Bakersfield College Accessibility Plan

DRAFT ONE

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Establish Accessibility Committee.

Accessibility affects everything that we do at Bakersfield College. The depth of the taskforce work has brought into focus the need to have a core established group that can address accessibility initiatives officially, not just as a temporary taskforce. The primary recommendation of our committee is to transform the taskforce into an established campus committee. The work of this group needs to be codified into an official committee sanctioned by the Academic Senate and provide an annual report to the Faculty Senate and College Council. It is notable that in 2020, the Bakersfield College Academic Senate supported the development of such a committee and the College Council did not finalize this committee creation. Notably, several California Community Colleges have established Accessibility committees. Furthermore, the taskforce argues that beyond dedicated campus staff in DSPS and counseling, there needs to be a faculty/ staff/student/manager coalition that is advising on matters campuswide. We offer the subsequent justifications for the permanent establishment of an Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Stabilize accessibility efforts. The establishment of a college wide committee is particularly vital because change in administrative leadership should not destabilize accessibility efforts. If a different college president is hired, and they do not want to focus on accessibility this temporary work could be decommissioned, or it can go somewhere else. The establishment of a committee would allow the work to continue. It is notable that this process worked for the Kern Community College District level accessibility efforts. Kern CCD started as a task force and then they worked towards making it an actual committee. The committee would also provide a platform for accessibility advocates; Bakersfield College has some super stars in staff, faculty, and administration when it comes to accessibility work, and they need a common place to advise and collaborate.

The Kern CCD Accessibility Committee has different needs than Bakersfield College. District efforts overlap with Bakersfield College but do not always meet our campus accessibility needs and we need a core group that speaks to the needs of our campus. The challenge with being a taskforce is that accessibility lives in multiple places on campus. Accessibility is always more than what folks are immediately thinking, that has been the experience of those who have been involved in campus accessibility work overtime. Many think that accessibility is a thing and you do it like running a race, and once you cross the finish line it is done, which is an inaccurate analogy. Accessibility is an ongoing hermetic process that never ends. A college does not just make things accessible, and the job is done. It is a constant process of engaging in how to make our institutions' opportunities available to everyone and being vigilant in learning about and following the principles of accessibility.

Bakersfield College serves a large diverse population. Bakersfield College has substantial enrollment numbers, nearly thirty thousand students. Throughout the county there are dozens of locations where classes are offered in the community. Rural needs: City Serve, Shafter, McFarland, Delano, Wasco, Job Spot (Southeast Bakersfield), Lamont and Arvin. Early College at dozens of high school campuses throughout Kern County. There are also thriving extension campuses in Delano, Southwest Bakersfield and soon in Arvin. The size and scope of the various populations that Bakersfield College serves demonstrates the need for its own dedicated committee.

Build a network between the accessibility and technology work happening throughout the campus. There are all these different avenues where this work is happening, but Bakersfield College is not leveraging all those groups together in the best conceivable way. Many areas focus on accessibility work including DSPS, the Education department, the Business department, web services, the library, Distance Learning taskforce, our ASL program, and Instructional Technology. If this committee continues, it can provide a voice to some of the things that are happening in the corners of the college and compiling that work in one place is a way to create awareness and compliance. The committee could help collaborate on an annual audit of verifying the accessibility of certain things such as instructional materials, senate documents or professional development. A lot of staff, faculty and administration know they have done some accessibility work, but they do not see the larger scope and the interconnectedness. An advisory committee would allow conversations about the difference between what DSPS does and what needs to happen for accessibility, like legally. What needs to happen for accessibility just because it is the right thing to do.

**Accessibility Compliance Apathy & Resistance**

Invest in Accessibility. In many instances, Bakersfield College uses contractors to ensure our materials are accessible. Our task force thinks changing the culture of our campus requires an investment in staff that support campuswide shifts to accessibility rather than depending on free online tools and volunteers. CSEA and CCA should be actively involved in conversation about job creations to help support and sustain the existing campus needs. At the least, hiring student assistants to aid in verification of documents that can be aiding staff and faculty would be immediately useful.

Create instructional videos. Over the last six years there has been huge resistance, but that has lessened over time, bringing us to this moment where people seem open to accessibility conversations. Bakersfield College is still missing the boat somewhere, and one way to help get out in the world would be promotional videos about what it means to be accessible, what benefits the students when something is automatically accessible, and they are not running into barriers. To make faculty and employees more aware of how their actions affect other people, because they are not doing it to be mean, it's just that it's never a part of their everyday life they are thinking about.

Compulsory Professional Development. We should be able to require everyone to take some training related to accessibility. This training could be part of a campus wide engagement effort, at an all staff meeting like opening day.

Accessibility as Part of Evaluation. Adding accessibility into the evaluation process to better comply with ACCJC (Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges). The Taskforce includes CSEA and CCA members who understand that this suggestion will need to be bargained with unions. However, to decrease the ADA verification burden on the staff, building this into workplace core expectations would ensure ongoing compliance. Furthermore, getting all the documents and converting for our disabled students could be easier if faculty and staff understood what makes materials accessible. We need more awareness to try to get equal access for every person on campus. The faculty handbook is woefully outdated and should be adjusted to include responsibilities and expectation of accessibility.

Accessibility Reference Sheets. Add to websites, worksheets for document creation for word, pdf, and PPT. If someone generated a quick reference sheet when staff are creating their materials, they may be willing to just reference that and help them get started or review previous trainings. Though this approach is not as in-depth as professional development training, it could be used as a refresher.

Accessibility day awareness day/campaign. An awareness campaign, where we partner with the library or other campus groups doing this work. An event could have computers that are set up with the technology, the software is already on school issued computers. The goal of the event would be to let people experience what it is like to explore a class that has not been made accessible versus one that is so they can really see how challenging that can be.

# **Continue Best Practices**

Provide templates. The Bakersfield College Academic Senate has provided templates for agendas, meeting minutes and reports that come to the Academic Senate. All the committee co-chairs were provided with these materials. It would be strong for administration to also utilize this practice of basic word documents to have a start.

Support Professional Development Opportunities. The Bakersfield College campus should continue to offer PD and emphasize in advertising that these are not unique to online faculty, but all instructional faculty understand accessibility. The campus has strong PD provided for accessibility strategies for the learning management system Canvas and how to make documents accessible. The ongoing offerings, not just at FLEX, provide ongoing support for everyone that works on campus. Including these workshops as part of programing to New Faculty Orientation and Adjunct Workshops are strong approaches that should be continued.