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FOR RELEASE:
Dec. 12, 2014

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U.S. Education Department Reaches Agreement with Youngstown State University to Ensure Equal Access to its Websites for Individuals with Disabilities

The U.S. Department of Education announced today that its Office for Civil Rights has entered into an agreement with Youngstown State University in Ohio to ensure that the school's websites comply with federal civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability.

The agreement ends an OCR investigation and commits the 13,000-student public institution in northeast Ohio to providing equal access to educational opportunities for students with disabilities and to ensuring that the school's websites are accessible to persons with disabilities, including students, prospective students, employees and visitors.

"I applaud Youngstown State University for agreeing to make its websites – through which it increasingly provides information to employees, applicants, students and others – fully accessible to all, including to individuals with disabilities," said Catherine E. Lhamon, assistant secretary for civil rights. "Web inaccessibility could significantly deter applications and participation from students with disabilities; this resolution ensures that Youngstown State can fully serve its entire student population, consistent with the law."

As part of this investigation, OCR examined the accessibility of the university's websites to persons with disabilities, particularly those with sensory impairments who may require the use of assistive technology to access the sites.

OCR determined that the school was not in compliance with two federal laws that the office enforces—Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. In the first instance, Youngstown State's websites were not readily accessible to persons with disabilities. And in the second, OCR found that the university was not fully in compliance with the regulatory requirements regarding the publication of a notice of nondiscrimination in relevant documents.

In response to these determinations, the university entered into a resolution agreement to ensure that content on its websites is accessible to individuals with disabilities and that it is providing an equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities to participate in and benefit from its online learning environment.

Under terms of the agreement, the Youngstown State will:

- Develop and publish one consistent notice of nondiscrimination that includes contact information for the person(s) designated to ensure compliance with Section 504 and Title II.
- Develop, adopt and provide notice of a Web accessibility policy and an implementation and remediation plan to ensure adherence to the policy, including particular attention to a prioritized conversion of image-based documents to accessible materials.
- Provide training to staff responsible for webpage and content development, including faculty and

- Review its website and e-learning platform(s) to identify and fix any accessibility problems, as well as to put in place mechanisms to ensure that the sites continue to be accessible.
- Provide certification from a third-party web accessibility consultant or an employee of the university with sufficient knowledge, skill and experience that the university's electronic and information technologies meet the technical standard(s) adopted by the school.
- Provide OCR with reports describing its efforts for multiple subsequent school years to comply with its Web accessibility policy and plan, including information documenting any compliance issues discovered through the monitoring, audits, or complaints and the actions taken to correct those issues. And,
- Ensure that access to computer labs, especially regarding provision of assistive technology, is comparable to that of students without disabilities, and that accurate notice is given to students, faculty, staff, and other beneficiaries able to utilize university computer labs that these services are available.

A copy of the resolution letter can be found [here](#), and the agreement is posted [here](#).

OCR's mission is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation through vigorous enforcement of civil rights. OCR is responsible for enforcing federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination by educational institutions on the bases of disability, race, color, national origin, sex, and age, as well as the Boy Scouts of America Equal Access Act of 2001.

For details on how the office handles civil rights cases, please [click here](#).