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

Asher Baca, Lead Specialist
Jordan Colbert, MMFT, ATP
Intro about USC’s Student Accessibility Services

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

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

“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

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

• 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

- 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

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

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

“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

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

• 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 (NT) – Sonocent - [https://sonocent.com/](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

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
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)
Poll 3

- 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

“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

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

• 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

## 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

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?

Thanks!
Contact Us

Asher Baca (asherbac@usc.edu)

Jordan Colbert, MMFT, ATP (jordan.colbert@yale.edu)

Student Accessibility Services (sasfrntd@usc.edu)

Grace Ford Salvatori Hall (GFS)

3601 Watt Way, Suite 120

Los Angeles, CA 90089-0896

http://osas.usc.edu