
IT Accessibility Accomplishments, Activities, and Strategies

April, 2022

Introduction

Information Technology (IT) is dedicated to the principle of equal access to the University's data and other electronic resources and systems in order to foster a community based on accessibility and inclusion. To that end, IT has dedicated itself to this pursuit in several demonstrable ways including, most importantly, the addition of the IT Accessibility Coordinator position in the fall of 2015. Since then, IT has intentionally gone about the task of increasing accessibility efforts both for its own services and for services offered across campus all while diligently working to raise awareness of these needs across our entire campus.

The following report will detail these efforts and demonstrate IT's commitment to the principles of accessibility, inclusion, and equity where our digital resources and services are concerned.

Timeline of Efforts

IT has a long history of increasingly involved efforts in this space. The following timeline details some of the most important milestones in our efforts.

2011 – IT purchases Read&Write Gold assistive software.

2012 – Site Improve is purchased for the entire campus. Every website the IT Web Team manages is scanned on a regular schedule.

2012 – UNI Web Team designs a new Drupal 7 website template that meets accessibility standards of the time.

2015 – Information Technology reallocates existing funds to create an Assistive Technology Support Specialist position. Carolyn Dorr is hired into the role.

2016 – IT publishes its first set of strategic initiatives related to accessibility.

2016 – IT purchases ZoomText screen magnification software for use across campus.

2016 - New Student Accessibility Services Coordinator begins. IT and SAS begin collaboration on assistive technology review and selection as well as student accommodation delivery.

2016 – Web Team joins IT from University Relations. Job descriptions are updated to include Web Accessibility as a requirement.

2016 – IT launches its closed captioning service for all of campus.

2016 - IT Accessibility Coordinator joins the University’s Disability Advisory and Advocacy Committee (DAAC) as a member of the Assistive Technology Subcommittee.

2016 - IT designs the new model for UNI’s standard classroom in conjunction with industry experts; UNI faculty, staff, and administration; and according to best practices. These new standards include, among other things, an ADA-compliant sit/stand lectern that raises and lowers.

2017 — IT begins providing closed captioning support for student learning accommodations.

2017 – IT Accessibility Coordinator presents at two different industry events in collaboration with colleagues at the other Regents’ institutions: “Collaborative Efforts to Promote IT Accessibility in Higher Education in the State of Iowa.” Participation in the Iowa Board of Regents IT Accessibility (IBRITA) group is solidified and relationships lead to collaboration.

2017 - Blackboard Ally is purchased and implemented to incorporate into our Learning Management System - Blackboard. Ally scans documents uploaded to Blackboard courses and provides tips on how to make those documents more accessible, sometimes even being able to make the changes automatically.

2018 - IT establishes an internal working group focused on accessibility across all its services.

2018 – Launched first faculty-focused seminar on accessibility titled “From Reactive Accommodations to Proactive Accessibility”

2018 - IT helps deploy a new cloud-based case management system for Student Accessibility Services to help them better serve the students using their office for accommodations. This system, by Simplicity Systems, is called “Accommodate” ; it is specially built for tracking and managing student accommodations.

2018 – Assistive Technology Support Specialist becomes IT Accessibility Coordinator. Carolyn Dorr remains the incumbent.

2019 – Reviewing Voluntary Product Accessibility Templates (VPAT) or Accessibility Compliance Reports becomes the norm for all technology purchases that meet the necessary criteria.

2019 – IT hires a student employee with a visual impairment to assist in the checking of website accessibility before sites go live, as well as checking existing sites with screen reading software.

2021 – IT Web Team designs a new Drupal 9 website template to be accessible at the time of site creation.

2022 – An increased focus is placed on continuing to build editor awareness of accessibility, particularly in the areas of heading usage, link text structure and proper wording of alt tags.

2022 - IT Signs agreement with Zoom to bring Zoom Phone to campus as a much more accessible phone system than the current Avaya voice system.

2022 - IT works closely with Facilities Management on several committees to help with the development of new digital campus maps that show accessible entrances, snow removal priorities, and other important information.

Initial Strategic Goals

When IT hired an Assistive Technology Support Specialist in 2015, that staff member and the Chief Information Officer worked to establish some initial strategic goals in the area of IT Accessibility and IT has been working through these since that time. These goals are listed below.

Phase I

Web and Document Type Accessibility

Web accessibility is defined as the removal of barriers that prevent interaction with or access to web sites and document types. Using WCAG 2.0 standards, the University of Northern Iowa will

design, develop, and maintain web sites that provide equal access to information and functionality.

Closed Captioning

Closed captions are the text version of spoken word, music, or sound effects portions of video presentations. The text can be read when audio cannot be heard. Information Technology Services intends to define closed captioning requirements and provide an in-house service.

Accessibility Focus Groups

UNI Information Technology Services will collaborate with university departments, working groups, and committees to ensure that no one is unreasonably denied access to or participation in services, programs, and activities at the University of Northern Iowa because of technology. In addition to working closely with Human Resource Services, Student Disability Services, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and the UNI Disability Advisory and Advocacy Committee (DAAC), Information Technology Services will consider forming an assistive technology focus group within the soon to be established IT Advisory Council.

Phase II

Software and Hardware Inventory and Support Plan

IT personnel will inventory all assistive technology related software and hardware. The effectiveness of each offering will be measured. A gap analysis will be conducted to identify unmet needs across the campus community. Products will be procured to remediate gaps and support plans will be developed for the delivery and support of these services.

Accessibility Review of Primary IT systems

The Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) is a document developed by the United States Government and industry to evaluate the accessibility level of products according to Section 508 (as amended) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. IT will build a library of VPAT documents for technologies in use and newly procured by the University of Northern Iowa. IT staff will begin by identifying all primary systems in use and will work with vendors to obtain VPAT documents or similar documentation evidencing appropriate accessibility of products. Where products fall short of Section 508 requirements, IT will collaborate with vendors to meet compliance standards or identify an alternate approach. IT will also complete VPAT forms for all custom applications developed by information technology professionals at UNI.

Procurement and Accessibility

Information Technology will collaborate with University of Northern Iowa purchasing staff to require vendors responding to Request for Proposals to complete a VPAT, as appropriate. In

addition, relevant contracts will contain standard language that addresses accessibility requirements.

Phase III

UNI Accessibility Policy

IT will collaborate with key campus stakeholders to develop UNI accessibility policies and procedures that adhere to legal obligations and best practices.

Accessibility Guidebook and Campus Awareness

IT and University Relations will collaborate to publish an accessibility guidebook. IT will develop a campus awareness program to increase understanding and participation. Training will be offered to the campus community and ongoing activities will be sponsored.

Universal Design for Learning and Online Course Content

The National Center of Universal Design for Learning defines Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a set of principles for curriculum development providing all individuals equal opportunities to learn. While UNI has successfully adopted Quality Matters standards for online learning, IT will collaborate with the UNI academic community to develop Universal Design for Learning (UDL) standards for use in academic settings.

Accessibility and Event Support

IT will collaborate with UNI event support organizations to develop accessibility strategies and to select technologies to ensure that registration materials, programs, fliers, announcements, event accommodations, and other related activities are accessible to all.

Partnerships and Stakeholders

Student Accessibility Services

IT works closely with Student Accessibility Services to provide accommodations for students who have such a need on campus. This includes, but is not limited to: captioning for course videos, in-class resources to assist students in hearing or seeing class material, and providing individualized software that students identify they might need.

Human Resource Services

IT works closely with Human Resource Services to help deliver any employee accommodations that might have a technology component.

Facilities Management

IT works with Facilities Management to, among other things, ensure classrooms are remodeled and are accessible to all students; to develop digital resources like maps to accessible entrances that students might need to use; and many other such initiatives.

eLearning Council

The soon to be enacted eLearning council will be comprised of faculty, academic administrators, and others from places on campus like the Rod Library, the UNI bookstore, and others, to help IT set priorities on the implementation of new eLearning tools, the review of tools in current use, and other important initiatives.

Procurement Services & University Counsel

IT works closely with Procurement Services to ensure that accessibility checks are performed on new technology purchases that would require them and to ensure that standard language is inserted into contracts for new technology that will ensure we work with vendors who value accessibility as much as we do.

University Relations

IT works closely with University Relations on event planning and communication, video production, and web development and content creation. We work together to ensure videos and events are captioned and other accessibility needs are met and that websites are accessible at the time of launch. UR also helps to notify campus as to the need for captioning and other accessibility requirements.

Rod Library

IT works closely with the Rod Library to ensure that students have dedicated access to assistive technology in the library building as well as resources to help those in need of accommodations with their online research.

Iowa Board of Regents IT Accessibility Group

IT works closely with their counterparts at both of the other regents' institutions in Iowa State and University of Iowa. They hold monthly meetings, share findings and solutions, and even present together on their efforts on each campus.

Current Efforts and Services

Information Technology offers many services that directly aid the accessibility of our services and those provided across campus. This section outlines those services and some current projects and efforts that are underway to enhance those offerings.

Currently Offered Services

Information Technology currently offers the following services in the area of accessibility:

- **Web Accessibility Scanning** – on a recurring monthly basis, all University websites are scanned with our central reporting tool, Site Improve, and reports are sent to each department detailing any issues with broken links, spelling and grammatical mistakes, and accessibility issues.
- **Web Accessibility Training** – Any time a new departmental or university website goes live into production, the associated staff assigned to update and maintain the website are required to go through Drupal web and accessibility training. The training is provided either Face to Face or via Zoom and is delivered by Carolyn Dorr, the IT Accessibility Coordinator. This training covers how to operate their new website as well as how to ensure their site stays accessible as they continue to add new content.
- **Screen Reader Website Checks** – Above and beyond the monthly automated website accessibility checks that IT performs, on occasion, we will also test certain high profile websites with screen reading software to ensure what our reporting is telling us is actually occurring in the real world.
- **Accessible Website Development** – The best way to maintain accessible websites is to start out with an accessible template. The IT Web team ensures that all base templates used for new site creation start as accessible right out of the box. The Drupal 7 theme used for many years and now the new Drupal 9 theme is accessible out of the gate. Each Drupal 9 site includes a new and highly praised plugin for accessibility called *Editoria11y* which helps developers and content admins for the website to monitor accessibility in real time as content is added or updated.
- **The IT Accessibility Guidebook** – IT published and maintains an accessibility guidebook found on the IT website here: <https://it.uni.edu/accessibility>. This guide contains much information on web accessibility, document types and accessibility, closed captioning, and other training and guidance for the University community on the topic of information accessibility.
- **Closed Captioning** – IT provides a closed captioning service for all of campus to take advantage of and in coordination with Student Accessibility Services, even helps to provide captioning for academic accommodations to ensure classroom content is as accessible as possible. Closed captioning requests can be made via Service Hub here: <https://servicehub.uni.edu/servicedesk/servicedesk/customer/portal/1/create/921>
- **Technology Procurement Review** – IT assists in the procurement process to ensure that new software, systems, or services brought on campus are as accessible as possible. The IT Accessibility Coordinator works with the Office of the CIO to review incoming purchases by reviewing Voluntary Product Accessibility Templates (VPATs) or Accessibility Compliance Reports

(ACRs) to ensure these products meet our needs as a campus. During this process, IT and University Counsel's office work with the vendor's legal department to adopt the following standard contract language:

[Customer] is committed to supporting equal access to information and communication technology for all its learners and users, including students, employees, and visitors. [Customer] supports the procurement of technology that is accessible under the following policies and standards:

- [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)
- [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) (refreshed as of January 2018)
- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0](#) (WCAG), levels A and AA

[Vendor] is also committed to supporting accessibility for all users and will remain so for the duration of the term of this agreement. [Vendor] agrees to provide a [Voluntary Product Accessibility Template \(VPAT\)](#), use version 2.0 or higher of the VPAT, and ensure the VPAT is prepared by an employee, or a third party entity (if needed), with accessibility expertise.

If the product and/or service cannot in any way be used to conform with applicable federal, state, and local disability laws and regulations, [Vendor] shall use commercially reasonable efforts to update the product and/or service so as to be in conformance therewith. In the event deficiencies arise regarding [Vendor's] compliance with applicable federal, state, or local disability laws and regulations, whereby the product and/or service does not meet minimum requirements, [Vendor] will assign an employee with accessibility expertise to work with [Customer] to resolve said deficiencies.

[Vendor] further agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless [Customer] from any loss, damage, or expense (including reasonable attorney's fees) arising out of [Vendor's] failure to comply with the requirements of this Section. Failure to comply with the requirements of this Section may constitute a material breach of this contract and be grounds for termination for cause by [Customer].

- **Accessible Course Design** – IT staff help faculty everyday with designing and implementing accessible solutions for content delivery, assessment, and course design using the Quality Matters standard to ensure course materials are delivered via the University's eLearning toolset, adhering to industry best practices, including the Quality Matters framework. Multiple IT personnel are certified Quality Matters peer reviewers.
- **Accessibility Training and Professional Development** – IT staff provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff at the University in the form of seminars and training on information accessibility. One seminar in particular, "From Reactive Accommodations to Proactive Accessibility" has been very well received by campus and delivered on demand via session recording or live via Zoom or in person at least twice an academic year.
- **Assistive Technology Offerings** – In conjunction with Student Accessibility Services and Human Resource Services, IT provides several types of assistive software to campus via campus-wide

licensing programs. These software titles range from screen reading software to text magnification to text-to-speech applications. We also work with the groups previously mentioned to review current offerings, find gaps in coverage, and fill those gaps with new software or apps.

Current Projects

Technology is always changing and thus the needs in this space are always changing. Information Technology has identified several high priority projects to continue to add to our story of information accessibility on campus.

Vetting New Assistive Technology Options

There are new software and app offerings in the assistive technology space and IT is working with Student Accessibility Services to identify need and move forward with several options including:

- **Microsoft Editor: Spelling and Grammar Checker** – a “Grammarly”-like software that reviews what you’re typing as you are composing a document and offers suggestions on your writing, word prediction, and a more advanced grammar editor.
- **Natural Reader** – IT currently licenses a product called Read&Write Gold for text-to-speech and a few other assistive technology needs. This software is older and less featureful than some newer counterparts. Natural Reader is one option to replace it.
- **Otter.ai** – Otter is a AI powered speech-to-text software that offers transcriptions, plugs into Zoom for video conference meetings, and automatically transcribes meeting notes. We’re investigating campus wide licensing for this product.

Drupal 9 Template WCAG 2.0 AA

With the end of life for Drupal 7 coming in a year and a half, our campus is moving full steam ahead towards the newer Drupal 9 platform. With this transition, our web team is working hard to make sure our Drupal 9 theme is WCAG 2.1 AA compliant right out of the box. They are working to incorporate new strategies to ensure templates and websites maintain their accessibility compliance throughout the development lifecycle with the implementation of modules and tools like *Editoria11y* which check for accessibility errors in real time as development occurs.

Updates to the IT Accessibility Guidebook

IT staff are always working hard to add to and review our online self-help resources and this includes our online IT Accessibility Guidebook found here: <https://it.uni.edu/accessibility>. With websites being revamped across the institution due to the new branding rollout, IT's website will be redone in the calendar year 2022 and will include an enhanced version of our IT Accessibility Handbook.

IT Accessibility Policy

The Iowa Board of Regents has asked each university to ensure it has an IT Accessibility policy in place governing the use of digital services and websites. IT has developed a draft policy that made it through to the President's Council for review where a few concerns were identified and are now being addressed.

Future Efforts and Services

- The creation of a new "IT Procurement" Service Hub form to streamline the pre-procurement accessibility review process
- Training additional IT personnel to review purchases for accessibility
- The development of an accessibility campus-wide awareness course (in eLearning or something similar)
- The campus-wide implementation of Zoom Phone, a voice services platform that adheres to accessibility standards and best practices
- Explore proctoring and testing solutions with representatives from Academic Affairs and the department of Exam Services.
- The establishment of a standard suite of accessible equipment available for use by the University community.
- Collaboration with campus stakeholders to establish clearly defined roles and responsibilities, as well as new opportunities for collaboration in the area of digital accessibility and services.
- Research and consideration for including "visual interpreting" services: <https://aira.io/>
- Contribute to an events-focused accessibility group to help with things like live event audio descriptions, live captioning needs, etc.