

Advisory Group for Accessibility, Disability, and Universal Design

Rhodes College

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Purpose of Advisory Group

In the fall of 2022, Rhodes College established the Advisory Group on Accessibility, Disability, and Universal Design, which reflects The College’s commitment to institutional inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility and to fostering a sense of belonging among all members of the college community, including persons with disabilities. The advisory group’s role is to ensure broad institutional input on matters relating to persons with disabilities of all characteristics at Rhodes College.

The purpose of the advisory group:

- Promote knowledge and advocacy in the areas of disability, accessibility, and Universal Design.
- Promote disability awareness, access, and inclusion in campus policies, procedures, training, and resources.
- Promote an understanding of the connections to other kinds of diversity we want to encourage on our campus.
- Advocate for campus planning on all levels to consider Universal Design principles and best practices.

- Advise the president and senior leadership regarding access compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and best practices in fostering a truly inclusive, diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

Group Membership

Advisory group membership consists of faculty, staff, and students. Initial members were appointed in 2022 by Carroll Stevens, J.D., interim president of Rhodes College. Members for 2023-2024 are listed below.

Faculty:

- Kim Brien, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Chemistry
- Eric Gottlieb, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Mathematics & Computer Science
- Eric Henager, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Spanish
- Vanessa Rogers, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Music

Staff:

- Anne Beard, Chief of Staff, Co-Chair
- Darlene Brooks, Director, Barret Library
- Melissa Butler, Director of Student Accessibility Services, Co-Chair
- Brian Foshee, Director of Physical Plant (retired spring 2024)
- Jeff McClain, Director of Physical Plant (spring 2024 – present)
- Martha McGeachy, Benefits Manager, Human Resources
- Alexa O'Hara, Student Outreach & Support
- Sherry Turner, Ph.D., Vice President of Strategic Initiatives

Students:

- Sophie Garau 2025
- Elise Keller 2024
- Maggie Lindsay 2024
- Carolina Smith Cavalcante 2024

2022-2023

Melissa Butler and Sherry Turner co-chaired the advisory group from spring 2022 through spring 2023. The advisory group met twice during spring 2022 and identified five subcommittees. From summer 2022 through spring 2023, the group prioritized and focused on three subcommittees: Digital Environment, Physical Environment, and Learning Environment. Below is a summary of progress during this time.

Digital Environment Subcommittee

- Focus: Address digital environment access issues related to online learning platforms, materials posted to those platforms, college websites, digital communication platforms, and social media. Address accessibility issues, such as creating accessible materials, captioning, and identifying protocols to ensure accessible course design, online platforms, and technologies. Identify necessary training and resources.

- Completed to date: Compiled a comprehensive list of all digital platforms currently used at Rhodes College. Researched best practices for digital access and explored ways to ensure that accessibility is considered when the college purchases new software.
- Members: Kim Brien, Melissa Butler, Jana Files (Communications), Maggie Lindsay '24, Greg Paraham (Library), Sherry Turner.

Physical Environment Subcommittee

- Focus: Address existing and potential barriers in the campus physical environment. Examples include, but are not limited to, accessible paths around campus, building and classroom accessibility, processes for reporting physical access issues, and new construction accessibility. Prepare an annual plan that prioritizes access solutions and guides spending for campus access improvements.
- Completed to date: SAS revised [Report an Access Barrier Form](#). Compiled list of physical access barriers with solution updates.
- Members: Darlene Brooks, Melissa Butler, Brian Foshee, Martha McGeachy, Carolina Smith-Cavalcante '24, Sherry Turner.

Learning Environment Subcommittee

- Focus: Advocate for Universal Design for Learning, proactive and accessible course design, and early selection of materials. Provide feedback to Student Accessibility Services on accommodation protocols and identify training and resource needs.
- Completed to date: Gathered and reviewed Universal Design for Learning materials. Discussed ideas for promotion of best practices for accessible course materials, program materials, and event planning. SAS enhanced website and created a [Faculty Resources](#) page.
- Members: Melissa Butler, Sophie Garau '25, Eric Gottlieb, Eric Henager, Vanessa Rogers, Sherry Turner.

Policies/Procedures Subcommittee

- Focus: Advise on revisions to existing access-related policies and new college policies to eliminate/prevent barriers for individuals with disabilities. Identify disability-related training needs for college employees and develop a centralized resource repository.

Campus Culture Subcommittee

- Focus: Examine campus attitudes and perceptions of disability and accessibility in our community. Identify necessary awareness training and resources to promote increased access, inclusion, and sense of belonging for students and employees with disabilities.

Anne Beard and Melissa Butler will co-chair the advisory group from fall 2023 through spring 2024. The advisory group will meet in early fall 2023 to discuss updates and identify priorities for fall 2023/spring 2024.

2023-2024

Anne Beard and Melissa Butler co-chaired the advisory group from fall 2023 through summer 2024. The advisory group met once during fall 2023 and once during spring 2024. Below is a summary of progress during this period. The group decided to continue focusing on the digital, learning, and physical environments.

Student Accessibility Services Updates

- 24% of Rhodes students were registered and approved for accommodations during 2023-24.
- AIM software: SAS was approved to acquire and implement a new data management software, AIM, during summer 2024. AIM will streamline SAS processes for the 470+ registered students with disabilities and improve faculty notification letters. There will be a student portal and a faculty portal. This request was supported by the advisory group.
- Anthology Ally software: SAS, Student Success, and Academic Affairs were approved to acquire and implement Anthology Ally software during fall 2024. Anthology Ally will integrate with Canvas, allowing all students to select their format preference for digital materials (e.g., mobile-friendly, PDF, audio, digital braille, etc.). Ally then instantly converts and provides the requested format. It also provides guidance for fixing access issues and institutional data on progress. This request was supported by both the advisory group and the Diversity & Equity faculty committee.
- During 2024-25, SAS will promote AIM and Anthology Ally software awareness with faculty, staff, and students, and assess the impact on the learning and digital environments.

Digital Environment Subcommittee Updates

- Information Services confirmed that the college considers accessibility compliance when acquiring new digital platforms.
- In order to raise awareness on promoting greater digital accessibility on campus, we need to first clarify the scope (e.g., for existing platforms or for websites, PDFs, hyperlinks, alt text, etc.).
- The acquisition of Anthology Ally software will significantly improve accessibility in the digital environment, moving us forward with Universal Design by ensuring accessible digital content for all students. The provision of institutional data and guidance on accessibility of course content will allow Rhodes to assess digital access progress over time.

Learning Environment Subcommittee Updates

- The subcommittee discussed ways to include accessibility representation in standing faculty/campus committees (e.g., DEI faculty committee, technology and academic space planning faculty committee, etc.) and ways to get Universal Design on the campus radar to make it second nature.

- Eric Gottlieb agreed to lead the subcommittee this year and explored options for elevating the access/SAS lens.
- SAS Director was voted by faculty to become a permanent ex-officio member of the Diversity & Equity faculty committee.
- The advisory group discussed ways for students with disabilities and SAS to improve partnerships with faculty. The subcommittee will explore conversations and/or small focus groups with students with disabilities and the possibility of revisiting the Testing Room assessment and faculty concerns.
- SAS will continue to promote best practice resources for accessible course/program materials and inclusive event planning. SAS has received feedback from faculty that they need professional development in areas of accessible digital content and Universal Design for learning. The topic of access will be included in August faculty development training and new faculty orientation.

Physical Environment Subcommittee Updates

- SAS and subcommittee members continued to maintain a spreadsheet for physical barriers and the college's response efforts.
- The subcommittee discussed reviewing the 1996 campus audit and determining next steps. Considering that today's needs may require/desire more than one accessible entrance per building, we could consider dividing this task into multiple parts: (1) Initial survey looking at 1996 report; Rhodes decides internal priorities. (2) More detailed survey to clarify barriers and fixes. (3) Identify top improvements that would have the greatest impact. Note: The subcommittee was unable to manage this task with current workload demands. Additional guidance is needed.
- Subcommittee progress stalled somewhat due to the Director of Physical Plant's retirement. A summer 2024 subcommittee meeting will be scheduled with Jeff McClain, new Director, to discuss next steps for subcommittee and preferred ways to promote reporting access barriers.

IDEAs 2.0

- Sherry Turner inquired about the group leading an Access/IDEAs 2.0 workshop during 2024-2025. Anne, Melissa, and Sherry will brainstorm and explore date options.

Membership Updates

- Three student members graduated in May 2024 and will need to be replaced for 2024-2025.
- The group needs to establish a process for new member selection and work toward a staggered replacement of members to avoid having all new members every three years.
- Moving forward, the group agreed that members will serve three-year terms, designate a leader for each subcommittee, and develop a timeline for future advisory group/subcommittee meetings.