The SWAT Team: Developing Student Workers to Implement Accessibility on Campus

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About Student Accessibility Services at Yale University

- Student Accessibility Services at Yale is the office responsible for providing academic accommodations for students with disabilities.

- Currently servicing 2900+ students (25% of student population)

- Managed by 7 staff members (6 accessibility specialists, 1 administrative)

- Prior to 21-22 academic year, 4 staff (3 accessibility specialists, 1 admin)
Overview

• The Student Workers in Assistive Technology Team

• The 3 Phases of Building the SWAT Team

• Campus and Administrative Buy-in for the SWAT Team
Important Considerations

• Connotations associated with the team/unit names
  • “Take the meat and leave the bones” principle
  • Intended to associate with a trained and highly specialized team that addresses problems others are unable to do

• Funding and staffing issues
  • Not all accessibility or disability services may have budget or bandwidth to develop same size of team
  • Can be adapted to volunteer or smaller scale teams
  • Campus partners may be able to assist with funding, training, or management
The Student Workers in Assistive Technology (SWAT) Team

- Undergraduate and graduate student workers over 2 teams and 6 positions
  - Accessibility Assistant Unit (Remote)
    - Graduate Accessibility Assistants
    - Lead Undergraduate Assistant
    - Accessibility Assistant
  - Communication Interpretation and Assistive Technology (CIA) Unit (Hybrid)
    - Communication Access Assistants
    - Assistive Technology Assistants
    - Alternate Format Assistants
Accessibility Assistant (AA) Unit

- Unit that specializes in document remediation for faculty and students
- Training through WebAIM: Document Accessibility Certificate
  - Graduate AAs manage teams of AAs work assignments
    - Responsible for uploads and downloads of course materials
    - Interact with faculty for support and guidance with materials
  - Lead AA
    - Senior member of the team who train and supports AAs
    - Communicates to team at large and supports social media
- AAs
  - Document remediators
Graduate students from different disciplines

Involved with direct student training and technology related accommodation facilitation

Directly support the mission, value, and vision of the SAS office through projects

Engages campus partners and student groups through presentations and trainings
## CIA Roles and Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Access Assistants</th>
<th>Assistive Technology Assistants</th>
<th>Alternate Format Assistants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Manage captioned media accommodations for faculty videos</td>
<td>• Manages notetaking and assistive technology trainings for student accommodations</td>
<td>• Conduct text-to-speech technology trainings</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Coordinates CART and ASL services for student coursework related needs</td>
<td>• Generates data and assessment related materials from database for SAS staff</td>
<td>• Obtains alternate formats of textbooks for students with accommodations</td>
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<td>• Manages SAS website updates and accessibility</td>
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Accommodations Facilitated by the SWAT Team

- Accessible Course Materials
  - AA Unit and Alternate Format Assistants
- Notetaking Technology
  - Assistive Technology Assistants
- Assistive Technology Software and Applications
  - Assistive Technology Assistants
- Captioned Media, Audio Description and CART/ASL
  - Communication Access Assistants
Leadership Development and Oversight

• Each team has a Lead who directs the function of their team
• 1-hour check-in meeting per team biweekly with Associate Director
• 1-hour CIA unit meeting biweekly
• 1-hour SWAT Meeting monthly
• Communication via Teams (Graduates) and Slack (AAs)
Questions to Consider

- Do any of these roles infringe upon you or your co-workers’ responsibilities?
- Does your campus have the appetite for a student-centered team like this?
- How might these roles support and free up your office’s functioning?
Building the SWAT Team

A 3-year model
Year 1: Assessment

Understanding what you have and what you need
Assessment of AT Services

- What assistive technology do you currently have?
- How are accommodations related to AT facilitated?
- Who are the main decision-makers for AT?
- Which campus partners have a role in accessibility?
- What gaps exist in AT and accessibility delivery?
Adapt and Start Small

Available AT
- Inventory
- Needs

Facilitators
- Immediate support
- Availability

Campus Support
- Identify Allies
- Existing Practices

Start as puddy, not playdough

Make assessments, not advisories

Test foundations, not patience
Build the Base

Focus on the low hanging fruit

Find a champion and an eager beaver

• Locate an employee who understands your vision
• Partner with them to spread the word
• Find one student who is passionate and self-sufficient
_activity time!

turn to your neighbor and share one area of at need on your campus or in your office
Year 2: Development

Gather what you need and build the machine
Deliver a State of the Service Address

Take the opportunity to grab the power players attention at a high-level start of the academic year meeting

- Highlight previous successful areas of AT services
- Discuss immediate needs that were identified
- Explain who helped you and gently mention who blocked you
  - “...collaborated with X, but wasn’t able to connect with Y and will in the future”
- Depict failure as a product of the size of the needs
- Shout out your champion and eager beaver
- Express optimism and expected success with future support
Fall of Year 2: Under Promise and Over Deliver

• Present one tool that will slightly fill a gap in service
  • Implement 3 free tools that can be expanded on in 1-2 semesters for full-service delivery
  • Expand accommodations related to this toolset to demonstrate greater need for support

• Focus on developing one area of service per semester
  • Begin with largest area of deficit in AT delivery
  • Tell campus partners your next semester plans and ask for support

• Find another eager beaver
  • Leverage their enthusiasm for more bandwidth to take on tasks
  • Identify volunteer/part-time positions that could be offered for experience
Get to Work: Utilizing Your Eager Beavers

Eager Beaver 1

• Begin training students on existing AT

• Explore peer-institutions processes for guidance

• Establish email account for communications

• Delegate tedious process tasks for staff efficiency

Eagar Beaver 2

• Begin remediation of priority course materials

• Explore communication tools for best team results

• Enlist an undergraduate volunteer/hire to support remediation efforts

• Obtain access to communicate with faculty for materials harvest
Spring of Year 2: Capitalize on Efficiency

- Highlight the office support and student growth as reflective of additional student worker
- Point to faculty support as a means of building relationships
  - “Help us, help you” mentality
- Explain that good work means more work, and more work needs more support
- Double trainer role need for accommodation implementation
  - Remove onus of AT knowledge from FTE to student workers
- Introduce 5 volunteer or student workers with lower hour expectation and wages than initial hires
Use Engagement to Differentiate Roles

• Track numbers for proof of momentum
  • AT training engagements
  • Documents remediated
  • Faculty contacts-include the champion!
  • New responsibilities through need identification

• Create team meetings once per month
  • Create new titles for differing roles and responsibilities
  • Let roles train their teammates on their focus
  • Bring campus supports to meetings for introductions
  • Assign homework related to spreading awareness
    • Ex. tell one friend or professor about your role in accessibility
No Growing Pains, No Growing Gains

• Continue to ask for more areas of influence through secondary needs
  • What supports were neglected while addressing the priority need?
  • Do campus partners need support?
  • Are there office projects that staff cannot complete due to constant “fires”?

• The increase in tasks may cause some students to reconsider commitments within the roles
  • This provides a need for growth to accomplish goals

• Staff and administration may question impact to their own goals
  • Resistance can be redirected as new opportunities for personal growth
  • Emphasize student development and service delivery
Reflect on Progress for Summer Projects

• Survey interest in summer positions whether paid or volunteer
• Use accomplishments to justify competency
• Feedback surveys from students and population metrics
• Use student excitement and campus appetite for guidance
• Expand expectations and utilize vision for additional hiring
What is the greatest barrier to accessibility program success?

Hint: It’s not effort!
Year 3: Efficacy

Let the machine do the work
Set the Tone Before the Year Starts

- Hold an entire team meeting and announce lead roles
- Establish clear expectations of the importance of the work
- Inform faculty and campus partners of team size and scope
- Create opportunities for community engagement
  - Drop-in technology hours once weekly
  - Attendance at orientations
  - Team SWAG - shirts, flyers, stickers
Utilize Leads to Improve Delivery

• Ensure that the Leads have varied skillsets
• Establish biweekly offsetting team meetings
  • 30 mins to 1 hour MAX
• Check-in on workloads and communications
• Elicit creative solutions for common problems
• Remember student-workers are not FTE
Continual Improvement: Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better

- Create immediate feedback opportunities
- Minimize tedium
- Maximize innovation
- Population growth = SWAT growth
- Identify new needs assessment
- Generate campus excitement
- Re-engage champions for exposure
- Highlight senior SWAT members
Campus Immersion

1. Provide opportunities for engagement with campus events

2. Present as a faculty resource for AT accommodation training

3. Adapt to student schedules and meeting spaces
Who on your campus might resist your SWAT Team development?
Campus and Administrative Buy-In
Campus Stakeholders with skin in the game!

- Includes:
  - Champions
  - SWAT Team Members
  - Campus Partners who receive support or collaborate
  - Student Orgs that focus on DEIA and community building
“Help us, help you” Approach to Campus Detractors

• Leverage the inclusivity and minimal lift related to implementation

  • Ex: Librarians can focus on research skill development without worrying about accessibility of research materials

  • Ex: Students do not have to ask for alternate materials or specific tools

  • Ex: Less nuanced faculty support through training and workshops for greater understanding
Administration: It Affects the Bottom Line $$$

- Campus culture of accessibility has an impact on student choice and retention
- Continual increase of students with accessibility needs are entering higher education with AT experience
- Creates a proactive rather than reactive approach to student support
- It’s harder to pay for staffing than to find volunteers and experience-hungry students
Administration: Shows Robust Care

• Enables peer-to-peer support and community on campus
• Expresses a commitment to an inclusive classroom environment
• Spreads awareness of resources through collaboration
• Develops professional accessibility knowledge in students
• Builds bridges between faculty, disability offices, and student groups
The Keys to Buy-In

- Business is done over lunch and the golf course
- It’s hard to be forgotten if you’re always around
- You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar
- Don’t just talk about it, be about it
- Bring solutions, not problems
- The President was in an entry level job once
If You Build It, They Will Come
Questions?
Feel free to contact me at Jordan.Colbert@yale.edu