REVISING YOUR COURSE FOR ACCESSIBILITY

This document is available in alternative formats. Please contact cli@assiniboine.net.

MAY 2022

Purpose

To provide instructors with strategies, ideas, and resources for improving the accessibility of their courses.

Background

Generally, accessibility refers whether a product, device, service, or environment is usable for all intended audiences. In the educational context, the accessibility of a course refers to the ability for all learners to engage with the course fully.

Accessibility is an integral part of the course design and revision process. An accessible course a more inclusive course, as students from a variety of backgrounds and abilities are supported. Designing with accessibility in mind anticipates that students in your class will have a variety of needs and works proactively to support them.

Revising courses with an accessibility lens can help you identify how to reduce the barriers which student may face in the course. This will then help to improve the experience of all students and create an inclusive student learning environment, while reducing the time and resources needed to implement individual accommodations.

How To
Map Course Design

A great way to start revising your course for accessibility is by mapping the course. Typically, a course blueprint (also referred to as a course map) is used for this. A course blueprint (or map) is a visual representation of the course that identifies how learning outcomes, assessments, learning activities, and instructional materials are aligned. It may look like this:

Learning Outcomes	Evaluation and Assessment	Learning Activities	Instructional Materials

Once your course is mapped, you have an overall picture of your current course and a starting point for redesign for accessibility. These questions from CUNY Academic Commons (n.d.) can help you identify what elements of your course could be improved:

- Checking alignment: Do the activities and content really support the learning outcomes for the course or units?
- Analyzing: What was most difficult for students to achieve or for you to assess?
- Reviewing the whole picture: How do the various component parts of the course or assignments complement and reinforce student learning?
- Identifying reliance on one modality: Do students have to get the majority of their content from one modality (all lecture or all reading)?
- Clarifying your course activities: Do students know what to do and why they are doing it?

You might also consider:

- Student feedback: What have you heard from students about pain points, challenges, or confusing parts of the course?
- Accommodations: What accommodations do you typically see in this course? Are there particular assessments that drive higher accommodation requests?
- Your experience: What frequently asked questions did your learners have? Where there any assignments that didn't go as well as you hoped? Did you encounter any issues in the course?

This information will help you identify elements of your course you can revise for accessibility. You may want to rethink a specific assessment, improve the accessibility of course content, reduce the need for formal accommodations, etc.

Make your Course Assistive Technology Friendly

Assistive technology is:

> technology used by individuals with disabilities in order to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible. Assistive technology can include mobility devices such as walkers and wheelchairs, as well as hardware, software, and peripherals that assist people with disabilities in accessing computers or other information technologies. For example, people with limited hand function may use a keyboard with large keys or a special mouse to operate a computer, people who are blind may use software that reads text on the screen in a computer-generated voice, people with low vision may use software that enlarges screen content, people who are deaf may use a TTY (text telephone), or people with speech impairments may use a device that speaks out loud as they enter text via a keyboard (Washington University, n.d.).

Many Assiniboine students and staff use assistive technology, sometimes as part of an accommodation and sometimes not. If your course content, assessments, or instructional resources are inaccessible that means some of your learners will not be able to use assistive

technology. Here are some examples of how instructors have made their courses more assistive technology friendly.

Past practice	Accessibility issue	Change made and impact
Course handouts are provided in hard copy format.	Learner would need to scan and format document in order to use assistive technology.	Course handouts are provided as accessible Word or PDF document. No additional work is required for learners using assistive technology.
Course readings are scanned or photocopied from a hard copy text.	A scanned PDF contains no tags, structure, or other information to provide content or context to assistive technology users. The scanned PDF presents a major accessibility barrier and requires significant remediation.	Scanned copies replaced with accessible electronic copies.
Images are added, without alternate (Alt) text or captions. Alt text "is meant to convey the 'why' of the image as it relates to the content of a document or webpage. It is read aloud to users by screen reader software, and it is indexed by search engines. It also displays on the page if the image fails to load" (Harvard University, n.d.).	Without Alt text, learners may not be able to access the meaning conveyed by the image.	Alt text is added to images used in the course, ensuring all learners can access the meaning of the images.
Assistive technology only used as part of a formal accommodation.	Assistive technology can benefit all learners, not just those with formal accommodations. Some learners may be reluctant to use assistive technology in the course, if they are unsure how it will be perceived by their instructors or peers.	Assistive technology use is promoted in the course. Instructor highlights benefits of assistive technologies for all learners, such as how text to speech can be helpful in editing written assignments before submission.

The Accessibility Checklist provides additional ideas for making sure your course and documents are accessible to learners.

Check Accessibility of Course Documents

Each course will contain documents, such as the course outline, handouts, and readings.
It is important the course documents are accessible. Revise your documents for accessibility by:

- Ensuring the accessibility of the document. Specifically, check that you:
  - Use headings
  - Use lists
  - Use meaningful hyperlinks
  - Add alternate text to images
  - Identify document language
  - Use tables wisely
  - Use text that is at least 12-pt font
  - Use built-in page number functions
  - Use the paragraph formatting function to add space between paragraphs or sections instead of using hard returns

  You can use the Microsoft Accessibility Checker for this task, or complete the Accessibility Checklist.
- Ensuring instructions and expectations are clear.
- Avoiding jargon and write in plain language (clear, concise, well-organized, appropriate to intended audience).
- Ensuring learners will not be disadvantaged by course choices. For example, when creating course expectations, consider the accessibility implications (*Creating Accessible Learning Environments*, n.d.). For example, a 'no lap – top policy may negatively impact students who need their computer for note taking.

Make the Moodle Course Page Accessible

The central landing point for an ACC course is the Moodle course page, a page within Moodle that is created for a course or a specific section of a course. Instructors can use the Moodle Minimum Presence Standards to enhance accessibility within the course by providing a consistent student experience that ensures students can access the critical information and curriculum assets they need to be successful.

For more information about creating supporting accessibility in Moodle see Supporting Accessibility in Moodle.

Instructors can also use standards #16-28 from the OSCQR SUNY Online Course Quality Review rubric as a guide to ensuring the Moodle course page design and layout is accessible.

Improve Accessibility of Assessments

Improving the accessibility of assessments ensures learners can show what they know. To do this:

- Ensure that the expectations and instructions are shared with are in accessible documents. Look at the Accessibility Checklist for more information.
- Build scaffolding into your assignments, so that you have a chance to check in with learners and support their progression.

- Provide students with multiple ways of communicating their learning. For example, instead of the assignment being a written paper students could have the choice of an audiovisual presentation, podcast, or paper. This provides different ways for learners to show their achievement of the learning outcome.

Improve the Accessibility of Course Content

It is essential that all learners be able to access the content of the course.

- Consider your course content, is the course heavily reliant on one modality? If so, are there opportunities to build in variety. For example, if you course includes a lot of readings can you add in some videos throughout the course so students have a different access the course content.
- Look at the resources that students are going to use as part of the course, can they be adapted so they are more accessible?
  - PDF, Word, and PowerPoint – refer to the Accessibility to Checklist to see how to ensure that your documents are accessible. You can use the Microsoft Accessibility Checker for this task, or complete the Accessibility Checklist.
  - Audio/Video Transcripts and Captioning – provide transcripts for audio clips and synchronous captioning for video clips. Videos shared on Microsoft Stream have automatic captions.

Facilitation Strategies that Enhance Accessibility

The choices you make in facilitation can enhance accessibility in course delivery. Here are some strategies you may want to try:

- Include Icebreakers in your class to build community and engagement.
- Hold all students to consistent and high standards in your course.
- Boost classroom engagement by building in ways for students to engage with you and course content in a variety of ways. For example, include Moodle discussion forums, classroom discussions (and encourage the use of chat if on Zoom), small-group work, and individual assignments.
- Monitor student groups when using small groups in your class support students in creating community and relationship build through peer-to-peer engagement strategies.
- Communicate with students – if you are making an important announcement to students in class, also send them an e-mail or online announcement through Moodle to support it (*Creating Accessible Learning Environments*, n.d.).

Out of Class Activities

When planning field trips, work-integrated learning, and practicums consider accessibility. Are all students going to be able to engage fully in the learning experience? Contact Accommodations and Disability Services if you need support with this.

References

Creating Accessible Learning Environments. (n.d.). Vanderbilt University. Retrieved

April 29, 2022, from https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/creating-

accessible-learning-environments/

Harvard University. (n.d.). *Write good Alt Text to describe images*.

https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/describe-content-images

SUNY Academic Commons. (n.d.). Course design and development tutorial: Redesign and

revision. CUNY School of Professional Studies.

https://spscoursedesign.commons.gc.cuny.edu/redesign-and-revision/

Washington University. (n.d.). *What is assistive technology?*

https://www.washington.edu/doit/what-assistive-technology