



Accessibility Fact Sheet

eCollege AU is the most *accessible* and most *usable* eLearning platform currently available. eCollege AU supports both Window-Eyes and JAWS Screen Readers – software that audibly renders what the sighted see thereby enabling use by the blind and visually impaired. Additionally, eCollege AU works well with most screen magnification software.

This document answers frequently asked questions about eCollege AU accessibility and highlights eCollege efforts to provide the most accessible eLearning platform for both instructors and students.

Is eCollege AU ADA Compliant?

eCollege AU is Section 508 compliant, meaning it meets the U.S. Federal Accessibility Standard for electronic and information technology. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act is different from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While the ADA has ‘jurisdiction’ over disability issues, it’s actually Section 508 that applies to the Internet.

Additionally, eCollege re-engineered internal support and development processes and departments to help our educational partners comply not only with the requirements of Section 508 but also with Section 504, ensuring all students are afforded equal access to information and software services.

What are the Legal Requirements for Accessible Online Education?

There are three key pieces of legislation all educational institutions should be kept aware of:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act requires accessibility for people with disabilities
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requires educational institutions offer accessible solutions
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act mandates certain technical specifications for the Internet

All three of these U.S. Federally legislated requirements identify accessibility as a civil right, and define accessibility as equal access to equal content and tools, insofar as eLearning is concerned. eCollege and eCollege AU stands alone in the market as addressing all three of pieces of legislation with our accessible platform, course development services, help desk support, and ASP model.

What does an accessible eLearning platform have?

The most recent Frequently Asked Questions, posted to www.section508.gov and hosted by the General Services Administration, stress a Section 508 implementation is comprised of both products *and* services:

- **Compliant Services:** “...agencies acquiring help desks must ensure that providers are capable of accommodating the communications needs of persons with disabilities...” (B.1.ii.). *Only eCollege offers a trained Help Desk staff using assistive technology.*
- **Accessible Multimedia:** “...if the product is multimedia (e.g. image and sound) and is considered ‘training or informational,’ then it must meet the applicable requirements of §1194.24...” (C.6.i.) *Only eCollege offers full course development services including closed captioning of any multimedia file.*

What disabilities and assistive technologies does eCollege AU support?

eCollege AU addresses all disabilities covered by Section 508 provisions. However, eCollege AU exceeded Section 508 standards by developing and testing our platform to ensure full usability by people with physical disabilities. This means eCollege AU can be used without vision and/or a full range of physical mobility. eCollege AU supports popular screen readers and screen magnifiers.

Why eCollege AU is the Most Accessible eLearning Platform

There are several features and services unique to eCollege that make eCollege AU the most accessible eLearning platform available. These same features and services make us a logical choice in any procurement environment concerned about the accessibility and hence legality of their online learning environment.

eCollege & eCollege AU	User & Client Benefit	Competition
Provide a full suite of Section 508 compliant	The General Services Administration and	No other eLearning service provider can

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services and solutions ensuring all users, regardless of disability, have equal access to all electronic information and technology.	<p>www.section508.gov identify Section 508 as a civil rights issue and indicate "Individuals with disabilities may file a complaint with an agency or bring a civil action in Federal Court for an agency's noncompliance with the requirements of Section 508."</p> <p>Only eCollege can guarantee, with our Section 508 compliant eLearning platform and assistive technology trained 24x7 Help Desk staff, equal access to all course content regardless of disability.</p>	<p>offer the level of dedicated support to all disabled users at the level provided by eCollege.</p> <p>Locally hosted solutions are not always equipped with trained technicians who are capable of supporting multiple disabilities and assistive technologies.</p>
<p>Fully Section 508 compliant, including our chat application.</p> <p>eCollege AU offers both a Java applet and an HTML-based chat option. Both are usable with popular assistive technologies.</p>	<p>For sometime now the accessibility community cast eCollege, WebCT, and Blackboard in a "chat race". eCollege won – meaning the disabled can participate in online chats <i>and</i> organizations can rest assured their online learning opportunities are not discriminatory.</p>	<p>No other eLearning provider provides a choice between a Java applet and an HTML, text-based chat environment.</p>
<p>24x7 Help Desk trained in the use of assistive technologies.</p> <p>The just released "Section 508 Acquisition FAQ's", available at www.section508.gov, highlight the need for compliant solutions to also offer compliant services, like Help Desk support for all users.</p>	<p>eCollege Help Desk can assist any disabled user with online tasks, configuring their assistive technology, and provide general support for their online learning experience.</p> <p>This is critical as it provides a buffer between the disabled student and failure, which can lead to a frustrating user experience, complaints against the university, and lawsuits against educational institutions.</p>	<p>No other eLearning provider can compete with our ASP model. Our up time and 24x7 help for the disabled is unique in the industry.</p> <p>With this eCollege can guarantee all students have access to their content – sparing the university or their I.T. department the headache of supporting not only their locally hosted eLearning platform but providing crucial support services for disabled instructors and learners.</p>
<p>Course Development and Instructional Designers trained in Section 508 standards and development techniques.</p>	<p>Any type of content used in our system can be made accessible and compliant with Section 508 by our Course Development services. We can close caption multimedia content and ensure an instructor's content is compliant and accessible.</p>	<p>Neither WebCT nor Blackboard have announced any plans to assist instructors with the development of accessible and compliant content.</p> <p>Though they claim to have compliant eLearning platforms there are no provisions for compliant and accessible content.</p>
<p>All users now have a Section 508 compliant and accessible eLearning platform.</p>	<p>Because eCollege is an ASP every eCollege user and client has a compliant and accessible platform.</p>	<p>Locally hosted solutions require additional software purchases and installations for their compliant code set.</p>
<p>Collapsible course navigation feature designed for screen magnifiers.</p>	<p>The ability to collapse the navigation frame in our course not only maximizes the content area but makes our system very usable for the visually impaired using screen magnifiers. This means less scrolling and more content are visible for these users.</p>	<p>No other eLearning provider has addressed the needs of the visually impaired use of screen magnification software.</p>
<p>Support for the leading Screen Readers and Screen Magnifiers.</p>	<p>eCollege AU supports the two largest screen readers and the largest screen magnifiers defined by market share.</p> <p>At eCollege a student is a student and an instructor is an instructor – our technology and services are so inclusive we consider assistive technologies the same as web browsers.</p>	<p>Some vendors offer some general guidance on assistive technologies but neither supports the disabled user and his/her technology with the degree of expertise and solution focused technology employed at eCollege.</p>
<p>Exceeded Section 508 Standards.</p>	<p>eCollege AU has been developed and tested to exceed Section 508 standards by ensuring full support for keyboard-only use. This goes beyond the requirements of Section 508 and addresses the needs of the mobility impaired.</p> <p>eCollege AU also implemented feature sets for screen magnifiers (see above).</p>	<p>No other eLearning vendor has addressed going beyond Section 508 to meet the needs of the mobility impaired and physically disabled.</p>