

Portfolio Assignment: Accessibility Implementation Plan

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Define what systems thinking is and why it is important to improve the implementation of accessibility.

Systems thinking is an "Appreciation of complexly interrelated phenomena and dynamic relationships" and an "Appreciation of complex network structures with a holistic orientation" (Cabrera & Cabrera 2023), as cited by (Lampe 2023). The improvement of accessibility implementation at institutions depends upon numerous collaborative systems to enhance the student learning experience. For instance, a higher education institution has several vertical systems, such as the executive, faculty, staff, and students (Lampe 2023). Also, each vertical system operates within the parameters of horizontal systems. The executive system includes the horizontal systems of the president, vice president, academic deans, etcetera. Moreover, the faculty system includes subsystems such as councils, tenured faculty, departments, etcetera (Lampe 2023). As a systems thinker at a higher education institution, one must consider that multiple complex, complementary, and active relationships work together with a holistic exposure to improve campus accessibility implementation (Cabrera & Cabrera 2023).

To use system thinking in an applied way, consider that an instructional designer works for a university. This instructional designer is responsible for the lecture capture application and for aligning this software with the contact hours that have been allocated (Lampe 2023). Further, the instructional designer gathers content from the faculty that is input into the lecture capture application. A problem arises that involves certain faculty members turning in content late, which affects the instructional designer's ability to do their job. How should the instructional designer respond to this problem in the system? Being a system thinker requires the instructional designer to understand that "...connections are not always obvious and systems thinking sometimes requires us to see the invisible" (Woodsmall 2021).

In the case above, the instructional designer could ask questions and reflect on possibilities. In this way, the designer would use systems thinking as a diagnostic tool. As stated in the article by Goodman (2016), "In this sense, systems thinking is a disciplined approach for examining problems more completely and accurately before acting. It allows us to ask better questions before jumping to conclusions" (Goodman 2016). So, instead of going to the administration for a solution or casting blame solely on the faculty, the instructional designer could ask, "What other things are going on in that faculty member's situation that might be hindering them?" (Lampe 2023). Perhaps, the instructional designer could let the content being

turned in late slide "...because at the end of the day, hopefully, it is just the one-off time until it becomes more of a pattern" (Lampe 2023). The instructional designer must identify "...patterns of behavior over time, to surfacing the underlying structures that drive those events and patterns" (Goodman 2016).

Further, the instructional designer must expand the possible solutions and the range of choices for finding a solution to a problem so they can see and communicate problems innovatively. Extending one's viewpoint also involves applying aspects of emotional intelligence and soft skills such as courage, empathy, and curiosity. Moreover, Goodman comments that applying systems thinking perspective requires an approach that includes "...the willingness to see a situation more fully, to recognize that we are interrelated, to acknowledge that there are often multiple interventions to a problem, and to champion interventions that may not be popular (Goodman, 2016).

At this stage, the instructional designer might consider procedures "...that indirectly impact making sure that the process is smoother?" (Lampe 2023). Are there things that could be done to improve the channels of communication? Are there tools the instructional designer could employ to make methodologies more efficient so that the faculty member could deliver their content on time to the instructional designer? Perhaps, the designer could investigate their processes for efficiency or "...take into consideration the lives and situations of the other stakeholders that build learning experiences" (Lampe 2023). By integrating system thinking principles, the instructional designer will be "...aware that there are no perfect solutions; the choices we make will have an impact on other parts of the system" (Goodman 2016).

Let us consider that the instructional designer works at a larger system institution that has the financial resources to fund accessibility initiatives. This larger system institution can purchase a lecture capture application that can provide free close captioning. Also, this institution can provide the "...funding to ensure that schools and colleges are training their faculty members to understand that new technology" (Lampe 2023). In the short term, the faculty use the new lecture capture application to provide close captioning for their students. In the long term, the university is improving its processes and the system to improve the implementation of accessibility to its students. This scenario demonstrates how a system functions "...as an organized collection of parts or subsystems that are highly integrated to accomplish an overall goal" (Woodsmall 2021). Finally, improving accessibility techniques benefits the faculty,

students, instructional designers, etcetera and also aids the larger institution in avoiding lawsuits from students or advocacy groups (Lampe 2023).

Out of the list of events that the Provost provided to you, which issue would you tackle in the first year of your role at the institution? Explain using course materials for your justification.

As an instructional designer, I have been employed by Instructional University to solve a tremendous problem involving the institutional culture encompassing accessibility and inclusive design. Also, Instructional University must bridge the gap between their departments and offices to improve accessibility and inclusive design for their students. The administration that hired me bought into the idea of systems thinking, which I presented during my interview sessions. During a meeting with the Provost, they gave me a list of events to help paint a picture of what is happening at Instructional University and where to enhance accessibility and inclusive design. As we examined and discussed these scenarios, I would emphasize a key principle of system thinking: a system functions as a whole. So, if one part of the system changes, the nature of the overall system will also change, as "systems thinking is the philosophy that everything is connected" (Woodsmall 2021).

As our meeting continued, I would persuade the Provost to embrace systems thinking as it "...helps leaders see the big picture and understand and influence the consequences of their decisions across the community" (Woodsmall 2021). The Provost's list of events includes numerous stakeholders at Instructional University, including the Faculty Senate, the Math and Engineering Department Faculty Representative, the Distance Education Director, the Director of Facilities Management, the Disability Services, the Office of Information Technology, and the Department of Learning Technologies. As we reviewed each issue, I would determine which problem is ideal for systems thinking intervention based on the following criteria such as: "the issue is important, the problem is chronic, not a one-time event, the problem is familiar and has a known history" (Goodman 2016). Further, I would avoid assigning blame and instead focus on each problem using the "three angles of events, patterns, and structure" (Goodman 2016). Based on my analysis, I determined that issues surrounding the Disability Services Internal Reports on Accommodations met the systems thinking intervention criteria and the three angles of events, so it would be the one I would tackle during the first year of my role at the institution.

Out of the departments listed in the Provost's list of events, propose their roles and responsibilities when implementing accessibility.

Administrative Faculty and Staff

From the scenario case descriptions, The Provost, the Distance Education Director, and the Director of Facilities Management would be part of the administrative faculty or staff. These stakeholders make up the Executive system at Instructional University. Their interactions may involve assisting students and employees in accessing various electronic resources. Additionally, they may have the responsibility of submitting purchasing requests. Their knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding web accessibility and the web standards that Instructional University adheres to will help ensure that Instructional University's electronic services and resources are accessible to all faculty, staff, students, and community members with disabilities. (Source: George Mason University 2023)

The Administrative Faculty and Staff are part of the Executive system and include leadership positions at the Instructional University. These stakeholders promote the vision of the university. Also, they implement sustainable actions for accessibility implementation, which include creating an institutional culture that embraces, empowers, and funds accessibility and inclusive design initiatives. Moreover, the administrative faculty and staff must understand the purchasing and procurement processes to ensure electronic resources meet accessibility standards. These stakeholders must be familiar with accessibility technology resources to help students, faculty, and staff access and create accessible electronic resources. These accessibility technology aids will incorporate accessible text, accessible media, web accessibility testing, Assistive Technology, etcetera. (Source: George Mason University 2023)

Since the Administrative Faculty and Staff oversee purchasing and procurement at Instructional University, these stakeholders must ensure that each new platform, tool, or property meets and complies with accessibility guidelines. Any issues discovered must be corrected or have a procedure in place for remediation before the contract can be concluded. The Director of Digital Accessibility should review all new digital purchases. Finally, during my meeting with Provost, I would propose the following officer, director, committee, and team: The Chief Information Officer, the Director of Digital Accessibility, and the Digital Accessibility

Committee would become the influential subsystems of the Administrative Faculty and Staff and the Executive system at Instructional University. (Source: University of South Carolina 2023)

Chief Information Officer (New proposal)

The Chief Information Officer is responsible for ensuring compliance with digital accessibility at Instructional University lies. The CIO serves as the main driving force behind all efforts related to accessibility. The CIO, along with other appointed executives, leads leadership inquiries, high-level legal discussions, and crucial university-wide conversations regarding digital accessibility to accomplish the goals of the accessibility program. The CIO and the Director of Digital Accessibility approve the direction, strategy, and new initiatives of the accessibility program and assist in making these efforts successful. The CIO plays a part in educating university leaders about the importance of digital accessibility and fostering collaboration efforts around digital accessibility among all departments at Instructional University. Finally, the CIO infuses a mindset of serving all users well and considering accessibility among university stakeholders. (Source: University of South Carolina 2023)

Director of Digital Accessibility (New proposal)

The Director of Digital Accessibility actively advances and nurtures accessibility across all digital domains and supports others to do the same. At Instructional University, they assume the primary role of advocating for a digital campus that is both inclusive and accessible. Their responsibilities include the organization and administration of accessibility training programs. Also, the Director of Digital Accessibility seeks to educate university stakeholders to achieve and sustain accessibility standards. Further, the Director of Digital Accessibility adopts an innovative stance by proposing and overseeing initiatives with a systems-thinking mindset. These accessibility efforts can help change structures not serving or enhancing accessibility by expanding the "...choices available and creating more satisfying, long-term solutions to chronic problems" (Goodman 2016).

(Source: University of South Carolina 2023)

Digital Accessibility Committee (New proposal)

The Digital Accessibility Committee would comprise accessibility experts from various key departments within the university. They would discuss the digital initiatives at the university and strategize to ensure that Instructional University complies with digital accessibility standards. Also, this committee would contain experts from essential university areas who actively monitor and maintain the progress of digital accessibility efforts. Further, additional individuals would be regularly invited to join the committee when their college, department, or involvement in a new digital project requires the expertise of the Digital Accessibility Committee. Lastly, this committee would collaborate to create, update, and oversee accessibility policies and procedures.

(Source: University of South Carolina 2023)

Department of Learning Technologies

The Department of Learning Technologies (DLT) at Instructional University works hand in hand with the Director of Digital Accessibility to guarantee that every member of the university community, such as students, faculty, and staff, can comfortably navigate both digital and physical environments. Further, the DLT is recognized for its expertise in using assistive and adaptive technologies to enhance learning. These technologies encompass a variety of tools, devices, and services specifically designed to aid those with disabilities in accessing all elements of the Instructional University's physical and digital infrastructure. In addition, the DLT offers a broad range of services to the University community, such as resources for learning and training, accessibility assessments, procurement assistance, and consultancy in digital accessibility.

(Source: University of Wisconsin at Madison 2023)

In particular, the Department of Learning Technologies (DLT) at Instructional University provides guidance and support to guarantee that all types of multimedia learning content - such as video and audio clips, images, graphics, and data visualizations - are user-friendly for everyone, including those with disabilities. In addition, the DLT facilitates training, backing, and real-time events that are focused on fostering accessible presentations both online and in-person, ensuring virtual event inclusivity, and managing combined inclusive meetings.

(Source: University of Wisconsin at Madison 2023)

The DLT also offers further learning options, including webinars and virtual meetings, which aid in creating accessible websites, mobile app accessibility, accessible documentation, and user-friendly course content. The DLT adopts the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a flexible teaching and learning methodology that reaches all learners. In conclusion, the DLT will conduct accessibility assessments to examine the accessibility of websites, applications, multimedia resources, digital files, and software and develop plans to eliminate any accessibility barriers. (Source: University of Wisconsin at Madison 2023)

Faculty & Instructors

Instructional University expects all faculty members and instructors to ensure that educational materials are accessible to their students, whether shared through an online classroom, a learning management system, email, or any other platform. By making their course materials accessible, faculty members and instructors empower all students to improve their learning experience and achieve higher performance. Moreover, all course content, regardless of the distribution method (learning management system, online classroom platforms, email, etcetera), must follow digital accessibility guidelines. It is necessary to create all content, especially those intended for digital sharing, in compliance with accessibility standards right from the beginning. Furthermore, all educational platforms promoting online classes must be accessible and follow the specified procedures for incorporating third-party digital tools and platforms.

(Source: University of South Carolina 2023)

All faculty members and instructors at Instructional University must ensure that any content intended for online or digital media experiences the necessary changes to improve accessibility. Further, attending training sessions is essential to gain expertise in creating accessible course content that meets digital accessibility standards. Also, all faculty members and instructors should address any accessibility concerns raised during routine university digital content audits. Before sharing online, faculty must verify that every new PDF, Word document, and other files, as well as any videos or audio, comply with digital accessibility standards. Lastly, and when possible, instructors should integrate accessibility standards into the criteria for projects created by students that will be shared in any digital learning space.

(Source: University of South Carolina 2023)

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