

## ACPAC Open Source Action Team

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### Summary of Access and Compatibility

The university has a compelling interest in maximizing accessibility and insuring future compatibility in the exchange of electronic documents. The unintended effect of adopting proprietary formats (associated with current commercially dominant products) as **de facto standards** is to reduce the accessibility of official guides, forms, and other materials for current students, potential students, off-campus users, and the general public.

#### Background ([www.openformats.org](http://www.openformats.org))

- **What is a Format":**

"A format is what enables an application to interpret the raw data contained in a file. A format, in other words, is the mode of representation of these data. Very often, file formats are marked in the extension of the file name: the three-letter suffix with which the file name ends."

- **What is an Open Format?**

"a file format is open if the mode of presentation of its data is transparent and/or its specification is publicly available. Open formats are ordinarily standards fixed by public authorities or international institutions whose aim is to establish norms for software interoperability. There are nevertheless cases of open formats promoted by software companies which choose to make the specification of the formats used by their products publicly available."

- **What is a Proprietary (or closed) Format?**

"a file format is proprietary if the mode of presentation of its data is opaque and its specification is not publicly available. Proprietary formats are developed by software companies in order to encode data produced by their applications: only the software produced by a company who owns the specification of a file format will be able to read *correctly and completely* the data contained in this file. Proprietary formats can be further protected through the use of *patents* and the owner of the patent can ask royalties for the use or implementation of the formats in third-party's software."

#### Rationale for Adopting Open Formats in a University Context

- Sharing materials in proprietary formats creates access obstacles for students, staff, and the general public;
- The substance of most shared university documents could be equally well conveyed in open formats;
- Document exchange and compatibility should be maximized at all usage points, including on-campus AND off-campus locations;
- Open formats can be produced by most software products, maximizing user choice and avoiding vendor lock-in.

#### Proposed Action

*Recognizing the importance of maximizing access to and compatibility of documents for internal/external communication, student work, and archival university documents-- ACPAC recommends **that open document formats be adopted as the default for the circulation of official and unofficial documents.***

Faculty, staff, and offices are encouraged (but not mandated) to observe default formats whenever practical, and when the communication aims can be successfully achieved through such formats. The following list represents those judge preferable at this time (November 2008) and is subject to revision:

- Text Documents (working): Plain Text: (TXT); Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML)
- Text Documents (presentation or read-only): Portable Document Format (PDF); Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML)
- Images: Joint Photographic Expert Group (JPEG); Portable Network Graphics (PNG); Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG)
- Slide Presentations: Portable Document Format (PDF)s
- Spreadsheets: Comma Separated Variable (CSV)
- Audio: Ogg Vorbis (OGG); Free Lossless Audio Codec (FLAC)
- Video: Ogg Theora (OGG)