Context

Many online courses are not accessible to students with disabilities even though:
• accessibility is required by federal and state laws,
• 30+ legal cases have required institutions make online courses accessible, and
• more than 6 million students, including students with disabilities, are taking online courses.

“When you plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you don't blame the lettuce. You look for reasons it is not doing well. It may need fertilizer, or more water, or less sun...”

-Thích Nhất Hạnh
Vietnamese Buddhist Monk

Goal

Make online courses welcoming to, accessible to, and usable by students with disabilities

Research Question

How can instructors make online content accessible to students with disabilities?

Methods

Review of research and practice literature

Results

Thousands of assistive technologies make computers accessible to students with disabilities. Examples include:

Assistive technology:
• Emulates the keyboard, but does not emulate the mouse.
• Cannot read content presented in images.
• Can tab from link to link.
• Can skip from heading to heading (and subheadings!).
• Cannot accurately transcribe audio.

Therefore:
• Design websites/software to operate with keyboard alone.
• Provide alternative text with images.
• Make links descriptive.
• Structure with hierarchical headings.
• Caption video and transcribe audio.
• Make PDF, Word files, and other documents accessible.

“Universal design” (UD) offers a framework for accessible online learning. UD = “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”-The Center for Universal Design, NCSU

UD offers multiple ways to gain knowledge, engage with content, and demonstrate learning. UD strategies benefit all students. For example, captioning videos benefits students who are deaf, but also students who are English language learners and students who simply want to know the spelling of words.

Conclusion

Training is needed to help online learning designers and instructors employ accessible practices. More research is needed to determine best practices for accessible design.

Resources

AccessCyberlearning
uw.edu/doit/programs/accesscyberlearning/overview

Center for Universal Design in Education
uw.edu/doit/cude

Accessible Technology
uw.edu/accessibility/

DO-IT at University of Washington
uw.edu/doit


20 Tips for Teaching an Accessible Online Course
uw.edu/doit/20-tips-teaching-accessible-online-course

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Access Technology Services: uw.edu/doit/accessible-technology-services-0
UW-IT: uw.edu/uwit/
Infographic: bbc.co.uk/education/guides/zxgkxnb/revision/8