

'No Plans' to Delete Free Content

IHE [insidehighered.com/news/2017/03/14/after-uc-berkeley-announcement-universities-say-they-will-continue-offer-free](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/03/14/after-uc-berkeley-announcement-universities-say-they-will-continue-offer-free)

The recent [decision](#) by the University of California, Berkeley, to restrict public access to free online educational content has raised questions about whether other colleges and universities will do the same to avoid legal action.

The university this month announced it will remove audio and video lectures currently available to the public on platforms such as iTunes U and YouTube. Berkeley said it reached that decision after determining that retroactively making the content accessible to people with disabilities would be “extremely expensive.”

Berkeley has pledged to create new publicly available content that conforms to web accessibility standards, but restocking its online libraries will take a long time -- its decision to remove content encompasses tens of thousands of publications. The university's YouTube channel, for example, includes 9,897 videos.

The U.S. Department of Justice in August found Berkeley was in violation of Title II of the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 and ordered it to make the content accessible. The department's investigation only looked at content available to the public, and not how Berkeley serves students with disabilities.

It is unclear whether the Justice Department will take as active a role in accessibility lawsuits under President Trump. Disability rights groups, however, have been open about continuing to take the legal route -- “university by university,” as a spokesperson for the National Federation of the Blind once said -- to ensure that institutions don't discriminate against students with disabilities.

Inside Higher Ed asked several universities that offer free online courses and other educational content if they are considering following in Berkeley's footsteps. Several of them did not immediately respond, including Arizona State, Carnegie Mellon, Cornell, Harvard, Princeton, Vanderbilt and Yale Universities and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The institutions that did respond, all of them public flagship and private research universities (which tend to have large online collections available to the public), were unanimous in their responses: they will continue to offer publicly available content.

On YouTube, the universities vary in how they caption videos. They frequently include correct, prewritten captions for promotional videos, but other videos -- including recorded lectures -- often rely on YouTube's hit-or-miss automatic captioning feature or lack captions altogether. Some of the universities have settled or face ongoing accessibility lawsuits.

Here are the universities' responses:

University of Minnesota

“The University of Minnesota has no plans to restrict access to public-facing content. University staff including instructional designers, developers, communication professionals and accessibility professionals are aware of accessibility requirements and are committed to a collaborative inclusive design approach where accessibility is built in as part of development and improvement cycles.”

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

“MIT OpenCourseWare and MITx on edX plan to continue sharing content with the world, for free. MIT's Office of Digital Learning is committed to making its online educational material accessible to students and online learners with disabilities.”

Georgia Institute of Technology

“None of our credit course offerings that we produce are released to the general public for free or under any other circumstance. Our recordings require an official GT username and password in order to be viewed. Additionally, all of our recordings, past and current, are transcribed and made available on demand.

“In addition, our MOOC offerings are fully compliant.”

Stanford University

“At the moment we are not considering the same [as Berkeley]. We have an active captioning program.”

University of Texas at Austin

“UT Austin has not begun doing anything like this.”