

## **Strategic Direction VI: *Support and Promote Environmental Sustainability***

### **• DISABILITY ACCESS REVIEW OF FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS**

In order to recruit and retain the most diverse and talented pool of students, staff and faculty, among whom are individuals with disabilities, the college must be a welcoming and accessible learning, working, and teaching environment. Strategic planning provides a timely and historic opportunity to evaluate the college's capacity to assure equal access to its facilities and programs. Disability non-discrimination laws fundamentally require the college to assure equal access to its programs, which may or may not require facility modifications. Based on the findings and recommendations of the Common Ground project and the work of the Disability Access Advisory Committee, we offer a joint proposal approved by both committees that the college **develop a specific plan for assuring current compliance with program accessibility requirements under Section 504 and the ADA as well as priorities for facility improvements over time.**

In order to develop a plan for equal access the college should:

- Conduct a disability access review involving an updated accessibility audit of facilities and a program access review process to be completed within a two to three year period, with priority given to those programs and facilities that are essential to support new programs and opportunities created to address the college's eight new strategic directions.
- Develop a plan for disability access and compliance based on the facility and program review under the leadership of the Office of Institutional Diversity and the Office of Disability services with appropriate direction and support from senior staff and involvement of senior management throughout the college.

Specific collaboration with the Director of Operations and Facilities is essential to a successful facilities audit. The Office of Human Resources is another important collaborator with regard to conducting the program review, which may be modeled after previous organizational effectiveness assessments. Program directors and others must be involved in order to understand the relationships between facilities and programs in order to fully assess the level of existing accessibility and to develop a plan with short and long range goals for reasonable changes to facilities over time based on program needs. Outside expertise and consultation should be secured as needed to assure a comprehensive approach that is technically sound as well as organizationally and financially feasible within a reasonable time frame that will allow the results to inform development of initiatives related to all areas of strategic planning.

An anticipatory approach that examines the current level of accessibility will allow the college to identify, prioritize, and plan for needed changes in policies, programs, and facilities and identify and plan for funding necessary to assure equal access. A facility and program review will provide a foundation for understanding the human and financial

resources necessary to make Smith capable of supporting the diverse populations it hopes to serve well into the future.

**Accessibility and Sustainability:**

While sustainability is often framed in environmental terms, it is more accurately about both environmental and social sustainability. To support and promote sustainability we must give consideration and attention to those factors and conditions that support optimal human functioning within a given environment. Accessibility is integral to assuring participation and functioning of people with a wide range of abilities that change over time as people grow and age. Creating an accessible and inclusive community at Smith will require intentional design choices and focused efforts to assure both environmental and social sustainability

Planning for access at the design stage offers the opportunity to build structures and programs from the outset that incorporate and address the needs of a wide range of users. Cost savings are often possible and the need and expense of ongoing accommodations to overcome barriers is avoided. When access is integral to the way people learn, work, and live at Smith everyone can participate and benefit from all that the college has to offer in a more seamless and equitable way.

**Background**

Discrimination on the basis of disability has historically excluded individuals with disabilities from social, educational, and economic opportunities throughout our society and around the globe. Today laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, are increasing opportunities for people with disabilities to live and work as equal members of society. While it is important to provide needed accommodations and services to known individuals who identify themselves and request assistance, we have a growing population of people with disabling conditions who utilize Smith facilities and programs who are alumnae, visitors and guests. An access review is essential to planning for facility and programmatic changes as well as priorities for resource allocation to assure access to Smith academic and other programs. Equal access is required by disability non-discrimination laws, is in keeping with Smith's values and commitment to diversity, and is essential to achieving the mission of the college.

**Also pertinent:**

*Strategic Direction IV: Deepen Students' Awareness and Appreciation of Other Cultures and Global Issues*