Report on Accessibility Efforts at Wichita State University

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Introduction

What follows is a report on efforts made to improve accessibility at Wichita State University. This report will identify broad areas of effort and tie those efforts to specific elements of the agreement that Wichita State signed with the National Federation of the Blind in 2016.

The document will address broad areas of requirement from the agreement, referring back to the original agreement by section.

III A. Accessibility Coordinator

Wichita State has had three accessibility coordinators. Initially, Deltha Colvin, VP of Student Affairs, was named Accessibility Coordinator. She served for six months, and then the role transferred to Molly Gordon, Associate General Counsel, until her resignation from the university in March of 2020. At that time, John Jones, Director of the Media Resources Center, took on the role as interim Accessibility Coordinator.

Agreement Items in III A and Success

- Hire or designate Accessibility Coordinator: Completed
- Accessibility Coordinator will be knowledgeable concerning all related accessibility requirements and norms: Completed and ongoing (we are always learning)
- Coordinate WSU's Compliance with the Agreement: In Process
- Assist WSU in the development of policies: Completed
- Report and Document Semi-annually to the VP or Student Affairs on several topics: Ongoing

The Accessibility Coordinator Position in the Future

In the new fiscal year, the university will hire a new full time ADA/Accessibility coordinator who will be a part of the university compliance office. The role is transitioning away from one that was staffed as a response to the need to manage the agreement and towards one that will have a more complete focus on University-wide compliance going forward.

III B. Adoption and Dissemination of Policies

Wichita State wrote new Accessibility Policies which were made effective August 7, 2017. The policies were reviewed by the NFB's team and are posted in the policy manual and linked from the Accessibility pages.

- 8.10 Students with Disabilities

- 8.11 Accessible Content

Creation of the Academic Accessibility and Accommodations team

This is a team of educational accessibility technologists whose efforts are dedicated to the production of high quality, effective accommodations materials and solutions for students with high impact accommodation plans, primarily braille and tactile graphics. In many cases this team works as a liaison between the student and the faculty involved but does keep the Office of Disability Services informed.

The advent of this team – and its necessity – was a matter of discovery and process improvement that took several iterations. It now is led by Jay Castor and produces materials for students in our programs – higher quality than we could expect from outside sources, and we can ensure that the production meets our timelines. The University continues to invest in this key team and the work they do. The University recently purchased a new Braillo embosser. The braille produced is now much more accurate (no more dropped pins), it's easier to read (better dot height than the old desktop embossers can produce) and is about ten-times faster than the desktop model we had been using.

Instructional Design and Access

Another important structural change within the Media Resources Center was to expand the focus of the Instructional Design and Technology team to include a focus on accessibility. This team, dedicated to providing training and support to faculty in all modes of instruction, but especially those related to instruction with technology, has been the primary driver of a lot of instruction and support for faculty. The team, led by Dr. Carolyn Speer, was renamed "Instructional Design and Access" (IDA) and continues to make accessibility a core part of their work.

The close relationship between the two teams – Academic Accessibility and Accommodations and Instructional Design and Access, both housed in the Media Resources Center – has proven to be a core component in the team's ability to share ideas, relationships, and even team members in times of unexpected spikes in demand.

IDA engages in a lot of outreach to faculty, including making weekly labs available to faculty to come in and work on accessibility problems (as well as problems with our LMS, Blackboard). The team also conducts a regular system of one-on-one and department interviews and meetings to discuss challenges faculty face, and one of the key components of those sessions is a discussion of accessibility.

In the Summer of 2020, as the IDA team prepares the faculty for moving partially or fully online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a much more aggressive training program has been

implemented; accessibility is a featured training topic during all of these training events, and it is included as a critical value in all training that does not focus exclusively on accessibility.

Direct work with the Faculty Senate

The Media Resources Center leadership engaged very actively in an effort to work with the faculty senate on issues of accessibility and related topics. The Media Resources Center (MRC) director served for two years as the chair of an ad-hoc committee of the Faculty Senate that wrote a faculty statement on Accessibility, which was written over the course of many months by the committee, and then ratified in a single, unanimous vote by the entire senate. The ad-hoc accessibility committee also took on other issues, like Open Educational Resources, which have important connections to accessibility.

The committee was successful enough that it has been made a permanent standing committee of the faculty senate.

- Faculty Senate Statement on Accessibility

Notification of Policies

Upon the launch of the new policies, all faculty and staff were informed of the updates to the policies, and a comprehensive training program was launched – first in person, and then also through online training. An updated version of this training that includes updates on new processes and standards – is provided and required of instructional staff each year.

Agreement Items in III B and Success

- Adopt and implement policies: Completed
- Post the policies online: Completed (linked above)
- Ensure policies are available to all instructors and administrators: Completed

III C. Training

In the Spring of 2017 Wichita State launched the “Ability Ally” training program, which was a two-hour face-to-face training program that provided a combination of sensitivity training, training addressing the new policies and standards, and discussions about practices for addressing accessibility in classroom design. The training was required for all instructional staff, and recommended for staff, especially those whose work was related to instruction.

The training program’s slides were reviewed and approved by the NFB’s team.

Over the course of the next several years, the training offerings have evolved to adapt to the changing needs of the organization and our efforts to shift toward a more accessible culture.

Every year there is a training offered, both face-to-face and online, that provides a refresher on accessibility standards, as well as new information about processes and requirements as the university's efforts move forward.

Specific Training Program Notes

The university offers (and has offered) a wide variety of training programs since the agreement was signed. These are the highlights of those offerings.

The initial training package was developed by a blended team of trainers and subject matter experts from Human Resources, the Office of Disability Services, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and Instructional Design and Access.

Subsequent trainings, with their more direct focus on instructional content and methods, have been developed and delivered by Instructional Design and Access and the Media Resources Center leadership.

Ability Ally (Spring 2017)

The original training program provided a combination of impairment sensitivity training, policy training, and some discussion of expectations and requirements for instructional materials.

This training was offered in person and online. Variations of this training were made available as a dedicated training for department offices and other teams that requested their own version of the training.

Ability Ally (Fall 2017+)

Optional impairment sensitivity training, providing guidance and soft skills to faculty and staff related to working with people who have impairments.

Required Accessibility Training (2017+)

Annual training that is required of instructional staff. A version is prepared for non-instructional staff and offered as a recommended training. The training covers:

- A refresher of the agreement, Accessibility standards and policies
- New information on expectations, processes and procedures for the current year

Fundamentals of Accessibility (Blackboard Course)

This is a blackboard course that provided a large amount of specific instruction on accessibility in a variety of tools and situations, including both online and face-to-face instruction. It was presented to all instructional staff as an optional learning library.

KSARN Training Courses

The IDA team identified that we had a critical gap in instructional materials and accessibility. In many classes, materials that are used for instruction are created by other students in the class, and not by the instructor. Those resources also need to be created in an accessible format, and that means that students need to be trained in basic accessibility so that they can create materials for their peers.

That resulted in the development of a series of short courses on specific situations that are appropriate for students to take. They're presented through our accessibility resources site, KSARN.org, and award badges upon completion, which makes it easy for students to demonstrate they have completed the assignment.

WSU Tech Summer Accessibility Summer Camp

WSU Tech, a Wichita State affiliate tech school, has an instructional design team that works very collaboratively with the Wichita State Instructional Design and Access team. This is a two-day multi-strand conference that is presented with a combination of WSU Tech and WSU trainers, and it has drawn attendees from all over the country.

Agreement Items in III C and Success

- Develop a Training Program: Completed and ongoing. Through platforms like KSARN.org, the WSU Tech Accessibility Summer Camp, and others, we are providing training well beyond the scope of the agreement.
- Include key information in Accessibility training: Completed and ongoing
- Make training available within 60 days of all new instructional staff commencement of service: Completed and ongoing
- Provide accessibility training in student orientation: Completed and ongoing
- Include key information in ADA student training: Completed and ongoing
- Make a record of all attendees to training: Completed and ongoing

III D. Technology Audit

The Electronic and Information Technology audit was conducted by the Educational Accessibility Technician in the fall of 2017. Early in the spring semester of 2018, the EAT and the director of the Media Resources Center met with the parties responsible for any issue found in the audit, and plans were created to remediate those issues.

The Corrective Action Strategy (CAS) documentation was published online later that spring in consultation with the NFB and based on the NFB's requested recommendations for format. The information on that page is now periodically updated and reviewed, and based on recent feedback from the NFB, the format will be revised to better reflect key information.

The CAS report is a high-level summary of the efforts that have been undertaken to comply with the Agreement terms and to document the University's performance. In some cases, the details address a class of product (like publisher software) and not specific items, because of the wide variety of tools that are out there in that class. The CAS is treated as a living document, with an expectation that as we discover problems, we will document them there in addition to what was found in the initial audit. Also, as we complete goals, those successes will be reflected in the CAS. It should be noted that some goals will always be continuing/ongoing—accessibility efforts will continue past the life of the Agreement as the University strives to improve upon its accessibility for all students now and in the future.

The Educational Accessibility Technologist also maintains a web page of accessible publisher resources which lists publisher tools that have been reviewed already and found to meet our standards.

Links:

- EIT Audit Questionnaire
- Corrective Actions Strategy
- Accessible Publisher Resources

Agreement Items in III D and Success

- Hire an Accessible Technology Specialist: Expectations exceeded.
    - Two new positions were created and filled: Educational Accessibility Technologist (who reviews EIT and works with the Instructional Design team on accessible solutions) and an Adaptive Technology Specialist, who worked in the Office of Disability Services to provide accommodations.
    - In 2018, the Adaptive Technology Specialist was moved into the Media Resources Center when the Academic Accessibility and Accommodations team was created, adding two additional full time positions and more resources to address the need for accommodations.
- Conduct an EIT Audit: Completed and ongoing
- Provide written audit findings and recommendations to the accessibility coordinator within 60 days of the completion of the audit: Completed
- Develop a Corrective Action Strategy: Completed and ongoing
    - Because of the variety and complexity of university systems, we created a process that allows for newly discovered issues to be added to the CAS and be addressed with the same tools.

III E. Instructional Materials

The effort to transition to accessible instructional materials and accessible instructional methods has been the focus of a great deal of effort that has built upon the work involved in the creation of accessibility policies and the training programs that have been detailed above.

Because of WSU's strong position on academic freedom, instructional staff choose the resources they use in their own classes – those choices are not made for them by their departments, colleges, or upper administration. That has required a concerted culture change effort to create the change necessary, rather than a top-down directive from upper administration. That sort of culture change is much more challenging and time-consuming, but it has the potential to become a more sustainable core value for the institution, rather than resulting in a temporary initiative to meet a short-term goal.

Over the several years we have worked on that change, the message has been delivered through persistent work with the faculty senate, with individual faculty and staff, through training and support and a coordinated effort led by stakeholders from many parts of campus.

Publishers, Textbooks, and Publisher Software

Wichita State has worked extensively with publishers and vendors to reach a point where we have made dramatic improvements in the accessibility of our content, and we have processes and systems that ensure that we will continue to work towards those goals.

We have, for example, been able to work with our faculty to put dramatic pressure on publishers through their sales reps and support teams to push for accessible tools. For example, Cengage worked with the Media Resources Center closely in the 2019-20 academic year to develop a version of their Calculus homework system that met accessibility standards. This represented a subset of the question bank, so the product is still not perfectly accessible, but by sticking to the subset of questions, the instructors are able to teach the class in an accessible way – and we have ensured that the subset was substantial enough that instructors are able to teach everything they need to teach, so academic standards are not sacrificed.

This engagement with publishers is aided by an exceptions process that puts a heavy accommodation burden on faculty (see below), so that faculty have a powerful incentive to pressure the publishers they depend on to meet our needs.

Media Resources Center leadership has also been invited to participate in an advisory group for Pearson publishing, where we are pushing to set expectations that accessibility be a consideration from the beginning of the content development cycle – so that we can be sure

that when images are part of the content the publisher has a library of appropriate alternative graphic files that support the production of tactile graphics and other touchable displays.

The University Bookstore is working hand-in-hand with university efforts as a part of the accessibility committee and has been promoting accessible options through their contract with Access Now, an accessible digital textbook marketplace and delivery platform. They are also important partners in our efforts to promote the use and development of Open Educational Resources, which can be delivered in the same platform, in a consistent, accessible way.

Blackboard Ally

Wichita State is a Blackboard Ally subscriber, and this product has been an important tool in our ongoing efforts to be accessible.

On-demand, Alternative Formats for Students

Blackboard Ally is a plugin for Blackboard (and other content management systems) that provides on-demand support for students and guidance and review for instructors. There are also some reporting tools that help staff target areas of significant need.

The student-facing tools create alternative versions of content in the course so that students can have accessible content. It can auto-tag inaccessible PDFs, convert office documents and pdfs to a variety of formats like HTML (which is a format that can be supportive of users with low vision), audio, and digital braille. These automatically generated versions may have some minor flaws, as all documents may, but creating dynamically generated alternative versions of content is a major step forward in making instructional materials accessible.

Instructor Awareness, Training, and Support

The instructor-facing tools provide reporting and guidance for instructors about the content they are producing in the class. Instructors see an indicator for each file they upload that lets them know the accessibility score for that document and provides detailed information and guidance about the specific ways that the document needs to be improved. This steady reminder and on-demand instruction for content creators has been a critical tool.

The reporting provided has proven to be of limited value in determining the overall accessibility experience of our students. For example, for many years instructors were coached to upload multiple versions of files – both PDF and Word files. This allows for people to select the alternative version of that content that is most accessible and usable. There is no way in the reporting to identify one piece of content as the accessible alternative to another, so a course that does meet accessibility standards may appear in a review as if it does not (a false negative). Nevertheless, it is a very useful diagnostic tool.

Exceptions Process

Wichita State's policies are written to include provisions for the inevitable situations where an accessible solution is not available.

The process that we have developed (based in large part on the work of Ohio State University's Exception Request process and standards) gives WSU the ability to walk instructional staff through a process of evaluating their resources, identifying the need for an exception, and stepping through the process to responsibly request one.

The exception request requires a Rationale, Equally Effective Access Accommodation Plan, Communication Plan, and a Plan for future compliance as part of the request. These core elements of the request help ensure that faculty understand the challenge that their resource presents. It highlights the work they will need to commit to in the case of a student who can't use the resource in its current state, both through explicit declaration and the burden of renewing these exceptions, which puts ongoing pressure on faculty to seek accessible solutions.

Agreement Items in III E and Success

- All instructional materials will be accessible to the best of WSU's ability: Ongoing
    - Work in this space will always be ongoing. Thanks to training and resources provided we have made dramatic improvements in this area; additionally, resources like Blackboard Ally and Aira help fill in gaps.
    - WSU's Blackboard Ally report for the Summer 2020 semester's courses reports that reviewed content in Blackboard is 73.5% accessible. This data is very incomplete – it does not include content that is not delivered in Blackboard, it does not consider content that is delivered as native blackboard content, and it does not consider whether equally effective, alternative access versions of inaccessible content is available. While quantitative measurement is difficult, to the best of WSU's ability, we are making instructional materials accessible to blind students at the same time they are available to any other students enrolled in that program, though of course we are continually seeking to improve accessible instructional material delivery to all students.
    - We have identified and addressed problems beyond the scope of the agreement, creating standards for accessible in-person instructional standards, training for students who create content that is used as an instructional tool, and so on.
- Make print textbooks available in requested alternative formats requested by a blind student: Completed and ongoing.
    - The demands of this work required some iteration and re-design to get right. We found that a single staff member dedicated to this work was not sufficient, and that we were much more successful when we were able to move this work closer to the instructional design team.
    - The demands of this work come and go – some semesters the demands are very high, and other semesters have a much lighter load. We have had to develop

the capacity to flex staff into this team to address spikes in need without getting behind.
    - Our commitment to parity has set a new standard for access to braille materials that exceeds the standards of the industry (see below).
- Tactile graphics must comply with the Braille Authority of North America's "Guidelines and Standards for Tactile Graphics": Completed and ongoing.

III F. Websites

At the time of the agreement with the NFB, Wichita State's web sites were inaccessible. That reality was the result of a lack of training and guidance for content creators that would promote accessible content creation, as well as severe limitations in the university's home-grown content management system, which was quite old and out of date at the time.

The university was in the early stages of talks with higher ed-focusing content management platforms already, and the need for a platform that provided accessibility tools was added to the RFP. The process took a bit longer than we had hoped, but we communicated with the NFB's representatives and requested extensions to the agreement's timelines for web accessibility.

The new web site was launched (on the Omni Update Campus platform) and that alone made dramatic accessibility improvements to the site.

What remained was content that migrated into the new site that was not accessible. Content creators were trained in accessibility as they were trained and granted access to the new tools. That provided some good momentum, but there remained orphaned content and other problems that required a more direct solution. So dedicated staff in the MRC worked with the accessibility tools and reports within Omni Update to target and eliminate accessibility problems in the content delivered by those tools.

In the Fall of 2019, we had reached a solid footing where that content is concerned, and our tools reported 1% or less known errors on any given day for content delivered by the Omni Update tools. At this point the NFB, using an external review tool drew our attention to many more errors being reported from the outside by content that was not managed by the CMS, and so not reported in the tools we were measuring our success with. The vast majority of those reported problems were found on PDFs delivered through our web site; because they were not part of the web content system, they had existed outside of our efforts thus far.

We quickly purchased the tool that the NFB used to evaluate our site from the outside (SiteSort) and ran our own reports to begin working on the new challenge – PDF remediation. A

team of web developers worked with the team of instructional designers who were working on instructional PDFs for accessibility standards and got to work remediating the PDFs on the web site that are creating problems.

This effort is, at this point, ongoing. A team of three provides both training to PDF creators and remediation work to clean up and replace inaccessible PDFs on the web site with accessible ones – or they ensure that there is an equally accessible alternative for content delivered in that PDF.

As an example of that last point, the Admissions team maintains a network of web pages for every major and minor that a student might be interested in. They produce PDFs of those pages, which may have accessibility problems (because those PDFs are dynamically generated and those processes are not 100% accurate), but each PDF is a product of the original web page that provides the same information and equivalent experience.

A university web site is a living organism – content is constantly being created and uploaded to the site. At this point, new content in the Omni Update CMS cannot be published if it does not meet accessibility standards, so it is very difficult for users to create new accessibility problems. We will need to continue to work on the problem of PDFs and other content on the site, and have dedicated teams doing this work.

Nevertheless, there is an excellent outside indicator of the success we have made in our efforts to be as accessible as possible. A web accessibility company called Pope Tech has created a web report that reviews all university and college web sites in the country. Their survey scans the top 100 pages of the institution's web site, using the WebAim web accessibility checker (the industry standard), and that report ranks Wichita State very highly. The Pope Tech report is based on the home page and the top 100 pages linked from that page, which includes pages that are not part of our content management system (like PDFs) so while it's only a rough indicator based on the very top pages on our site, it is not cherry-picking content from our CMS.

The report indicates a 0.05% error density. In their rankings, WSU's web site is #39 out of 3,837 schools, so just about at the top 1% all institutions in the country. For institutions our size (10-20,000 students) we are ranked #3 out of 306 (also roughly the top 1%). We are also #3 in the state of Kansas (for comparison, Kansas University is ranked #23 in Kansas and #1,129 overall; and Kansas State University is ranked #15 in the state and #605 overall).

- Pope.tech Results for Wichita State

So, while we will continue to strive to be the most accessible school in all of those pools, we have made dramatic improvements over the course of the four years of this agreement. Being in the top 1% of our peer institutions in the country is a great indicator of that work.

Agreement Items in III F and Success

- Within 18 months, WSU's web sites shall be made accessible: Ongoing
    - Extensions were required on the timeline because of delays in our contracts with our web design firm and CMS provider
    - Web pages created in the CMS are as accessible as we can make them
    - PDF remediation work is a major focus of work going on right now.
- Develop process to monitor and remediate barriers: Completed and ongoing
    - Daily accessibility reporting on the main web site alert the team to problems as they arise.
    - Content creators on the main web site are not able to publish web pages that do not pass automatic accessibility checks.
    - The MRC-Web Services team provides training on web accessibility as part of the training for new content creators.
    - The MRC-Web Services team is working to address the libraries of inaccessible PDF files on the university web site.
    - The MRC-Web Services team provides training for content creators on PDF accessibility.

Accommodations and Support

At the time of our agreement with the NFB, our efforts had been falling short in our efforts to meet the accommodation needs of a specific student in a STEM major who had visual impairments and needed braille and tactile resources for her classes.

The process of learning to successfully meet that student's needs – and the needs of students who have come during the time of the agreement – was not easy or without problems. While the first student is named in the agreement with the NFB, I will refer to the student as Student One for the sake of privacy. I will also address our efforts working with three other students and one faculty member.

Early Efforts

The addition of a new accessibility technologist to the Office of Disability Services, who was intended to be made available half-time for the effort to provide the resources that Student One needed, was a great first step in the effort to make important improvements. The Office of Disability Services invested in some new equipment (notably a Picture in a Flash) and made a good effort towards solving the problems.

Over the course of several semesters it was clear that this was not going to be enough. Even working full time on his accommodations work, the technician was only able to stay ahead of the student's demands when things were ideal. Late work from instructors, illness, and other fairly typical challenges repeatedly created situations in which the student's access to materials fell behind the class, and we were back in the situations that had led to the agreement in the first place.

In an effort to solve that problem as well as move the work into the hands of teams with more expertise in academic technology and instructional delivery, a change was made in the spring of 2018 to move the accommodations technician and the work into the Media Resources Center. There, a team of three was quickly put on the task of doing the work that the previous person had been challenged with, increasing capabilities and delivery.

Fall of 2018: New Student, New challenges

The transition from a team of one half-time to three full-time people made a dramatic difference in what we were able to take on for the student in her classes. Where, in the previous semesters, we had only been able to provide the absolute necessities for materials, the new team set a goal of providing the same materials all students have access to, and to do so far enough ahead of the student's needs that there was sufficient buffer to handle unforeseen events.

The new team, in the Media Resources Center, was called Academic Accessibility and Accommodations (AAA).

The move in the Spring of 2018 to create AAA turned out to be prescient – we learned that summer that we would have a second student who required braille that fall, and it looked like our workload was going to double.

Student Two is a music major, and so presented many new challenges for the AAA team to solve. We learned quickly what it was going to take to produce musical braille, and because of the need for excellent music reading skills and skill with the Sibelius software, the process of accommodating Student Two has relied on a mix of efforts from the AAA team and from graduate assistants in the School of Music, who transcribe music from sheet music into XML which can then be translated into musical braille.

Over the course of the 2018-2019 academic year the team was refined a bit, and skills developed. With the music department helping to carry some of the load for Student Two, the team was able to keep up with both student needs overall, and the year was mostly successful.

Late in the spring of that year we found out we would have a third student, in yet another subject matter area – computer science. The long-time director of Disability Services, Grady Landrum, retired that summer, and the university hired Isabel Medina Keiser as the new director.

Since the arrival of Medina Keiser in late August of 2019, processes and collaboration between related teams has improved dramatically. Isabel brings with her over 12 years of working in the area of disability services. Her work experience ranges from working with students with disabilities in a smaller Hispanic Serving Institution to a larger university with over 26,000 students.

Within the first few months of her being at WSU, the MRC teams and the Office of Disability Services were meeting and collaborating in a much more profound way. The teams have a much stronger connection and understanding of each other's roles now and work collaboratively to ensure that a process problem that impacts one team is a priority for all to solve.

Fall of 2019: The Process Works

In the fall of 2019, we geared up to meet the needs of all three students. The skills of the team were strong enough by then to add a third student without falling significantly behind, and while we were not always able to keep up our full buffer, students were by and large not left significantly behind at any point. Problems were quickly solved, by and large.

That fall, Student One encountered problems with an instructor from the Biology department whose rigidity about their labs (and especially lab exams) created special challenges for the student and for the staff of the AAA team.

After a challenging semester, Student One availed herself of the university's processes for filing a discrimination complaint and resolved the situtation through the university's internal processes. While the necessity of that process was unfortunate, it stands as a good demonstration that our processes and systems are working as designed.

At about the time that was going on, we learned that we would have a fourth student – this time a fully-online student in a graduate program, who would start in the Spring of 2020.

The examination of the path ahead of Student Four revealed a big win for our accessibility efforts. The courses the student would be going into – graduate programs in the College of Applied Studies – were by and large already accessible, thanks to faculty efforts to make their

classes accessible. This made meeting their needs much less of a burden than we expected as we dealt with a semester supporting four students.

At the end of the Spring semester, Student One finished her degree, and applied to KU Medical School's Pharmacy program. She has been a student employee in the Media Resources Center and a big part of the university's efforts to succeed in meeting her needs, and we remain deeply committed to her success going forward.

Fall of 2020: Onward and Upward

This coming fall, the courses selected by Students Two and Three will keep the team busy. Student Two will be taking classes in music history that present dramatic challenges in the creation of tactile graphics, but the team is in place and working already to solve those problems.

One opportunity that our work provides us this fall is the AAA team has been working with a Physics professor who has lost his vision to macular degeneration. We have been supporting him in his efforts to learn braille and have tactile versions of his own teaching materials – and this fall Student Three will be entering his class. Four years ago, this would have been an impossible problem for Wichita State. This year, we do not anticipate anything beyond the capabilities of the AAA and ODS team to solve.

Wichita State's Philosophy on Accommodations

One of the things that is evident in the progress that we have made over the past four years, transitioning from a lower level of sophistication for accommodations to a higher one that enables student success in exceptionally challenging disciplines like hard sciences, is that we have had to adopt a standard of service that is vastly different from the standard operating procedures at most institutions around the country.

It has become apparent that many Disability Services offices lack the funding, skills, and institutional support to be effective, and the people who suffer as a result of those deficiencies are the students.

At Wichita State, it required dedicated work from a team of trained educational technologists and accessible document specialists to meet the needs of a few students, and this represented full-time work for that team – it was not something that could be taken on by the overtaxed Disability Services staff, serving their caseloads of 600+ students -- and our ODS staff are exceptionally dedicated. It is demanding work that is substantially different from day-to-day ODS coaching and advocacy work.

The network of braille production houses that many of institutions rely on for braille and tactile graphic materials are dangerously inadequate. The high cost of these materials makes it cost prohibitive to do anything but provide a painfully limited amount of the course materials for the students, and those products were not reviewed for usability by visually impaired users or accuracy by the subject matter experts in those fields. They were, at best, flawed first drafts, often delivered late, and too limited for true student success.

Our reliance on that sort of production was a major component of the systemic failure that led to Student One's complaint against Wichita State. We didn't find the right path until we moved that work out of Disability Services due to the caseload there and the differences in instructional material production that were needed.

Parity: What works for Online is necessary for Accommodations

When we moved the work out of Disability Services and into the Academic Affairs side of the house, partnered with the university's Instructional Design team, we were able to share skills and talents between the two teams while operating with an understanding of parity and quality that was based on the instructional design team's use of those terms as they related to the effort to move face-to-face instruction into an online format.

For an online version of a face-to-face class, we regularly insist that all resources and experiences in the face to face class need an analog in the online class, even if those experiences did not explicitly appear on the exam. Online students need enrichment and supporting instruction just as much as face-to-face students do. And if that is the case for an online course design, it must also be the case for an accommodated course design.

With that mindset baked in, the Academic Accessibility and Accommodations team set out to take on the challenge of creating braille and tactile graphics for content used in the classes they were working on, rather than simply the subset of those materials that would "appear on the test." After all, the purpose of any course is not to pass the exam, it is to develop the skills and understanding represented by the course – and the exam is only an imperfect assessment of that understanding, not an end in itself. Focusing only on what will be "on the exam" is a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose of academic work.

From the first week of classes, the first term that the AAA team was working on behalf of Student One to make sure she had all of the materials, we were able to see that these efforts were making a dramatic difference in her ability to succeed in the class.

This requires a level of investment that is not typical for most institutions. Until publishers make these sorts of materials available as a matter of practice, there does not appear to be a way to

provide materials at an appropriate level (all materials, not just what will explicitly be tested on) without investing in the staff and resources to handle the production of those materials in-house.

It also requires the right people – the right team, with the right skills and access. By moving this work into the academic side of our house, we were able to leverage skills and relationships that are not available to most disability services teams. We were also able to cross train and flex team members back and forth to meet the shifting needs of this work, as students take on more or less demanding subject matter – and also ensure that our ability to meet the needs of our students is never tied to the health and availability of a single team member.

In a higher education environment in which state and federal aid is shrinking rapidly and budgets are in full retreat, it's an exceptionally difficul challenge to sell the idea that other institutions need to make this kind of investment so that we can raise our standards for accommodations to a level that will allow for student success. That difficulty makes it all the more important for collaboration across institutions and agencies to promote that sort of culture change.

Other Efforts and Programs

Museum Accessibility

In 2018, the Instructional Design and Access team and MRC leadership worked with designers working on a remodeled Pizza Hut museum at Wichita State. Working with the designers, architects, and history department – and in consultation with Envision (a local Wichita agency that serves and supports visually impaired people), we were able to ensure that the museum was as accessible for visually impaired people as we could make it – and created scalable standards for how we will make similar spaces accessible throughout campus.

In the fall of 2019, the MRC teams collaborated with the Ulrich Museum of Art to create an art show that explored accessible art, creating tactile versions of several pieces in the museum's permanent collection. The same show highlighted Bluetooth beacon technology and other solutions to make museums and museum experiences accessible.

Now the museum is working with the new concepts and standards for making exhibits accessible as they update signage in the university's outdoor sculpture collection and will continue to invest in access in the future.

Aira Access

Aira is a service which provides an on-demand visual assistant to users through their smartphones (or dedicated sunglasses). Wichita State has become an Aira Access location (on all ten of our locations, including WSU Tech locations).

Aira provides important service to provide autonomy and accessibility, and there was even good media converage of the new service, with one of our student users featured and demonstrating the service.

Digital Signage

Like many institutions and businesses, Wichita State has a network of display screens around campus that provide important emergency information as well as announcements and promotional information to users on campus.

The information on these screens – and displayed visually in a handful of other ways – is not accessible to users who can't see it. One of our earliest initiatives to find an equally effective alternative for a problem like this was the creation of an audio podcast version of the digital signage programming that is released weekly so that users have access to the same announcements and promotions that other students do.

The emergency information that is conveyed in the Digital Signage systems is also conveyed in other formats, including text messages, so there is no need for those to go out over the podcast – and they would not be timely enough to be useful, anyway.

Conclusion

At this point, at the end of the four years of our agreement with the NFB, Wichita State has successfully made dramatic improvements to the accessibility of our offerings. We have policy, process, and solutions in place. We have training and well-communicated standards. And we have many significant successes.

Our journey is not complete, because accessibility is a journey that will never be completed. There are problems and issues that appear requiring new solutions or revisions to current practices and policies. WSU is ready for these challenges as they come up.

A dedicated team of professionals is working to continue moving forward and addressing problems as we see them. The Accessibility Committee, pulled together to address problems explicitly called out in the agreement, is adding to its efforts an examination of outstanding physical accessibility problems on campus, and will continue to provide training, support, and advocacy to the rest of campus. With the advent of a dedicated ADA/Accessibility Coordinator in the university compliance office, we will be in an even stronger position for continued improvements.

We have also made it a focus of our work to share what we are learning and developing with other institutions, especially other Kansas Board of Regents schools. Our accessibility leaders have keynoted regional conferences, presented at the national level, and have built a collaborative web site to share training and resources, the Kansas Accessibility Resources Network (ksarn.org). We consult with local service agencies like the Wichita Area Sexual Assault Center to help them deliver their training and information in an accessible way.

An important note to land on, as an indicator of success in a difficult, challenging environment, is to consider the success that our students requiring high-impact accommodations like braille and tactile graphics had this spring. All of those students succeeded in their classes and advanced successfully despite dramatic Covid-19-related upheaval. Our processes and systems are robust enough now that there was no interruption in the services provided by the teams and instructors that work with those students.

Four years ago, we struggled to succeed under normal circumstances. Today, we succeed under the stress of events more impactful than anything higher ed has faced for decades.