# 4 Years Later: Reflecting on a Proactive, Collaborative Model for Students with Visual Impairments

Accessing Higher Ground, November 10, 2023

## Introductions

* Ione Priest
they/she
Assistant Director
Access Center
MSU Denver
* Melissa Cermak
she/her
Associate Director
Access Center
MSU Denver

# In the beginning…

## Initial Accommodation Process

* Accommodation Eligibility Appointment - preferably prior to start of first semester.
* Register for MSU Denver classes and request accommodation letters; Access Center (AC) sends to professors.
* Accommodations are implemented by professors with support of AC.
* No proactive elements

## Complaint & Resolution

* Fall 2016-Spring 2018
* Timeliness of students who are blind receiving materials in accessible formats
* Not meeting students’ accommodation needs
* Who’s responsible for what?
* No simple solution to a complex institutional problem
* Common accessibility barriers

## Common Accessibility Barriers

* Textbook & Print Materials
* Lecture formats (PowerPoints, adequate verbal descriptions, etc.)
* Instructional materials
	+ 3rd Party materials and platforms
	+ Visual content: images, tables, graphs, videos, etc.
	+ Special equipment
* Class/Lab/Homework activities

# Present Day

## Current Model

Work with various partners to facilitate proactive identification of incoming BLV students

* MSU Denver Orientation team
* Concurrent enrollment team
* Local high schools
* Colorado School for the Blind

## Current Process: Initial steps

* Introductory meetings for students with AC to ascertain:
	+ Experience with blindness and education
	+ Current skill levels using technologies and formats
	+ Preferences for formats
* Accommodations Eligibility meeting (may be part of introductory meetings)
* Early Registration to begin planning ASAP
	+ AC also contacts students in advance to inquire about intended courses

## Current Process: Pre-semester

Early meetings with faculty

* Introduction of the student and any relevant info
* Introduction of the faculty member and the course
* Introduction of AC staff and info for both student and faculty
* Identifying course materials for conversion/remediation
* Identifying specific areas of concern and brainstorming solutions

## Current Process: Mid-Semester

* Check-ins
	+ Approximately 2-3 weeks into the semester
	+ Opportunity to identify any unforeseen issues and address them
* On-going communication
	+ Student and faculty encouraged to reach out with questions or concerns throughout the semester

# Benefits and Limitations

## Benefits for current model

* Proactive discussions about which professors/sections to select
* Opportunity to have difficult conversations with students and faculty
* Increased collaboration with other academic departments, and ability to advertise resources such as Center for Teaching, Learning and Design (CTLD)

## Benefits in practice

* Installation of JAWS in chem. lab environment before semester start
* Course substitution for Environmental Science major (GIS course)
* Identification of software alternative for audio production
* Addressing accessibility issues mid-semester with GoReact platform and developing a viable workaround

## Limitations for current model

* Barriers not caught during the initial meeting that need to be addressed mid-semester
* Continued communication issues with faculty or students
* Personality conflicts with faculty or students

## Additional limitations

* Students who:
	+ register last-minute or don’t inform us of registration
	+ do not attend collaborative meetings
	+ misrepresent their level of proficiency with technology or document formats
* Faculty who:
	+ are resistant to all or part of the process
	+ fail to communicate effectively or in a timely manner

## Limitations in practice

* Organic chemistry professor who waited until the last minute to build the course and all assignments
* Student who did not communicate registration in several music courses until the start of the semester
* Prof. providing their own modified exam with omitted questions instead of providing to us for conversion
* Student requesting oral exams due to “barriers” (actually a lack of JAWS skill)

# Feedback and the Future

## Feedback From Students and Faculty

* Generally positive - both groups find the process helpful to make sure courses are more accessible more quickly
* Requests for university-level support:
	+ Training
		- Required, annual training on course accessibility
		- Image description training for STEM
	+ More human resources
		- for Braille production (including Music Braille)
		- Specialist for accessible lab equipment

## Present Adjustments to the Model

* Shift to request faculty identify documents being used in Canvas (due to increased volume)
* Considering more targeted questioning around student skills

# Questions?

# Thank you!

* Ione Priest
they/she
Assistant Director
Access Center
MSU Denver
ipriest@msudenver.edu
* Melissa Cermak
she/her
Associate Director
Access Center
MSU Denver
mcermak@msudenver.edu