IT ACCESSIBILITY TASK FORCE 2020 REPORT
University of Washington (UW)

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DESCRIPTION OF TASK FORCE

CHARGE
Develop and implement plans for promoting the procurement, development, and use of accessible information technology (IT) and establish best practices on all UW campuses.

OBJECTIVES

- Take steps toward the procurement, development, and use of accessible websites, documents, videos, commercial software, and other IT and institutionalize cooperative relationships between key stakeholder groups at the UW.
- Develop strategies that can be applied campus-wide, such as accessibility audits and the availability of training and IT accessibility tools (e.g., Siteimprove, SensusAccess, Ally).
- Recommend steps toward a more comprehensive and coordinated campus-wide effort in promoting the development, procurement, and use of accessible IT.
CATEGORIES OF EFFORT

- Develop plans for promoting web, document, and video accessibility, including who should be involved and what processes should be institutionalized.
- Work collaboratively in planning for activities and events to promote IT accessibility, such as Global Accessible Awareness Day activities, the UW Celebration of Accessibility, and annual IT Accessibility Capacity Building Awards.
- Review the UW’s Accessible Technology website (uw.edu/accessibility/) and recommend the addition of content useful to the campus community (e.g., best practices, templates, guidelines, standards).
- Submit annual reports to project sponsors.

MEMBERSHIP

The original members of the task force represented UW External Affairs and UW-IT. The number of stakeholder groups engaged in the task force has gradually increased to include the following members who include representation from all three UW campuses:

UNIVERSITY MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS
- Thomas Winston Thorpe, Director, Web Strategy, twthorpe@uw.edu

UW-IT
- Sheryl Burgstahler, Director, ATS, sherylb@uw.edu (chair)
- Doug Hayman, Technology Specialist (with a specialty in captioning), ATS, dhayman@uw.edu
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HUMAN RESOURCES
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STUDENT SERVICES
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COMPLIANCE SERVICES
- Bree Callahan, ADA Coordinator, breec@uw.edu

PROCUREMENT SERVICES
- Raymond Hsu, Director, Strategic Sourcing and Contracting, rayhsu@uw.edu

CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING
- Karen Freisem, Instructional Consultant, kfreisem@uw.edu
HISTORY OF TASK FORCE AND ACCESSIBILITY OF IT AT UW

The task force, meeting each month, has made significant contributions since its inception in 2012, particularly in developing campus guidelines and resources; creating and following system-wide IT accessibility plans; increasing campus awareness; developing proactive processes that promote the procurement, develop and use of accessible websites, videos, documents, and software; and engaging accessibility enthusiasts system-wide as IT Accessibility Liaisons. However, we are far from reaching a high level of accessibility of the UW’s IT assets. Tens of thousands of UW websites and digital documents (mostly PDFs) have accessibility problems, hundreds of videos remain uncaptioned, very few videos have been audio described, and many software products in use and being procured fail to meet accessibility requirements.

Peer institutions making the greatest progress toward accessible IT, with adequate staff to sustain their efforts, are typically those who have faced legal action or formal civil rights complaints regarding accessibility of their IT. We have not received a formal complaint, at least in part because of the efforts of ATS and the task force. We have used the resolutions and settlements resulting from complaints at other institutions as our guide toward making our own university compliant with respect to accessible IT. We are satisfied with our approach, but lack adequate staff and technology resources to make sufficient progress for an institution of our size. The number of staff whose positions are dedicated to IT accessibility are small, both centrally and within campus units. Meanwhile, publication of inaccessible PDFs continues at an alarming rate as faculty do not know the barriers they are creating for some students. These and other practices are of increased concern as the UW has moved thousands of courses and services online as a result of the pandemic.

DRS and DSO have made significant efforts, often in cooperation with ATS, in providing accommodations to specific students, faculty, and staff with disabilities who encounter IT accessibility barriers, but more efforts are needed to make the IT we develop, procure, and use at the UW accessible so that many of these accommodations are not required. Proactive approaches
such as universal design are consistent with the social model of disability and UW efforts toward a more inclusive campus. For example, if captioning videos and using accessible documents were standard practices at the UW, remediation of these products for students with disabilities would no longer be required. We are far from that end state, but do not doubt the importance of making progress in that direction.

2021 RECOMMENDATIONS TO TASK FORCE SPONSORS

The task force asks that its sponsors help with the following higher-level tasks:

- Educate University leadership—perhaps by inviting ATS staff or task force members to deliver presentations—on the importance of compliance with State Policy #188—Accessibility, following UW’s IT Accessibility Guidelines, employing proactive universal/inclusive practices, and addressing disability issues in all diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.
- Encourage more units to clearly assign IT accessibility roles, and ensure that these roles are adequately staffed.
- Explore ways to fund adequate numbers of staff that work system-wide to ensure IT procured, developed, and used at the UW is accessible to people with disabilities.
- Support efforts to establish enterprise-wide capabilities for accessibility, such as through pursuing funding for an expansion of the Siteimprove license.

Thank you for your continued support of task force efforts.

2021 PRIORITIES FOR THE TASK FORCE

Task force efforts on all three campuses will include those listed below, organized by categories of effort.

EXPLORATION OF POLICIES/PROCESSES

- Promote compliance with State Policy #188, IT accessibility guidelines, and IT accessibility in procurement policies within units and in specific workflows.
- Consolidate and coordinate policies, regulations, and other information relevant to IT to make it easier for users to find and apply information.
- Locate channels through which to connect with department coordinators and/or department instructional designers to promote accessibility as part of their workflows and join the IT Accessibility Liaisons group.

ENHANCEMENT AND PROMOTION OF ONLINE RESOURCES AND ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS

- Update the Accessible Technology website to provide relevant content for various stakeholder groups and encourage campus units to promote it.
- Increase levels of promotion of the use of Siteimprove, Ally, SensusAccess, YouTube Caption Auditor (YTCA), and Able Player (accessible HTML media player). Both YTCA and Able Player are free, open-source tools created and maintained by ATS with support from AccessComputing.
- Develop and promote the use of accessible UW-branded templates and themes for
websites, documents, events, and presentations.

**Promotion of Accessible IT**

- Continue to identify videos that lack captions and audio description and provide financial and technical support for addressing accessibility of high-impact, high-use videos. Consider identifying other incentives and funding sources for improving accessibility of UW video collections.
- Encourage faculty and staff to use accessible HTML as the primary means of sharing content and, if desirable, attach PDFs as a secondary option for the user, especially those who wish a printed version of the content. Continue to document and share efficient workflows for reducing the need for PDFs as the primary means for sharing content. Continue to explore costs for using outside vendors to remediate PDFs proactively through ATS and for clients of DRS and DSO.
- Deliver more presentations and other outreach, including effective training and support for Ally and promoting ATS’s IT accessibility webinar series.
- Recruit more IT Accessibility Liaisons and continue to support them with online communications and three half-day meetings each year.
- Offer CBIs for Washington State postsecondary institutions on IT accessibility and accessible online learning.
- Consider offering a Canvas course on accessible online learning.
- Consider offering a UW Professional Organizational Development course on accessible IT.
- Organize special events and activities for raising awareness of IT accessibility, perhaps in conjunction with Global Accessibility Awareness Day (May 20, 2021). Select recipient(s) for the annual IT Accessibility Capacity Building Award for promoting the accessible design of IT and universal design of instruction both onsite and online.

**2020 Accomplishments Regarding Accessible IT at UW**

The following lists share 2020 accomplishments regarding the accessibility of IT on campus, organized around three categories of effort.

**Exploration of Policies/Processes**

- **State Policy #188** – Accessibility (ocio.wa.gov/policy/accessibility), adopted in August of 2016, establishes “the expectation for state agencies that people with disabilities have access to and use of information and data and be provided access to the same services and content that is available to persons without disabilities...” Sheryl Burgstahler continues to serve as UW Coordinator with respect to Policy #188. On December 14, ATS hosted a half-day capacity building institute for Policy #188 coordinators at postsecondary institutions statewide where they shared promising practices and challenges; Sue Langen, Deputy Director for Strategy & Management in the state Office of the Chief Information Officer, delivered a presentation about Policy #188 and future updates.
- **Accessible IT Plans and Progress** are regularly posted on the IT Accessibility website at uw.edu/accessibility/plan.
- **Procurement Guidelines**, updated in 2020, are summarized on the Accessible Technology website at uw.edu/accessibility/procurement and are included in Section

- **DRS and ATS Processes.** The ongoing collaboration between DRS and ATS led to a plan for an on-site collaborative Accessible Media Center in 2019; plans are currently on hold due to our remote work caused by the pandemic.

- **Feedback Mechanism.** The established procedure for reporting IT accessibility barriers continues to be featured prominently on the home page of the Accessible Technology site.

**Enhancement and Promotion of Online Resources and Accessibility Tools**

- **SensusAccess.** ATS and DRS continue to co-fund a license for this web-based product that converts documents from inaccessible formats (e.g., a scanned PDF image) to more accessible formats. The service continues to be promoted through DRS, DSO, and ATS. The UW Document Conversion Service (tinyurl.com/uw-doc-convert) is linked from the DRS, Accessible Technology at the UW, ATC, and other UW websites. Since unveiling the service in December 2014, it has been utilized by over 1000 unique users, including over 100 users who have converted 10 or more documents.

- **Blackboard Ally.** UW-IT launched and continues to provide and support Ally, a tool for promoting accessibility of online instruction within Canvas. As instructors upload course materials, Ally evaluates them for accessibility and provides a score and feedback to instructors. In March 2019 it was launched for all UW Canvas courses. In 2020 a new Accessibility Report feature was launched to provide an accessibility score and feedback for an entire course, conveniently accessible to instructors via the course menu. This provides a second entry point for instructors to access feedback on accessibility of their course materials. In 2020, the instructor feedback feature was launched 24,667 times, leading to 8,873 fixes (a conversion rate of 35.97%). A weekly analysis of instructor usage shows a consistent pattern of instructors launching the feedback feature—and fixing accessibility problems—immediately prior to the start of each academic quarter (with spikes of usage in December/January, March, and September). Ally also generates alternative formats of course materials for students to download. Students downloaded 100,737 files in alternative formats in 2020.

- **Siteimprove.** This online service—which crawls websites and reports broken links, spelling errors and accessibility issues—continues to be funded by University Advancement and used by multiple campus units. As of December 2020, 122 websites at the UW were using Siteimprove. Of these, 26 sites (21%) showed improvement since December 2019. This is down slightly from 2019, in which 30 sites (25%) showed improvement. ATS plans are underway to more actively engage Siteimprove users in 2021 with a goal of seeing a significant improvement in accessibility scores. An ongoing limitation of the impact of Siteimprove is that our current license covers the scanning of no more than 50,000 pages, which is a tiny fraction of the overall UW web. The task force continues to explore sources of funding to expand to an unlimited license for all UW website owners.

- **DocMD.** Throughout 2020, the UW participated in a pilot test of Open Access Technologies' product DocMD, a tool that crawls select public UW directories, evaluates accessibility of PDF, Word, PowerPoint, and Excel files, and provides functionality to support various workflows for remediating files for accessibility. The pilot was led by ATS staff with several participants recruited from the network of IT Accessibility Liaisons. An initial baseline crawl conducted in December 2020 of a limited sample of
URLs found 9,451 files, the majority of which were PDF (7,386 or 78.2%). Across all file types, 177,192 accessibility errors were found. DocMD results could be used to better understand the UW's PDF landscape (e.g., which errors are most common) and to identify specific directories/departments that exhibit the highest frequencies of errors. This information could be used to guide outreach, education, and remediation efforts. If DocMD ultimately proves to be useful for supporting our document accessibility efforts, there will be a need to find funding sources to license it after the pilot period has ended.

- **Accessible Technology Website Improvements.** Task force members and their associates continued to improve the UW’s Accessible Technology website. In particular, new pages were added related to accessibility of online courses and meetings in response to the growing demand for this information as the UW moved to an online teaching and working model. Also, work began in 2020 on a major website redesign with ATS collaborating with UMAC's content strategists. The new website will be unveiled in early 2021. According to Google Analytics, the website attracted 451,060 page views in 2020, a 91.62% increase over its 235,391 page views in 2019.

**Promotion of Accessible IT**

- **Collaborating with Vendors.** ATS continues to work collaboratively with many of the technology vendors with whom the UW does business in order to help them design and develop more accessible products and services. In 2020, ATS was actively engaged in 30 collaborations with key vendors, including Canvas, Google, H5P, Interfolio, Manifold, Microsoft, Panopto, PollEverywhere, Pressbooks, ServiceNow, WorkDay, and Zoom. The impact of these collaborations is particularly noteworthy given the significant societal role that some of these companies have played during the pandemic. Thanks in large part to the past efforts of ATS in this area, people with disabilities have been able to fully participate in remote teaching, learning, and work by using accessible products and services.

- **Captioning Videos.** ATS continues to manage central funds for captioning high-traffic, high impact videos. In 2020, ATS staff captioned 273 videos with over 68 hours of run time, estimated to impact over 137,000 viewers. ATS staff also audio-described 2 videos, a service that helps individuals with visual impairments. ATS conducted periodic audits of known UW-affiliated YouTube channels using YouTube Caption Auditor (YTCA), an open source tool developed in-house that uses the YouTube Data API to collect data about videos hosted on UW-affiliated YouTube channels. As of December 2020, there were 87 known UW-affiliated YouTube channels. A YTCA analysis found that collectively these channels had published 10,303 videos, and had captioned 43.5% of them, including 49.9% of high traffic videos (i.e., those with views greater than the mean for that channel). This is significantly higher than previous analyses (e.g., 25.8% of videos were captioned in 2019, and only 7.6% were captioned when we started keeping track in August 2015). Also, of the 54 active channels, only 5 of the 87 channels have captioned 0 videos, and 29 channels have captioned over half their videos. Both of these numbers are improvements over previous years.

- **Inaccessible PDFs.** The task force continues to identify the proliferation of inaccessible PDF files to be a high-level concern. In Fall 2019, ATS staff began providing free remediation of some PDF documents that are highly-visible, high-impact, multiple use, and/or strategic. In 2020, ATS staff members remediated 674 PDF documents totaling 6,102 pages, positively affecting thousands of students, faculty, staff, and visitors as they
access public-facing documents. ATS continues to offer consultation, trainings, resources and tools to teach others how to create accessible documents. DocMD, described above under *Enhancement and Promotion of Online Resources*, may ultimately help with these efforts.

- **Campus Web Accessibility Support.** ATS staff continues to provide individualized and group support to web designers and developers both on request and through targeted outreach. UW web designers and developers are offered various means of receiving accessibility support, through access to web resources, monthly UW Web Accessibility and Usability Meetup, monthly Accessible Technology Office Hours, the AccessibleWeb Mailman list, and individual website reviews offered on request by ATS staff.

- **The University Marketing and Communications Web Development Team** has continued its efforts to increase the accessibility of its products and services, in collaboration with ATS staff. Accessibility improvements are made on an ongoing basis to the UW Boundless WordPress theme, UW Brand PowerPoint templates, and other resources.

- **Campus Presentations and Events.** Task force members delivered and supported the delivery of many accessibility-focused presentations, trainings, and meetings in 2020, including those hosted by the UW Web Council, UW Bothell, UW Tacoma, Continuum College, the UW Center for Teaching and Learning, UW Engineering Department, Learning Technologies, UW Libraries, Front-End Developers Community of Practice, Cultivate Learning, the UW Advisors Group, the UW Online Certificate Program, and the UW Elearning Special Interest Group. ATS presented on IT Accessibility at UW TechTalks on July 30, which coincided with the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. ATS staff led courses for UW-IT Learning Technologies, covering topics that include accessible document creation, website accessibility, and PDF accessibility and remediation. UW Bothell Digital Learning and Engagement (DLE) led workshops on Canvas accessibility, using Ally for Canvas, Document, PDF, Visio accessibility, included lessons on document and media accessibility into the UW Bothell Teaching Online 101 and 201 tri-campus sections for faculty, and assessed 10 product VPATs as part of ensuring accessibility in procurement processes. UW Tacoma IT staff led trainings for student workers on PDF remediation and captioning.

- **Off Campus Presentations and Events.** Task force members and their colleagues delivered presentations, hosted booths, and organized pre-conference events at various academic conferences including Accessing Higher Ground, EDUCAUSE Annual Conference, HighEdWeb Accessibility Summit, HighEdWeb Annual Conference, International Teaching Learning Collaborative conference, and Washington Association for Postsecondary Education and Disability (WAPED). Presentations were also given to groups including the Northwest Higher Education Accessibility Technology Group (H.E.A.T), a workgroup of the NorthWest Academic Computing Consortium (NWACC), Maple Leaf Community Council, University of Puget Sound, Consortium for Computing Sciences in Colleges - Northwestern Conference (CCSC-NW), and Northwest eLearning Community (NWeLearn). Webinar presentations included those hosted by the University of Washington, Innovative Educators, Simmons University, Academic Impressions, and 3PlayMedia.

- **Capacity Building Institute (CBI).** Task force members gave input, recruited participants, and engaged in the Washington State IT Accessibility CBI held virtually in
December 2020. The CBI brought together 50 representatives of Washington State colleges and universities who serve in leadership roles in implementing IT accessibility strategies on their campuses. Twelve institutions gave presentations related to their IT accessibility efforts, followed by discussions on challenges, needs, and opportunities for collaboration. The event revealed dramatic increases in knowledge and practices when compared with our first IT Accessibility CBI on Policy #188 in 2016, for which UW staff delivered all of the presentations.

- **IT Accessibility Liaisons.** The task force and ATS worked together to increase the number of UW staff volunteering as IT Accessibility Liaisons to nearly 150 members. Each Liaison formally agrees to communicate online, meet about three times per year, and promote accessible IT in their units. Three half-day meetings of IT Accessibility Liaisons were held in 2020, focusing on accessibility tools, teaching and working online, and IT accessibility procurement procedures, respectively.