Implementing a Systematic Approach to Online Course Accessibility

Although implementing a systematic approach to online course accessibility may seem like a daunting task, the best way is to begin by taking small steps while working towards establishing institution-wide accessibility policies and procedures. Below is a list of items you may be able to employ in order to implement a systematic approach to online course accessibility at your institution.

1. **Meet with co-workers** to see who's interested in getting involved in accessibility initiatives on your campus.

2. **Build a relationship with your student disability services office** and discuss how the accessibility of online course materials is being addressed.

   a. Are students having difficulty accessing their online course materials?

   b. Are materials being made accessible for the students?

   c. Whose responsibility is it to make these materials accessible?

3. **Research what other institutions of higher education have already done** in the area of accessibility of online course materials. Some places to start include:

   • University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (http://html.cita.illinois.edu/)

   • California State University System (http://www.calstate.edu/accessibility/)

   • Penn State University (http://accessibility.psu.edu/)

   • George Mason University (http://accessibility.gmu.edu/)

   • University of Central Florida (http://teach.ucf.edu/resources/accessibility-tips/)

4. Provide faculty professional development opportunities.

   a. Partner with various units on campus and interested faculty to promote and share best practices for making online materials accessible.

   b. Create and record short (30-minute) webinar sessions and place them online

      i. Faculty Seminars in Online Teaching (http://teach.ucf.edu/professional-development/faculty-seminars/)

      ii. Faculty Multimedia Workshop Series (http://www.oir.ucf.edu/index.php?q=FMworkshopseries)

   Some fun facts and rating system on the impact of each (five stars is highly recommended):
   - **Annual accessibility-related letter from the provost (★★★★★)**
   - **Hire a usability checker (★★★★)**
   - **Assign an accessibility coordinator (★★★★★)**
   - **Develop an accessibility support model (★★★★★)**
   - **Implement a campus-wide Universal Design for Learning (UDL) initiative (★★★★★)**
   - **Avoid the use of complicated technology (★)**
   - **Build a course without considering UDL or accessibility (★)**

5. Create or link to accessibility-related online resources for faculty on how to make their online course materials accessible.

   a. Accessibility Tips (http://teach.ucf.edu/resources/accessibility-tips/)

   b. Creating Accessible Course Content (http://teach.ucf.edu/resources/creating-accessible-course-content/)

c. Document Formatting Guidelines (http://teach.ucf.edu/resources/document-formatting-guidelines/)

d. Module and course rubrics (http://teach.ucf.edu/pedagogy/design-of-an-online-course/evaluation/)

6. Syllabus strategy

a. Include accessibility-related statements on the syllabus to include items such as:

i. Required plugins and different types of media that will be used in the course (e.g. videos, narrated PowerPoints)

ii. Where students can go to for assistance.

7. Hire a usability checker

a. Part-time student with significant experience using screen readers (JAWS, Window-Eyes, NVDA)

b. Test multi-media products, websites, online course materials, virtual worlds, mobile devices, software (homegrown and commercial).

8. Assign an accessibility coordinator for your department or campus to:

a. Oversee and coordinate accessibility initiatives

b. Provide leadership and guidance

c. Plans, monitors, and coordinates accessibility activities

9. Develop an accessibility support model (image 1)

a. The following model is designed to address several types of accessibility initiatives that include:

i. UDL (apply these principles when creating a brand new online or hybrid course)

ii. Proactive requests (to retrofit online or hybrid courses for accessibility)

iii. Immediate need (for online or hybrid courses that need accessibility accommodations for currently registered students).

b. Collaborate with other campus units (e.g., student disability services, faculty centers, instructional technology)

Image 1: ACCESSIBILITY SUPPORT MODEL

10. Acquire a provost letter

a. Seek support from the university's administration. A letter from the administration to faculty reminding them of the responsibility of making online course materials accessible and where they can go for support and assistance can go a long way.

b. UCF's provost letter (http://teach.ucf.edu/resources/creating-accessible-course-content/).

11. Offer an online or hybrid course accessibility check

a. Review course components for accessibility-related ítems such as:

i. alternative text for images

ii. color contrast

iii. captioning

iv. bulleted/numbered lists

v. table headers

Authors
Kathleen Bastedo and Nancy Swenson are instructional designers at the Center for Distributed Learning at the University of Central Florida.

Kathleen Bastedo   Nancy Swenson