



Strength in Numbers: A Collaborative Approach to Digital Accessibility Across a University System

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University System of Maryland

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Where Are We with Digital Accessibility?

Thinking about people, processes, and technology together, where would you place your institution right now in relation to the updated Title II digital accessibility requirements?

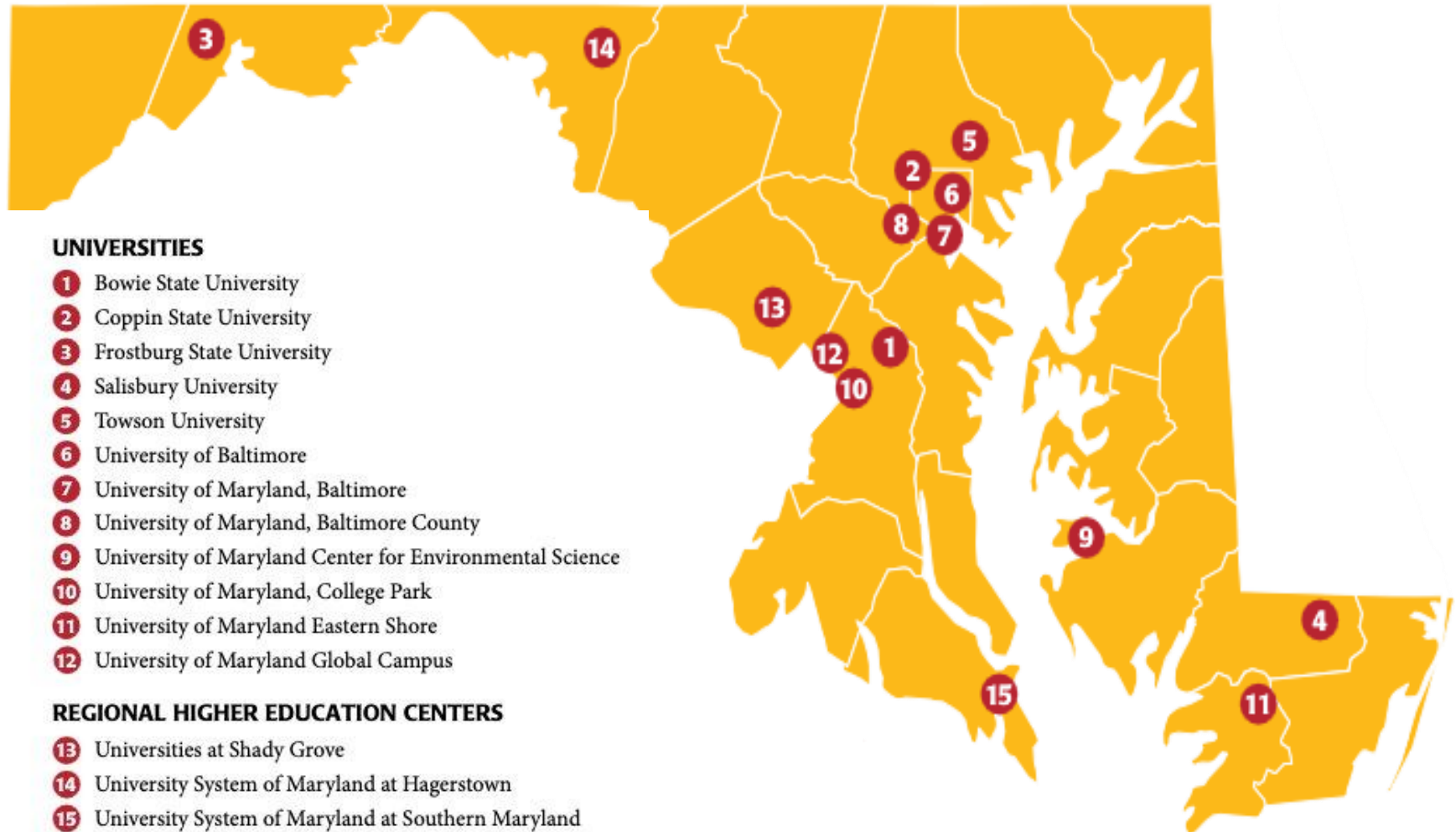
1. Coordinated and sustaining
2. Developing but uneven
3. Just getting started

Context



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The University System of Maryland



The Challenge

- Differentially resourced institutions, varying levels of expertise and bandwidth
- April 2025: Institutions significantly behind in preparation
- Ensuring this work is not just an "add-on"

The Need for a Paradigm Shift

- From web accessibility to digital accessibility
- From reactive to proactive
- From being the work of DSS/IT to being everyone's responsibility

Why Collaboration?

- Aligns with culture- and capacity-building emphasis (vs. only compliance)
- Promotes common/consistent messaging
- Reduces isolation among individuals facing similar challenges
- Extends the expertise of campus colleagues to a wider audience
- Ensures resources are beneficial across different contexts

Guiding Framework



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University of MD's Six Essential Steps of Digital Accessibility



Why This Framework?

- Evidence-based & developed by accessibility experts at University of Maryland
- Moves WCAG technical standards into common language and actionable guidance
- Builds confidence through incremental, scaffolded approach

How it Guided Our Initiatives

- Grounded training in the six essential steps—for faculty & staff, academic & student affairs leaders, and students
- Each month, we focused on one step:
 - Monthly newsletter
 - Monthly virtual sprint
 - Monthly resource creation

Building the Ecosystem



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Established & Ongoing Outreach

- Presidents
- Provosts
- CIOs
- Centers for Teaching and Learning
- Academic Transformation Leaders
- System-wide councils for faculty, staff, students
- USM student organization leaders
- Deans and Chairs
- Campus Unit Heads (advising, IR, etc.)
- Marketing/Comms

Digital Accessibility Work Group

- Membership: Reps from USM institutions, community colleges, independent public institutions, and partner organizations
- Charge: Foster cross-institutional collaboration to support faculty in meeting the Title II ruling.
- Purpose: Serve as collaborative body to identify DA campus needs, develop shared resources, and establish best practices for creating accessible course materials.

Issues & Projects from Work Group

Spring/Summer 2025:

- Tool identification
- Shared contracts
- Training modules

Fall 2025:

- PDF remediation
- Faculty support
- Reach beyond faculty

Winter/Spring 2026:

- LMS remediation
- Metrics for success
- DA strategic planning

Fall 2026-Spring 2027:

- Training student modules
- Procurement procedures
- Music, Arts, & STEM support

USM Digital Accessibility Hub

Accessibility in Action

Accessible by Design.

Inclusive for All.



Welcome to the USM Digital Accessibility Hub

At the University System of Maryland, we believe that education should be accessible to everyone. The Digital Accessibility Hub serves as your central resource for creating inclusive digital environments where all students, faculty, and staff can thrive regardless of ability.

Accessibility News at USM

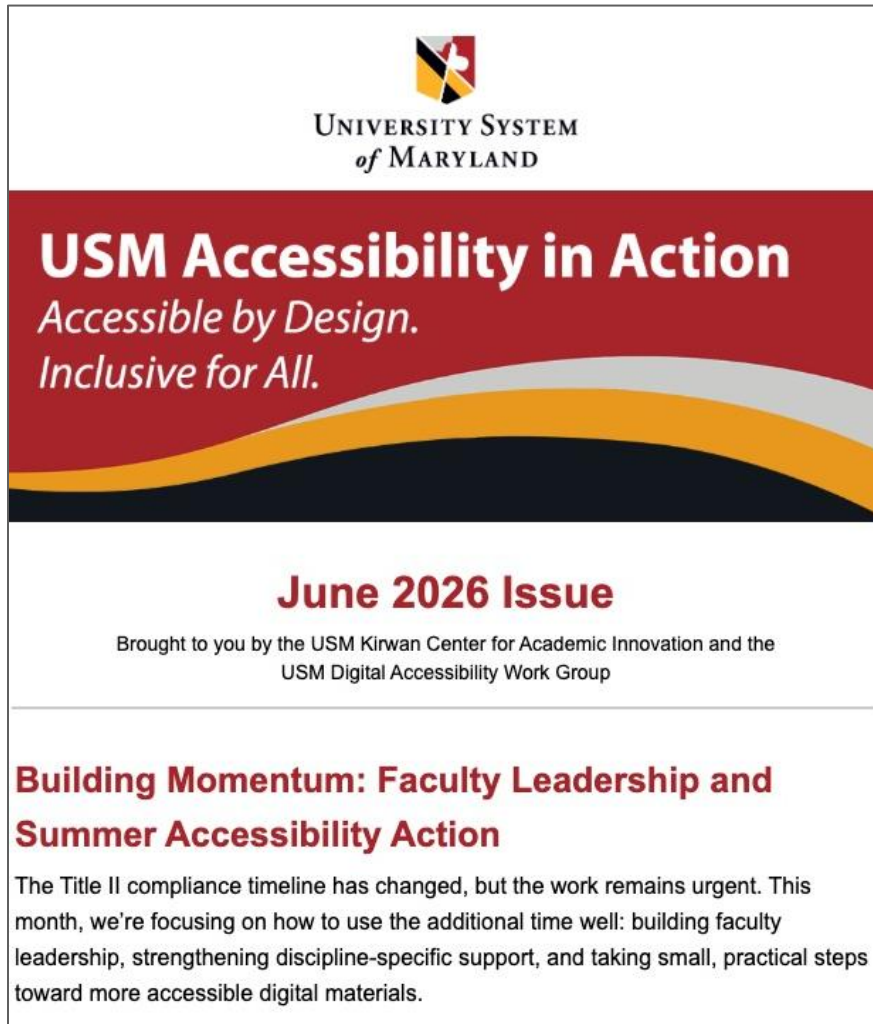
[Read the June Accessibility in Action Newsletter](#)

We want to hear about your successes! [Share](#) or [Nominate an Accessibility Win](#)

Digital Accessibility at USM

- [Digital Accessibility Hub](#)
- [Accessibility Resources](#)
- [Training and Professional Development](#)
- [Digital Accessibility Work Group](#)
- [Success Stories and Case Studies](#)
- [Accessibility FAQ](#)
- [Accessibility Glossary](#)

Monthly Touchpoints



- Monthly newsletter & special issues, transitioning to updates and quick tips in June 2026
- Monthly Remediation Sprints, focused on one of the six steps with a short overview and time to remediate top five materials

Fall Faculty Mini-Grant Program

- Structured opportunity for 17 USM faculty to engage in accessible course redesign for spring
 - Asynchronous + synchronous 6-week online program
 - Poster presentation and discussion of course revisions at culminating event
 - Mini-grantees served as campus ambassadors in Spring

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Beyond Compliance: A Thoughtful Approach to Access

PSYC 304: Adolescent Psychology



Context & Course Information

- PSYC 304: Adolescent Psychology, is an in-person undergraduate course that contributes to the Developmental Domain for the Psychology Major (BA and BS) and minor and is required for students pursuing the Developmental Track under the new BS curriculum. It is also designated as a social science course and can be used to fulfill general education requirements.
- This course is a new preparation for me, providing an ideal opportunity to design it from the outset with accessibility in mind. By embedding accessibility considerations during course development, my aim is to create a learning environment that is inclusive and responsive to all students.

Step One: Identifying an Accessible Text

- To ensure students have course materials at the start of the semester, I will participate in UMBC's Course Materials Initiative program, which provides immediate e-textbook access through Blackboard.
- In preparation, I evaluated e-textbooks to determine which would offer rich course content while also supporting accessibility and inclusion.
- To do so, I applied the POUR principles, a framework emphasizing that materials should be *perceivable*, *operable*, *understandable*, and *robust* for all users.

Accessibility Features

The adolescent psychology e-textbook I selected provides:

- Perceivable content through adjustable display settings, captions, transcriptions, and audiobook options
- Operable features such as screen reader compatibility, navigational, supports, and flexible video play
- Understandable organization with clear language, highlighted key terms, and a comprehensive glossary
- Robust functionality across computers and mobile devices, and an accessibility reporting mechanism



Figure 1. Display settings available in selected e-textbook.

Step Two: Creating an Accessible & Inclusive Syllabus

- Based on the University System of Maryland Digital Accessibility Checklist and the CAST Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines, I developed a syllabus with the goal to the best possible experience for every student.

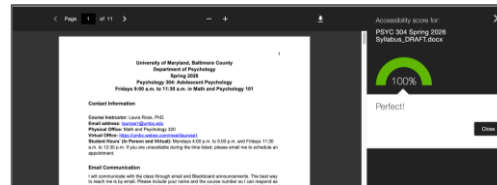


Figure 2. PSYC 304 Syllabus and Accessibility Score from Ally on Blackboard Ultra

Accessibility and UDL Implementation

From an accessibility perspective, I:

- Chose a sans serif font to improve readability
- Applied heading styles to support screen reader navigation
- Moved the accessibility statement to the first page to increase visibility
- Added alternative text to images and figures
- Replaced generic hyperlinks with descriptive text
- Redesigned tables to avoid merged cells

From a UDL perspective:

- Engagement:** I incorporated design options that welcome students' interest and identities, allowing them to select final project topics and collaborate in group work to foster collective learning
- Representation:** I created opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding in multiple ways, such as exams, projects, participation, and activities, and to choose their final project format
- Action & Expression:** I developed varied approaches for student creation and composition, with scaffolded support during class time devoted for project development and progress monitoring

Process & Lessons Learned

- As part of my effort to create accessible course materials, I learned to use various tool.
- For the e-textbook, I used VoiceOver, the built-in screen reader for Mac users, to test navigation and evaluate operability.
- For my syllabus, I applied the Word accessibility checker and Ally, Blackboard Ultra's built-in accessibility tool.
- Although there was a learning curve, especially with VoiceOver, the process was informative and provided valuable insight into how users navigate materials using only keyboard commands.
- While this extended the time required to review e-textbooks and develop my syllabus, the nearly 20 hours dedicated to each were worthwhile.
- The experience prompted me to think critically about how course design and materials influence all students' learning experiences.

Impact & Next Steps

- These changes ensure that students can engage fully with course materials. By improving navigability and clarity, students can more easily understand expectations and participate in learning activities. Overall, these adjustments promote a more accessible and inclusive learning experience.
- I will apply this experience to future course materials, designing them with accessibility and inclusion from the outset, using POUR principles and UDL guidelines, and regularly reviewing them to support student learning.

Contact, Acknowledgement & QR Code

- laurose1@umbc.edu
- Many thanks to Drs. Jennifer Potter and Nancy O'Neill for providing resources and support through the Boosting Course Accessibility Mini-Grant Program.



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Context & Course Information

- Course Description: Introductory Statistics covers fundamental concepts in data analysis, probability, and hypothesis testing for undergraduates.
- Students Served: Undergraduate students with diverse learning needs—including visual impairments, ADHD, and English language learners—enrolled in a blended online course.
- Reason for Selecting Remediation Materials: Module 3 (Describing Data Graphically) contains numerous visuals and graphs that create accessibility challenges for screen-reader users.

Example 1: Module 3 – Describing Data Graphically

Before - Charts used red/green colors and lacked alt text.

- Barrier 1: Graphs not screen-reader accessible
- Barrier 2: Colors not colorblind-friendly
- Barrier 3: Inconsistent slide layering affects reading order

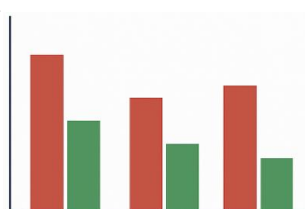


Figure 1. Red-green bar chart, unlabeled, no alt text; not colorblind-friendly; slide layering hinders screen readers.

After - Alt text added for all charts, blue/orange color palette, consistent slide titles.

Solutions implemented

- Added alt text for each graph
- high-contrast colors
- standardized slide layout for keyboard navigation

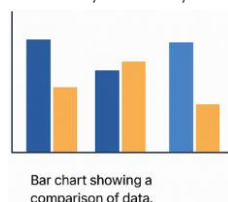


Figure 2. Blue-orange bar chart with alt text and consistent titles; screen-reader and colorblind accessible.

Impact

Students using screen readers or with color vision deficiencies can now interpret graphs independently, with improved contrast and consistent layout benefiting all.

Example 2: PDF Reading – “Graphical Summaries of Data”

Before - Scanned PDF with dense text; unreadable by screen readers.

- Barrier 1: Screen readers cannot read scanned images
- Barrier 2: Small, dense text hinders readability
- Barrier 3: Tables lack labels

Graphical Summaries of Data

A graph is a graphical summary of numerical information. In a graph, data are displayed in a visual format such as a bar graph, dotplot, or boxplot. Each type of graph displays data in a different manner. An example of a bar graph is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1

Another common way to display data is with a dotplot, as seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2

Graphical Summaries of Data

A graph is a graphical summary of numerical information. In a graph, data are displayed in a visual format such as a bar graph, dotplot, or boxplot. Each type of graph displays data in a different manner. Table 1 shows the number of students choosing each type of graph.

Type of Graph	Number of Students
Bar graph	10
Dotplot	15
Boxplot	12

Table 1: Number of Students Choosing Each Type of Graph

Figure 3. Graphical Summaries of Data - scanned PDF with dense, small text and unlabeled tables; unreadable by screen readers.

After - OCR (Optical Character Recognition) applied, headings tagged, tables labeled, increased font size.

Solutions implemented

- Converted to text-based PDF
- Added structured headings and table tags
- Enhanced readability with larger font and spacing

Graphical Summaries of Data

1. Introduction

A graph is a graphical summary of numerical information. In a graph, data are displayed in a visual format such as a bar graph, dotplot, or boxplot. Each type of graph displays data in a different manner. An example of a bar graph is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1

2. Dotplot

Another common way to display data is with a dotplot, as seen in Figure 2.

Graphical Summaries of Data

1. Introduction

A graph is a graphical summary of numerical information. In a graph, data are displayed in a visual format such as a bar graph, dotplot, or boxplot. Each type of graph displays data in a different manner. Table 1 shows the number of students choosing each type of graph.

Type of Graph	Number of Students
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Table 1

Figure 4. Graphical Summaries of Data – text recognized via OCR, headings tagged, tables labeled, and larger font; fully navigable by screen readers.

Impact

Students with low vision or dyslexia can access and navigate readings independently; all learners benefit from improved readability and searchable PDFs.

Process & Lessons Learned

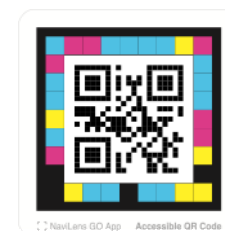
- Tools Used:** PowerPoint Accessibility Checker, Adobe Acrobat Pro OCR, JAWS/NVDA, Panopto for video narration, LMS accessibility settings.
- Biggest Challenge:** Making visual content (graphs, charts) screen-reader accessible without losing statistical meaning.
- Key Insight or Surprise:** Minor accessibility improvements, like alt text and color adjustments, greatly enhance learning.
- Approximate Time Investment:** 15–20 hours for Module 3 remediation (PDFs, color, alt text).

Impact & Next Steps

- Student Benefits:** All students, including those with visual impairments and ADHD, can independently access and analyze graphical data. Offering multiple ways to engage with and express information reduces barriers and supports equitable learning.
- Applying Learning:** Apply accessibility practices—alt text, color adjustments, readable layouts—to future modules and assessments.
- Future Plans:** Create accessible content from the start, include alt text and accessible PDFs, provide multimedia alternatives, and test with screen readers.

Contact & Resources

- Email: halkhateeb@ubalt.edu
- Acknowledgments: Supported by the Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation, University System of Maryland, through the Boosting Course Accessibility Mini-Grant Program.



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Data Collection Project Goals

- Strengthen campus DA conversations and actions through data collection and sharing
- Develop system-wide understanding of progress
- Identify successful & shareable strategies
- Create compelling narratives that demonstrate impact
- Build a foundation for data-informed decision making
- Assist institutions in meeting Title II compliance requirements

Data Collection Project

- Institutions invited to engage in a structured data collection and reporting process, November 2025-May 2026:
 - Collecting baseline data on campus DA efforts
 - Collecting baseline data on LMS content
 - Documenting stakeholder engagement efforts
 - Capturing success stories
 - Preparing baseline assessment report and follow-up progress report

Spring Cleaning Events

- Two days in January targeting faculty to remediate spring course materials
- Virtual programming plus in-person campus offerings across our campuses
- Engaged 1,000+ participants across 8 virtual webinars and workshops



Pause and Reflect



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Brief Discussion

- What kinds of programming have you been doing?
- Which of these might you consider at your campus, system, or consortia?

Strategic Planning Summit

- Post-April, aimed to help ensure momentum while also focusing on next-level work
- Incorporated "pain points" from DA Work Group members
- Provided strategic planning playbook and template:
 - Helped guide campus-wide planning, implementation, documentation, and reporting.
 - Division-level plays: Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Libraries, Finance & Admin, Procurement, etc.
 - Template includes maturity rubric and 90-day, 1-year, and 3-year plans

Maturity Rubric Example

E. Procurement and Vendor Accountability

Beginning / Developing (1 point) Accessibility is rarely considered during procurement; vendor claims are not verified.

Proficient / Functioning (2 points) Accessibility requirements are included in some procurements; vendors provide documentation.

Accomplished / Exemplary (3 points) Accessibility review is standard; contracts include enforceable requirements aligned with WCAG 2.1 AA.

Team Score: _____

Support/justification for your selection (1-2 sentences):

Looking Ahead to This Year

Continuing Efforts:

- Updating the hub
- Convening the DA Work Group
- Monthly series on DA tips & tricks and success stories
- Strategic planning check ins
- Fall cohort of DA mini grantees

New Initiatives:

- Fall Prep series
- DA STEM Community of Practice
- DA Music & Arts Community of Practice
- Exploration of student credentialing opportunities for digital accessibility skills

Lessons Learned & Critical Success Factors



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Signs of Success: Growing Engagement

- Newsletter subscribers increased monthly
- Work group expanded with 100% retention
- Sprint attendees = newsletter subscribers
- Mini-grantees joined newsletter
- Hub cited in presentations system-wide & beyond

Signs of Success: Deepening Collaboration

- Spring Cleaning: Virtual cross-campus + localized events
- Resource sharing → Hub building
- Engaged participants → Champions
- Monthly Work Group meetings: active & productive

Signs of Success: Expanding Reach

- Moving beyond traditional faculty development
- Instructional designers, ADA coordinators, IT staff
- Deans, chairs, student affairs, provost offices
- Living the message: This work is everyone's work

If We Could Do It Again...

Timing & Capacity

- Offer more events like Spring
- Begin strategic planning earlier
- Plan for continuous new requests exceeded capacity
- *Reality check: 2-person staff, one of many initiatives*

Reach & Messaging

- Find ways to engage more with senior leadership
- Add more emphasis on values vs. compliance
- Provide more hands-on time for faculty
- Create more opportunity and space for feedback loops

Addressing Faculty Bandwidth Limitations

- Six Essential Steps (not WCAG)
- Easy → harder remediation sequence
- Start small with top 5 materials
- *Barriers addressed: time, technical skills, tools*

Addressing Kirwan Center Bandwidth Limitations

- Newsletter template
- Repurposed presentation slides
- Leveraged work group for campus-level fit
- *Reality: 2-person team, multiple initiatives*

Addressing Institutional Bandwidth Limitations

- Worked within existing campus structures
- Emphasized proactive remediation vs. reactive compliance
- Open licensing for localization
- Resources evergreen but continuously updated
- *Truth: Nothing was completely “set it and forget it”*

Keys to Cross-Campus Collaboration

- Leverage Existing Trust
 - Kirwan Center's established cross-campus credibility
 - Work Group built campus-level relationships
 - Honored different priorities and approaches
- Shared Ownership Model
 - “Our” work, not “your” work
 - Co-sponsored with DA work group & campus groups
 - Campuses contributed content, led sessions, shared resources

Keys to Cross-Campus Collaboration, Continued

- Infrastructure that enables
 - Microsoft Teams site
 - Monthly meetings + regular emails
 - All resources openly licensed
- Distributed leadership
 - Participants became champions
 - Work group connected us to campus advocates
 - Built capacity to continue beyond our direct involvement

Non-Negotiables for Success

1

Find your people and keep them connected.

2

Message, message, message.

3

Start small and continue to build.

4

Connect to what faculty and staff care about.

5

Offer positive framing and acknowledge the effort.

Building Your Ecosystem



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Guided Activity

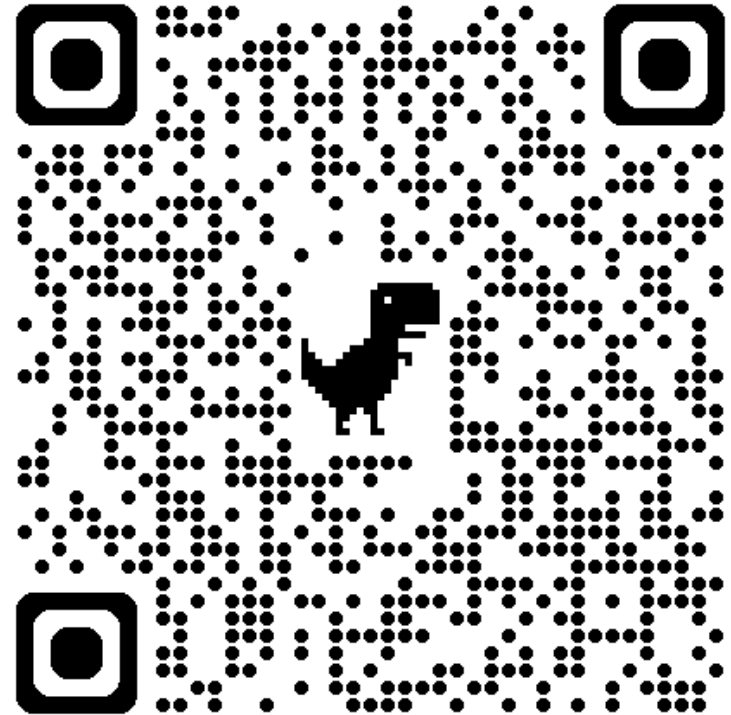
- Using the handout, take a few minutes to:
 - Draft your next initiative
 - Identify your stakeholders
 - Map your current resources
 - Determine your next step
- Form groups of 3-4 people and discuss your ideas
- Designate a volunteer to be the note-taker/reporter

Share-Out & Discussion

- We'd love to hear from a few groups!
- Share one thing from your discussion:
 - A stakeholder you hadn't thought to include before?
 - A resource you already have that you could leverage differently?
 - An initiative idea you're excited about?
 - A challenge you're still wrestling with?

Session Evaluation

tiny.cc/8zu1101



Thank you for attending!

Your feedback helps shape future programming.

Thank You!



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