Transforming Library Culture with a Digital Accessibility Team

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How can digital accessibility transform a library?
Presentation outline

- Brief history
- Challenges coordinating accessibility efforts
- Strategic investments
- Creation of the Digital Accessibility Team (DAT)
- Mission, expertise, and services
- Reflection on impact
- Next steps
- Takeaways
Brief history
Accessibility at U-M and in the Library

1983
Council for Disability Concerns

mid-1980’s
Knox Center
Adaptive Technology Computing Site

2007
Web Accessibility Working Group

2012-2017
Hiring Accessibility Specialists / Staff Training

2017
Digital Accessibility Team
Challenges coordinating accessibility efforts
Challenges with coordination on campus

Campus is huge:

- Over 46,000 students
- Over 26,000 administrative, medical, and academic staff
- 13 undergraduate schools and colleges
- 18 graduate schools and colleges
- 3 hospitals, dozens of outpatient clinics and medical centers
- Nearly 500 library staff
Challenges with coordination in the library

Diverse contexts
Library environments, in-person and online services, collections, content, and tools

Distributed procurement
Broad scope of resources procured across multiple departments in the library

Diverse content and platforms
Wide range of content produced; platforms, products, and resources created and maintained by library staff
Accessibility shouldn’t be ad hoc

- No accessibility policy on campus
- People try to be engaged based on good will
- It’s unclear whether people have to comply, or what compliance looks like
Strategic investments
Campus plans for accessibility

U-M has a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan

Council for Disability Concerns has a Strategic Plan to increase awareness and education
Library plans for accessibility

The U-M Library has a 5-year DEIA Strategic Plan focusing on:

- Recruitment, retention and development
- Education and scholarship
- Equity, inclusion, and accessibility
- Service and leadership
Library positions with a focus on accessibility

Accessibility representation within 4 library divisions: Deans’ Office, Learning and Teaching, Library IT, and Publishing

- **Jeff Witt**, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist
- **Stephanie Rosen**, Accessibility Specialist
- **Ben Howell**, User Experience & Accessibility Specialist
- **Bridget Burke**, Front-End Developer & Accessibility Specialist
- **Jon Earley**, Front-End Developer & Accessibility Specialist
- **Jon McGlone**, Front-End & User Interface Designer
Paving the way for the Digital Accessibility Team

**Challenge:**
With the creation of accessibility positions, implementation of tools, and training opportunities, what else was needed to help create a sustainable approach to ensuring digital accessibility compliance at scale?

**Solution:**
- Create a cross-divisional team that could offer digital accessibility services to project teams and individuals throughout the library
- Give the team a budget
- Encourage project teams and individuals in the library to consult with them
Creation of the Digital Accessibility Team (DAT)
Creating the Digital Accessibility Team (DAT)

Goal:
Coordinate digital accessibility consultation, evaluation and outreach services through a multidisciplinary team

Process:
- Created a charge and a basic plan
  - Mission, services, resources needed, members/expertise, communication strategy
- Incorporated strategic input from library leadership
- Established regular meetings and office hours
- Started sandboxing evaluation and consultation and outreach services
Digital Accessibility Team members

Bridget Burke
Front-End Developer & Accessibility Specialist (Library IT)

Jon McGlone
Front-End & UI Designer (Michigan Publishing)

Stephanie Rosen
Accessibility Specialist (Learning & Teaching)

Ben Howell
User Experience & Accessibility Specialist (Library IT)

Jon Earley
Front-End Developer & Accessibility Specialist (Library IT)
Mission, expertise, and services
Digital Accessibility Team’s mission

- Help align individual, team and organizational practices within Library organizational culture, processes and workflows
- Provide expertise on digital accessibility standards (WCAG, 508, ATAG, ARIA, EPUB) and accessible design/development best practices.
- Provide web accessibility evaluation services
- Conduct outreach, training and consultation during office hours
Our services

1. Provide consultation services during office hours or by appointment
2. Web accessibility evaluations (light, full and custom)
3. Provide support/resources for library staff to understand basic accessibility barriers and utilize universal design and digital accessibility best practices within their regular work
Who needs our services?

- Project managers
- UX/UI designers and developers
- Department managers
- Product and service owners
- Program managers
- Human Resources staff
- Public services staff
When are DAT services requested?

1. Procurement of new resources / renewing a contract or license for third party content or software
2. Creation of new web content and documents, products and services
3. Updates or redesigns related to vendor or library maintained products, services or platforms
Reflection on impact
Reflection on our first year

1. Defined and refined our web accessibility evaluation services
   a. Process/technology for request intake and management
   b. Designated/empowered team member to manage evaluation requests
   c. Created protocol for evaluations and template for actionable reports
   d. Practiced consulting with technical and non-technical staff on next steps

2. Established consistent office hours service

3. Empowered team members with defined roles based on capacity and expertise

Opportunity:

Conduct outreach to key partners in the Library
Growing influence in the Library

Challenge:
How can we connect the value of digital accessibility expertise, resources and services with key partners in the Library?

Solution:
- Schedule outreach appointments (team meetings, office hours) with key partners from (Human Resources, Deans’ Office, campus partners)
- Introduce our mission, accessibility services, and expertise
- Just listen
- Brainstorm opportunities to collaborate and follow up
Results of digital accessibility outreach

- Majority of colleagues are culturally aware and interested in accessibility
- Largely unaware of accessibility policies, guidelines
- Unaware that DAT could help them practice digital accessibility more fully in their work
- Opportunity to reframe and embed digital accessibility resources, services and consultation to improve Library processes
- The better we understand our Library colleagues work the better we understood our team, services and resource needs
Story

...during a recent outreach meeting with Meghan and Craig

Meghan
Lead Project Manager

Craig
Assessment Specialist
Next steps
Collaboration with accessibility campus partners

- Pilot Accessibility IT Standard Practice Guide (SPG) with the library
- Proactive approach to accessibility evaluation and compliance
- Handful of departments/projects adopt SPG into workflows and processes
- Learn together with campus partners in Information Technology Services and the Office for Institutional Equity
- Identify needed resources, training, and expertise
Takeaways
Nurture an inclusive and accessibility first culture

1. Craft and align organization behind a vision and mission to deliver accessible products and services

2. Build product, service design, and development processes and workflows to include and leverage web accessibility guidelines and universal design

3. Conduct regular outreach and training

4. Practice experiential learning — Learn accessibility through practice coupled with training

5. Include people of all abilities in product and service design, development, and assessment
Resources

U-M Library: Digital Accessibility Team Charge

U-M Library: Digital Accessibility Evaluation Protocol (Light)
Thank you for being here!

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