

MIT to caption online videos after discrimination lawsuit

February 18 2020, by Alanna Durkin Richer



In this July 16, 2019, file photo people walk past the Ray and Maria Stata Center building on the campus of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Cambridge, Mass. MIT has agreed to provide captions for more of its publicly available online videos as part of a settlement announced Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2020, of a lawsuit filed by the National Association of the Deaf, which said the school was discriminating against people with hearing disabilities by not adequately or accurately captioning videos of lectures and other programs it posts online. (AP Photo/Steven Senne, File)

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology has agreed to provide captions for more of its publicly available online videos as part of a settlement announced Tuesday in a case that accused the school of discriminating against people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The [settlement](#) comes months after a similar deal was reached in a lawsuit brought against Harvard University by the National Association of the Deaf, which said the schools were discriminating against people with hearing disabilities by not adequately or accurately captioning videos of lectures and other programs it posts online.

"Why would you not make your content accessible to everyone?" said Howard Rosenblum, CEO of the association. "We want to make sure that moving forward all the universities and colleges make themselves aware."

The lawsuits brought against MIT and Harvard in 2015 said people who were deaf or hard of hearing couldn't benefit from the schools' wealth of online educational resources because they had inaccurate captions or none at all.

Harvard and MIT both tried to dismiss the cases, arguing that the law doesn't require them to provide captioning for all their online content. But a judge ruled last year that content produced by and posted by the universities was subject to federal civil rights law.

Under the settlement, MIT has agreed to provide captions for any audio or [video content](#) it creates and posts on its website, as well as the school's pages on outlets like YouTube and SoundCloud. It must also provide live captions for certain events that are streamed online, according to the settlement.

Anything posted before Jan. 1, 2019, must be captioned or removed from public view only if someone requests it, according to the consent decree.

The agreement must be approved by a judge before it goes into effect.

A spokeswoman for MIT didn't immediately return messages seeking comment Tuesday.

The consent decree says MIT "has and continues to deny that it violated any laws related to persons with disabilities or otherwise through posting or making available any online content."

The two settlements follow a U.S. Justice Department finding in 2015 that edX, an [online platform](#) created by the two universities, failed to make its courses accessible to those with vision or [hearing](#) disabilities. The program settled with the agency and agreed to several measures meant to boost accessibility.

The Justice Department similarly ordered the University of California, Berkeley, to provide captions, but the school decided instead to restrict public access to thousands of online videos. Once removed from public view, the videos were no longer subject to the order.

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