Ticket to Work Employer. Administered by the Social Security Administration, the Ticket to Work program increases opportunities for Social Security disability beneficiaries to obtain employment, vocational rehabilitation, and other support services.

• In November 2010, an annual presentation to the Recruiter’s Roundtable/Case Managers was developed and implemented to highlight disability as an aspect of diversity in filling positions. A similar presentation was made for the Division of Facilities Services Diversity and Inclusion Council in February 2011.

• A resource matrix was created that identifies internal and external dispute resolution resources for faculty and staff with disabilities.

(http://hr.cornell.edu/diversity/communities/resolving_issues.pdf)

• To educate Cornell’s human resources staff about the changes in disability access obligations, the Office of Workforce Policy and Labor Relations presented a summary of changes and implications at the May 2011 Human Resources Community Meeting (attended by all human resources staff). The presenters asked the participants to advise the managers in their departments about these changes.

• A one page reference sheet was created for human resources professionals, supervisors, and managers that describes the disability accommodation process for faculty and staff.

(http://hr.cornell.edu/policies/all/disability_accommodation_faqs.html)
4. Communication

A number of accomplishments were made in the university’s efforts to increase the accessibility of its communication materials. Cornell also increased its communication to the community about how the university is addressing disability access.

- The disability website, which had been part of the diversity website, was moved to the university homepage this year to increase visibility of disability access resources and developments.
- University Communications launched Local List, a new events calendar that features maps with building locations and descriptions. When it is completed, the map will include disability access information.
- University Communications began using closed captioning to live stream high-profile university events, such as presidential speeches.
- To help the Cornell community understand the importance of addressing disability access, University Communications arranged for a close captioned Staff Notes series episode in March 2011 featuring Andrea Haenlin-Mott, in which she shared the “business case” for disability access and the university’s efforts in addressing accessibility on the campus. (http://www.cornell.edu/video?videoID=1135&startSecs=0&endSecs=954)

The university’s disability efforts were covered in campus publications, including the Cornell Chronicle and Pawprint.

- October 2010—The Chronicle reported on a grant that the ILR School received to study how employers can more effectively hire individuals with disabilities. (http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/Oct10/ILRDisabilityGrant.html)
- April 2010—A Chronicle article providing an update on the university’s progress in addressing disability access. (http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/April10/DiversityDisabilities.html)
- April 2010—The Chronicle highlighted how a student with a disability founded a student organization, the Disabilities Service Team, that assists disabled individuals with completing daily tasks. (http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/April10/Furguson.html)
- May 2011—A Pawprint article featured an interview with Andrea Haenlin-Mott to provide an update on campus accessibility.

5. Emergency Preparedness and Evacuation

Work was completed on the data needed for a comprehensive needs assessment of staff, faculty, and students on campus that will be conducted during a later plan year.

6. Technology

During this year, there were no specific actions for this priority; however, Information Technologies provided assistance to faculty in creating accessible web pages.
2011–2012 Goals and Objectives

For this plan year, goals have been established for all of the six priority areas.

1. Physical Access

- As part of the university’s overall ADA obligations, self-evaluation of the university’s physical space will continue, as well as the approval of a tool for self-evaluation and program review for all programs, services, and activities.

- An ADA Construction Accommodation Plan document will be created and implemented. It will be used by the Division of Facilities Services, colleges, and units in order to plan for short-term or long-term construction projects that will impact or limit ADA accessibility. This planning document will highlight the building or area impacted, time frame, accommodation plan, communication plan, and the contact information for the people responsible for the plan. This document and the subsequent plan it will create, will allow the university to continue to meet its ADA obligations during the construction process.

- This year, the expanded accessibility map will be completed to include building-specific information, such as accessible restrooms, elevator locations, and other accessibility features, including preferred entrances and assistive listening devices.

- The Cornell Design and Construction Standards will be updated to reflect the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design.

- The Facility Physical Needs Management System will be refined to reflect our identified barriers and ADA’s Readily Achievable Barrier Removal process in accordance with our obligations to have a plan to remove barriers on campus.

2. Educational Programs and Services

- Information and training will be provided to the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) to help the staff understand disability obligations under Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, and guidance on addressing these issues as part of their grant and contract requirements. This will include providing regular training on disability access as part of the OSP staff’s ongoing compliance training.

- A training session will be developed and implemented for event planners on how to effectively use the Guide to Planning Accessible Events.

- A self-evaluation tool will be developed for departments to review their level of disability accessibility, and an implementation plan will be created for working with units on how to use this self-evaluation tool.
3. Employment

• Training will be provided for faculty and staff on changes to the Americans with Disabilities Act and the recent U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations. This will help them to understand the focus on accommodation, and not disability, and will make them aware of the additional impairments and conditions that qualify as a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA). The training will include: 1) creating awareness, at supervisory levels, to identify situations where accommodations could be useful, and to know when and how to refer staff for assistance with disability accommodation inquiries; and 2) using publications, articles, and webcasts to explain the accommodation process to employees.

• A program will be put in place to create awareness within the frontline staff and general population to improve visibility of, and access to, the disability accommodation process, including self-reporting. A pilot of this awareness program will be conducted with the Division of Facilities Services and with the Division of Human Resources and Safety Services.

• A meeting will be held for the disability service providers in the local community and Cornell University recruitment managers. The meeting will create relationships between Cornell’s hiring managers with positions to fill and the local service providers hoping to place clients in meaningful work opportunities.

• The forms to request disability accommodations for employment will be revised to coincide with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act regulations.

4. Communications

• Efforts will continue in developing a communication strategy to inform the Cornell community of our commitment to disability access. This will be accomplished, in part, through completion of the re-design of the university’s disability website, continued development of the Local List, new Chronicle and Pawprint articles about disability access, and by featuring staff from Cornell’s disability services offices in the Staff Notes series on Cornell Cast.

• The university events calendar will be enhanced to incorporate disability access. When an event is added to the website, the coordinator for that event will be advised that disability access questions will be sent to them.

• University Communications will pursue the creation of a multi-source budget line to support closed captioning for live web streams.

• Strategies will be developed to inform the campus community, particularly managers, of the university’s disability compliance obligations.
5. Emergency Preparedness and Evacuation

- A form will be developed that will allow people with disabilities to self-report any assistance they may need in the event of an emergency.
- Spillman Computer-Aided Dispatch software, currently used by CU Police, will be implemented in a new way and will allow Environmental Health and Safety to know of the people who used the self-reporting form described above.

6. Technology

- We will continue to execute the standards for accessible web design as part of Cornell’s new Information Technologies principles. There will be coordination between existing groups within Cornell Information Technologies who are working on this initiative.
- Information Technologies service center directors will be educated about ADA requirements for accessibility, and technology access responsibilities will be added to their position descriptions.

Conclusion

Cornell University has been recognized on a number of fronts in its efforts to be a “best employer.” As with other aspects of diversity, the university will strive to achieve this same status for its efforts with disability access. The university’s third year of creating the disability strategic plan will result in continued work to accomplish the goals outlined above, and will present a way to communicate its progress.

The implementation and success of this disability strategic plan will be enhanced by the support of the senior leadership. The Executive Disability Access Steering Committee will work with other members of senior management to disseminate the university’s commitment to disability access, provide updates on increasing disability access on the campus, and garner support for the continued progress in addressing disability access through the strategic plan.
APPENDIX

Executive Disability Access Steering Committee:

Susan Murphy—vice president for the Division of Student and Academic Services
Elmira Mangum—vice president for the Division of Budget and Planning
Kyu Whang—vice president for the Division of Facilities Services
Mary Opperman—vice president for the Division of Human Resources and Safety Services
Laura Brown—vice provost for Undergraduate Education
Tommy Bruce—vice president for the Division of University Communications
Steve Schuster—interim executive director of Cornell Information Technologies
Jim Gibbs—director of the Department of Maintenance Management

ADA Coordination Team: (also part of the Steering Committee)

Lynette Chappell-Williams—associate vice president for the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity
Kappy Fahey—director of the Office of Student Disability Services
Andrea Haenlin-Mott—ADA Coordinator for the Division of Facilities Services