

Online Accessibility in Blackboard

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What is Blackboard?

- An online course management tool
- Designed primarily for asynchronous instruction
- Contains capability for synchronous delivery of information and discussion

Components of Blackboard

- Document storage
- Discussion Board
- Chat feature
- Announcements
- Self and Peer Assessment
- Journals and Blogs
- Testing



What is Accessibility

- Easily approached or entered
- The quality of being useful and convenient
- inaccessibility, unavailability - the quality of not being available when needed
- **Providing equal access to information for all students.**
- <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/accessibility>



Blackboard accessibility

- User interface has been redesigned to be more intuitive
- Behind the scenes coding has been redesigned to work more smoothly with screen readers
- Universal Design & Accessibility Course for Instructors
 - <http://coursesites.blackboard.com>



Accessibility Issues

- All audio should be provided in a text format for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- All visual information should be described for those with visual impairments.
- PDF documents should be in text not graphical format.

Accessibility Issues

- Consider font style, color, and size
- Consider typing and English skills in using the discussion board
- Be aware of technical issues such as security certificates not being recognized
- Include alt text for all graphics

Blackboard Content Formats

- HTML
- Microsoft Office
 - Word, Powerpoint
- PDF (Portable Document Format)
- Other Forms of Media
 - Video (... and YouTube too!)
 - Audio
 - Voice Over Powerpoint
 - Lecture Capture

Perspectives on Multimedia

- “In some cases, the best way to enhance accessibility may be to use more media... used in the right way, multimedia is a critical resource for accessibility.” *Slatin and Rush (2002) ‘Maximum Accessibility,’ p359.*
- “Multimedia is a very, very, powerful learning tool and it’s certainly my preferred way of learning. It has advantages over oral lectures because I can listen to a lecture, but I can’t read my writing afterwards. If I have something that’s presented through multimedia formats, all there for me, I can go back to it and it’s clear and I can understand it.” *Natasha Campbell, who has dyslexia*

The Challenges of Multimedia

- We have seen a growth in the use of multimedia in all of our online programs using Blackboard for course delivery.
- There is no doubt that creating accessible multimedia isn't always straightforward and may appear daunting and extremely challenging on its face.
- There is confusion surrounding the implications of accessibility guidelines.

Continued...

- There may be a lack of resources or technical expertise to create accessible multimedia.
- These challenges require a holistic, thoughtful, and analytic approach.
- We don't have all the answers, but have made some progress...

One Approach to Accessible Multimedia in Blackboard

- Creation of a faculty “production shop.”
- Assessing the instructional goals of multimedia inclusion.
- Creating an “accessibility strategy.”
- Selection of tools.
- Development of multimedia learning objects.
- Baby mis-steps or giant leap of perfection?

Accessible Video

- Example:
 - Providing Captions for Flash-Based Streaming Video.
 - *The Obesity Challenge in Public Health*

What About YouTube?

- Add caption tracks to your videos.
 - http://www.youtube.com/t/captions_about
- Example:

Transcription is KEY!

- The full transcript of audio is the key.
- Transcribing by hand vs. automated transcription tools.
 - Accuracy, accuracy, accuracy...
 - What is acceptable?

Accessibility Tools

- Adobe Flash
- Adobe Captivate
- Microsoft Accessible Wizard

- Just some suggestions... these are in our toolkit.

Instructor Training

- The instructor is the key to accessibility and can be the greatest barrier.
- Ideally all instructors should pass a training course before teaching online.
- The course should include accessibility training and strategies.
- Most instructors do not intentionally make their classes inaccessible.
- A lack of awareness is often the problem.

Administrative Support

- It is essential to have support from the administration to ensure and mandate accessibility.
- Administrators are concerned about the bottom line. So they want to see the benefits.
- Accessibility isn't always free but is cost effective if you look at the big picture.



Benefits of Accessibility

- Required training will improve the quality of the classes. Good teaching is good for everyone.
- Accessibility features can benefit all students not just a minority.
- Accessibility features meet the needs of individuals with a variety of learning styles.

Wrapping Up

- Blackboard has some accessibility built in. However, it is only as accessible as the instructor makes it. Instructor training is essential and administrative support is the only way to initiate university wide standards.
- Policy changes aren't easy but they are worth the effort and will make the learning experience better for all students and instructors.

