Brandeis UNIVERSITY

Building an Accessible Culture in Higher Ed

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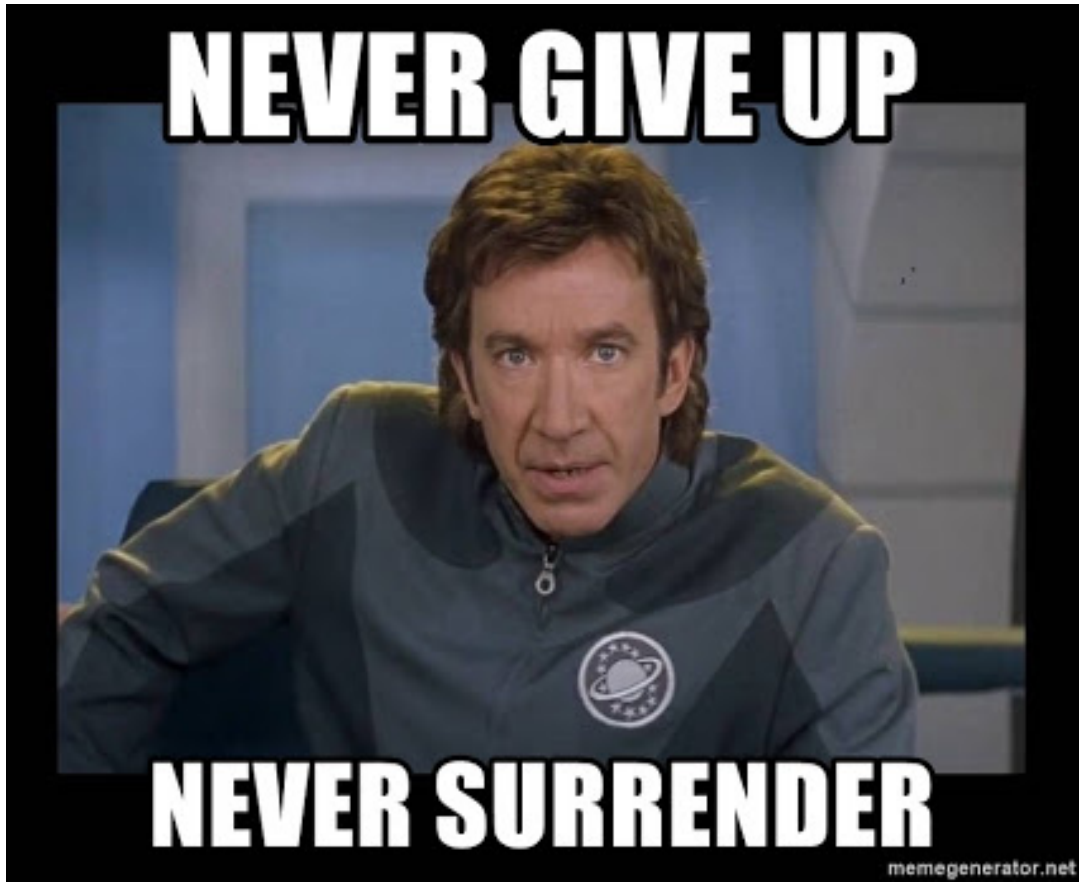
Notice the -ing in the title…we aren't done yet

People need time to adjust…keeping chipping away!

Continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection.

-Mark Twain

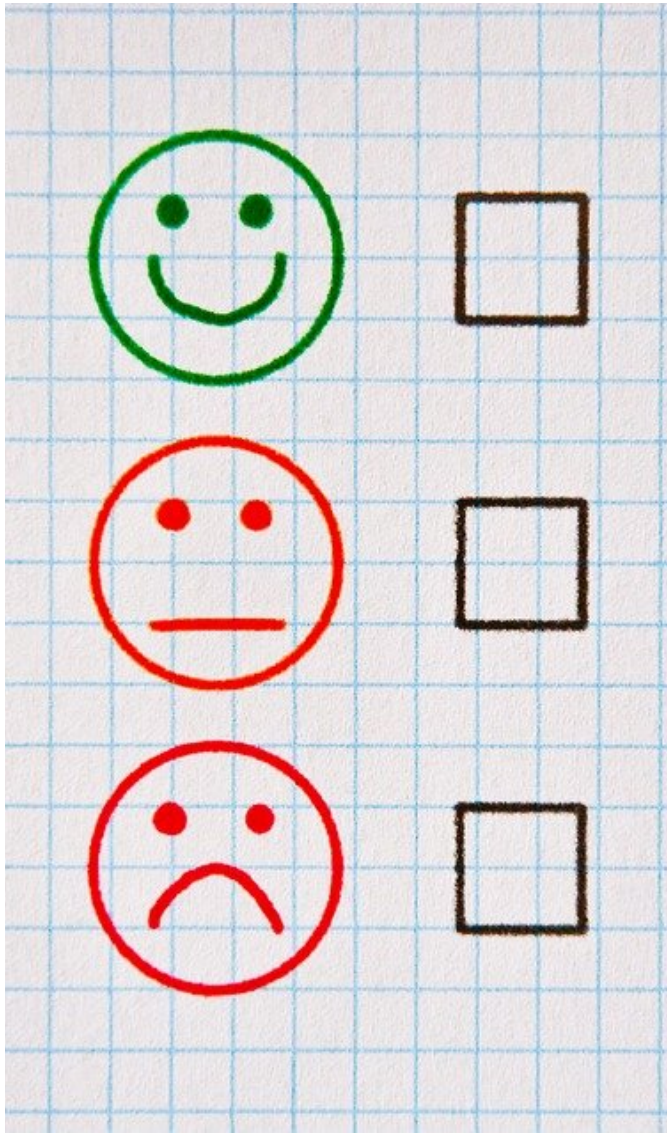


What is the attitude towards accessibility?

Self-Assess

In your community, do you have:

- Administrative buy-in?
- Faculty buy-in?
- Any underlying hostility, misunderstanding or fear?

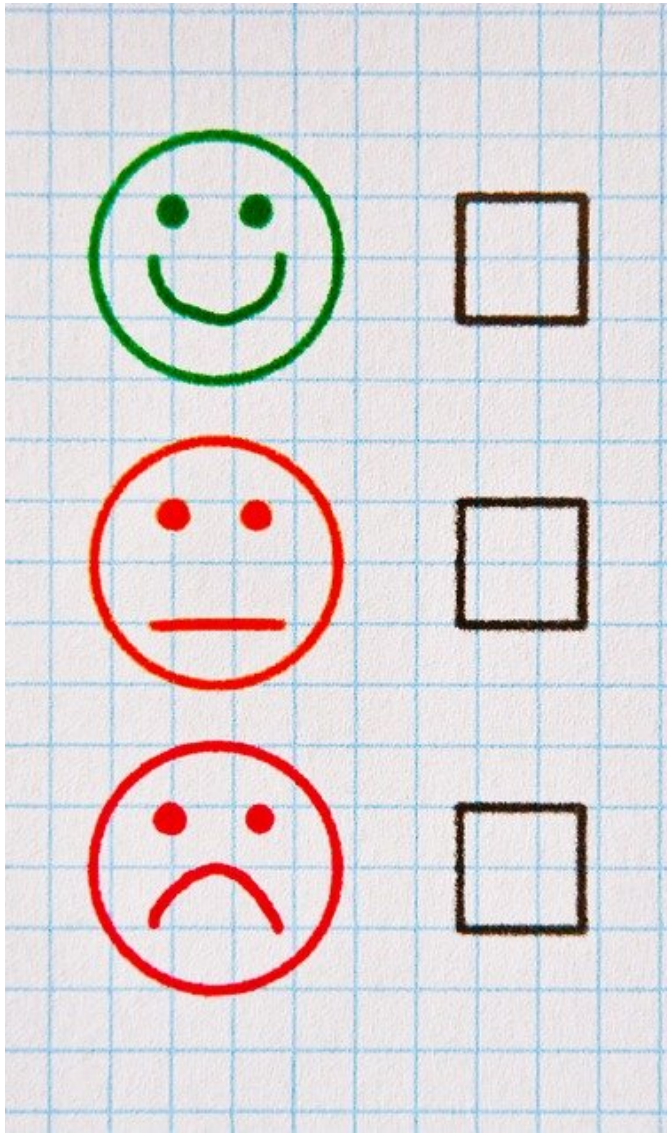


Everyone starts somewhere…

Self-Assess

What is your community already doing well?

What do they need to work on?

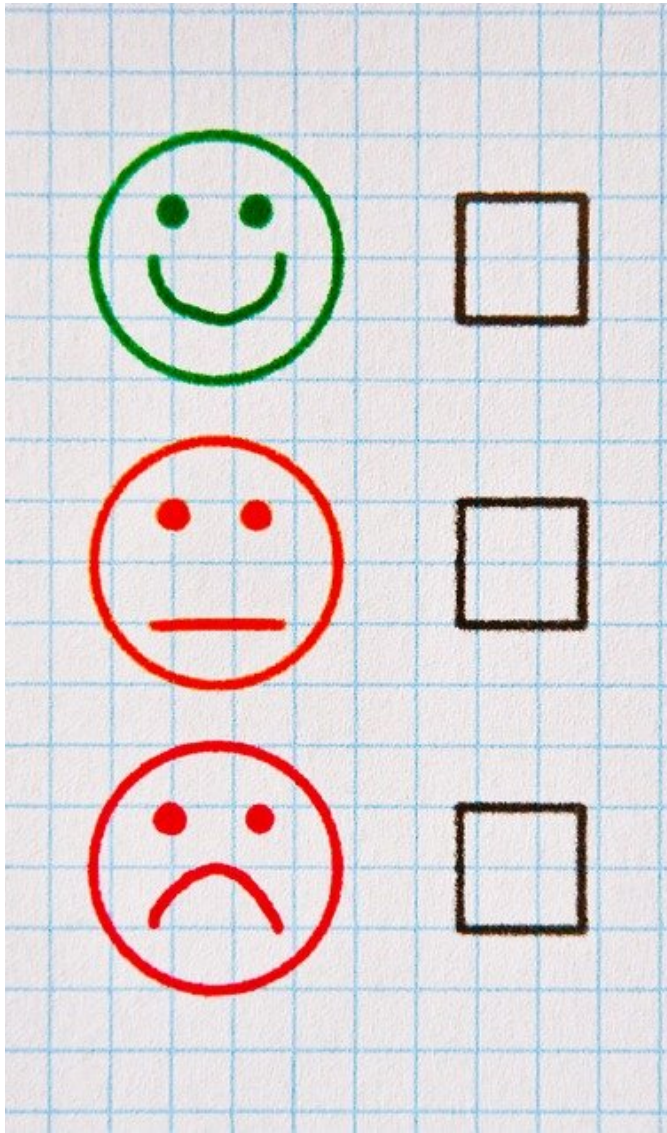


Everyone starts somewhere…

Self-Assess

What resources do you have?

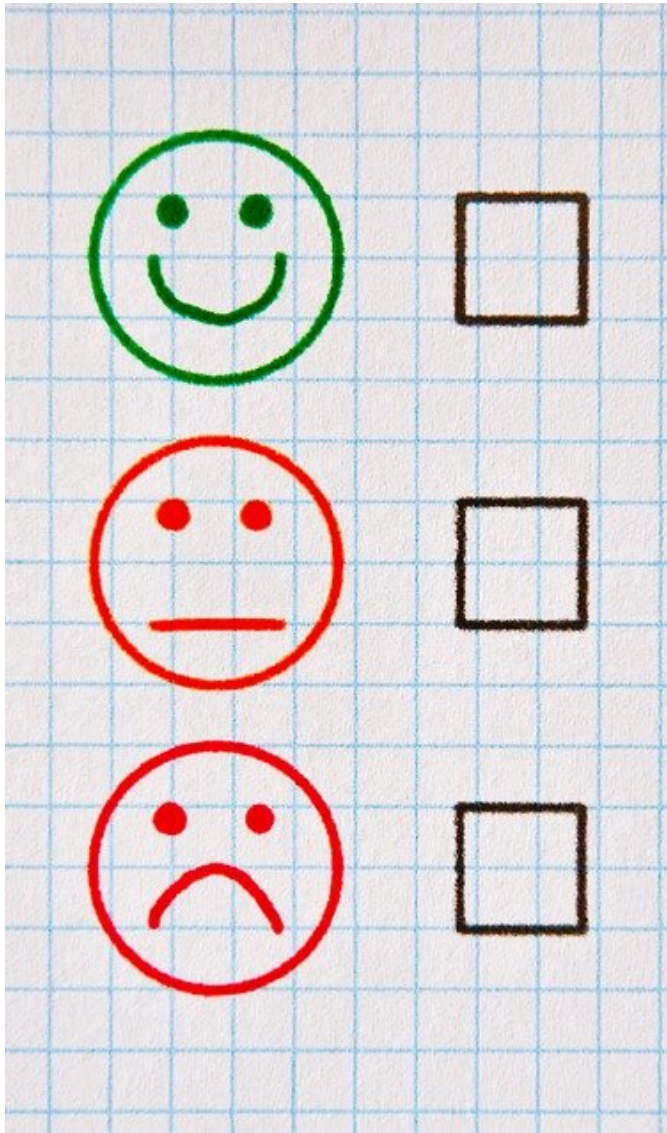
What resources might you need?



Where are the knowledge gaps?

Self-Assess

- Are they skills-based?
- Are there gaps in understanding?



Who are your allies?

Self-Assess

- Student Accessibility Support (Accommodations)
- Library
- Instructional design
- ITS
- Communications
- Media Services (A/V)
- Center for Teaching and Learning
- Academic advising

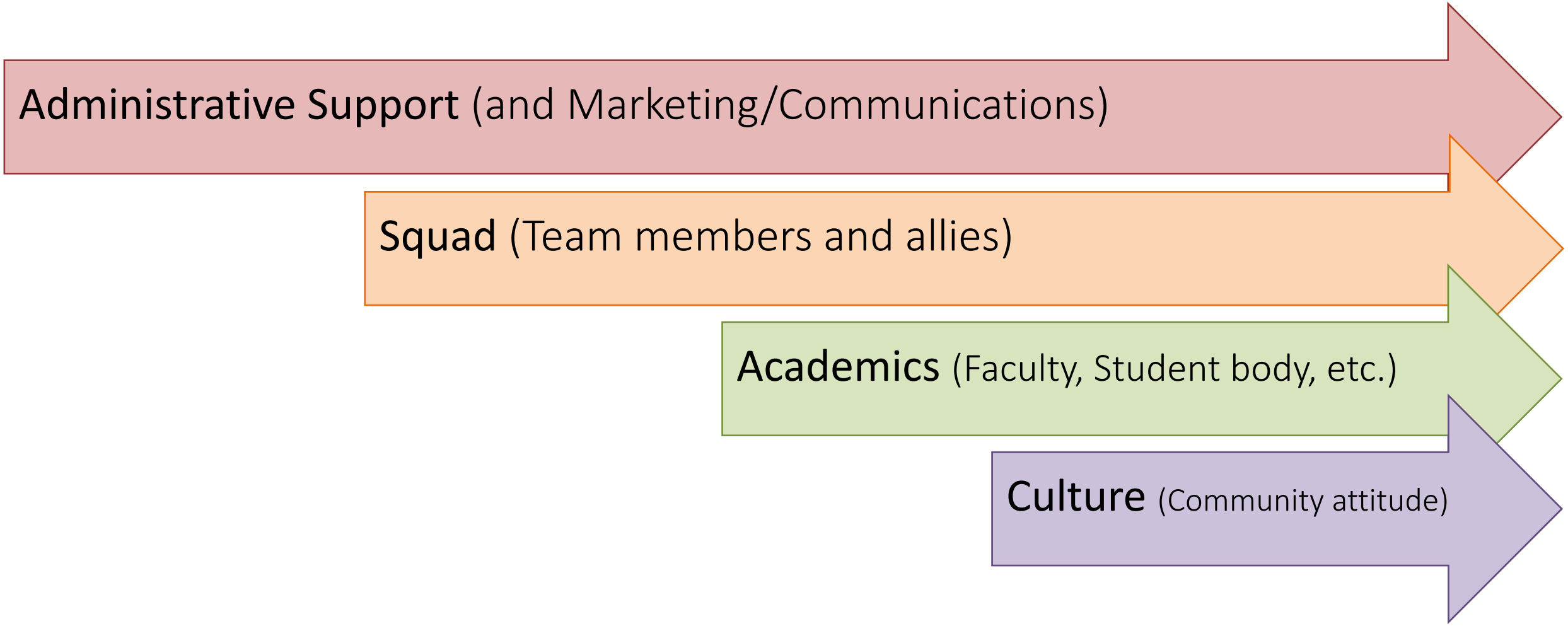
#AccessibilityGoals

Self-Reflect

Self-assessment: Where are you now as a community?

Goals: Where would you like to be?

Increasing awareness & advocacy on parallel tracks



History: what we had

Pre-2015

Administrative Support

- Decision to redesign main website
- Push to hire Web Accessibility Specialist (WAS)

Academics

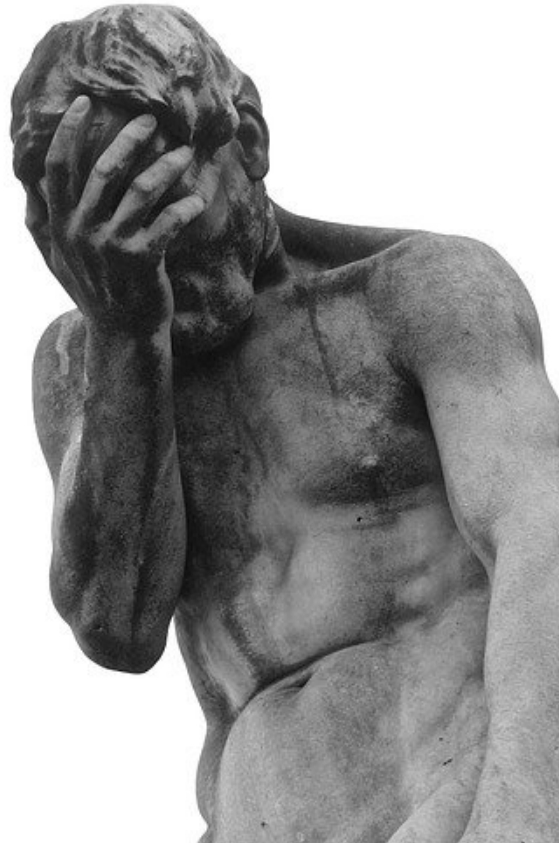
- Student Accessibility Support (SAS)

Squad

- Support on campus for hiring WAS:
  - Digital comms
  - Sr. Assoc. Provost
  - Student Accessibility Support (SAS) [Accommodations]

Culture

- Mostly internal at this point



History: tear it down…

2015

Administrative Support

- Website redesign underway
- Plan for all content to be made accessible during migration

Academics

- Nothing new!

Squad

- Web Accessibility Specialist (WAS) hired

Culture

- Conversations on how to spread awareness begin (WAS & Student Accessibility Support)

History: rebuild…

2016

Administrative Support

- Nothing new!

Academics

- AT offers support to faculty

Squad

- Academic Technologist (AT) hired

Culture

- Building relationships and cultivating advocates and champions

History: increase support

2017

Administrative Support

- New Website template goes live
- Content being made accessible during migration
- Mandatory training for Web Editors in migration phase begins

Academics

- FACET grant for training faculty in making accessible course materials debuts

Squad

- Instructional Designer (ID) hired
- Conversations about captioning ramp up

Culture

- Created the Help Desk for Web Accessibility to support the community

History: expansion

2018

Administrative Support

- Mandatory training for Web Editors expanded to advanced topics
- Movement on Admin buy-in

Academics

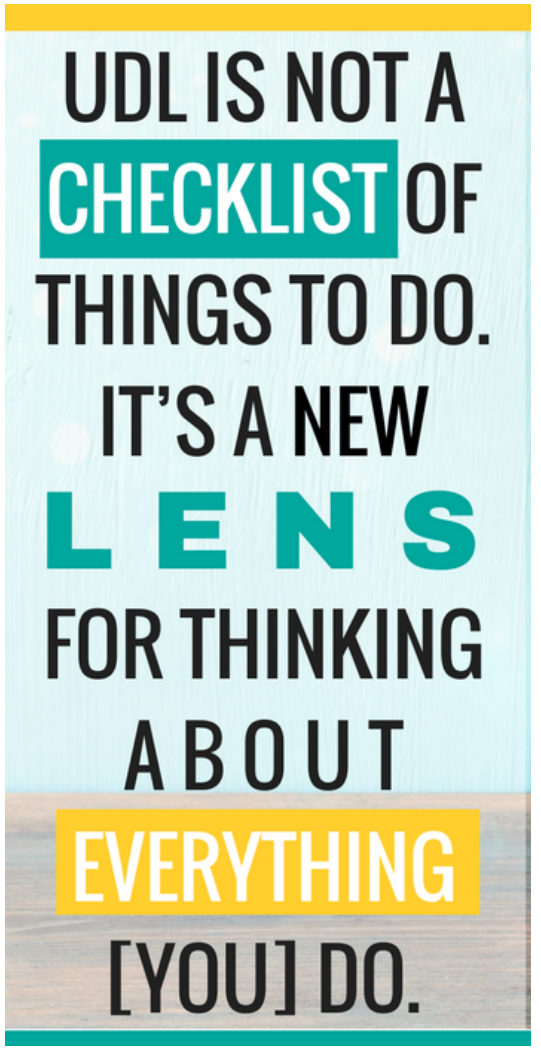
- Student Advocacy ramps up
- Library starts to spread awareness around Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Squad

- SAS specialist hired for grad students

Culture

- Same old, same old



Quote by Patti Kelly Ralabate

History: increasing demand for skills

2019

Administrative Support

- Training: advanced topics increase
- Admin makes a11y a focus – contract rider, facilities plan, $$$, listening to community

Academics

- FACET grant faculty training: applications increase 250%!
- Faculty training: *welcoming students* debuts
- Dean of Arts & Sciences calls out for accessible course materials

Squad

- Office of Equal Opportunity created, 504 Coordinator hired
- Student Worker x2 hired by WAS
- Second Instructional Designer hired

Culture

- Community-wide conversations around accessibility
- Transition: Reactive to Proactive model begins

Today: focus on students

2020

Administrative Support

- Final phase of migration
- Mandatory training for ALL Web Editors (not just undergrad)
- Campus-wide a11y committee created

Academics

- OCR scanners begin roll out on campus
- Hybrid Learning Institute, accessible materials
- Library materials reviewed for a11y

Squad

- Program Director position created

Culture

- Student op-eds
- Campus-wide a11y committee created

Wishlist

Future

Administrative Support

- Staff training mandatory
- Digital Accessibility becomes a department w/budget
- All digital materials accessible
- All buildings/spaces ADA compliant

Academics

- Faculty Training mandatory
- OCR available on all scanners on campus
- All course materials accessible

Squad

- WAS position filled

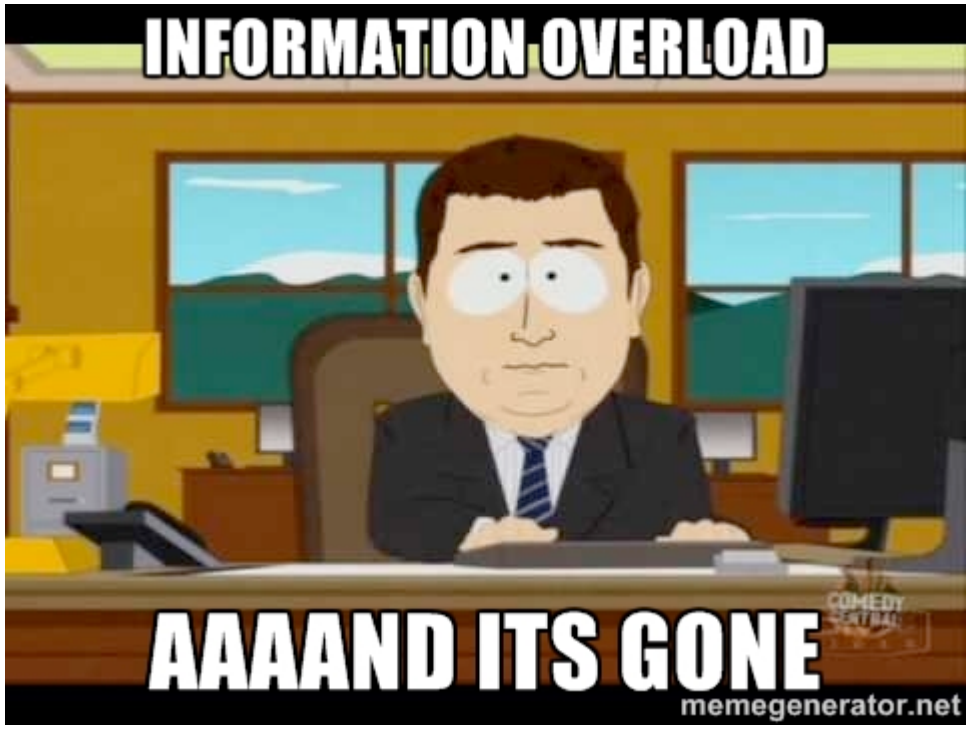
Culture

- Everyone feels welcome in the community and are being heard
- Running on Proactive model

Training Tips #1

Avoid Overload

- ✓ Don’t cram in too much at once
- ✓ Chip away at the problem
- ✓ How can we make this more accessible today than it was yesterday? And repeat.



Training Tips #2

Style & Attitude

- ✓ Keep a positive attitude: be a champion, motivate, inspire!
- ✓ Maintain some humor: use fun, light-hearted examples when possible
- ✓ Find a hook: help attendees relate to accessibility needs:
  - How do *all learners* benefit?
- ✓ Make it real: use hands-on demonstrations
  - Show *and* tell, ex: screen reader demos
- ✓ Be willing to have one-on-one conversations

Training Tips #3 Know your audience

- ✓ Celebrate accessibility achievements
  - Administrative policy updates
  - Physical building improvements
  - Faculty or staff spotlights
- ✓ Highlight when advocacy works, esp. student activism
- ✓ Use inclusive terms
  - Align language with social model
- ✓ Remind them: this is **not** a fad, it's **here**, it's **real!**

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Thank you!

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Brandeis.edu/web-accessibility