

Access, accessibility and equitable treatment

Can the people affected participate and obtain effective help?

A service is not ready merely because it works for the people who tested it first.

Recommended starting position

Evaluate accessibility, affordability, language, connectivity and differential effects in the intended use. Provide appropriate accommodations and workable assistance routes. When AI is required, make the approved means of participation realistically available.

Students may be working from a phone, using assistive technology, attending after hours or managing unreliable connectivity. A technically available tool can still create a barrier. Fairness review needs real tasks and affected perspectives, with privacy-respecting methods.

What the evidence supports

North Shore includes equitable access and human-centered protections in its principles. DOJ guidance explains web and mobile accessibility obligations for covered public entities. Institutional applicability and implementation requirements require local review.

Establish these foundations

- Test the actual task with relevant access needs.
- Provide a clear route to accommodation and human assistance.
- Examine patterns of error or disadvantage, not just overall averages.

The choices to make locally

Provide an approved institutional service

Consider this when: AI use is required or materially important to participation.

Tradeoff: Budget for access, support, accessibility and continuity, including adjunct and evening users.

Provide an equivalent route

Consider this when: An alternative can meet the same learning or service purpose.

Tradeoff: Ensure the alternative does not impose an unreasonable burden or lower the standard.

Restrict or defer the use

Consider this when: A material barrier or harmful differential effect cannot be adequately addressed.

Tradeoff: Preserve service continuity and define the conditions for reconsideration.

Illustrative campus case

The required tool fails with a screen reader.

A course requires an AI exercise. A student can access the login screen but cannot complete the activity using assistive technology.

Access to the product is different from access to the learning task.

1. Provide immediate support through the appropriate institutional route.
2. Identify an accessible way to meet the same learning objective.
3. Resolve the barrier with the responsible offices and vendor before expanding required use.

What the team produces: An accessible participation arrangement and an accountable remediation plan.

Who is responsible

Board and trustees: Ask whether implementation evidence includes people facing access barriers.

Institutional leaders: Resource accessibility, support and remedies as part of the service.

AI task force: Involve relevant specialists and affected users early enough to influence the decision.

Illustrative language to adapt

Institutional AI uses must address accessibility and equitable participation for the intended users.

Required uses must provide approved access and applicable accommodations. Owners must maintain a route for reporting barriers, obtaining appropriate assistance and correcting material problems.

Read alongside model policy sections 6, 7, 10. Reconcile local authority and requirements before adoption.

Evidence of implementation

- Task-based accessibility and participation checks.
- An effective support and accommodation route.
- Documented response to material barriers or differential effects.

Reconsider when: Reassess new interfaces, populations, costs, support arrangements and patterns of disadvantage.

Supporting sources

[North Shore Community College / Artificial Intelligence Principles and Policies](#)

[US Department of Justice / Title II web and mobile accessibility rule](#)