

Kindred Spirits:

Collaborating across multiple institutions to enhance digital accessibility

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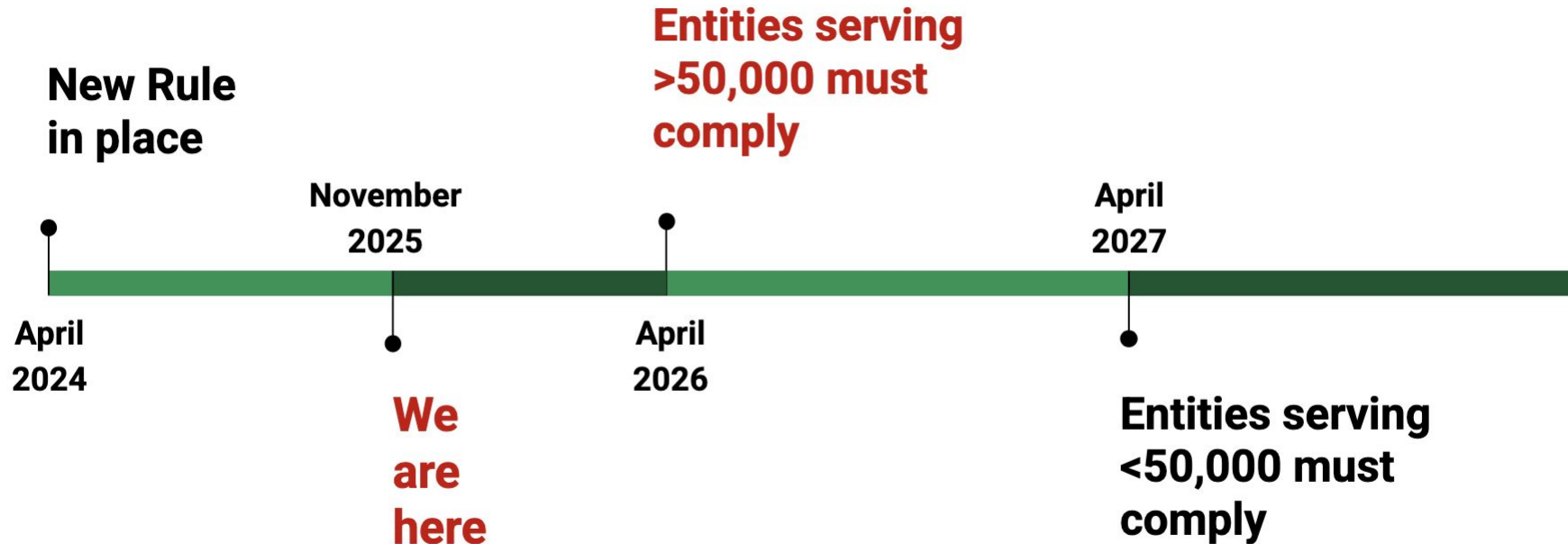


Updated Title II Regulation

DOJ Rule on digital accessibility

- April 2024 - DOJ published rule for digital accessibility
 - Title: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability; Accessibility of Web Information and Services of State and Local Government Entities
 - Part of **ADA Title II** and includes government agencies, public universities, hospitals, libraries, etc.
- April 2026 - Entities' websites, apps, and digital documents must conform to **WCAG 2.1 A**
 - Applies to institutions serving >50,000 constituents

Title II Implementation Timeline



Aren't UChicago and Northwestern private?

- Yes, but
 - This rule will likely be a blueprint for similar rule revisions in **Title III** and **Section 504**
- Working on this now puts us ahead
 - We have to be accessible anyway
 - Our own policies require that we conform with WCAG 2.1 Level AA
 - We can harness some of the current momentum for accessibility in the higher ed space
 - Let's be in a good position when this becomes law

Developing Partnerships



Partnership

- Monthly Zoom calls
- Sharing
 - Updates
 - Strategies
 - Tool ideas and experiences
- Bounce questions and ideas off each other
- Moral support



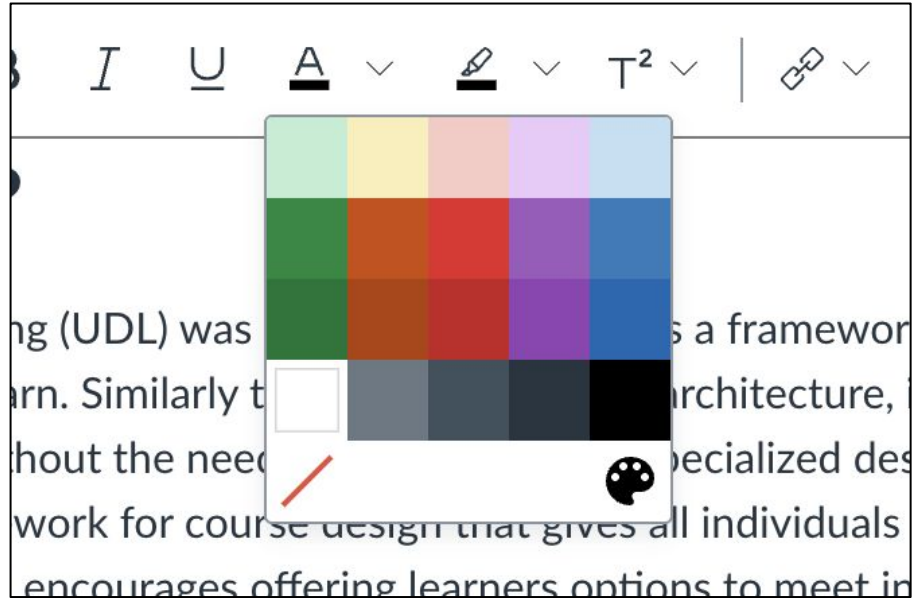
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Partnership accomplishments

- Canvas
 - Color palette change
- Pope Tech
- Approach
 - Persistence
 - Same message
 - Hearing from us at similar times



Crossover episodes

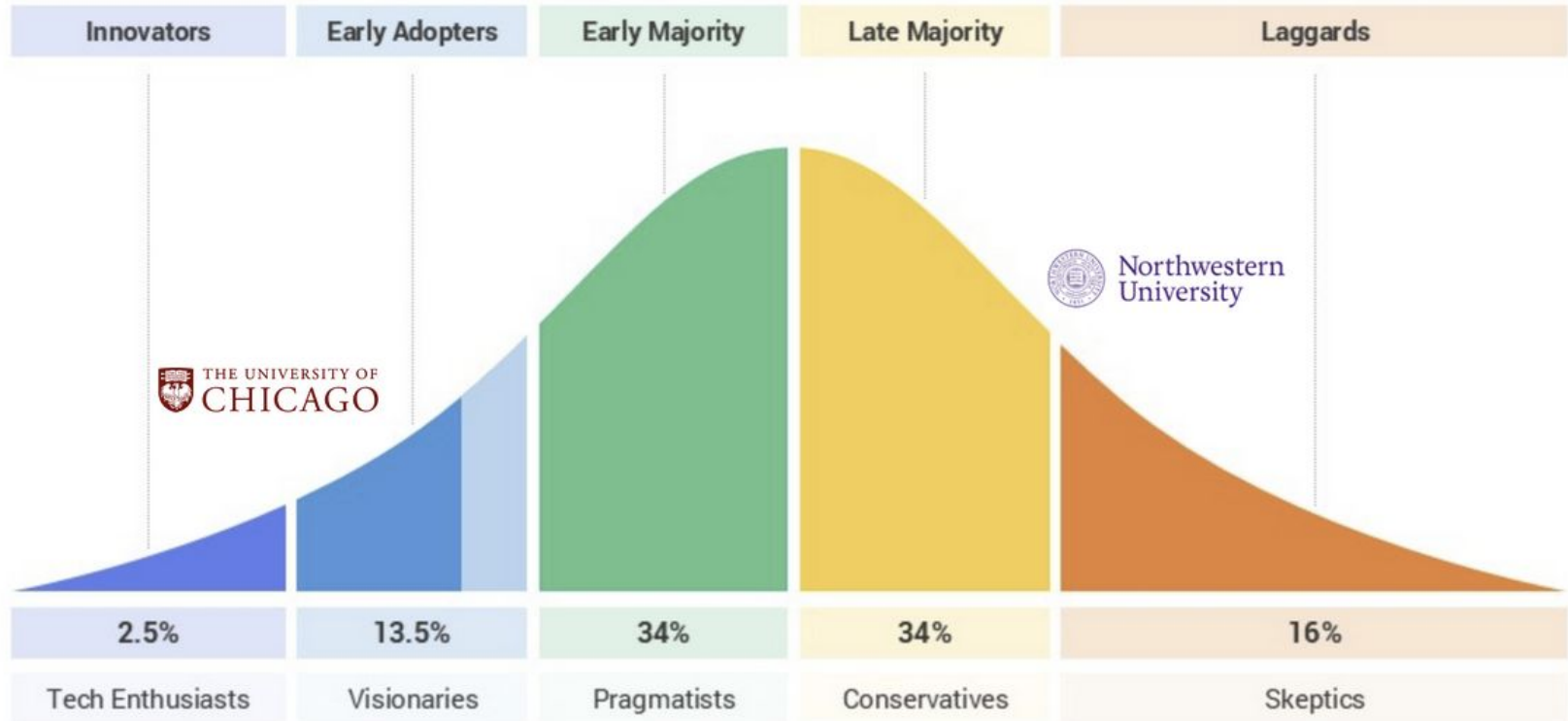


- May 21, 2025
TEACHx (Northwestern)
- November 14, 2025
**Graduate Business
Curriculum Roundtable**
- November 21, 2025
Accessing Higher Ground
- February 11, 2026
University of Chicago Event



Origin Stories

Faculty engagement pattern



How did UChicago get here?

Organize 2018 - 2020

- Pre-work on **IT Risk strategy**
- Adopted Digital Accessibility **Policy**
- Established **Center for Digital Accessibility**
- Developed **SOPs** for Consulting, Testing, and Training services
- Initiated enterprise **web scanning**

Operationalize 2021 - 2023

- Partnership with **Chicago Lighthouse** (now **Access Living**)
- Campus-wide volunteer **Advocate Network**
- Vendor agreements for **captioning services**
- Enterprise DIY **PDF remediation tool**
- **Scaled up** adoption of enterprise tools
- Live and pre-recorded **training**
- **GAAD** programming

What's next at UChicago

Optimize 2024 and beyond

- Consider **Title II update** and impact on course materials
- Enterprise **LMS tools**
 - Pope Tech - Canvas content
 - SensusAccess - alternate formats
- Analyze data on **course content**
- **Aim for Accessible** campaign kickoff
- Outreach to **instructional teams**
- Analyze data on **video captioning**
- Enterprise **accessibility dashboard**
- Create **unit level accessibility scorecards**
- Explore **bulk remediation solutions** for PDFs

Northwestern Canvas Accessibility Phases (1)

Self Identification (April 2023-2024)

- Develop resources
- Mission: Accessible Challenge
- Begin using Pope Tech in Canvas
- Provided recognition
 - Wall of Fame
 - Certificates
 - Emails to Deans, Assoc. Deans, Dept. Chairs

Work with Units (Dec 2023 - Present)

- Worked with Medill to reduce accessibility errors to 0 across the school
- Worked with Associate Deans to ensure workshops were well attended
- Used success with Medill to connect with other schools/units
 - Global Health
 - CSD
 - Orthotics and Prosthetics

Northwestern Canvas Accessibility Phases (2)

Direct Outreach (Sept 2024 - Present)

- Multiple approaches to outreach
 - Highest errored courses get direct outreach offering help
 - Highest specific errors get “Main Offenders” outreach
 - 30% fix the issues
- Began offering document remediation for addressing Canvas (March 2024 - August 2025)

Sustainability (Dec 2025 -)

- Developing a dashboard for administrators to track courses in their units
- Working on a find and replace option for some errors (color contrast, empty link, empty heading)
- Continuing to use Pope Tech
- Working to expand this effort:
 - Websites
 - Purchasing
 - Documents
 - Expanded training

Canvas Approach

Approach

Start with Canvas
content

Focus on high impact
issues

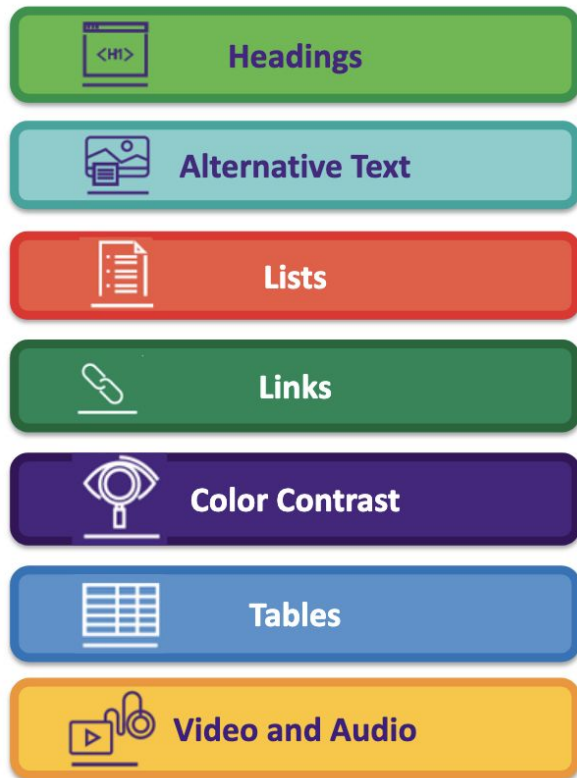
Don't overwhelm

Educate

Make it easy

Connect to UDL and
instructional design
best practices

Seven Core Accessibility Skills



Top Errors found by Pope Tech



- Very low contrast



- Empty links



- Empty headings



- Missing or suspicious alt-text



- Missing table headers

Branding

Mission: Accessible



Aim for Accessible



Seven Core Skills website

- Impact
- How To
- Things to Avoid
- Going Forward
- Make an Impact in Five Minutes

Headings

Structure your content using headings. Headings make the structure of your Canvas site accessible to screen readers. This also improves scanability for all users.

Using headings can also make implementing some changes easier for you. For example, if you use headings and want to change the font or weight size later, you'll just need to change it once within the headings format and it will change all of your headings.

Impact

Rarely does anyone look at a webpage and read it in its entirety from top to bottom. We typically scan for the sections that are important to us and read those. Using the headings format properly allows screen readers to do this as well. When headings are in place, screen reader users can listen to a list of headings and jump directly to the section of interest. When headings are not used, screen reader users must listen to the entire page to make sure they are not missing important information. Screen readers don't recognize words that are bolded or in a different font size as headings, but they do recognize words designated as headings using the heading format.

How To

Add formatted headings to structure your page. Before typing your heading, choose the proper heading level from the drop-down menu in the Rich Content Editor or highlight text you've already typed to use as a

Take the Challenge

Learn more and sign up to participate in the *Mission: Accessible challenge*.

Make an Impact in Five Minutes...

When you have an extra few minutes, pick a page in an existing course and add headings.

If you've typically created headings by changing font characteristics:

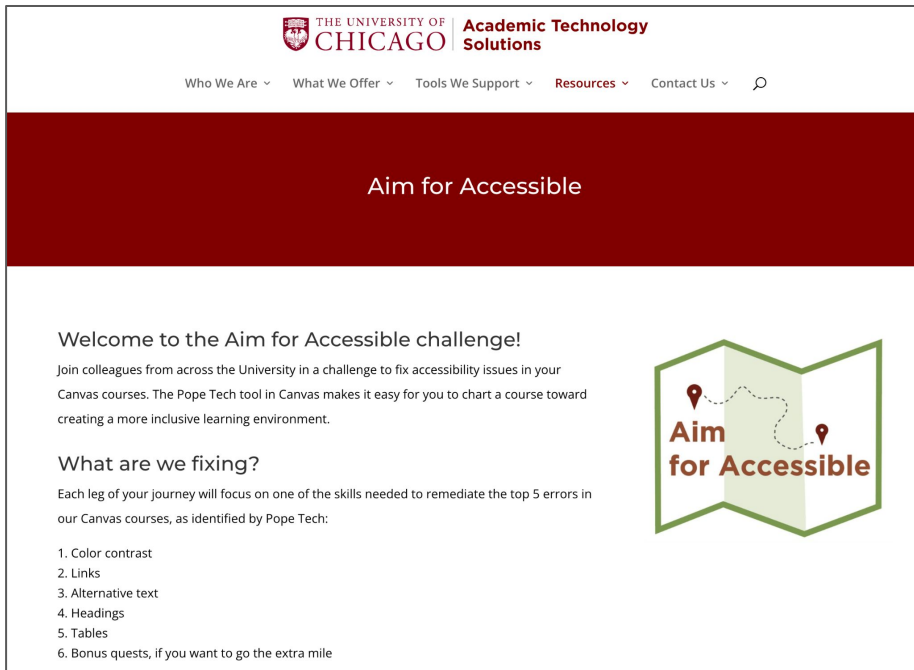
1. Select any section heading that you made by bolding text, changing font size, underlining, etc. and clear the formatting.
2. Choose the drop down arrow next to "Paragraph" in the RCE.
3. Select the proper level for that heading.

If your page doesn't have headings:

1. Find areas where the structure would benefit from a heading.

northwestern.edu/accessibility/digital-accessibility/seven-core-skills

Aim for Accessible web page



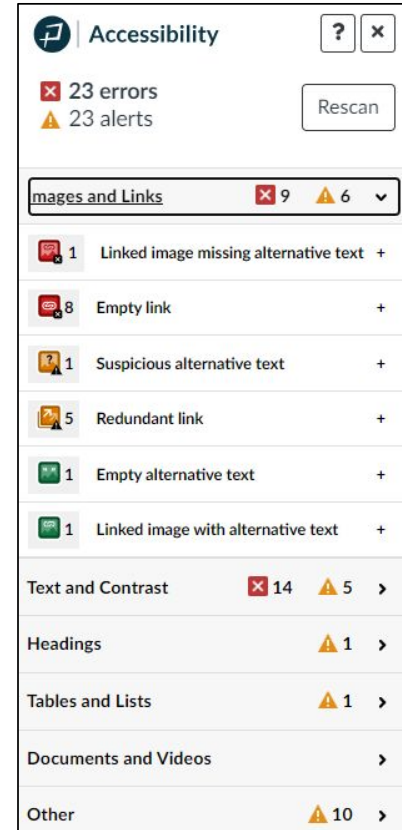
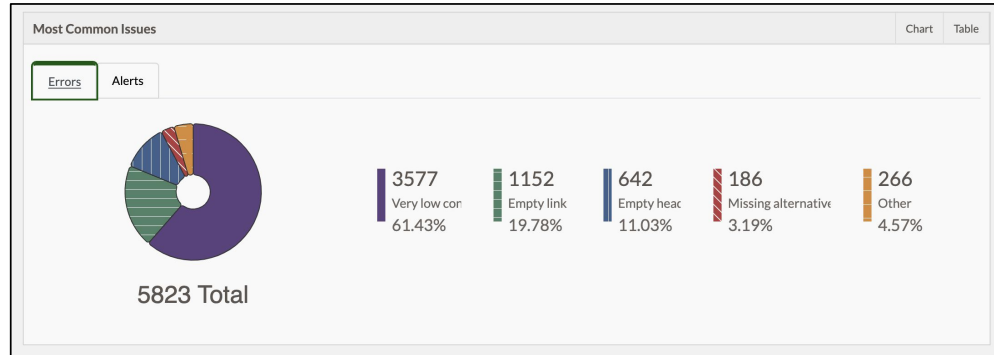
Hub for participation and support

Info about:

- What to fix
- How to fix it
- Why it's important
- Where to find help

academictech.uchicago.edu/aim-for-accessible

Pope Tech Accessibility Dashboard and Guide



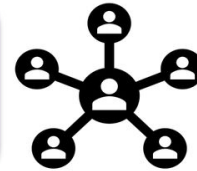
Results

Mission: Accessible Stats



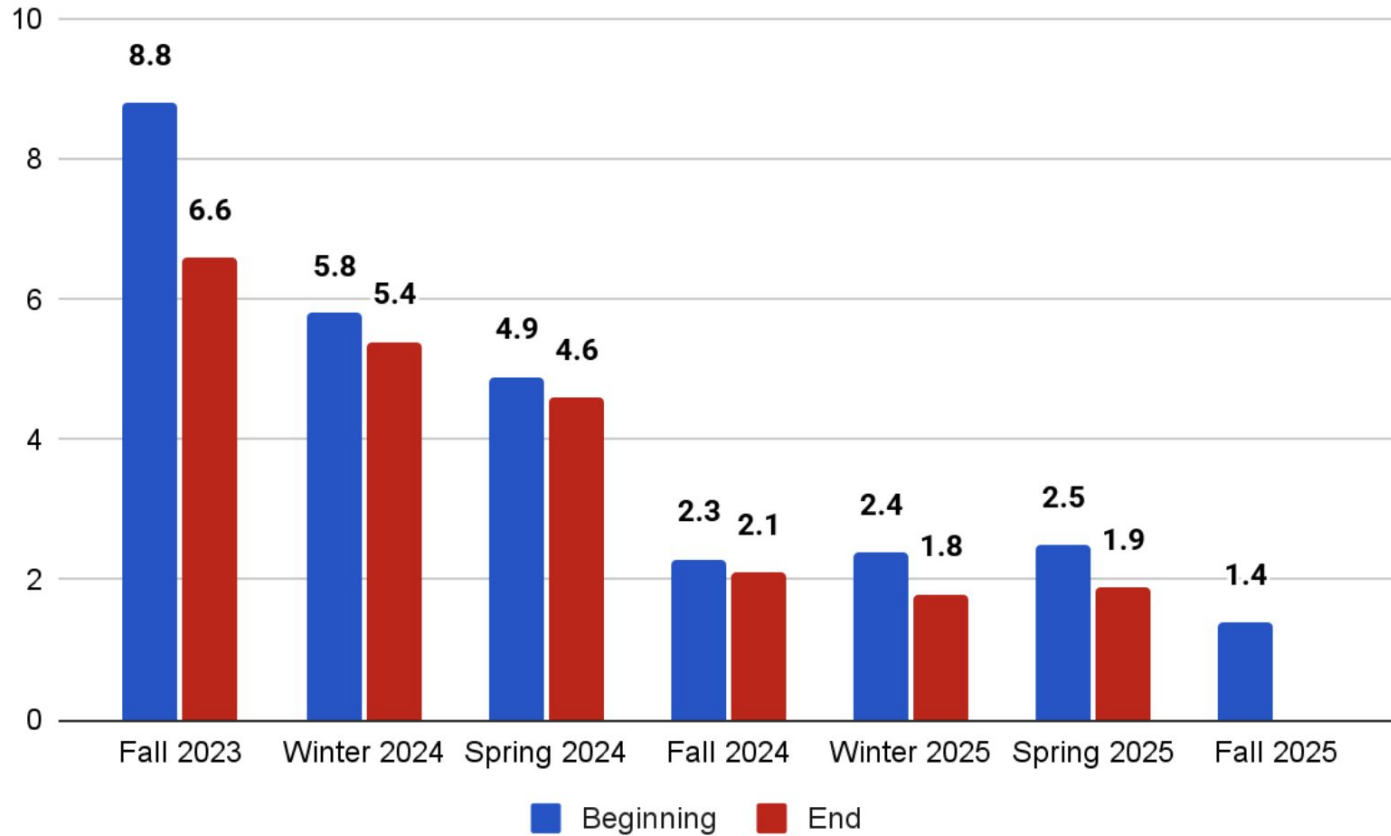
120 instructors completed the challenge

12 of 12 Northwestern schools were
represented in the challenge



213 classes successfully completed the challenge

Accessibility errors per course



Mission: Accessible's Impact

Error	Fall 2023	Fall 2025	Percent Improvement
Color Contrast	16869	1600	90.6%
Suspicious Link Text	6491	3267	50.3%
No or suspicious alt text	25610	9713	68.1%
Possible Lists	5490	3247	41.9%
Heading issues	84270	57900	32.3%
Layout Table	18573	4958	73.4%

Lessons Learned

1. Make it as easy as possible.

2. Partnerships are key, find those with faculty connections.

3. Data opens doors, shows success, helps build support.

4. Associate Deans are key.

5. Mass communication & general workshops have limitations.

6. Invest in those that are interested

7. Celebrate success

Resources

- Aim for Accessible
 - academictech.uchicago.edu/aim-for-accessible
- Mission: Accessible
 - northwestern.edu/accessibility/digital-accessibility/seven-core-skills
- Big Ten Academic Alliance
 - <https://btaa.org/technology/itaccessibility>
- Pope Tech Blog
 - <https://blog.pope.tech>
- WebAIM
 - www.webaim.org

Questions?

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