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**Disability Policy Audit**  
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OSU Graduate School Policy

Disability policies and resources can be found on the OSU graduate school website<sup>1</sup> by clicking on policies and procedures, and then disability policies<sup>2</sup>. The featured policies are “Rights and Responsibilities of OSU Students,” located on the ADA coordinator’s website (contains general information on rights of students with disabilities, planning for accommodations, and employment rights), a link to ODS (which contains a link specifically for prospective students), a link to HR policies (including a policy for equal opportunities for employees with disabilities), and the Web Accessibility Center.

A student who has been previously diagnosed with a learning disability or who has a physical disability would most likely be able to find their way to the ODS website through this site. A student who has an undiagnosed disability and who is struggling might not know to look for a centralized disability center. For students who find the ADA coordinator’s site, there are helpful links as to what to expect in showing documentation of a disability and what rights and expectations students may have.

Moritz College of Law Policy

A student seeking information on accommodations for disabilities will find nothing relevant on the Moritz website. A search of the site turns up a link for ODS as the recommended result, but all other results are to articles, CVs, or other non-relevant results. If a student wants to know whom to contact at Moritz, if anyone, she will have to guess as to where to begin. If a student wants to know the relevant policy for students with disabilities, she will not find it online. It is also impossible to find policy on the website. If a student did not know policy is in the Facebook or needed to know relevant policy prior to the publishing of the Facebook (October, two months after school begins) she would again be out of luck.

Analysis and Recommendations

It does not appear that the graduate school or the law school disability accommodations violate the relevant ADA provisions. However, meaningful compliance can be readily achieved with a few modest changes to the accessibility of information and the transparency of policies and procedures.

*Accessible Information*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gradsch.osu.edu>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gradsch.osu.edu/Content.aspx?Content=13&itemid=1>

In light of the amount of information available to students with disabilities attending law school or graduate classes, the first step to more meaningfully comply with the ADA is greater accessibility of information. Meaningful accessibility for students with disabilities is required and appears to be provided, but information about those accommodations must also be accessible. A brief review of graduate syllabi revealed that the use of boilerplate disability language is not consistently included. Enforcement of this policy would increase access to disability information. The professors including this information must also be knowledgeable about the process in order to assist students who self identify. More information should be available in each program's prospective handbook and orientation materials.

More prominent information on the main law school and graduate school websites would be an important resource for both potential and current students. With the growing dependence on electronically available information, students are likely to look to the internet for information regarding disability accommodations. The addition of a webpage identifying the process for students seeking accommodation for disability will greatly increase access to information and transparency.

The word disability is often thought of as applying only to those with physical disabilities. Adding the words "mental, physical, or emotional disability" to the information will be more inclusive and will likely reach more students falling within the purview of the ADA.

#### *Policies and Procedures*

The information available on-line and in the handbooks should include the title of the point person to speak with for interim accommodations or questions about the process. This person should be familiar with the school policy and the ODS process. It is important for continuity that this role be connected with a job title and not an individual because positions are often more permanent than current employees. Due to the level of sensitivity and importance of being in full compliance with the ADA, it is recommended that these duties be added to a position of authority.

If the policy is to refer students to ODS, that policy should be expressly written. Students should be informed about where to go to receive an accommodation and what to do with the ODS recommendation. Ideally, interim accommodations would be available to a student with a recurrent disability or the sudden onset of a disability when accommodations may need to be timelier than ODS can produce recommendations.

In addition to the procedures to receive an (interim) accommodation, grievance procedures should also be elucidated along with the initial procedures. The grievance process should also be linked to titles, not specific employees. The student should be informed who to report his/her grievance to and the process that will be followed until a final decision is reached. The position holding the authority to make the final decision should also be clearly identified so that both the administration and the student are aware of where the process ends.

These recommendations encourage greater availability of information to students. Transparency in the process of receiving accommodations and resolving grievances will make the process more efficient for both parties. Having available written policies and procedures also increases the likelihood that both schools will continue to be in compliance with the ADA.

## APPENDIX: Practices at Other Universities

### *The University of Michigan*

While an in-depth review of practices at other universities is not within the scope of this project, a brief review of the websites and posted policies regarding disability was conducted for the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan's main site<sup>3</sup> features a link at the top of the page both for web accessibility and for disability resources. Clicking on the disability resources link<sup>4</sup> takes the user to a welcome message and a collection of resources for general accessibility information, accessibility for students, for staff, and a collection of other resources. The student resource list is extensive, ranging from campus housing to snow removal to accommodations in the classroom.

The University of Michigan Law School has a memorandum posted<sup>5</sup> regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. It sets out the information students need to provide, encourages them to work with the University's office for students with disabilities, sets forth the procedure for requesting accommodations, and includes a grievance procedure. The memo also encourages students to speak to the Assistant Dean who provides his phone number. It would be helpful to know if this memorandum is posted in the law school or otherwise distributed to students in addition to being online.

The information for the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan was a little harder to find and did require searching, but thorough guides to policy and procedure for both current and prospective students can be found online through the Rackham Graduate School Help Desk website.<sup>6</sup> The pages for both prospective and current students are very helpful and contain information on admission test accommodations, planning research with a disability, special considerations for students with psychological disabilities, and an appeal process.

### *Boston University*

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.umich.edu>

<sup>4</sup> <http://umich.edu/Disability/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.law.umich.edu/ProspectiveStudents/Admissions/Documents/0809Accommodations.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> For prospective graduate students: [https://umich-rackham.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/umich\\_rackham.cfg/php/enduser/std\\_adp.php?p\\_faqid=1978](https://umich-rackham.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/umich_rackham.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faqid=1978)

For current graduate students: [https://umich-rackham.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/umich\\_rackham.cfg/php/enduser/std\\_adp.php?p\\_faqid=1977](https://umich-rackham.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/umich_rackham.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faqid=1977)

Boston University's main web page<sup>7</sup> does not contain a link for students with disabilities. Graduate school admission is conducted through the individual departments, so there is no specific information for all graduate incoming students. A search of the main site turns up information about the Office of Disability Services, but no specific information for students with disabilities in the application process. There is a link on the law school admissions page<sup>8</sup> informing students of the opportunity to explain a GPA or LSAT score in light of a disability and notifying them that the Office of Disability Services will coordinate accommodations if they are accepted to BU.

The law school student handbook contains a policy informing students how and when to contact the Office of Disability Services and refers students to a dean with whom they should discuss concerns<sup>9</sup>. The policy handbook also contains a very lengthy and detailed policy for complaints of disability discrimination. The policy contains a procedure for discrimination by the university in general, discrimination as a student employee, and grievances with the accommodations suggested by ODS.

### *The University of Texas*

The University of Texas has a link to resources for people with disabilities on the front page of its website.<sup>10</sup> The resource page<sup>11</sup> contains links for students on campus, ADA information in general, and points of contact for students and staff. The page for current students<sup>12</sup> includes a link under diversity for students with disabilities and leads to the Services for Students with Disabilities page.<sup>13</sup>

The graduate school page<sup>14</sup> requires a search for disability, but the top result<sup>15</sup> does contain a link to the Services for Students with Disabilities page. The grad school policy (contained in the catalog) begins with a statement of diversity and lists the coordinator for ADA policy and contact information for students. Beyond that, no specific policy for grad students with disabilities was in the catalog.

The law school catalog<sup>16</sup> has a similar statement on disability, and no other mention of a policy on accommodation or a grievance procedure.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bu.edu>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bu.edu/law/prospective/apply/jd/application/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.bu.edu/law/central/jd/academic/documents/Online%20handbook%2008-09.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/disability/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/student/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/ogs/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/ogs/publications/gradguide/campus.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/law08-10/index.html>