

Active Teaching Lab: Accessibility in Canvas

Middleton Building, Room 302 - Thursday, January 31, 2019, 1pm

Thinking About Accommodation

How can we reframe conversations about disability in the classroom and in digital learning environments so that (what is socially constructed as) disability is less a problem to be accommodated and more an invitation to think about how to make our learning spaces, our content, our assessments, and even the language we use more welcoming to all?

- Faculty and instructors, what is your gut reaction to seeing McBurney letters appear at the busy start of the semester, telling you you're legally obligated to comply?
- Accommodation works off of a request/compliance paradigm. Students get documentation that disability specialists review (which can be a time consuming process for students). Instructors receive accommodation letters. Think about this from the students' perspective: students' first contact with professors is about what they *cannot* do and what they need to ask their very busy professor to do.
- Accommodation is often an afterthought, a reactive measure. Even if we talk about *Universal Design in Learning*, disability is not uniform; accommodations should be exceptions to meet specific needs. If you do have to accommodate, online or f2f, ask your student how things are working after a bit. Having a professor initiate the inquiry helps to treat the student like a person and not a problem.

Inverting the Accommodation Paradigm: Thinking About Accessibility

What if we could save faculty members time, let students with disabilities be students first, and make our classes more welcoming and engaging for all students?

- Much accommodation is avoidable through proactive inclusive design. DLE like Canvas make this easier. We control more of our classroom; FP&M controls less.
- Front-end time investments that provide return on investment for everyone in the long run.
- I pride myself on *not needing to* accommodate a maximum number of student disability accommodation requests, on telling students that what they need is available and having them confirm, and that they don't need to schedule a special appointment with me but that I look forward to getting to know them as students. The reactions I get are telling.

Disability at a Digital Crossroads: In Tech, the Present is the New Future

We don't just teach content; we model civic responsibility, and technology impacts society.

- In spite of standards, regulations, diversity initiatives, and the 25M Microsoft gave to AI and ML for accessibility, basic digital accessibility is not a given in classrooms or elsewhere. In the first Industrial Revolution, ableist tropes of the worker and the workplace took shape. Will the next "Machine Age" 3-D print these biases and train AIs to reproduce them? Will digital learning environments reproduce the barriers of physical classrooms? What is the place of higher ed in this?
- Require students to think about user-facing design and accessibility in multimedia projects.

Start the Way You Mean to Go On: What Good Habits Does Canvas Make Easy?

As more and more faculty create online content, what can we do from the start?

- *Just do it:* Alt text, OCR'd pdfs, dropped grades
- *Just don't do it:* hyperlinking "Click here" (bad design, bad for screen readers; bad for SEO, just bad)

“What do I have to do (to avoid liability)?” vs. “What could I do (that is exciting and I never would have thought of before)?”: **Disability, Design, and Innovation Beyond Compliance**
There is a place for compliance. (And some of it, like captioning, is complex, possibly costly, and can overshadow other parts of usability and accessibility). But asking “What do I have to do?” reduces disability to a problem, often one from which the rhetorical ableist gaze will be averted after provision of minimally compliant solution. In so doing, we all lose.

- Who has sent a text message this week? (technology originally designed for the hearing impaired)
- Disability necessities design and discovery through different perspectives on everyday tasks that others take for granted or don't even see. Innovation comes out of doing more with less, working creatively within constraints.
- Usability, universal design, and accessibility are all about flexibility, about embracing different modes of content access, expression, and assessment. Let's learn from our students, all of our students, and ask what works for them and why.
 - One example is periodic self-assessments (through which multiple little elements in an online class could even be graded) that asks students to make connections and reflect on their learning process, barriers, and goals.

Personal Experience: From Chalkboards (and Other Dusty Ideas) to Accidental Accessibility
I have accommodated more student needs, learning styles, and preferences in f2f scenarios with one tool more than any other: a virtual chalkboard linked in the LMS (aka UW google doc for which students have view only privileges) and a virtual interactive chalkboard (UW google doc that acts as class wiki).

- Chalkboards are dusty, quickly erased, and require the instructor to be able to stand and remain standing and to turn his/her back on students (which impedes lip reading).
- Data projection of a virtual chalkboard means I stay facing my students. Students can choose to take notes or choose to listen more, knowing the chalkboard isn't erased. Students with visual impairments, hearing impairments and other disabilities find it easier to compensate. And it's good pedagogy. I can reference the first day of class at the end, review where we left off. In a blended class, the link in the LMS, helps to integrate the two environments.

Canvas, Common Accommodations, and LMS Functionalities

What are frequent accommodations? Is there support for feature requests and functionalities that make them easy to implement in the LMS?

- Next UX interview with Canvas software engineers, I intend to point out that time and a half on every timed assessment is a frequent accommodation. Time and a half on every fourth quiz on alternate Fridays of home games is not. In other words, if you use native quizzing tool in Canvas and need to extend time on timed assessments, you likely want to set rules on a student-level and not on an assignment-level. **Update: SOLVED 4/19 in Canvas!**
- What questions should we ask as our digital learning ecosystem expands? To continue with the example of quizzing, what if we embed H5P in Pressbooks with H5P having LTI functionality with gradebook?

How Do We Make Accessibility and Usability Expected and Part of Conversations (and Budgets)?

- What would help to make digital accessibility more widely expected and supported?
- How do we show accessibility and inclusive design as a site of (iterative and exciting) innovation and not a problem to be solved?