

# Educate, Navigate, Self-Advocate: Improving Assistive Technology Engagement Through Inclusive Processes

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# Intro about USC's Student Accessibility Services

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Switched over to AIM in Summer 2017

- Re-evaluated barriers in AT areas
- Re-branded our service models
- 2,500+ actively registered students

45% using Assistive Technology (AT)

- Notetake Technology (NT)= 77% (35% of total)
- Alternative Formats= 52% (25% of total)
- Communication Devices/Access= 16% (7% of total)



# Poll 1

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1. How satisfied are you with your current Assistive Technology (AT) processes?
2. How well do your students understand their own needs?



# Educate: The Interactive Process

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“A way to arrive at an appropriate academic adjustment or appropriate auxiliary aids or service through a deliberative and collaborative process of communication with the student” ([Interwork Institute, 2017](#))



# Essential Question for Educating Students

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How can DS departments use the intake process to educate students about relevant services, the benefits of utilizing resources, and improve their own learning outcomes?



# Rationale for the Interactive Process

## AHEAD Program Standards and Performance Indicators:

4.2 Determine with students appropriate academic accommodations and services. Incorporate a process that fosters the use of effective accommodations, taking into consideration the environment, task, and the unique needs of the individual.

- Interactive processes
  - Include student input/experience
  - Isolate specific disability functional limitations
  - Provide a decision tree for targeted accommodation supports
  - Identify historical learning obstacles and accommodation usage
  - Build rapport and an ongoing relationship



# Implementation

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- In the initial meeting with students, staff members:
  - Explain the K-12/Community College transition to a 4 year university.
  - Collect history of accommodations at previous schools.
  - Identify similar or new supports available.
  - Give context to students for how decisions regarding accommodations are made.
  - Introduce students to the Notetaking (NT) or AT Specialist for a warm handoff later.



# Ultimate Goal

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- Develop an interactive and ongoing relationship with the students we serve. To that end, we aim for:
  - Students to receive appropriate accommodations through inclusive assessment.
  - Students to be aware of and connected to services that will address additional needs.
  - Students to feel heard, acknowledged, and interested in accessing resources.
  - Students to be able to gain independence and confidence in their abilities.
- If students feel knowledgeable of resources, they are more likely to engage relevant services.



# The AT Centric Model

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## Frontloading DS Staff with AT Prep

- Introduce staff to the available AT/NT via demos and trainings
- Explain FAQ, How To, and Training Calendar
- Quick AT suggestions and “warm handoffs” for AT/NT for assessment

## Making public facing information easy to access

- DS Website Accessibility
- Clear and devoted sections to the different AT and NT processes and services
- Consistent file sharing (Direct download or Google Drive)



# Poll 2

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1. In what ways can students interact with your office?
2. Which campus resources do you frequently refer students to?
3. Do students seem excited about technology accommodations?



# Navigate: Accommodation Delivery

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“While the student interview is an important step in considering accommodations, disability professionals should always approach these conversations with a clear understanding that the goal of all accommodations is to create access.” [\(Meyer, Thornton, & Funckes, 2020\)](#)



# Essential Question for Accommodations

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How can DS offices provide clear accommodation approvals and processes that allow students to navigate their accommodations and access AT?



# Rationale for Navigating Accommodations

“Reasonable accommodations, such as the ones typically discussed in our field and communicated to faculty through “letters” of accommodation, are retrofits to inaccessibly designed environments put in place on an individual basis to create access” [\(Meyer, Thornton, & Funckes, 2020\)](#)

Accommodation delivery is one of the primary obligations of a DS office:

- Students must be aware of their approved accommodations.
- Students must be knowledgeable on how to use their accommodations.
- Barriers to using accommodations must be addressed

Accommodation approvals require:

- Student feedback to keep messaging relevant to their needs.
- Identifying service gaps and what stakeholders are missing.
- Follow up!



# Implementation

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- We want students to have as many connections as possible and to feel empowered by their AT
  - Language for approvals is important!
    - Ex: [Notetake Technology](https://sonocent.com/) (NT) – Sonocent - <https://sonocent.com/>
      - You will receive an email with instructions on how to access this software application. Please contact our Notetaking Specialist, Asher Baca ([notetake@usc.edu](mailto:notetake@usc.edu)) should you have any questions.
    - Ex: Notetake Technology – Sonocent
  - Follow up emails with login information, training options, and licenses for AT software
  - Conduct trainings and encourage follow up for any troubleshooting
- Consistent messaging after approval is key to identifying environmental obstacles to use



# The AT Centric Model for Delivery

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## Alternative Formats, AT Apps, and Screen Reader Delivery

- Upon approval, students receive an AT Profile for Alt Formats
- Students are messaged monthly reminders to submit requests for alternative formats
- Students receive updates about the available trainings and service hours
- Provide additional AT evaluations
- Weekly 1-hour NVDA individual trainings

## Notetaking Delivery

- AIM pre-semester messaging for Sonocent and NoteTake Express.
- Notifying students of their responsibilities and resources.
- Training for Sonocent use in the online setting
- Sonocent user guide made specifically for USC students



# FAQs for Support

To support our goal we also created numerous FAQ and how-to sheets for all of our services and processes.

Each one is based off the most common questions we receive for each service such as:

## Q. What is Alternative Format Textbooks?

- a. Alternative Format Textbooks turns your physical textbooks or readings in different electronic forms. You can receive them as:
  - i. Accessible PDFs
  - ii. eBooks
  - iii. Audio files (MP3)
  - iv. Kurzweil text-to-speech files (KESI)
  - v. Braille
  - vi. Electronic Braille (BRF)



### USC Notetaking Accommodation FAQ

#### Q. How do I request a notetaker and access notes?

- a. Please see the attachment included in this reply, titled "How to Request a Notetaker and Access Notes".

#### Q. It is the first/second week of class and I do not have a notetaker, what do I do?

- a. DSP attempts to recruit a notetaker from the first two weeks, or three attempts, of your request in MyDSP. If a notetaker is not secured in the first two weeks, or after three attempts, you will receive an email asking for information that DSP requires to ensure you receive your accommodation. Be sure to respond to this email in a timely manner to receive class notes after the two week recruitment window has passed.

#### Q. I have a quiz/test soon and have only some or no notes from my notetaker, what do I do?

- a. DSP expects students with the accommodation of peer notetaking to check MyDSP for notes within 24-48 hours of class. Should there be issues with uploads such as no notes provided, notes uploaded after 24-48 hours, or illegible handwriting, you must inform with DSP staff. DSP will attempt to attain materials however, it is not guaranteed that last minute requests will be fulfilled. Please email your primary advisor or [dspnotetaking@usc.edu](mailto:dspnotetaking@usc.edu) to address the issue.

#### Q. The notes I am receiving do not cover the information I need for this class, can you tell the notetaker what I need?

- a. The peer notetaking accommodation is *supplemental* to your own notes and not a replacement for them. This means that you are expected to both attend class regularly and take your own notes. There may be extenuating circumstances in certain cases; if you believe your case is extenuating please email [dspnotetaking@usc.edu](mailto:dspnotetaking@usc.edu).

#### Q. I was absent and did not receive notes for those days yet, can I get them?

- a. If you miss class, you are responsible for attaining class materials. There may be extenuating circumstances in certain cases; if you believe your case is extenuating please email [dspnotetaking@usc.edu](mailto:dspnotetaking@usc.edu).

#### Q. Can I receive notes directly from my notetaker in class instead of through MyDSP?

- a. MyDSP allows for all parties to have access to materials and is necessary in ensuring you receive your accommodation. If a notetaker does not upload materials to MyDSP, they will not receive their award and we cannot check to ensure they are regularly uploading notes. DSP highly recommends following our established process.

#### Q. I requested notes through MyDSP however, my request disappeared. What happened?

- a. DSP asks that you respond to our request to confirm notetaking for your courses. In some cases, students do not download and use notes that have been provided through MyDSP. To avoid such scenarios, you will be asked via email to confirm the need for notes in classes that you have requested this accommodation. If you do not, your request will lapse. It can always be reactivated by contacting your primary advisor.

Please contact [dspnotetaking@usc.edu](mailto:dspnotetaking@usc.edu) with any questions, comments, or concerns. Communication is impacted during the first few weeks of the semester, so if you do not hear back right away be sure to follow up or contact the Main DSP email [DSPFrontDesk@usc.edu](mailto:DSPFrontDesk@usc.edu) for a response.

# Poll 3

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- How are students notified of accommodations?
- Are students satisfied with their AT or NT accommodations?
- Do students stay engaged with your office after approval/training?



# Self-Advocate: Follow Up and Speak Out

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“Self-advocacy has been well studied within the disability literature and has been defined as a component of the civil rights movement for people with disabilities, the ability to speak up for oneself, a component of self-determination, and an awareness of an individual’s own strengths and weaknesses allowing for articulation of accommodations and supports” [\(Fleming et. al, 2017, p. 218\)](#)



# Essential Question for Self-Advocacy

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After students are approved and given information, they still may face barriers to engage with their AT accommodations. How do we improve their self-advocacy in the learning process with tangible AT applications that overcome environmental barriers?



# Rationale for Self-Advocacy

“Environments that foster self-advocating behaviors throughout students’ experiences and interactions with others are critical to promoting self-advocacy.”  
[\(Test et. al, 2016, p. 52\)](#)

Environmental barriers may pop up throughout a student’s college career:

- Faculty aren’t aware of legal requirements
- Discrimination
- Physical access issues
- Document inaccessibility
- Technology failure
- Technology is not a good fit

It is the responsibility for the DS offices to address these barriers as much as possible, while enabling students with disabilities to identify, report, and collaborate for their removal.



# Implementation of Building Self-Advocacy

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- Build trust through reliability and appropriate responsiveness with your students.
  - It never feels good to be ignored
  - Establishes institutional integrity
- Build confidence and comfort with the provided AT through training and outreach
  - Promotes the ability to exercise access to technology in the classroom
  - Increases self-efficacy
- Build self-advocacy through encouragement to connect with other resources on campus
  - Title IX for reporting violations/discrimination
  - Counseling/Health Services for treatment connection, if needed
  - Organizations and opportunities for leadership
- Office visibility in the University community is key
  - If they know your office can support them, they will be more likely to advocate for their needs



# The AT Centric Model for Self-Advocacy

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## Notetaking Approach

- Sonocent vs. Notetake Express vs. Peer-Notetaker
- Sending out Sonocent loan extension reminders for engagement checks
- Promoting conversations with faculty for concerns about recordings
- Referring to relevant campus resources for additional support

## AT Approach

- Sending out training reminders with flexible times and further learning options
- Screen reader training program
- Proactively provide solutions for document inaccessibility
- Referring to relevant campus resources for additional support



# Poll 4

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1. How likely are your students to speak out to DS or relevant offices about inaccessibility?
2. How well can your students express their need for accessible technology or AT use?
3. In what way do your students engage in leadership roles on campus?



# Questions?

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Thanks!



# Contact Us

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