DEVELOPING A MODEL DISABILITY RESOURCE INFORMATION CENTER (DRIC) FOR AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE U.S.

By

By Jayanta K. Bandyopadhyay and James P. Scott
Central Michigan University

ABSTRACT

In order to ensure equal opportunity for all people with disability, the U.S. Congress extended the 1961 Civil Right Act to include people with disabilities by enacting Americans with Disability Act (ADA) in 1990, and continuously funded a number of organizations for providing various types of support services to people with disabilities. Under ADA all institutions of higher education in the U.S are also required to provide equal opportunity to their disable students, faculty, staffs by providing various types of disability related services. This paper attempts to develop a model for an internet based disability resource information center for an institution of higher education in the U.S as a part of information resource management for improving the facility and the performance of their employees, and students with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Census 2000 counted 49.7 million people with some type of disability in the United States of America (1). This represented 19.3 percent of the total 257.2 million people who were aged 5 and older in the civilian but non-institutionalized population. or nearly one person out of five of the U.S. population (2). This estimate, however, excludes people in the military, war veterans, and those who are committed to institutions. In order to ensure equal opportunity for all people with disabilities, U.S. Congress extended the 1961 Civil Right Act to include people with disabilities by passing Americans with Disability Act in 1990.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

In 1990 U.S. Congress enacted Americans with Disability Act (ADA) to ensure equal opportunity for people with disabilities. And to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, State and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications. It also applies to United States Congress (5).

An individual with a disability is defined by the ADA as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment. The ADA, however, does not specifically name all of the impairments that are covered, but accepts the determination and recommendation of a licensed physician in this respect (5).

Title I of ADA requires all employers with 15 or more employees to provide qualified individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from the full range of opportunities available to other employees. Religious and educational entities with 15 or more employees are also covered under title I (5).

Title II of ADA covers all activities of State and local governments regardless of the government entity's size or receipt of federal funding. Title II requires that State and Local governments give people with disabilities an equal opportunity to all of their programs, services, and activities (e.g. public education, employment, transportation, recreation, health care, social services, court, voting and town meetings). They also must provide access in inaccessible older building and communicate effectively with people who have hearing, vision, or speech disabilities. They are required to make reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures where necessary to avoid discrimination, unless they can demonstrate that doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity being provided (5).

Title III of ADA covers businesses and nonprofit service providers that offer public accommodations, and privately operated entities offering certain types of courses and examinations, such as schools, colleges, and universities. It also covers privately operated transportation, and commercial facilities, such as airlines, buses and retail outlets (5).

Title III of ADA requires that courses and examinations related to professional, educational, or trade-related applications, licensing, certifications, or credentialing must be provided in a place and manner accessible to people with disabilities or alternative accessible arrangements must be offered (5). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 also prohibits universities, colleges, and educational institutions from discriminating against or excluding qualified individuals with disabilities from its program, services and activities

Thus, under the ADA, all educational institutions including elementary, intermediate, and high schools, as well as two-year and four-year colleges, and universities must comply with basic nondiscrimination requirements that prohibit exclusion, segregation, and unequal treatment of people with disabilities including students, faculty and staff and their families (5).

ADA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The ADA Technical Assistance program was funded in 1991 by National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) within the office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) of the U.S. Department of Education. Under this ADA Technical Assistance Program, ten regional Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTAC) were created by NIDRR in 1991 to provide information, training, and technical assistance to employers, people with disabilities, and other entities with responsibilities under ADA (7). Each center works closely with local businesses, disability, government, rehabilitation, and other professional networks to provide ADA information and assistance related to employment, public services, public accommodation, and communications. These centers particularly emphasizes in better understanding of disability-related legislation which may impact on rights of individuals and responsibilities of employers and businesses (8). The following are also some of the resource information systems created in the past decade.

The DOOR (Disability, Opportunities and Other Resources) Online System

Prior to 1993, in Colorado, there had been a number of telephone-based, paper-based, computer-based electronic information and referral systems serving people with disabilities, their family members, and supporting agencies. But the general consensus was that these listings were incomplete, out-of-date, and not disability focused, or insufficiently representative of local, state, and national resources. As the number of people searching for disability related resource information continued to grow, the need for an accessible searchable resource listing was strongly

recognized . In 1993, a group of information and resource providers began meeting to identify common interest and goals in establishing a disability resource data base Ultimately, the group became the developer of DOOR (Disabilities, Opportunities, and Other Resources) Online System. The group members were comprised of a diverse representation of disability related service providers which included Colorado Department of Education (CDE), Colorado Assistive Technology Project (CATP), Access Colorado Library and Information Network (ACLIN), Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, The Children's Hospital, Colorado Community College and Occupational Education Systems (CCCOES), and Resources for Young Children and Families, Incorporated. The DOOR Online was designed to provide information on resources and services supporting the diverse needs of the residents of Colorado particularly those interested in disability related information (12).

Ensuring accurate, current, and detailed data on service providers, publications and training projects, etc. were accomplished by setting up agencies utilizing individual community managers, who are also experts in their field, and respond directly to the needs of data updating and maintenance directly related to their constituents. As more and more agencies were set up, the response to annual data qualification requests and utilization of the DOOR Online system had greatly exceeded the anticipated results (more than 75%) within the first five months of its operation (13). DOOR Online currently works in conjunction with the Colorado Assistive Technology Project (CATP) to provide training for (SWAAC) Statewide Assistive Augmentative Alternative Communication team members. Throughout Colorado. training and demonstrations are currently ongoing activities for Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and coordinators (13).

Driver Rehabilitation Service Information System

Driver Rehabilitation Services at Bloorview MacMillan Center (BMC) in Toronto, Ontario, Canada and a number of other similar centers across Ontario currently provides assessment and services to approximately 800 drivers per year with various physical and medical disabilities. In 1996 BMC developed a computer based information system for storing, updating, and disseminating disability resource information to service providers, administrators, and researchers. The System stores all clients' data ranging from observing, monitoring, assessment, in an accurate, concise, and convenient form for instant retrieval. This data base system provided important services to client members, and important information to service providers related to type, length, and success of retraining of specific disability groups, such as CVA related disabilities.. This project was supported by a grant from the Ministry of Transportation, Ontario, Canada (14).

American Management Systems

In the year 2000, under a $1.2 million U.S Government contract, American Management Systems, Incorporated. a private contractor, redesigned typefaces and graphics to make navigation, and added various online tools for accessing information in most government internet sites by disabled people with impaired motor skills. One major site that was redesigned is the Health Care Financing Administration's portal for Medicare beneficiaries. Since the redesign was completed in May 2000, traffic at www.medicare.gov has more than doubled to 800,000+ visits a month (15).

The Conceptual Model of the Integrated (NDRIC)

A conceptual model of this integrated (NDRIC) National Disability Resource Center is presented in Figure 1.
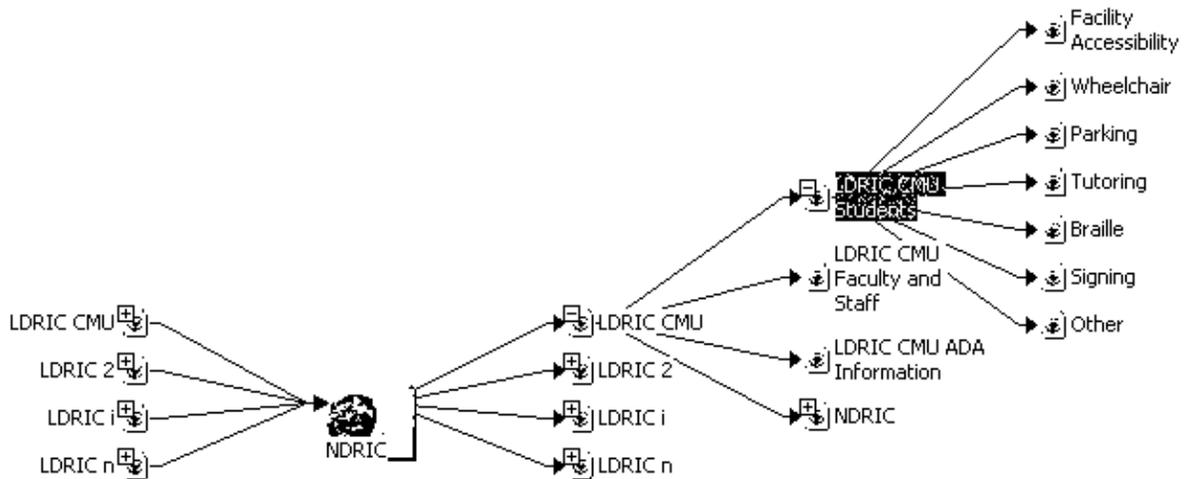

Figure 1. A conceptual model of the integrated NDRIC

LEGEND:

NDRIC = Integrated National Disability Resource Information Center
LDRIC-CMU = Local Disability Resource Information Center at CMU
LDRIC-2 = Disability Resource Information Center at 2nd institution
LDRIC-i = Local Disability Resource Information Center of ith institution
N = total number of institution of higher institution in the 48 states of the US

DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTEGRATED NDRIC SYSTEM

This integrated (NDRIC) system may be developed and maintained as follows:

1. As a part of the accreditation requirement each institution of higher education should be required to develop a Local Disability Resource Information Centers (LDRICs), (in our case at Central Michigan University).
2. All these LDRICs should be linked together to form the NDRIC.
3. NDRIC should maintain the services web pages.
4. NDRIC should provide web site templates to LDRICs.
5. LDRICs should customize and post templates to their web sites.
6. Information may be retrieved using alphabetic search of the institution's LDRICs.

As a preliminary study, a prototype Local Disability Resource Information Center (LDRIC) with Databases containing disability resource information for students, faculty, staff and their families has been developed at Central Michigan University. This LDRIC data bank currently contains the following sets of databases as shown in Figure 2

- Disability resource information for students,
- Disability resource information for faculty and staff, and
- Information related to Americans with Disability Act.

These data bases have been successfully developed and installed in College of Business Administration's Server and is ready to be launched in the Internet. After launching in the internet, it will be monitored continuously for its utilization and effectiveness.
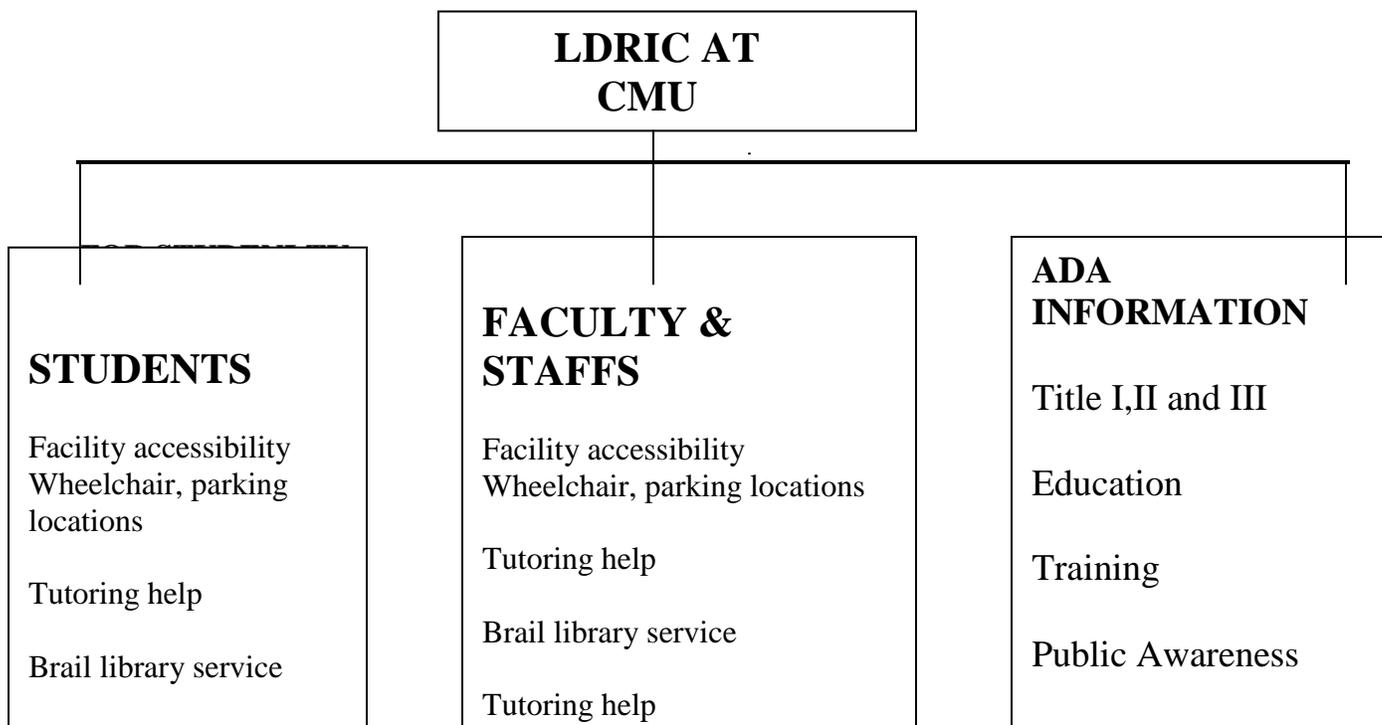

LDRIC AT CMU

STUDENTS

Facility accessibility
Wheelchair, parking locations

Tutoring help

Brail library service

FACULTY & STAFFS

Facility accessibility
Wheelchair, parking locations

Tutoring help

Brail library service

Tutoring help

ADA INFORMATION

Title I,II and III

Education

Training

Public Awareness

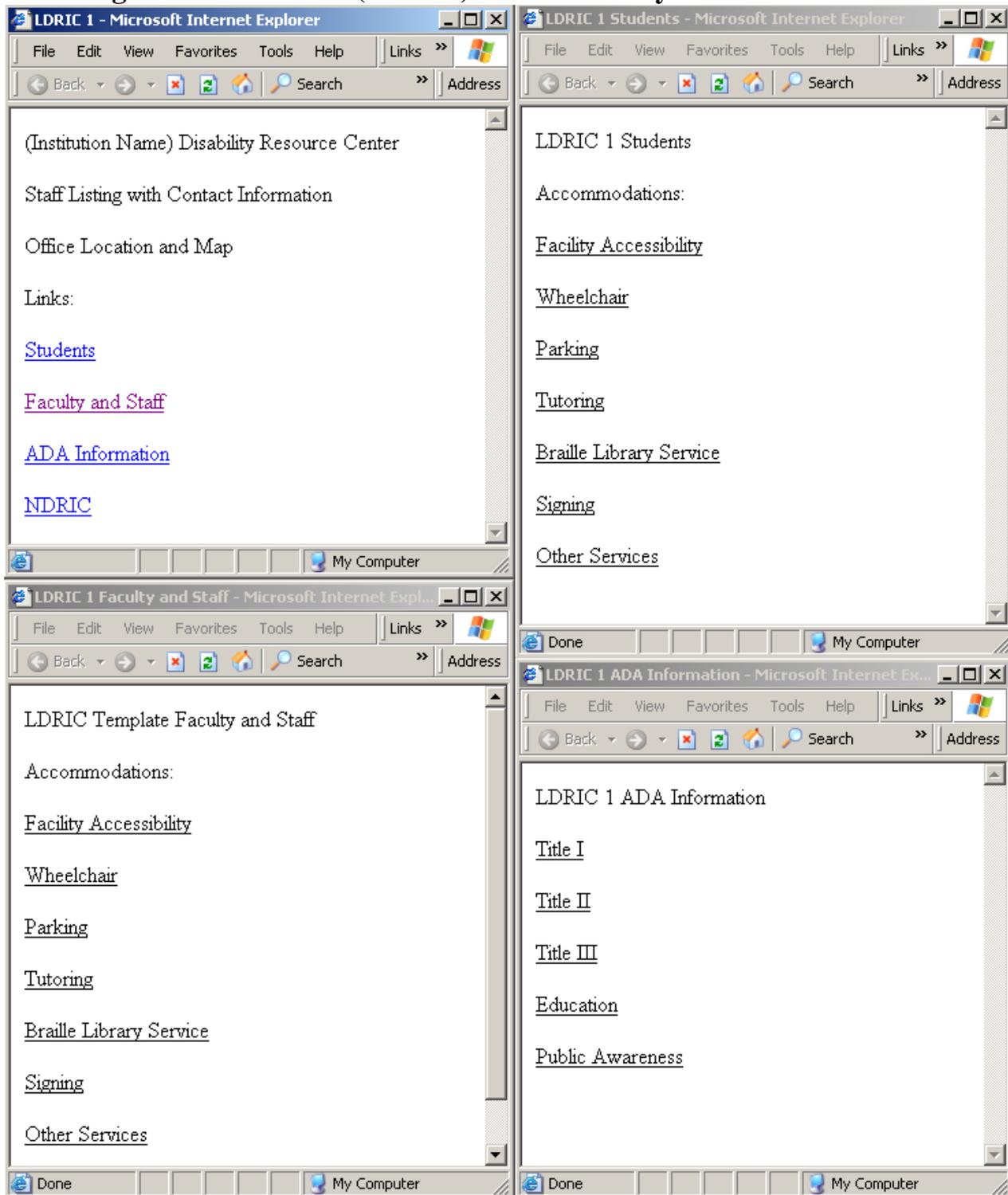## Figure 2. A Model of (LDRIC)Local Disability Center at CMU

Figure 3. Templates for LDRIC Web Site

    Figure 3 shows the four web page templates that will be supplied by the NDRIC to the LDRIC. The templates free the LDRIC from the task of developing suitable, compliant web sites, and they insure that links are maintained, in a consistent fashion, to the service web pages that are maintained by the NDRIC. Local DRICs need only customize the template to include their own local contact information and location.

CONCLUSION

In response to the growing disabled student population in the U.S. and their protection under ADA, most American universities have already revisited their management policies and developed appropriate strategies for improving their work place and work environment, allocated adequate resources and developed such Local Resource Information Centers to provide equal opportunities to their disabled students, faculty, staff and their families.

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