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# 2003 NASCIO Recognition Awards Nomination Form

*Please complete entire form.*

**All nominations must be postmarked no later than Sunday, May 18, 2003.**

Title of Nomination: Missouri Assistive Technology - Web Accessibility

Project/System Manager: Sara Clark

Job Title: Web Coordinator

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## **Category for judging**

(please list only one): Accessibility & Participation

Person Nominating  
(if different than above): Diane Cordry Golden, Ph.D. and Tom Stokes

Job Title: Director, Missouri Assistive Technology Council / Technology Specialist

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*Please return nominations to:*

**2003 NASCIO Awards  
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## **Missouri Assistive Technology Web Accessibility**

### ***Executive Summary***

People with disabilities can be defined broadly as those with limitations in human actions or activities due to physical or mental impairments. Essentially, these folks may find the daily activities many of us take for granted beyond the scope of their ability to perform. The introduction of the computer and the Internet has had a tremendous impact on improving the options for those with disabilities to function in an able-bodied society. But it has also created challenges. Many software programs do not always lend themselves well to assistive technology devices (ATDs) designed to serve as the eyes for a person who is blind. The placement of an icon on an Internet screen may challenge someone with limited mobility to move and align a mouse pointer. Any number of other details invisible to the non-disabled world may obstruct the disabled person from accessing the same information and services now available electronically.

In order to address this issue and other related accessibility issues and maximize the ability of Missouri State Government and the state university system to serve its citizens, the Missouri Assistive Technology Council was established by state statute in 1993. The Council is charged to serve as an advocate for policies, regulations and programs to establish a consumer responsive, comprehensive assistive technology service delivery system. Meeting quarterly at a minimum, the Council reports annually to the Governor and the general assembly on council activities, programs and initiatives to increase access to assistive technology, as well as provide programmatic direction for all activities and services.

The Assistive Technology Council, in cooperation with the Missouri Office of Information Technology (OIT), developed and implemented statewide information technology accessibility standards. These standards are accessible from the OIT website at <http://oit.mo.gov/policies/accessibility.html> and are currently providing state agencies as well as state colleges and universities a common format to be used when developing or procuring information technology products and services.

An important initiative developed to meet the challenge of creating accessible websites was championed by Southwest Missouri State University (SMSU) in Springfield, Missouri. Through the efforts of Sara Clark, Web Coordinator, a web accessibility review system was developed in-house beginning in October 2001 and is an ongoing process that continues today. This project utilized student workers for the majority of the programming and Microsoft FrontPage was selected as the development software using VBScript in active server pages (ASP). The system utilizes a SQL database that stores the review, deadlines and communication. A demonstration of the Web Accessibility Review System can be accessed from the Southwest Missouri State University website at <http://wact.smsu.edu/demo/>. Please take the opportunity to explore the fine work being done by Sara Clark and her student workers.

## Missouri Assistive Technology Web Accessibility

### ***A. Description of Project***

People with physical, visual, hearing, and cognitive/neurological disabilities may have problems accessing the content of some web sites. Common accessibility problems that need to be addressed in web sites include: images without alternative text, uncaptioned audio or undescrbed video, lack of alternative information for users who cannot access frames or scripts, tables that are difficult to decipher when linearized, or poor color contrast.

Southwest Missouri State University (SMSU) is working to overcome these problems and provide access for all users, including those with disabilities, to official university web sites. Though the efforts of Sara Clark, Web Coordinator, a web accessibility review system was developed in-house beginning in October 1, 2001 and is an ongoing process that continues today. This project utilized student workers for the majority of the programming, thus providing the students with a “real life” work experience.

SMSU strives to make all official university web pages, including central, divisional/collegiate/departmental, organizational, and course pages on all campuses, ultimately accessible to the guidelines defined in the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board's *Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Standards* at <http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/508standards.htm>. During migration to compliancy, SMSU divided its pages into three tiers. Tier level I included any page designed specifically for individuals with disabilities—e.g., disability support, assistive technology support, learning diagnostic center, central web pages, web-based email, any page addressing issues of health, safety, welfare, and any page containing federally mandated information for the university community. Tier level II included divisional/collegiate/departmental web pages and web pages used to support course requirements. Tier level III included all official (non-personal) web pages not listed in tier I or II. Work is currently under way on Tier level I web pages and all new official web pages must comply with the prevailing conformance level. Web supervisors remove all outdated web pages from their sites as they convert the current pages to an accessible format.

A critical component in the successful long-term implementation of this policy is regularly scheduled process checks and assessments concerning the efficacy of the goals in relation to state-of-the-art technologies. Those charged with carrying out this action plan, as well as SMSU administration, approach this extremely large, ongoing, and critically important project with considerable flexibility. The Web Access Compliance Team posts the progress of this action plan online at <http://wact.smsu.edu/progress.asp>.

Web page supervisors are responsible for ensuring compliance of their pages with the SMSU web page accessibility policies. Several avenues of support are provided. The Web Access Compliance Team coordinates, prepares, and distributes guides in various formats. Instructional designers and instructional technology support specialists provide technical advice regarding discipline-specific issues and instructions. Training courses

are offered several times throughout the year by the web coordinator. Graduate assistants were hired and trained to review web pages for accessibility. Two additional instructional resources were utilized with the technical trainer including web access information in Microsoft® FrontPage® and web-related Short Courses, and the Disability Support Coordinator will provide some web access "awareness" and instruction in conjunction with courses/seminars presented through the Faculty Development Grant. The Web Access Compliance Team provides individualized support on accessibility issues to all web developers in the SMSU system. Supportive personnel, such as instructional technology support specialists and instructional designers further assist the instructors in their department or college in creating and converting course web pages to an accessible format. The web coordinator and the Assistive Technology Support Specialist provide specialized training and instruction to these supportive personnel. SMSU-West Plains Campus User Support specialists further assist SMSU-West Plains developers in creating and converting web pages to an accessible format.

The Web Access Compliance Team reviews university web pages for compliance with the web policy. The team consults the Disability Services Committee for advice or assistance with specific developmental tasks or phases. The team conducts reviews of web pages and makes recommendations for human intervention web policy. The team prepares and distributes reports highlighting the degree of accessibility compliance and their recommendations for achieving accessibility compliance, as indicated in the *Compliance Enforcement Procedures*. The Web Access Compliance Team (WACT) provides an online comment form for those with disabilities to complete regarding their needs and experiences with SMSU web pages. The WACT reviews the results, identifies any problems, and contacts web supervisors or the Disability Services Committee as necessary.

Compliance enforcement procedures were established allowing the Web Access Compliance Team to prepare and distribute reports to web supervisors that include the degree of accessibility compliance and recommendations for achieving accessibility compliance. Accompanying the reports is a link to an online form where web page supervisors can notify the WACT that they have completed the necessary changes. Web supervisors are notified on their report that they will have six months to make their web pages accessible and return the completed report. Two weeks prior to the six-month deadline, the Web Access Compliance Team sends a second notice to web supervisors. This notice tells web supervisors that they have two weeks to finish making their pages accessible and return the form, or contact the Web Access Compliance Team. Web supervisors requiring additional time to make the necessary accessibility changes can contact the Web Access Compliance Team to request an extension to his or her site's deadline. These extensions are granted based on the web supervisor's prior attempts to make his or her site compliant and to the size and complexity of the site. Upon receiving the completed online form, the Web Access Compliance Team re-checks the web pages under review. The team then notifies the web supervisor whether they have successfully brought their pages into compliance or need to continue their efforts.

If web supervisors refuse to comply or do not contact the Web Access Compliance Team within the six month timeframe and do not respond to the reminders, the Web Access Compliance Team will remove the web pages from the SMSU web server. In place of the removed pages, a notice will be posted that states the web pages are temporarily unavailable and lists contact information for the web page supervisor. Supervisors of web pages that have been removed from the server are not barred from publishing future pages on the SMSU web and may begin immediately to replace removed content with web pages that are compliant with the prevailing conformance level. Those supervisor will have access to all of the resources including instructional guides, training courses, and individual consultation. Web supervisors may appeal any decisions by first contacting the Web Access Compliance Team. Further appeals may be made to the Web Access Appeal Board, which includes the Vice President of Academic Affairs, Chief Information Officer, University Counsel, Dean of Students, and Equal Opportunity Officer.

### ***B. Significance to the Improvement of the Operation of Government***

The Southwest Missouri State University Web Accessibility system was developed to coordinate and review web pages for accessibility by individuals with disabilities. The system addresses the challenges created by State Statute RSMo 191.863, Federal Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. It provides web developers with the needed support to identify problem areas and provides management the tools necessary to track progress and ensure problems are resolved. This system will serve as a model for all state agencies to follow when developing and maintaining websites.

### ***C. Benefits Realized***

Web developers will have a process by which they can break websites into manageable chunks, identifying the most critical pages to their individual operations, pages that were designed specifically for individuals with disabilities, and pages that address issues of health, safety, welfare, and any page containing state statute mandated information. Priority can be given to review and compliance of these pages following procedures outlined above that ensure regular review and follow-up to ensure goals are being accomplished. Adequate support in the form of instructional guidelines, training, and technical support have been provided to assist with completion of tasks and answer questions, and effective appeals processes have been identified.

This program, developed by SMSU, provides a consistent, repeatable methodology for all web developers. The benefits are realized when Missouri citizens with disabilities are able to access information and services electronically from either Missouri State Government or state college and university websites. When this happens, all participants in electronic government are benefactors.

#### ***D. Return on Investment***

Although a dollar-savings measurement is yet to be identified, the intangible results are invaluable. With a program such as Web Accessibility, individuals with disabilities will have access to and use of information and services comparable to the access and use by individuals without disabilities. It certainly removes the ‘dis’ from this term, essentially providing all citizens with the ‘ability’ to communicate and interact within this society.

The Web Accessibility site is accessible from the Southwest Missouri State University website at <http://wact.smsu.edu/demo/>. Please take the opportunity to explore what this program has to offer.