ACCESSIBILITY IN HYBRID COURSES

OVERVIEW

Faculty who teach hybrid courses must make accommodations for two kinds of learning environments: synchronous (usually the classroom) and asynchronous (online) learning spaces. Classroom accommodations may require special seating, the presence of a notetaker or interpreter, and other accommodations for students dealing with "hidden" disabilities, such as anxiety, learning disabilities, autism spectrum, etc. These accommodations are often handled through the college or university's disability services office.

This handout, however, focuses on the technologies instructors need to make their course materials, whether provided in a classroom or online, accessible. For example, if you are using a print or e-book version of a textbook, you may have to make an accessible version available. Hearing impaired students may need speech recognition software that converts spoken language to text.

But the primary challenge for hybrid course instructors is to make certain that all materials provided synchronously and asynchronously typically through a learning management system (LMS) or any other web content, are accessible.

Most colleges and universities have an office dedicated to helping faculty develop accessible instructional material. Faculty should work with that office to better understand why we need accessible course materials (it is the law) and how you can design course materials that meet that requirement.

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) requires faculty to make their instructional materials accessible to students with documented disabilities, but the strategies for making these materials accessible enhances the learning of *all* students. Thus, it is important to follow the principles of Universal Design (UD) when building hybrid courses.

BASIC ONLINE TEXT ACCESSIBILITY CRITERIA

FACULTY TEACHING HYBRID COURSES THAT BLEND SYNCHRONOUS (CLASSROOM) AND ASYNCHRONOUSE (ONLINE) INSTRUCTION MUST DO THE FOLLOWING:

- All text documents should be tested for accessibility so that they can be read by screen reader programs such as JAWS.
- All videos must have transcripts.
- All videos should be captioned.

For an example of an accessible video with captions and a transcript, watch this brief video on YouTube, "A Personal Look at Accessibility in Higher Education." The video includes interviews students and faculty with disabilities who explain why it is necessary for them to have access to online materials. The video transcript is included in the list of resources.

ADDITIONAL ACCESSIBILITY CRITERIA

MAKE A HABIT OF INCORPORATING THESE STRATEGIES INTO YOUR COURSE BUILDING PROCESS:

- **IMAGE ALT TAGS:** Use image alt tags when inserting an image. Blackboard will prompt you for alt-text. This is a formatting option that provides alternative text to describe images to vision-impaired students.
- **HEADERS IN WORD**: When formatting Word documents, use one of the style settings for headings and subheadings that allow students with vision impairment to easily navigate the document. Do not include extra spaces and tabs.
- **UNIQUE SLIDE TITLES IN POWERPOINT**: The top line of the text on a slide (typically formatted as the "Title") should be unique to avoid confusion when students with vision impairments advance through the slide deck.
- **SIMPLE TABLES**: Include column and row headings to distinguish the headings from the table data. Do not include extra spaces and tabs.

If you do not know how to complete these tasks, explore the resources below from the George Mason ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE**.**

CREATE ACCESSIBLE DOCUMENTS

Learn how to make all of your documents accessible by using the accessibility review in programs like Word, PowerPoint, Excel, both for Windows and Mac operating systems.

BLACKBOARD COURSE ACCESSIBILITY CHECKLIST

This page lists resources for verifying that your syllabus/schedule is accessible, as are your PDFs and textbook.

CREATE ACCESSIBLE MULTIMEDIA CONTENT

Videos are time consuming to develop and edit, so make sure you build in the accessibility requirements as you design and produce. This page will explain how to request captioning services from ATI, and how to use video software to create "do-it-yourself" captions.

WEB ACCESSIBILITY

Do you want your students to use WordPress or PBWorks wikis? Both of those platforms are websites, so make sure they, and other web resources you want your students to read, are accessible. This page of resources explains why it is essential that websites be accessible and includes both videos and guides for determining web accessibility. The videos on this page show the need for accessibility from the perspective of the disabled person. They drive home why we need to make online materials accessible.

ACCESSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA

If you use social media in your course materials or require students to use social media in assignments, check these resources to learn how to make this content accessible and inclusive.

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