Slide 1: Collaboration Benefits Student Success-Bringing text-to-speech software to the broader student body

Salem State University

IMAGE: This image consists of accessibility icons and the name Disability Services. The icons consist of an ear with dots and lines going through it to imitate soundwaves, a telephone on top of keyboard keys representing a TTY, silhouette of a brain inside a human, two hands where one is positioned upwards, making a pinching motion with their index finger and thumb, and where the other is positioned downwards, making the same motion with the same fingers, a square with the letters ‘CC’ inside, a person in a wheelchair going up a ramp, a hand with its index finger pointing outwards at a key on a keyboard, an eye with a slash through it, a human brain, and a dog with a leash. The word ‘accessibility’ is also present in all capital letters.

Prepared by Lisa Bibeau and Jenny McDowell

Slide 2: About Us

IMAGE: This image is of the Salem State University mascot, the Viking. They have a big, orange beard, a Viking helmet on their head that says ‘Salem State,’ and short stubby legs and arms.

Lisa Bibeau, Assistant Dean for Student Success in Disability Services

Worked at Salem State 21 years

Jennifer McDowell, Assistant Director, Alternative Text Specialist

Worked at Salem State 16 years, in Disability Services for 12 years

Slide 3: Salem State University

IMAGE: This image consists of an ariel view of the Salem State campus.

Public regional university north of Boston

~5,000 undergraduate / ~1,500 graduate students

900 first-year students Fall 2022

95%+ of undergraduates qualify for financial aid and 50% are Pell-eligible

40% of undergraduates identify as students of color

Emerging Hispanic Serving Institution

35-50% of undergraduates are first-gen

Slide 4: About Our Office

IMAGE: This image consists of the staff in the Disability Services Office. Lisa Bibeau, Assistant Dean of Student Success and Disability Services. Joe Kelleher, Assistant Director. Jennifer McDowell, Assistant Director. Tim Erickson-Oberg, Staff Assistant. Emily Bradley, Staff Associate.

Slide 5: How Did We Get Here?

For 10 years, the alt text accommodation supported a small portion of our student population

A student worker (or grad student) would handle scanning books when needed

The student workers also tracked requests and fulfillment of the requests

We had bookmarks for students sharing free text-to-speech programs to use to read PDFs

As demand for this accommodation grew, and we lost a long-time student worker to graduation, tracking requests became a shared responsibility of the staff

Slide 6: Alternative Text Specialist

Eventually, in 2015, we received a grant from the Tower Foundation to create and fund an Alternative Text Specialist position for 2 years.

Jenny (front desk/office manager at the time) applied for and started that position in September 2015.

Slide 7: PDFs

At the time Jenny started, PDFs were most of the focus

Most work time was spent contacting publishers, scanning books, tracking and fulfilling requests.

A few trainings were done with students on free text-to-speech programs

Slide 8: Our History with Text-to-Speech Software

We were fortunate enough to receive a gift from a donor that we used to purchase a universal site license for Read&Write by TextHelp.

We have since also added Equatio and OrbitNote

This allowed for a more focused outreach to all SSU’s students around 1 program everyone could use

Slide 9: Increased Student Trainings

IMAGE: This image consists of an example timeline

Increased focus on referring students to a one-on-one training.

There were initially in person when the student would learn how to use text-to-speech programs

These continue to this day, but now we have also moved to offer training over zoom to reach more students

Slide 10: Viking Toolbelt

IMAGE: There is an image of a piece of paper with a folded corner to represent the PDF Reader, and a circle cut in half where the pieces are still touching, but are slid in either direction, making it non-symmetrical. There is an arrow between the two: it points from the PDF Reader icon, to the right to the OrbitNote icon.

With the help of IT, we developed a Canvas course to provide additional academic resources for students.

This gives us a central page for to direct students to for download instructions, resources, videos, etc.

Slide 11: Collaborative Partners

IMAGE: This image consists of four people putting together giant puzzle pieces that are supposed to complete the image of a lightbulb.

Once that central location was established, we began building partnerships with other offices on campus to try and push Test-to-Speech programs out to the campus community

First year seminars

Writing Center

Tutoring

Slide 12: First year seminars

IMAGE: There is an image of four individuals standing in front of a banner that reads “Firsts Matter: First Year Experience.”

Presentations to faculty at trainings and bootcamps for First Year Seminar faculty

Participating in these faculty development opportunities allowed us to talk about these programs and how it could fit into their courses

Slide 13: Writing Center

IMAGE: There is an image of the Writing Center at SSU, which is a small office-sized room containing desks and chairs, as well as some computers and printers. This image shows a group of people sitting at tables that are pushed together so they can be in one centralized areas to work together.

Student driven, practicum course for future writing tutors

Teach one class each semester to the practicum cohort, focused on inclusive practices but also using text-to-speech software in the editing and writing process

Meetings and demonstrations with writing center staff.

Slide 14: Tutoring

IMAGE: This image consists of two people smiling, sitting outside of the SSU library, looking at a laptop.

Brought into two-week training program for tutors to talk about inclusion each year for new and returning tutors.

Even with all those plans, meetings, and trainings, we were not getting anyone very interested in utilizing Text-to-Speech programs outside of our immediate office

Slide 15: Accuplacer problem… momentum starting

IMAGE: There is an image of a rectangle that contains the words “CollegeBoard: Accuplacer.”

Accuplacer Reading and Math exams are proctored at orientation for incoming students.

Students registered with our office would often use a text-to-speech accommodation for the Accuplacer Reading test.

Many students were struggling to pass the reading test, which was a requirement for graduation

Slide 16: Students failing reading test

IMAGE: This image consists of icons representing a hammer, nails, a paint brush, a wrench, screwdriver, and ruler. Each of these tools is working to build the word “IDEA” out of bricks.

Many students without a diagnosed reading disability would struggle to pass this exam, which brought it to the attention of the Associate Provost.

As the AP became more aware of this, she brought together a task force to think through solutions.

Moving away from deficit model, the idea of using Text-to-Speech programs became more exciting to the group

We started to produce a plan internally to push these programs out to the general population, which lead to new office initiatives.

Slide 17: Sustainable, without straining staff

IMAGE: There is an image of Giorgio A. Tsoukalos, the television presenter and producer of a show called ‘Ancient Aliens.’ Many memes/joke images have been made of him, and this one consists of Giorgio with his hands raised, asking “Is such a thing even possible?”

With the taskforce it became apparent we wanted to start pushing out more training opportunities for the general populations.

But we wanted to do this in a way that didn’t overbook/overwork the two staff who did all the trainings for the students registered with our office.

So we found some students to help

Undergraduate student Intern building presentations (last spring and summer)

Drop-in hours with the student intern(s) for students to come by to learn or troubleshoot the programs during this academic year

Slide 18: Where we are now

IMAGE: There is an image of the SSU mascot, the Viking, holding the Disability Pride flag. The flag has diagonal stripes of red, yellow, white, blue, and green, on a mainly black background.

We started working with the library to make sure there were more OER/electronic resources available to all students (that were compatible and would work with Text-to-Speech programs)

Working with student organizations and student government

Partner with different departments first year courses

Hoping to build a larger team of students who can train and increase drop-in hours/availability for the general population

Slide 19: Transition Planning

While acknowledging the difference between a high-end software program and built-in accessibility functions within computer/smart devices, it became important to us that students leaving the university have a ‘transition plan’ for their technology related to reading needs for when they graduate.

Talking to juniors and seniors about learning features built-in to their own devices to help transition post-graduation

Opportunities for trainings their senior year, work with career services to think about specific needs.

Academic strategies become life strategies

Slide 20: Looking to the Future - CAAR Center

Department structure change to now encompass all areas of academic support with a focus on reading

The development of the Center for Accessibility and Academic Resources, CAAR, brings supplemental instruction, tutoring, the university testing center, and disability services under one center

It promotes a centralized and streamlined approach to support services, making it easier for students to access the resources they need

This integration allows for better coordination and collaboration among the various support services

tutors can be aware of specific accommodations needed by students with disabilities

supplemental instructors can incorporate strategies recommended by disability services into their sessions

Slide 21: Thank You!

IMAGE: There is an image of a giant orange and white question mark.

Any questions?

Feel free to contact us-

Jenny:

jmcdowell@salemstate.edu

Lisa:

lbibeau@salemstate.edu

Slide 22: For additional resources…

Image of book cover: Disability Services in Higher Education: An Insider’s Guide

Kirsten T. Behling

Eileen H. Bellemore

Lisa B. Bibeau

Andrew S. Cioffi

Bridget A. McNamee

Illustrated by Andrew S. Cioffi

Disability Services in Higher Education is the first comprehensive guide for people working in the field of ADA compliance in higher education. The authors examine how disabilities are supported to ensure students receive appropriate accommodations throughout their collegiate experience as well as provide guidance on overall campus accessibility.

This practitioner-friendly book will help newcomers and seasoned professionals explore and evaluate best practices in the field through questions, examples, and functional job aids available for immediate use.