Guidance on Digital Accessibility Compliance
Using a Risk-Focused Approach

May 2025

TAKING A RISK-FOCUSED APPROACH

Considering the recent addition to Title II of the ADA regarding digital accessibility, the UWSA Digital Accessibility Working Group offers the following guide for fulfilling the compliance obligations based on a risk-focused approach. This is intended as internal guidance only for informational purposes.

In general, UW universities are encouraged to identify, evaluate and remediate barriers to accessibility of all digital content. To prioritize evaluation and remediation, UW universities may use a risk-informed approach to identify digital content that is:

✓ In high usage;
✓ In student-facing, high-revenue, or publicly attended activities;
✓ On widely advertised web, mobile or multi-media applications or platforms; and/or
✓ In close connection to a university's mission.

The following guidance is intended to assist universities in determining how to incorporate the necessary steps to implement the new requirements under the UW System Administrative Policy SYS 655. Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Applications (hereinafter referenced as "SYS 655") on or before April 24, 2026. This document is intended as a guiding tool only.

ACADEMIC COURSE CONTENT

Phase I: Training

All instructors should complete all relevant training courses on Title II of ADA digital accessibility standards based on WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards and SYS 655.

Phase II: Archive Content

Any existing academic course content in a LMS that is not currently being used for educational purposes with no plans for future use should be archived. Any archiving or deletion of records of any kind, including course materials, should be conducted in accordance with the UWSA and/or university's records retention policies and procedures. [Note: Please contact your Records Officer for additional information and guidance.]

Phase III: Existing Course Content

Any and all <u>existing course content</u> in a LMS that is intended to be used in the nearest academic term should be reviewed and remediated first. Then, take steps to review and remediate other course content for use in later terms.

- ✓ Examples of academic courses or programs to potentially prioritize first to minimize risk of exposure to noncompliance (non-exhaustive list):
    - o General education courses with larger student enrollments (higher risk due to exposure to more students);
    - o Degree programs that are focused on careers where the student would work with individuals with visual, hearing or learning disabilities (special education, vocational rehabilitation); or
    - o Courses with content that would be easier to remediate (lower hanging fruit)

Phase IV: Newly Developed Course Content

Any and all <u>newly developed course content</u> within Canvas or other LMS during the upcoming 2025-26 academic year (and beyond) should be created in a digital format that fulfills the accessibility requirements under WCAG 2.1 AA standards and SYS 655.

Note: See similar suggestions offered above for prioritizing courses to focus on first.

WEB CONTENT AND MOBILE APPLICATIONS

Phase I: Training

All employees who are responsible for web content and mobile apps should complete <u>applicable training modules</u>, in accordance with WCAG 2.1 Level AA and SYS 655.

Phase II: Archive Content

Any existing websites and related pages, including electronic documents, which are no longer up to date or relevant should be archived. Prioritize removal of public-facing webpages before internal or intranet webpages. Any archiving or deletion of records of any kind should be conducted in accordance with the UWSA and/or university's records retention policies and procedures. [Note: Please contact your Records Officer for additional information and guidance.]

Phase III: Existing Web Content and Mobile Applications

Any and all <u>existing web content and mobile applications</u> that are accessible to the public should be reviewed and remedied for accessibility in accordance with WCAG 2.1 AA standards and SYS 655.

Phase IV: Newly Developed Web Content and Mobile Applications

Any and all <u>newly developed web content and mobile applications</u> (whether public-facing or not) should be created in an accessible format in accordance with WCAG 2.1 AA standards and SYS 655.

Phase V: Existing and Newly Acquired Third Party Services

All employees with responsibility over the creation, maintenance and/or updating of digital tools and electronic resources should review all existing third-party services to determine whether said services are compliant with accessibility requirements in accordance with SYS 655.

All newly acquired third party services related to web content, mobile applications, and digital tools should be verified as accessible in accordance with SYS 655 on or before April 2026.

CONTRACTS AND PURCHASE OF DIGITAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Digital tools and electronic resources created, maintained, hosted, or delivered by third parties for use in a university's services, programs, or activities must be accessible pursuant to SYS 655.

Phase I: Current or existing third-party contracts

UW universities should consider designating a university representative (main point of contact) who will be responsible for collecting and reviewing all existing procurement contracts, purchases or agreements that involve services for digital web content, mobile applications or other types of services that would be subject to SYS 655 on or before April 24, 2026.

Upon designating a person, prioritize a list of contracts or agreements to collect and review terms and conditions (to verify accessibility or make amendments) by the following:

- ✓ University-wide services (largest impact on operations)
- ✓ Most widely used in academic programs or courses
- ✓ Larger monetary purchase
- ✓ Purchase contracts with shorter terms (if up for renewal, may renegotiate or terminate)
- ✓ Any other factor that would warrant more immediate review and action

Note: For existing vendors, please see Phase II (Step Two) below to assess whether the vendor can verify that their product/services are or will be accessible (with a firm deadline).

Phase II: Future third-party contracts

Step One: Communicate to all procurement officers, purchasers, contracting personnel and/or persons with signature authority that no contract or agreement shall be executed unless and until advanced review and approval has been received from a named contact person or office.

Step Two: During procurement processes, such as requests for proposals (RFPs) or requests for bids (RFBs), and in contracts, UW universities may incorporate language notifying potential third-party vendors and requiring that:

- ✓ Digital content procured, created, or maintained under the contract must comply with the WCAG 2.1 Level AA accessibility standards and SYS 655; and
- ✓ Vendors provide a completed Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) or functional equivalent, either as an addendum to a bid/proposal, prior to executing a contract, or upon the university's request; and
- ✓ If a Vendor fails to maintain compliance with WCAG 2.1 Level AA, or the University identifies an accessibility barrier in a product or service that renders the product or service inaccessible or unusable to people with disabilities, the University shall notify the Vendor of non-compliance. Upon notice, the vendor shall immediately take action to create a conforming alternative version that meets WCAG 2.1 Level AA. *See [SYS 655 Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Applications Guidance](#).*

Step Three: On or before January 1, 2026, UW universities should consider assessing existing third-party vendors' compliance with SYS 655 through a completed VPAT or a manual accessibility review of digital content procured, created, or maintained by said third-party vendors.

Note: If an accessibility request or requirement of a digital tool or electronic resource significantly changes the intent or purpose of the content, course or service, or results in a significant burden or cost, the individual should notify their supervisor who should contact the Office of General Counsel or university legal counsel for legal advice.

Resources :

- [UW System Administrative Policy SYS 655. Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Applications](#)
- [Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Applications Guidance](#)

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Disclaimer: This document is intended solely as guidance and does not contain any mandatory requirements except where requirements found in statute or administrative rule are referenced. This guidance does not establish or affect legal rights or obligations and is not a final determination of issues addressed. This guidance does not create any rights enforceable by any party in litigation with the State of Wisconsin or the Board of Regents.