Accessibility Guidelines for Course Development

Purpose: Purposefully designing a course to be accessible to those with disabilities has a number of benefits to you the instructor and the students. Primarily, law dictates that course content must be accessible to those with disabilities and it is the responsibility of an instructor to provide content that is accessible. Student may disclose a disability even after a course has begun so creating content that is accessible is a proactive approach. In addition, research has shown that content developed for those with disabilities also benefits the learning of other students, so even if a student has not disclosed a disability, your time spent to create accessible content is not in vain!

Instructors, please keep in mind NNU’s policy for student disability services and how students with disabilities should seek formal accommodations at the NNU Disability Services webpage.

Thank-you in advance for the students whom your efforts will benefit.

Steps to take in course content creation

1. Use “alt text” for any image or picture inserted into Canvas. Make the text descriptive of the image. For example, if the image is that of a student and is there for decoration, “smiling student” may be sufficient. If the image is a building where the architecture is important, the alt text should somehow indicate this. See the embedding images with the rich content editor page for information on how to insert an image and update “alt text” in Canvas.

2. When using hyperlinks, use words in the hyperlink that make sense. “Click here” is not descriptive where “course syllabus” as a hyperlink describes what the link will take a student to. Notice that here, rather than giving the actual web addresses as hyperlinks the hyperlinks are descriptive of the page it takes one to. This assists screen readers in providing content to students. See the Canvas page on creating hyperlinks in the rich content editor for more information on creating hyperlinks in Canvas.

3. Don’t use text colors alone to show importance in your class. This can make it hard for those with difficulty distinguishing colors to understand your intent. In addition to color, within Canvas pages use a larger text size, bolded font, underlining, etc. to convey meaning. In Word the use of “styles” is preferred to even text size, font, and underlining.

4. Avoid using tables in Canvas to format your page (place text next to photograph, etc.). Screen readers will see this as a table and attempt to read it that way.

5. In Canvas, use preset styles for paragraphs and headings when creating pages. Do this in the rich content editor. There is a box on the far right portion of this screen that defaults to “paragraph”. Using one of the “heading” options for headings and “paragraph” for paragraphs on a page helps screen readers properly read the content to a student.

6. When posting documents made in Microsoft programs (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, etc.), use the automated “accessibility checker” to scan and fix errors in documents. This can be done in a document by going to the “File” menu, “Check for Issues”, and selecting “Check Assesibility”. You will be guided through the program to find and fix accessibility issues for screen reading software.

7. For multimedia, be sure to create a transcript or captions to go with audio content. There truly is no automated method for transcription that has the fidelity needed for academic use. Camtasia is available to faculty through the Faculty Studio and can be used for captioning. Instructors can create transcripts before recording multimedia or after recording. Consider using a department Teaching Assistant for developing transcripts and/or captions.