ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: 10/4/2024
Time: 10:00am-11:00am
Facilitator: Colin Dory

In Attendance

Colin Dory, DeAnne Hamilton, Maddie Porter, Aubrie Swain, Wen Zhao-Pliske, Michelle Earthwright, Beth Reichenbach, Brian Umpstead

1.) New ADA Requirements

a) **New Requirements**: The Department of Justice passed new ADA regulations regarding online content that will come into full effect in April, 2026. All educational institutions are required to meet the new standards. Some general points to note are:
   - All online content, whether it is posted to social media, on the institutional website, or used in instruction, must be fully accessible.
   - Third-party platforms, such as textbooks and tools, must also be fully accessible.
   - All videos, regardless of intent (temporary use versus permanent instruction) must be captioned according to the ADA standards. AI-generated captions such as those provided by platforms like YouTube do not meet the standards.
   - Individuals (such as instructors) can be held accountable for not meeting accessibility standards.
   - Fines will be applied for being out of compliance.

b) **Challenges for Bates**: In order to gear up for these challenges, we will need to have an all-college effort. Some next steps include:
   - **Identifying Stakeholders:** Departments that will have critical levels of involvement such as IT, Communications, and Student Services will need to be involved. In particular, the Accessibility Committee will need to reach out to IT to get a representative from IT. The Board of Trustees will also have to be kept up-to-date on ongoing changes and challenges.
   - **Budgeting:** Many changes may need to be addressed by purchasing new services or tools, but the DSS has a limited spending budget, and the Accessibility Committee does not have a budget. Seeking out funds to meet accessibility requirements may be a crucial step in the process.

- **Outside Audit:** One step many other colleges are taking is hiring an outside auditor to identify problem areas of accessibility and the steps to take to resolve them. This may be a good process for Bates to explore as well.

c) **Issues of Concern**: Some big issues that will have to be addressed at Bates are:
   - Captions are required for all content, and AI captions are not sufficient. While the eLearning department budget currently covers captioning requests from faculty, more resources may be needed as those limited funds reach an end.
   - PDFs are notoriously difficult to make accessible, and many Bates programs involve complex documents like blueprints and other image-heavy content that may be difficult to convert.
   - One concern may be that some will choose to remove online content rather than make it accessible. While that may seem like it solves an issue, all content must be made accessible upon request.

2.) College Work Plan

The Accessibility Committee will have to submit a College Work Plan to the College Council by the end of the month. Here are some tentative goals suggested for the work plan:

a) **Goal 1**: Make Progress Toward Meeting ADA Requirements – Some of these steps could include recruiting stakeholders, helping to identify funding sources, and assisting faculty with identifying problem areas such as third-party vendors.
b) **Goal 2**: Trainings on Accessibility – Provide Canvas trainings, Online trainings (such as through Zoom), and in-person trainings.
c) **Goal 3**: Supporting Accessibility First Focus – Providing drop-in sessions, process and tools (and guidance on how to use them!), up-front help and creating master course shells.

3.) Good of the Order

a. Colin Dory is now co-chairing the Accessibility Committee with DeAnne Hamilton.
b. The committee will need to seek out new membership from departments that need to be involved in accessibility, such as IT, Student Services, and HR.
c. The next meeting will be held November 8th, 2024.