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
• 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
• “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.”
• 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
“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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