

Advisory Group for Accessibility, Disability, and Universal Design

Rhodes College

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Purpose of Advisory Group

In the fall of 2022, Rhodes College established the Advisory Group on Accessibility, Disability, and Universal Design, which reflects The College’s commitment to institutional inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility and to fostering a sense of belonging among all members of the college community, including persons with disabilities. The advisory group’s role is to ensure broad institutional input on matters relating to persons with disabilities of all

- Advise the president and senior leadership regarding access compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and best practices in fostering a truly inclusive, diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

Group Membership

Advisory group membership consists of faculty, staff, and students. Initial members were appointed in 2022 by Carroll Stevens, J.D., interim president of Rhodes College. Members for 2023-2024 are listed below.

Faculty:

- Kim Brien, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Chemistry
- Eric Gotlieb, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Mathematics & Computer Science
- Eric Henager, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Spanish
- Vanessa Rogers, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Music

Staff:

- Anne Beard, Chief of Staff, Co-Chair
- Darlene Brooks, Director, Barret Library
- Melissa Butler, Director of Student Accessibility Services, Co-Chair

- Completed to date: Compiled a comprehensive list of all digital platforms currently used at Rhodes College. Researched best practices for digital access and explored ways to ensure that accessibility is considered when the college purchases new software.
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2023-2024

Anne Beard and Melissa Butler co-chaired the advisory group from fall 2023 through summer 2024. The advisory group met once during fall 2023 and once during spring 2024. Below is a summary of progress during this period. The group decided to continue focusing on the digital, learning, and physical environments.

Student Accessibility Services Updates

- 24% of Rhodes students were registered and approved for accommodations during 2023-24.
- AIM software: SAS was approved to acquire and implement a new data management software, AIM, during summer 2024. AIM will streamline SAS processes for the 470+ registered students with disabilities and improve faculty notification letters. There will be a student portal and a faculty portal. This request was supported by the advisory group.
- Anthology Ally software: SAS, Student Success, and Academic Affairs were approved to acquire and implement Anthology Ally software during fall 2024. Anthology Ally will integrate with Canvas, allowing all students to select their format preference for digital materials (e.g., mobile-friendly, PDF, audio, digital braille, etc.). Ally then instantly converts and provides the requested format. It also provides guidance for fixing access issues and institutional data on progress. This request was supported by both the advisory group and the Diversity & Equity faculty committee.
- During 2024-25, SAS will promote AIM and Anthology Ally software awareness with faculty, staff, and students, and assess the impact on the learning and digital environments.

Digital Environment Subcommittee Updates

- Information Services confirmed that the college considers accessibility compliance when acquiring new digital platforms.
- In order to raise awareness on promoting greater digital accessibility on campus, we need to first clarify the scope (e.g., for existing platforms or for websites, PDFs, hyperlinks, alt text, etc.).
- The acquisition of Anthology Ally software will significantly improve accessibility in the digital environment, moving us forward with Universal Design by ensuring accessible digital content for all students. The provision of institutional data and guidance on accessibility of course content will allow Rhodes to assess digital access progress over time.

Learning Environment Subcommittee Updates

- The subcommittee discussed ways to include accessibility representation in standing faculty/campus committees (e.g., DEI faculty committee, technology and academic space planning faculty committee, etc.) and ways to get Universal Design on the campus radar to make it second nature.

- Eric Gotlieb agreed to lead the subcommittee this year and explored options for elevating the access/SAS lens.
- SAS Director was voted by faculty to become a permanent ex-officio member of the Diversity & Equity faculty committee.
- The advisory group discussed ways for students with disabilities and SAS to improve partnerships with faculty. The subcommittee will explore conversations and/or small focus groups with students with disabilities and the possibility of revising the Testing Room assessment and faculty concerns.
- SAS will continue to promote best practice resources for accessible course/program materials and inclusive event planning. SAS has received feedback from faculty that they need professional development in areas of accessible digital content and Universal Design for learning. The topic of access will be included in August faculty development training and new faculty orientation.

Physical Environment Subcommittee Updates

- SAS and subcommittee members continued to maintain a spreadsheet for physical barriers and the college's response efforts.
- The subcommittee discussed reviewing the 1996 campus audit and determining next steps. Considering that today's needs may require/desire more than one accessible entrance per building, we could consider dividing this task into multiple parts: (1) Initial survey looking at 1996 report; Rhodes decides internal priorities. (2) More detailed survey to clarify barriers and fixes. (3) Identify top improvements that would have the greatest impact. Note: The subcommittee was unable to manage this task with current workload demands. Additional guidance is needed.
- Subcommittee progress stalled somewhat due to the Director of Physical Plant's re-employment. A summer 2024 subcommittee meeting will be scheduled with Jeff McClain, new Director, to discuss next steps for subcommittee and preferred ways to promote reporting access barriers.

IDEAs 2.0

- Sherry Turner inquired about the group leading an Access/IDEAs 2.0 workshop during 2024-2025. Anne, Melissa, and Sherry will brainstorm and explore date options.

Membership Updates

- Three student members graduated in May 2024 and will need to be replaced for 2024-2025.
- The group needs to establish a process for new member selection and work toward a staggered replacement of members to avoid having all new members every three years.
- Moving forward, the group agreed that members will serve three-year terms, designate a leader for each subcommittee, and develop a timeline for future advisory group/subcommittee meetings.