Conversations With OER Creators: Advice for Accessibility

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Background

About University of Nevada, Reno

- Land grant R1 public university

- 15,200+ undergraduate student FTE

- 2,300+ graduate student FTE

- Consent decree requires all publicly available materials be accessible

- Everyone receives accessibility training

Research Background

- First study
  - Surveyed OER librarians about their knowledge/experience with accessibility
  - Just 11% experienced with accessibility; most said somewhat confident
  - 43% always consider accessibility; 39% sometimes do
- Second study
  - Evaluated 355 open textbooks for accessibility
  - Only two books had no fails; average no. of fails = 5.93 (out of 14/15 categories)
  - PDFs were the worst (mean of 8 fails)
  - Most common fail points: Alternative text, tables, and ordered headings

About the project

Research Question(s)

- What factors help OER authors and those who support OER creation ensure their products come out accessible? What factors hinder accessibility?

Study Details/Methodology

- Filtered list of study sample from Project 2 to books with 3 or fewer fails

- Identified about 10 books based on publication date, institution type, and discipline

- Created protocol for semi-structured interviews

- Conducted interviews in October/November 2021

- Used iterative process to create themes and code interviews

Results

Teamwork 1

- The open textbooks were largely made accessible by a number of people in various positions/roles with sometimes diverse skillsets

- Teams often contained instructional designers and students; some included librarians

- Several participants recognized that having access to a support system of experts is a privilege that others lack; but this support was crucial

Teamwork 2

- "I don't think I could have done this book on my own. I teach full time. I'm so busy."

- "We could have created it, but it just wouldn't have been a usable, user-friendly, accessible resource [without the team]."

- "[H]er skill set and the value that she adds to our team is incredible."

Tools 1

- Tools/technological aids were simultaneously a major frustration and very necessary for performing accessibility work

- Many used widely available tools/platforms, relying on built-in accessibility features
  - Word and Google Docs
  - PressBooks

- Creators' insufficient knowledge of and training in certain authoring and evaluation tools led to frustration or wasted time/effort

- Many lamented the lack of a "one and done" accessibility checker

Tools 2

- "There were times that I wanted to throw the computer at this thing…Why am I getting this flag? Why is it not accessible…?"

- "It's always been tricky with recommending tools to faculty, because there isn't that magical click a button here and it'll tell on PressBooks whether your book is good to go or not."

Supports 1

- Good project management/planning
- Financial support
  - From institutions, governments, and private entities
  - For staff and tools
- A supportive institutional culture
  - Makes accessibility a priority
  - Provides professional development opportunities
  - Focus on teaching/learning
- Modest ambitions/realistic expectations (a.k.a. the perfect is the enemy of the good)
- The support of the wider OER community

Supports 2

- "Once you can pay staff, then you can do it."

- "We had a must-have and we had a like-to-have list."

- "And there are various kinds of resources, including training workshops and manuals and guides…the institution has invested in ways for people to learn these things."

- "I think one of the things that's so beneficial is, you know, the nature of open is that we share."

Barriers 1

- Staffing
  - Lack of; lack of funding for
  - Adjuncts and others on temporary positions/short-term contracts
- Time
  - Everyone is busy, and faculty authors have many competing responsibilities
  - Deadlines are sometimes imposed by others (i.e., funders)
- Long-term maintenance
  - "Whose baby is it?"
- Discipline-specific or special content

Barriers 2

- "There are some limitations there simply because we don't have anyone...full-time dedicated to this."

- "But we were just, we were just racing against the clock, and so you have to, some things you have to say no to."

Recommendations

- If possible, institutions should hire staff, purchase tools, and fund faculty interested in creating OER

- OER professionals and advocates should continue to push for the development of easy-to-use platforms and tools and features

- Would-be authors should plan ahead and build in time for accessibility work from the start

- The broader OER community should continue to support authors by providing training in and guides to accessibility

Questions?

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