# Creating a Campus-wide Accessibility Program

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## Objectives:

Share Oswego’s strategies on how to:

1. Create collaborative partnerships and develop a supportive network of allies across multiple departments
2. Change the tone of the narrative that’s being used to empower and encourage others to join the accessibility initiative
3. Broaden the understanding of the terms “accessible” and “accessibility” to relate to equality and inclusion

## Background

### OCR Complaint

In 2017, SUNY Oswego, along with many other schools, faced a complaint from the Office of Civil Rights calling out specific web pages as being inaccessible.

* This springboarded our accessibility efforts on campus

#### Reasons for Sharing

* Provide knowledge and understanding that we didn’t have at that time
* Help another organization/institution prevent being in the same vulnerable situation
* Learn from one another
	+ Everyone has success and mistakes and failures
	+ We can help each other be better

#### Handling the Complaint

* There was no pointing fingers or placing blame
* Upper management had the attitude of “Let’s make it right”
* Became a positive learning experience for everyone involved
* We corrected the immediate issues, then decided to focus on being proactive to avoid similar issues in the future

#### Proactive Changes

* Established committees and groups around accessibility
* Improved web editor training to include accessibility basics
* Offered more accessibility professional development training
* Hired a Digital Accessibility Analyst

#### Lessons Learned

* It takes a village; learn from each other
	+ Different areas of expertise allow people to learn from one another
	+ Various perspectives bring a variety of solutions to the table
* Focus on inclusive design when working with accessibility.
	+ Design for outer edges of the bell curve to benefit more people
	+ Devices, environmental factors, situational/temporary disabilities may prevent people from consuming digital content
* It’s an ongoing process
	+ “Can’t Hurt Me” by David Goggins - “There is no finish line.”
	+ Continually striving to improve, then you’re moving in the right direction
* Invest in digital accessibility culture
	+ Training, awareness, dedicated committees/teams
	+ Restructure, reallocate, reprioritize, use grants, find the money
* Not a question of “if,” it’s a matter of “when.”
	+ Approach accessibility as if you know you’re going to have a complaint filed against you and you’ll be in a much better position to handle it.
	+ If a complaint never comes, you’ve done something right!

OCR dropped the complaint. We are in a better position now, but still not 100%.

## 1. Create collaborative partnerships and allies across departments

### A Coalition of the Willing

The only way to change the culture at your institution or organization is by one conversation at a time. Those conversations will then spider-web their way outward and exponentially gather more people.

#### Groups at Oswego

* Steering Committee:
	+ Set direction and goals, Develop policy and process
* Workgroup on Accessibility Practices:
	+ Develop resources, including Accessibility website and tutorials; hold workshops and training
* Web Steering Committee:
	+ Support and maintain accessible website and communication materials
* Remediation team:
	+ Evaluate online courses and assist faculty and staff in providing accessible online materials
* Faculty Fellows: faculty members from each of the different schools
	+ Advocate for accessibility on campus, act as liaison to departments, teach accessibility in class, expand discipline-specific accessibility expertise
* Representatives from various departments, including:
	+ Campus Technology Services,
	+ Office of President,
	+ Marketing & Communication,
	+ Extended Learning,
	+ Office of Diversity & Inclusion,
	+ Accessibility Resources,
	+ Library,
	+ and faculty

#### Meet people where they are, physically and conceptually

* Hold training during regular department or unit meetings
* Provide a variety of formats for resources and training
	+ Beginner and intermediate
	+ Written and video tutorials
	+ Autonomous and live synchronous sessions
* Include with new course developments and course revisions
* One very important but overlooked aspect: Focus on small achievements!
	+ Baby steps: focus on one or two aspects at a time
	+ Celebrate when these are mastered or understood

#### Expand and share your own knowledge and the knowledge of others

* Those with a little knowledge can train those who know even less
	+ There is always someone who knows more and always someone who doesn’t know as much as you
	+ Learn from those who know more, teach those who don’t know as much
* Continue professional development
* Take advantage of conferences, webinars, and presentations
* Let leaders drag others along
	+ Provide them with the time and resources to move forward, they will break the old patterns

## 2. Change the narrative that is being used to empower and engage others

### Want to vs. Need to

People generally don’t like to be told what to do! We were getting pushback by telling people they had to incorporate accessibility. We needed to find a way to invite and engage people, encourage them that they wanted to do it.

#### Impact of Covid

* Online course remediation jumped from an average of 20 courses per semester to over 200 courses in Fall 2020, this was unsustainable
* Content creators needed to take ownership of their content’s accessibility
* We needed to provide support and wide-scale training to support that
* Focused on highlighting the benefits accessibility has for a wide range of audiences
	+ Explained how various features help people in different situations

#### 10-Day Accessibility Challenge

* Campus-wide promotion plan
* Focused on 1 topic per day
	+ Broke it down into simple steps
* Added a gamification aspect
	+ Studies show that having some kind of reward draws people in
* Framed in a very inviting, friendly, and engaging manner
	+ Flip the narrative on its head
	+ Wanted to encourage people to join rather than force them
	+ Highlighted benefits to wide audiences

#### 10-Day Accessibility Challenge Goals

* Improve confidence and skills with foundational accessibility principles
* Teach others how to create accessible documents
* Build an accessibility community
	+ Connect with others around accessibility
* Involve all campus personnel
	+ Until January 2021, we had been focused on online faculty
	+ Needed to involve all content creators

#### 10DAC Results

* Nearly 200 participants signed up
	+ 42% staff
	+ 27% faculty
	+ 23% students
	+ 8% other
* Unique page views of the accessibility website jumped during the challenge period
* According to participant surveys, familiarity and confidence increased

## 3. Broaden the understanding of the terms “accessible” and “accessibility”

### Used in relation to equality and inclusion

There seems to be a severe misconception of the definition of these terms, based on whether you work with accessibility or not. Most people tend to think of the colloquial definition.

#### Definition from Merriam-Webster

Taken from [Merriam-Webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/accessible)

* Capable of being reached
* Capable of being used or seen
* Capable of being understood or appreciated
* Capable of being influenced
* Adapted for use by people with disabilities
	+ First 4 are generally how people understand accessibility
	+ These definitions are true, and can be applied within the realm of people with disabilities, but they don’t cover the full meaning

#### Definition from OCR

Taken from the [U.S. Department of Education](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/investigations/11116002-b.html#:~:text=%E2%80%9CAccessible%E2%80%9D%20means%20a%20person%20with,substantially%20equivalent%20ease%20of%20use.) website

* “...a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use.”
	+ A person with a disability and a person without a disability can have the same or similar experiences in the same or similar way

#### Oswego’s interpretation

* Proactively create content that is flexible enough to be used by a wide range of people from the outset
* Consider different audience needs and different use cases
* Reduce barriers to communication and learning for people with permanent, temporary, or situational disabilities
* Preserve a person’s right to privacy
	+ Not everyone wants to share that they have a disability

#### How to advocate for a better understanding of accessibility

* Sneak it into unexpected places
	+ Generally, people who need this information are not aware they do
* Make it automatically part of workshops, orientations, course developments, etc.
	+ Should not be treated as an add-on or afterthought
* Provide step-by-step information
	+ Provide tutorials, checklists, and other resources
* Be direct, clear, and explicit
	+ Do not beat around the bush - it won’t work
	+ Don’t just say that people should improve the accessibility of their materials; tell them why and give them resources that tell them how

## **What is the cost of not changing?**

This is the most important question an organization can ask itself.