



DEOMI

Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE



Why 508c Matters at DEOMI

Story by DEOMI Public Affairs and photos by Michael Marks

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PATRICK SPACE FORCE BASE, Fla.— As a Center of Excellence, the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute is very proud of our inclusive force that values and develops all individuals and thrives on their contributions. With the recent addition of Muhammad Waheed, DEOMI's 508c digital accessibility coordinator, it's our goal to be the role model within the Department of Defense to ensure maximum accessibility of all materials for those with disabilities.



508c is an addendum to the Rehabilitation Act that works to eliminate discrimination against those with disabilities in government-run and -funded programs. It dictates how all forms of information technology must conform so that disabled individuals can use them. Section 508 standards apply to the accessibility of "information and communication technology." Section 508 established accessibility to have a broader meaning than just access to a web page, including access to desktop software, mobile applications, documents, and even hardware interfaces like televisions or printers.

Through his lifelong personal journey of sight impairment and first-hand experience on the challenges of those with disabilities accessing material, Waheed, from Baltimore, Maryland, is a treasured asset within DEOMI's inclusive force.

DEOMI selected Waheed, who applied under the Workforce Recruitment Program, for the newly formed and important position. Every year, the WRP connects federal and select private-sector employers nationwide with highly motivated college students and recent graduates with disabilities eager to demonstrate their skills and abilities in the workplace through internships and permanent jobs.

"We've also incorporated him into the Disability Program Manager's Course (DPMC), where he'll be a panel member to discuss with students his firsthand experience of the challenges of those with disabilities accessing material," shared Jay Steinke, department head, Multimedia and Technology Development. "He'll be instrumental to help us identify current 508c issues and new processes when developing content, where all our content developers/creators will benefit by incorporating 508c-compliant steps when generating new content."



During the DPMC, a Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program outreach team came to DEOMI to demonstrate some of the many assistive technology and accommodations devices that CAP offers. It is a centrally funded DoD program that provides assistive technology and accommodations to support DoD civilian employees with disabilities and ill or injured active-duty service members.

“CAP was invited by DEOMI to provide the students in the DPMC information about an organization that is a vital resource for a disability program manager, shared Dr. Kervin Sider, DEOMI’s deputy director, Education and Training. “And to help the disability program managers improve the effectiveness of their agencies’ disability programs.”

Assistive technology products that CAP offers include software and devices that enable employees with vision, communication, cognitive, hearing and/or dexterity disabilities to have equal access to information and information and systems so they can be effective members of the workforce. CAP also offers online tools to help DoD civilians and service members, such as an online training library, assistive technology videos, quick tips, webinars and more.

“Muhammad is such a value to us because he’s not only worried about how he can help visually impaired people but how he can help everybody,” shared Steinke. “DEOMI doesn’t want to just meet 508c compliance, but we want to exceed the standards and expectations.”



When asked his thoughts about his selection to join the DEOMI team, Waheed responded, “I was excited and nervous. Excited because this is another opportunity for professional development and growth as well as a learning opportunity. But I was nervous because as I said all week, I know about accessibility from the users’ standpoint but the 508c areas of policies, regulations and law are areas of development for me. However, if you ask me as a user how you can make something easier to access, I can speak about that in most cases.”

Most importantly for the Department of Defense, Section 508 is not just the law, it's the right thing to do!

“One thing that rings consistently since onboarding here at DEOMI: DEOMI is a Center of Excellence,” stated Waheed. “In order to uphold that standard, we must ensure all individuals, regardless of their background and capabilities can access our materials whether that’s on our website or through our courses, various products. So, I hope to assist and contribute to the research, development and distribution of our various components at DEOMI by doing my best to ensure things are accessible and they meet 508c compliance. Another aspect that I really want to focus on is not only meeting 508c compliance but go the extra mile and ensure the ease of use. So, I hope that as I get more familiar with DEOMI and the DoD, we don’t just stop at 508c compliance and accessibility, but we can go further and have our consumers, clients and users tell us that what DEOMI is putting out has high ease of use.”

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