Grassroots Strategies for Building Buy-In for Digital Access - ACCESS 2024 - 3Play Media

[00:00:00.20] SOFIA LEIVA: All right. We will go ahead and get started. Welcome, and thank you for joining us at Access 2024. My name is Sofia Leiva, and I'm on the marketing team here at 3Play. My pronouns are she/her, and I'm a Latina woman with black hair wearing a black, long-sleeve top.

[00:00:21.68] Before we dive into the discussion, I'd like to go over a few housekeeping items. This presentation is being live-captioned, and you can view those captions by clicking the CC icon in your control panel. This session also features ASL interpretation courtesy of Deaf Services Unlimited. Please feel free to ask questions throughout the presentation using the Q&A window or chat.

[00:00:50.93] I'm happy to welcome you all to the session "Grassroots Strategies for Building Buy-In for Digital Access." Today we're joined by Korey Singleton, Deputy Coordinator for Accessibility and ATI manager at George Mason University. Thank you so much, Korey, for being here today. I'll pass it off to you for what I'm sure will be a wonderful presentation.

[00:01:15.40] KOREY SINGLETON: Thank you, Sofia. I appreciate it. And thank you guys for having me this late morning, almost afternoon. I'm going to go ahead and share my screen and my presentation, and we will get started. All right. If you can just give me a thumbs up or something just to let me know you guys can see it, that'd be great.

[00:01:36.52] SOFIA LEIVA: Looks great.

[00:01:37.63] KOREY SINGLETON: Perfect. Thank you. So as Sofia mentioned, my name is Korey Singleton, and I'm with George Mason University. I'll talk about that a little bit more, but we're going to talk a bit about "Grassroots Strategies for Building Buy-In for Digital Accessibility." So let's go ahead and get started.

[00:01:55.40] So just briefly, the agenda-- we'll talk a little bit about George Mason University. Then I'll talk about trends impacting digital accessibility in higher education. Broadly, it's impacting everything, but I'll talk specifically about higher ed, and just some practical strategies and examples that we've taken on our end to try to improve digital accessibility on our campus.

[00:02:20.23] If you would like a copy of the presentation one will be shared after, but I'm also going to share a bitly link as well. It's bit.ly/gmu_grassrootsaccess. All right. There's also a QR code here, the NaviLens QR code. And if you wanted to download the app, you could. But also, you can just point your cell phone smartphone camera at the screen and capture it that way as well.

[00:02:55.63] So just a little bit about George Mason University. Again, my name is Korey Singleton, as Sofia mentioned. I've been at George Mason for a little over-- well, actually, it'll be 16 years next week.

[00:03:07.96] I'm always the ATI manager. Recently, moved into the deputy ADA coordinator for accessibility roles. We're in the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. And the ATI is tasked broadly with overseeing George Mason's digital accessibility strategy. And I'll talk a little bit about that before I go on and talk about the institution a bit. Oops.

[00:03:35.15] So GMU is actually the largest public research institution in Virginia. We have a little over 40,000 students, as of last fall. A lot of that growth over the last decade has happened as a result of our online learning programs. They started investing pretty heavily in online learning right around 2011, 2012 or so. And we built out a number of fully online academic programs, both graduate and undergraduate.

[00:04:05.82] In recent years, there have been a lot of pathways initiatives put in place, too. We have partnerships with a number of community colleges across the state for students to-- if they have earned an associate's degree at that community college, then they're automatically enrolled in George Mason's-- towards an undergraduate degree as part of these pathways programs. So there are a lot of opportunities to continue to advance your education at Mason, and they've invested heavily in these initiatives over the years.

[00:04:40.28] We're located about half hour outside of Washington, DC. So that alone puts us in a position where we are kind of rubbing elbows with a lot of different industries, of course, the federal government, and a lot of the federal government contractors. So there are a lot of opportunities in the area as a result of it.

[00:05:00.29] George Mason's motto has always been, diversity is our strength. We have students that represent over all 50 states and over 130 different countries. It's one of the most diverse campuses in the country. I believe we're, like, top 10, or one of the top 10 institutions. So there's a lot of pride in the number of different perspectives that live on campus, the number of different cultures that are represented on campus, and we try to take advantage of that. And that also reflects in how we support our students with disabilities.

[00:05:36.06] So registered students with disabilities has grown approximately 2,000-- I'm sorry, 200% in recent years, I think, since COVID, actually. Students with disabilities who are registered with Disability Services represent about 7.5% of the student body right now.

[00:05:54.20] If you look at numbers nationally, as to what's expected in higher ed, I think the numbers are usually around 19%, 20%, something like that. And we're living right around 7.5%. I think that's representative of most higher education institutions where you find there's a bit of underreporting that's happening. And it's no different on our campus.

[00:06:16.46] Just talking a little bit about the Assistive Technology Initiative-- we started off many years ago. When I first started at Mason, we were pretty much tasked with creating or providing accessible textbooks for students with print disabilities and putting in place assistive technology solutions for students who needed technology-related accommodations.

[00:06:39.59] We still do that. But our role and mission has expanded quite a bit over the years. We are tasked with developing and implementing the University's digital accessibility strategy.

That includes not only providing post-production captioning, transcription, and audio description. We also review websites for accessibility review and monitor websites for accessibility.

[00:07:03.71] We started a document remediation service for the institution about six years ago or so. We still provide alternate formats for students with print disabilities. That includes not only tactile graphics, or rather, converting electronic documents into accessible formats, but also includes tactile graphics and 3D prints as needed. And we provide training to the university community as well. And I'll talk about some of these things and these strategies that we put in place so you can get a sense of how we've evolved over the years.

[00:07:39.40] So when we talk about Mason, it's a collaborative partnership. Our office reports directly to the ADA coordinator, who is a part of the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The ADA coordinator will typically refer employees with disabilities to our office for technology-related accommodations and support. And Disability Services, who is actually under our university life, will refer students with disabilities who need technology-related accommodations to our office as well.

[00:08:12.78] And then we have the digital accessibility role that we play on our campus, too. So I usually try to share this so people kind get a sense of how this partnership works on campus.

[00:08:24.06] So let's talk a little bit about the trends that are impacting digital accessibility. So the existing disability support model in higher ed is such that students with disabilities will typically-- we call it the medical model. So typically, what happens is students will register with Disability Services. They have to disclose that they have a disability. They provide documentation as it relates to the disability or that support that information.

[00:08:57.77] And then they're typically provided with accommodations. And they will take that faculty contact sheet and provide those accommodations, or rather, provide that information to the faculty members, who will then implement those accommodations that they've been approved for.

[00:09:12.62] Now, when we're dealing with typical accommodations, like extended time on testing or for homework assignments or things like that-- when we're thinking about note-taking, where you can provide a note taker in real time in some instances, or we're thinking about interpreting services, these are things you can tend to do at the last minute. So if a student with disability shows up on the first day of class, if these types of accommodations are needed, you can usually make some quick moves to address these things.

[00:09:44.28] Technology-related accessibility accommodations kind of upends all of that. And digital accessibility, specifically, really exposes the limitations of the medical model. And the reason I say that is because if an institution puts in place a learning management system that is inherently inaccessible to somebody who uses a keyboard only, or they use really funky contrast colors, or they have form fields that are inaccessible to screen-reader users, then you're not going to rip out their learning management system and then put in place a more accessible version.

[00:10:20.96] So in that instance, you've denied students the ability to effectively participate in their classes. So these are different things that we try to highlight when we talk about-- because this thinking still exists in higher ed, which is-- well, the student should tell me that they have a disability before I really even make any changes in my course. And we try to explain that technology really changes how we should be approaching these things. And so this is a way to try to get them to help understand some of that stuff.

[00:10:54.12] And when we look at the higher ed trends, like what's been happening in higher ed, there's an increasing number of students with disabilities enrolling in higher education institutions. We've talked about technology, the great implementation of online e-learning technologies, and higher education is making that difficult as well.

[00:11:12.22] When we talk about situations like the lockdown that I referenced before, where a lot of institutions maybe didn't have the technology infrastructure in place to support Zoom or to support Microsoft Teams or having actual courses in this kind of way-- Mason, as I mentioned, invested in distance education a long time ago, or over a decade ago.

[00:11:36.52] And so for that reason, when we moved fully online, it wasn't quite as much of a lift to try and make course content fully accessible. Doesn't mean we didn't have issues. But we had less issues than most of our counterparts because we had put a lot of the infrastructure in place.

[00:11:54.39] Now, since 2013, I believe, the Office of Civil Rights has entered in to over about 1,300 resolution agreements. And I made a mistake. This says, against institutions of higher education. That actually is inaccurate. The 1,300 number is actually representative of all public entities. When you think libraries, K-12 public school systems, state and local government entities-- when you think higher ed specifically, it's roughly about 300 or so higher education institutions.

[00:12:26.66] And these resolution agreements are typically identifying inequities as it relates to individuals with sensory impairments-- usually blind, low-vision, deaf, or hard-of-hearing. And so typically, if you're going to look at all 300 agreements, something's referenced about issues with screen-reader users being able to interact with an institution's websites or their academic tools or applications in the classroom. Could be a content management system. It could be a supplemental application off of a textbook-- for example, like McGraw Hill or Pearson, something like that.

[00:13:08.69] And the issues are collective. So we talk about our websites. We talk about our CMS, LMS. Usually, you'll see inaccurate captions for videos-- like, maybe using YouTube and relying on the auto captions as opposed to providing professional captions. Inaccessible documents may reference library databases.

[00:13:29.15] And the underlying issue against all of these particular situations is always timely access. And so that goes back to what I talked about with the medical model. When we introduce technology into the equation, it is very, very difficult to then rip out that technology solution to provide an accommodation for a student in real time.

[00:13:51.10] And this is no different in the workplace. If we put in place these email newsletters or an email system, or it could be the databases or the systems that are used in HR to actually access our-- submit timesheets or access our W-2s or W-4s and things like that-- if those solutions are inaccessible, then we are denying access to individuals with disabilities. And this is a lot of what's taking place now in terms of higher education institutions and trying to figure out their way around ensuring equivalent access to these digital resources.

[00:14:31.45] I'm going to talk about some of the practical strategies and examples for improving digital access. I'm going to reference a fair number of things that we've done in Mason. I'll try to highlight some colleagues here and there as well. And most of what I'm pulling-- this is a generalized list. But it's takeaways from these settlement agreements, from these consent decrees, and from the Dear Colleague letters that have been offered up-- most recent one being the joint DOJ/OCR one that came out as it relates to websites and mobile apps.

[00:15:04.10] So I'm going to go through these. I think I have roughly about eight. And so we'll talk about these. And then we'll talk about some examples, and then we can take questions and stuff from the audience.

[00:15:16.62] And so, as I mentioned, roughly about eight of them. It's a generalized list. It pretty much captures some of the language that you'll see in those settlement agreements and consent decrees-- consent decrees, excuse me. But I tried to infuse some examples so we can have a little discussion about how you take what DOJ and OCR are requiring and actually put those kinds of things in practice.

[00:15:44.27] So the first thing we're going to talk about is-- or first practical strategy, rather, is create a task force convening knowledgeable staff to develop a strategic plan around accessibility. So what exactly does that mean in practice, actually? And this is one of the first things we did. Most institutions, when they are figuring out if they've been sued and had to settle, or if they are operating without a lawsuit like George Mason did-- the first step is, how do we figure out our way through some of these requirements?

[00:16:18.83] And so we started this process back in-- 2013, 2014 is when we brought together what we called our Accessibility Working Group. And there was actually one case that actually prompted this. We had been trying for years, but we had one case that prompted this. We had a deaf student who was taking an online course. And the online course-- it was the online section of a face-to-face course.

[00:16:49.14] The student was a full-time employee. Couldn't get to campus to actually participate in the face-to-face course. Only had access to the online course. And basically, what was happening is the faculty member would just record that 1 and 1/2, to two-hour lecture, and then plop it up online, and the student could watch it.

[00:17:08.14] Well, we found out, about three four weeks in, that the student hadn't been able to participate in any of those classes because none of them were captioned. And at this time, the learning management system that was in place, or rather, the tool that was in place-- it took as long to download the videos as it did-- or rather, the length of time that it required to download it

matched the recording. So if it was an hour and a half video, it took roughly about an hour and a half to download. It was a really weird situation.

[00:17:40.82] So I remember I came in on a Saturday and downloaded about 15 hours of video in order for us to be able to outsource it, get it paid for, and then put it back in place somewhere for this student to be able to access these captioned versions. And then we figured out a process going forward. Well, there was no budget.

[00:17:59.86] So basically, that prompted us looking at what other institutions were doing. And what we saw is that Mason's issues mirrored a lot of the national cases that were out there. So we convened some partners, mainly with individuals from our library, our University Life, which is like our-- it's like Academic Affairs at other institutions, our information technology folks. Stearns is what used to be our Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence. And legal, academic unit, Disability Services, and then DEI. It used to be a different office, but it's basically, the DEI office.

[00:18:38.69] So we wanted to get some representative groups together to have some discussions about how we fix some of these issues And we came up with three core recommendations. And these three core recommendations laid the foundation for a lot of the work that we've done over the past decade. And part of it was improving student access in the classroom, improving access to our enterprise platforms, and then it also included how we best supported our faculty and staff. So I'll infuse some of those as we go forward. but that's practical strategy number one. And that's a good place to start.

[00:19:16.26] Now, one thing I'll mention is that sometimes institutions will start. They put together a committee. And as I referenced, you'll pull together all these folks, which are pulled from other units. And this accessibility work is on top of the work that they are evaluated for. So they have day jobs, and the accessibility work is kind of a side job.

[00:19:41.40] And so the work will not continue unless you have some staffing to actually support this effort. So that's another part of that strategy. The committee is great to get you started, but somebody is going to need to carry out the committee's recommendations. And at Mason, we had the ATI already in place so we were in place to carry out these recommendations.

[00:20:00.83] I've talked to colleagues at other institutions where they started the committee, committee made recommendations, and then people kind of-- and then the work falls off because the members of the committee either leave or take on new roles or they have to go back to their jobs, and they're not the ones that have the ability to carry on the additional work. So that's something to keep in mind.

[00:20:24.23] The second strategy is adopting an accessibility standard. And so usually, we're referencing WCAG, now on about 2.2, but you may see 508-- section 508, which still references 2.0, and the new ADA update, which references 2.1. And some institutions are going a little further than that. But it should be fairly easy now.

[00:20:46.34] The new ADA Title II Updates, which integrate digital accessibility, specifically around websites and mobile apps, was released on April 8. And it adopts a WCAG 2.1, level AA, which improves the support for individuals with low vision and mobile users. Compliance is expected by April 2026. So we have roughly about-- most institutions have roughly about two years to put these requirements in place, or rather, to put in place strategies to meet these requirements.

[00:21:24.41] They did reference a few exceptions. And the exceptions are things around archived web content. If I have documents that live online and then I archive that information and no one has a specific need for it, right now, I'm not required to now make it fully accessible unless somebody comes in and asks for that archived information.

[00:21:47.26] Now, pre-existing conventional electronic documents-- kind of the same idea. You may have documents that lived online. Could be meeting minutes from committee or something like that. If that stuff lives online, there's no need to make it fully accessible unless there's a request to make it accessible. And then, at that time, you need to go provide an accessible alternative version.

[00:22:10.48] Content posted by a third party-- the example we've used is if we have units on campus or faculty members on campus who are hosting social media sites-- are hosting information on social media platforms. If someone posts to your platform, then you're not required to ensure that what they post is accessible. What you post, however, does need to be accessible. The platform itself is expected to be accessible as well, especially if you're using it for instructional reasons in the classroom.

[00:22:44.64] Linked third-party content-- the easiest example that I would say is have a website you link out to another website. You obviously do not control the content on that other website, so you're not necessarily expected to make that fully accessible.

[00:23:00.65] The caveat we are using with our faculty members, though, is still-- if you're linking to a third-party resource that students are required to have access to, then you should make sure that content is accessible. And if it's not accessible in that form, then maybe you recreate it in a different form to provide those students with access.

[00:23:20.23] And then password-protected documents-- the easiest way to think about that is-- I'll use my wife as an example. Her paycheck stubs and her tax forms, like W-2, W-4, those are password-protected documents on the website. So the exception is that you would not necessarily have to make those fully accessible upfront. But if a student with a-- oh, I'm sorry, an individual with a disability required access to those, then you would need to make sure that password-protected content is fully accessible.

[00:23:56.80] The last two things I'll mention-- they do make a reference to conforming alternate versions in the update. And what that means, essentially, is that-- if you think about it in the past, when we were first developing websites, you would have the nice, quote unquote, "graphic intensive pretty website." And then the second website would just kind of be text-only. The text-only version was expected to be the accessible version.

[00:24:21.73] And what happened over time is folks would update, the quote unquote, "pretty website," and leave the text-only version with outdated information. And so it became that the Individuals with disabilities were not getting access-- equivalent access to the same information in real time. So they basically limit the scope for that being an alternative for creating accessible content.

[00:24:49.81] If there's a platform or a situation where you are needing to use tools or platforms or resources that are not fully accessible, you maybe, at that time, can create a conforming alternate version. But you can't just go and say, well, I'm going to make this Word document, and I'm going to make a different version of this Word document. We all know that you can make Word documents accessible. So that's a way to think about that part.

[00:25:17.01] Another factor is the European Accessibility Act, which was enacted in roughly about 2019, and that each member state of the EU was expected to put in place accessibility plans by 2023. There's now enforcement that will happen in 2025. So for any private companies that are doing business in the EU, they're required to make their digital resources fully accessible.

[00:25:41.19] And that covers a broad range of resources, from banking, telecommunications, travel, computer systems, websites, internet mobile. So it covers a lot of different tools and resources. Since we're all doing business with companies that are operating globally, there's a good trend that some of that will trickle back to us as well. So I took a little bit extra time just to go through some of that since it's so new, but that's something to think about when you think about adopting the accessibility standard.

[00:26:14.82] The other thing I would say is you need to integrate that accessibility standard into your policy considerations. So think about the purpose of your policy, and this sets the baseline for how your institution is going to operate. Who owns that policy? So it's one thing to just created policy. But if there's nobody there to provide any enforcement for it, then it's just kind of words on the page.

[00:26:41.07] So who owns that policy? What does it cover? When we first put in place our policy, we used to-- one of the reasons we did it was that when we would go to faculty members to talk to them about creating digital content, there was always this push-- well, this isn't covered. It became a legal fight. So everybody became a lawyer in the room for some reason.

[00:27:02.00] But it became a legal fight about which digital tools were covered by the law and which ones were not. And so we basically pulled definitions directly from settlement agreements and included those in our policy so that everybody knew the scope of what was covered. And then the implementation-- basically, how are we going to do this, what violations may look like. So what are ways that are demonstrative of people not actually conforming with the policy?

[00:27:35.37] And then the resources-- providing guidance. I know, in our policy, we included our procedural documents, our how-tos, how to access our resources and things like that. And so that's just a good thing to think about, too. I included some examples. All of them will have some different variations.

[00:27:54.75] But these are institutions-- Stanford, Harvard University, University of Illinois, University of Washington-- that have been doing this kind of work for a long time, and do excellent work. But there are some examples that you can review as well. Policy doesn't have to be huge and long, but these are some different considerations to keep in mind. Let me check the time just a bit. All right.

[00:28:19.58] So the third one is, obviously, create policies and procedures. So now that we have this institutional policy, how are we going to put in place all of these things that we need to do? I'm going to put some examples in for how we handled it here in Mason. So the first thing we did was we took a high-risk, high-impact approach-- a very targeted approach.

[00:28:38.54] As I mentioned before, we do not have-- or rather, we did not have any kind of lawsuit or settlement agreement that we were operating off of. And so oftentimes, in those, you are required to take a top-down approach. The university president, the provost, the VPs-- they're all kind of required to participate in this training and implementation effort. When you don't have that, you got to take a more grassroots approach.

[00:29:03.69] And so the first thing we did was we started collaborating with disability services. And we wanted to proactively identify where all of our blind, low-vision, deaf, and hard-of-hearing students were taking courses. And those are the faculty members that we went to. So instead of trying to train everybody at the institution on digital accessibility, we wanted, specifically, to go to those faculty members who are going to impact the academic experience of those students with sensory impairments. And so that was the first thing.

[00:29:34.30] The next thing we did was we started collaborating with our instructional designers. So at our institution, the instructional designers play an outsized role in the online course development process. It differs at other institutions. But I know at ours, they're very hands-on with the faculty members.

[00:29:55.08] And so if our instructional designers are aware of how to create accessible content, we know that-- and they're the ones that get the face time with faculty. My office does not get face time with faculty members in that kind of way. Our office does not get face time with all of the students in that kind of way.

[00:30:12.79] And so you really have to take that approach to operate with your partners who can be your mouthpieces in many ways. They're going to be in meetings that you're not ever going to be invited to. They're going to have conversations and discussions with folks that you are not having conversations and discussions with. So it's really important to educate key strategic people and bring them into this effort.

[00:30:34.42] We also collaborated with ITS, specifically our learning support services and our web administration folks. These are the folks who oversee the learning management system. They make decisions about Blackboard that we use on our campus, and now transitioning to campus. But they're making decisions about that and about the tools that get integrated into the learning management system.

[00:30:55.78] They also oversee our content management system. So Drupal and WordPress are the platforms that our websites live on. And so being involved in and working closely with those developers has helped us have a broader reach. So again, you're not going to hit everything. But what you can do is go to key people in key places to actually broaden your reach as much as possible.

[00:31:22.30] And then the last thing I'll mention is we operate on this accessibility-as-a-service model. That first story that I talked about at length about the deaf student-- that actually prompted us to create a captioning, transcription, and audio description service. That happened about 10-- a little over 10 years ago now. We have, in recent years, also put in place a document remediation service that started about 2018.

[00:31:48.10] No matter what you do-- and this is just my opinion, but it's the 16-year opinion, so-- no matter what you do, you're going to have faculty members and employees, staff or whatever, that are not interested in creating accessible content. They will do it if someone just does it for them. They are not interested in sitting in trainings and learning how to do this. They don't have time. They don't have energy. And they don't have resources. You've probably heard a lot of excuses.

[00:32:19.63] So on our campus, individuals are very supportive of, we'll give you resources if you do it for us. And so I said, OK, give me the resources. And so that's how it started. We started with captioning. And then it took roughly about three, four years of figuring out the document issue. But then we realized that 99.99% of the documents that were produced on campus were PDF documents, Word documents, or PowerPoint documents. And of those that are produced, probably about 70% of them are PDF documents.

[00:32:51.41] So once you start to pull these numbers, we kind of figured out how to target these services and figure out ways to support these faculty members who want to create accessible content but just don't have the time, energy, or resources to be able to do it. And so that was our accessibility-as-a-service model.

[00:33:10.05] Another solution that we put in place is implementing digital accessibility best practices. Now, there are probably 9,000 different resources out there. These are the ones that we thought made the most sense. We basically identified these eight digital practices that we thought would best support faculty members.

[00:33:30.19] And I'm not going to go through each, but some examples are captioning Alt text for images, color contrast, using simple tables, using accessibility checkers as much as possible. And then we try to highlight and target our resources on our website towards supporting faculty members to understand some of these things, and not only faculty members but our content authors and our web developers and things like that, too.

[00:33:54.87] And so just having a set of best practices that you operate off can be really helpful and beneficial. And the reason I say that is there was an instructional designer I worked closely with over the years. And one of the things that they would do is say, give me two or three things

that would have the most impact for faculty members. And we were like, all right, color contrast and caption and this--

[00:34:18.74] And they were able to get faculty members to buy into those two or three things. Because they may not even buy into the full eight. But we have a little quick card that will hand out just to remind people that-- at trainings and at orientations and things like that. But just being able to give them two or three actionable things that they can do can be really helpful, and advance your efforts, too.

[00:34:44.75] We also, over the years, have put in place what we call the Architecture Standards Review Board. Now, this committee is represented by a number of different units, one of which is accessibility. And they essentially review all of the incoming IT purchases. So if there is technology that's being purchased that has a user interface, then the ASRB is going to review that information.

[00:35:09.77] And we're still kind of going through the machinations, and we've been doing this for years, for how much that you review. Because it's not like we have a team of hundred people to review everything coming through. There are a handful of people. And so we're trying to go through the machinations of, where do you identify the highest risk so that you're mainly putting your resources in reviewing those things? But we do have in place a committee to address accessibility within the procurement process. And that's been really, really helpful in identifying issues before they get implemented on campus.

[00:35:47.87] Strategy number four is to update your accessibility testing and remediation protocols. Now, there are some different ways you can go about this. I'm going to use the example we have. We've always kind of had our own manual process in place. But we were fortunate enough, a few years ago, to put in place DubBot. DubBot is a web governance solution that looks not only at web accessibility, but broken links and spelling and readability of websites.

[00:36:16.52] And what that does is that brings together different entities on campus, operating within one platform to address issues. And there's a nice, pretty dashboard so that whenever someone logs into DubBot to look at their website, they will see an accessibility score, and a score for broken links, and a score for spelling and readability. And that dashboard is a reminder of accessibility every time they log in to review it.

[00:36:43.59] And so they are reviewing-- you can choose, actually, specifically what criteria that you want websites reviewed on. So it allows you to customize the review process. You don't have to review every check point within WCAG, but you can review the ones that you deem most critical for your institution.

[00:37:03.90] You can take a graduated process if you want to. One year, we're going to really focus in on Alt text. And the next year, we're really going to focus in on link text and all that kind of stuff. So those types of efforts can be really helpful from a broad-based review process.

[00:37:24.75] And then, also, we do it by request. So we will manually review any of the third-party websites or applications that are used in the classroom. We'll work directly with students

who use screen-readers to help them understand how to navigate these tools. Because sometimes it's not so much an accessibility issue but a usability problem, and so it's training the student on how to navigate some of these resources, too.

[00:37:48.50] But this manual process happens with JAWS, or NVDA, if you're on a PC, sometimes voiceover on a Mac. And we'll use two web-based tools, web-based accessibility tools like ANDI, or the Color Contrast Analyser, CCA.

[00:38:08.31] Number five is to audit your existing content and create a corrective action plan for mediating that content. So there are a number of different ways you can go about this, and I'll talk through each a little bit. So externally, you can go to a company like-- and I'm not promoting anybody. But you can go to a company like a DQ or a Level Access and ask them to help you with auditing your institution's resources, so you can come up with a plan and figure out how do we get started and moving forward through this process.

[00:38:43.00] There are other companies that offer this kind of service, too. But this is just an example-- working with an external vendor to do that. It's going to cost you money be costly, but it will be really good information and support to move off of.

[00:38:55.36] Another grassroots way to address it is to use some of the maturity models that have come into play. The policy-driven one, Adoption for Accessibility, I think it started out of Minnesota. It's in place in a number of different state entities now that are using this maturity model. Level Access has what they call the Digital Accessibility Maturity Model, or DAMM model. And then you have the W3C has a maturity model. And Microsoft even has an accessibility evolution model as well. There are maturity models out there that you can follow.

[00:39:30.91] What's nice about those is it's a very prescriptive way to move through a number of different places, or rather, to review and evaluate a number of different areas and to self-evaluate where you are in these specific places and what does it look like to be just starting out versus have a mature process in specific areas? The maturity models can be really, really helpful for that.

[00:39:56.16] And the last thing I'll mention is using enterprise solutions. Sometimes it's just-- let's just kind of jump in there with two feet and see where we are. And this is where web governance solutions, like I mentioned with DubBot and Siteimprove-- and Pope Tech is another one for websites. LMS accessibility integrations, like Ally or Panorama or UDOIT-- these are things that scan your entire LMS, looks through all of your courses, and they will tell you how accessible or inaccessible.

[00:40:23.15] They give you a quick icon and score for the accessibility of your documents and/or the content you have uploaded in the website. And then faculty member can take a more active role in figuring out what specific resources in their classroom are inaccessible and where to get started fixing some issues. And Nvidia hosting platforms-- the reason I mentioned that is we have Kaltura, which is integrated into our learning management system. That is what we use for hosting our videos.

[00:40:54.56] In the last couple of years, our learning management focus turned on the feature which allowed us to auto-caption every video that's uploaded in the Kaltura. Again, auto-captions is not where-- it's not the end. That's not the final solution. But it's a good half measure to get you moving in the right direction.

[00:41:16.41] We have a process in place to still provide professional captions. But having this auto-caption feature in there supports a lot of folks in the middle who don't necessarily need full 100%, but they can get by with 70%, 80% just out of the box, and are comfortable there. So using these kinds of enterprise solutions can help you with the auditing process as well.

[00:41:38.78] Process number six is issuing a public notice regarding these policies and procedures that you put in place and how to ensure compliance. Let me take a quick check of the time again. All right.

[00:41:50.54] We started with a letter from the provost, and it mirrored the DOJ/OCR Dear Colleague letter. And basically, what it said was, this is what we are required to do. These are our institutional goals and values. And these are the resources that are available to you. But it came from the provost. It went to every faculty member on campus. It kind of starts conversations, and it let everybody know that our administration was behind us. So that's a good thing to think about.

[00:42:26.24] Again, we did not get all-- we did not get the support of all the VPs and upper-administration deans, all that kind of stuff. But we did have the voice of the provost when we had this one issue around that deaf student. We were able to push that story all the way up to the top, and identify these are some strategies that we think would be beneficial going forward. So those folks can help start the conversation. And so that was one thing that was beneficial for us.

[00:42:57.28] Number seven-- develop a grievance process for reporting barriers involving inaccessible online content. So one of the requirements is always to make sure that if someone encounters an accessibility issue, they need to have a place to report that issue, and somebody to communicate with would be even better.

[00:43:16.06] I'm using my colleagues over at UVA who put in place the Report a Barrier project that they put in place. And they basically came out with this web-based form that 19 different departments and units have access to. And when an issue is reported-- and it's not just for digital accessibility issues-- physical issues on campuses, attitudes and cultural issues on campus-- but that gets reported. And all of those units are flagged to let them know this issue is there, they're all looking at it. And then, whoever is tasked with taking that on then actually takes over and follows through with that ticket.

[00:43:50.96] But this is a good way to get us all moving in the right direction. And this is something that GMU is thinking about as well. How do we collectively come up with a Report a Barrier operation, which allows us to quickly identify issues and then flag those issues, let those folks who are reporting the issues know that we are aware of the problem; thank you for letting us know; and then we continue communications in that manner. But this was a really good example of how to handle that from an institutional standpoint.

[00:44:25.75] And then the final thing I'll mention is to deliver training, and then annually thereafter on web accessibility to all appropriate personnel. And the important note that I will mention-- and this is what I've said a few different times. It's not how many people you train. It's who you train.

[00:44:45.69] So if I only focused on trying to get the executive-level focused folks on my campus to buy in and participate, we would not have been able to make advances because most of them don't know who I am, and I'm perfectly fine with that. Let's say we have 10 VPs on campus. I know two of them. And one of them is my boss's boss. But I'm in meetings with her, so she kind of doesn't count.

[00:45:17.74] But the other VP-- the other VP I know because I've been here 16 years trying to do this kind of work, and she's probably been here 20 or 30. So again, she might not totally count because she is a roll over-- several gradations up, but-- oversight of Disability Services. None of the other ones know who I am. The president doesn't know who I am. The provost-- new provost doesn't know who I am. These positions have changed a few different times.

[00:45:49.70] And so that tells you the importance of all of those folks who kind of operate in the middle-- those strategic partners who have oversight of all of these different platforms that you need to interact with and engage with. Oftentimes, the VPs, the deans, the assistant deans, in some cases in my experience, don't necessarily know about how all the work gets done. They just want the work to get done. So it's really important to talk to the people who are doing the work on the ground.

[00:46:21.24] If possible, provide annual training. Still great. I do a Title IX training every year. I do a purchase card training every year because I have oversight of a purchase card. I don't always remember everything that's in those trainings, but it's there. I do it. And if you can do something like that, great.

[00:46:39.06] But it's also important to do more targeted things. Faculty members who are teaching students with disabilities, specifically-- if they fall into those groups of students who are impacted, like you see in the resolution agreements. it can be a really good place to start the conversation.

[00:46:55.08] And then also, departments and units where those students are enrolled in degree programs, taking courses. We did a-- we called it a MAPs Initiative, where we wanted to figure out where the students were enrolled and what degree programs they were in. And that touched on almost every degree program on campus. So that kind of combated the attitude of, aren't these schools just-- these students in the College of Education? No, they were touching almost every degree program and every college on campus. And then also the content creators-- so those are people that are important to the conversation as well.

[00:47:29.82] I'll point out some strategies that colleagues from Virginia Tech and Princeton put in place. Virginia Tech has this Keep CALM Initiative, which was this really creative plan for increasing the capacity of folks around their campus to understand digital accessibility. And they have it available online. There's a link here for their Keep CALM Initiative.

[00:47:54.31] Princeton partnered with IAAP, which was an international organization offering certifications around digital accessibility. And they basically offered that training and the opportunity to be certified to a lot of their staff members. And that, again, allowed them to put in place really robust digital accessibility training for people in key positions around their campus.

[00:48:18.97] And we follow that model to a certain extent with what we call our-- we have two things-- our Digital Accessibility Fundamentals Badge, where we we will give you $250 to actually go through the trainings. It's about two, three months. And it's a guided train-- it's self-guided, but we will offer check-ins and support throughout if you want help.

[00:48:41.39] But it's basically you go through this Blackboard course. You let us know how it was. It takes you about two or three months. Then you'll get $250, and we created a digital badge to go along with it.

[00:48:52.55] We did the same leveraging the Department of Homeland Security's Trusted Tester initiative-- their certification. So you can go and get the Trusted Tester certification if you want. Basically, we have them go through the course and complete the course up through what is the incrementals part. And then, after the incrementals part, there's usually a practice exam and the final exam.

[00:49:14.57] Practice and final exam is not required. You need to take those in order to get the Trusted Testers actual certification. For us, we just want you to complete the course and go through the incrementals because the incrementals are pretty much just a broken-down version of the practice and final exam.

[00:49:30.24] So if you've completed the course, you pretty much learned everything we wanted you to learn, and it was a really robust training to go through. And again, we'll give you a $250 to go through that as well. And we had a number of our developers who oversee our websites, who are in our strategic communications area, which oversees our new Mason brand and the brand guidelines, go through this kind of stuff. So it's been a really impactful effort for us to train key people in key places around campus.

[00:50:01.49] I'll end with just some resources on getting started with digital accessibility. There are a lot of things out there, but these are some good places to start. W3C has some resources for getting started with digital access, which includes videos, and guides, and things like that.

[00:50:16.58] The OCR folks also have a technology accessibility website that they started building their web team-- national web team-- web accessibility team, rather, started creating resources to help people learn about digital accessibility but also understand what their requirements were as it related to the digital access. And then they have some videos that are hosted on the ADA's National Network as well. And I'm going to stop there and take any questions. I think I'm just within the time frame, and I will stop my share.

[00:50:49.99] SOFIA LEIVA: Yes. Thank you so much, Korey. That was a wonderful presentation with a lot of great nuggets.

[00:50:56.29] KOREY SINGLETON: Thank you, Sofía.

[00:50:57.49] SOFIA LEIVA: Yes. So we have time for a couple of questions. The first one we have here is, "A challenge I'm running into-- I'm at Harvard University, which updates digital accessibility policy, but it's not mandating any training for content creators. I'm an academic tech at the medical school, and I'm trying to improve compliance within our LMS, which is Canvas.

[00:51:23.41] The problem I'm seeing is that people don't know what they don't know. For example, they don't know that accessibility tools we have in Canvas don't cover videos and attach documents. How can we make our user population more aware that there are areas they may not be addressing?"

[00:51:41.70] KOREY SINGLETON: I'll reference the Virginia Tech-- that link that's in the presentation. That Keep CALM initiative spent one year-- essentially, they basically broke their efforts down into years. So in the first year, they focused solely on Alt text.

[00:52:00.51] So they didn't talk about captions. They didn't talk about hyperlink text. They didn't talk about any of that stuff. They focused solely on Alt text. Let's educate the community about Alt text. They had t-shirts, and stickers, and trainings all about Alt text. And then in the next year, it was like captions and something else. And so every year, they took one specific area, and they tried to build up the community's understanding of those specific tools or those specific features. And I think that's a great way to start.

[00:52:32.08] One of the things we-- when I go and do training on our campus is, I say, pick one thing. I know I've talked to you about eight or nine. I want you to pick one thing to go back and do in your course. That's all you'll do this semester. Next semester, you can go back, and you can look at captions for your videos or whatever. Now, we have resources in place, so it's a little easier for folks to buy in. But I would say always try to get folks to pick one thing, and give them graduated ways to move forward.

[00:52:59.65] SOFIA LEIVA: That's great advice. Let's see here. "How do you recommend overcoming resistance or skepticism from stakeholders who may not fully understand the importance of digital accessibility?"

[00:53:14.44] KOREY SINGLETON: One of the ways we've tried to address that on our campus-- and everything you mentioned, I probably have run into several different times, so I get it. One of the ways we address it is with stories. People will push back against me talking about the law or, say, what's required, and all that kind of stuff. But they will not push back against a student who says, I can't access this because of XYZ, or a staff member who says, I can't access this because of XYZ.

[00:53:40.80] So when we ran into pushback, we started focusing on bringing stories to the table, and that was really helpful, at least on our campus. I know in every campus, in every culture, with every person, it may be a different way. But at George Mason, the stories have really allowed us to advance the movements.

[00:53:58.23] Like I told you, I got a seat at the table with the provost because of that story about that deaf student not being able to access those courses. And so bringing those stories up have been really helpful. And not everybody wants to share those stories, but some of those have to be shared because that's the only way it moves forward. So it's not that we had the students sitting at the table. I was actually sharing what happened. But learning those stories can be really helpful.

[00:54:21.61] SOFIA LEIVA: Yeah. Yeah, definitely, sharing those stories is really powerful. So that's all the time we have for today. Thank you so much, Korey, for such a great presentation with a lot of great action items.