**May 2nd Blogpost Antonios Liamis**

**Assignment**

**Software and Design Lab**

**Web Accessibility, Ethics and Educational Practices**

Last week an Accessibility Conference took place at John Jay University, which I had the chance to attend in terms of my working tasks and I was given the chance to socialize with the audience of various experts, such as professors, agents, developers, designers and digital accessibility fellows. Most part of the panels were focused on new methods and practices regarding web accessibility innovation for people with disabilities. What stimulated interest was certainly all the methods and educational practices of web accessibility for disability students and how those reflect on ethical issues.

**Web Accessibility**

Web accessibility is topic of discussions ever since the beginning of the World Wide Web. A lot of surveys have demonstrated that a big percentage of users have abandoned, at least once, an e-learning website due to the fact that the usage was complicated and not very user friendly. The motivation results from the fact that web accessibility is still weakly distributed and there is increased awareness on the need to be increased remarkably.

One of the Graduate and Adjunct Lecturer, Mathew Conlin, had the chance to talk about what accessibility of an online platform means .He talked about some basic principles for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Among others, he mentioned that all the information that is presented in any platform has to be perceivable in a way that users can identify with. The user interface and navigation has to be functional and operable even only by keyboard. Also, the content that is presented on any platform has to be understandable, comprehensive and consistent. Finally, he referred to the technical and functional elements that have to be properly supported in a way that can be used in multiple ways including assistive technologies.

One of the Officers of the Faculty Development and Instructional technology indicated the fact that a standardized accessibility of an online project is possible, if specific technologies are being defined. It would be useful, he said, “if the Web Accessibility Initiative checks regularly the new standards according their compatibility of accessibility and gives regularly advice for future versions of these standards”.

A big discussion between teachers, agents, and students with disabilities took place in the conference. There are over 600 million person worldwide who live with a mental, physical, or self-care disability which limits their ability to learn, work or participate in daily activities. The Alliance for Technology Access (ATA) claims that all students or employees with disabilities are entitled to access the information and technology needed to foster independence, [employment](http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/ps/retrieve.do?docId=GALE%7CCX2555300045&userGroupName=cuny_gradctr&inPS=true&contentSegment=&sort=&prodId=GVRL&isETOC=true&resultListType=RELATED_DOCUMENT) and education. Accessible e-learning platforms and other websites through assistive technology devices, strategies and implementations are needed to maximize information access for people with disabilities. They also have the right to access the information they need in order to make informed decisions according to their interests. Computer keyboards with large letters, monitors with magnified screens that help people with low vision, electric page turners, headwands, talking pens, voice-output and recording capabilities that create books-on-tape are some of the hundreds assistive technology devices that exist. The Kurzweil Omni 3000 reading system also assists students whose disabilities affect their reading as it can read text out loud and highlights each spoken word on the computer display. Moreover, the Center for Information Technology (CITA) is a service that influences accessible information environments, services and management practices that is operated by the General Service Administration in the USA. It’s aimed to provide assistive technology services that eliminate barriers to education and the workplace for people with disabilities.

**Ethics and Definition**

Web accessibility should be a top priority in every digital strategy. However, these strategies can definitely expose ethical dilemmas by creating barriers to other groups, such as people with disabilities, who are equally deserving of access.

One of my colleague students, Yin Yan, who has a deep knowledge about the importance of ethics in web platforms as he is doing his PHD in a relevant program of CUNY, had the chance to present his information by defining what ethics exactly means.

Ethics is derived from the Greek word “ethikos” which means “character”, “norm”, “manner” “accustomed place” and also the word ethos which means moral character. Basically it is has a meaning of a code of conduct, a set of beliefs that are distinguishing right and wrong behaviors. Sometimes it is also synonymous with moral. Ethics involves judgment about appropriate behavior that carries in our everyday interactions, movements and modularity. Ethical standards of behavior has not stopped a lot of professionals from violating these standards. For that reason, laws have been placed to adjust legal restrictions. These restrictions work in the same level with ethical standards and agree with possible penalties for violating ethics.

One of the panels in this Conference was referring to the disappearance of computer ethics. It was mentioned that in time the use and design of information technology would become as routine as the use and design of television sets .This argument of computer ethics disappearance is more applicable to the users of information technology rather than to developers or designers. The increase of software tools that are continuously created, the free-source software supporters they work with and also the explosive growth of intelligent technologies make ethical guidance in this area even more important.

**Ethical Tasks for Teacher/Learners**

Some of the speakers mentioned that there are some core principles in terms of the ethical goals that reflect on the behavior of tutors, students as well as the group of people that have disabilities .Self control, self discipline and integrity, are types of leadership essentially including basic traits in order to be considered ethical. In the 21st century, leadership is grounded with moral and ethical virtues and the challenge is how these can be measured and implemented in an educational context as well as what character traits are related to ethical leadership.

Teachers need to provide self-disciplinary guidelines by formulating forms of ethical conduct. They need to promote public trust and confidence in the teaching profession as well as to guide ethical actions in teaching. They need to emphasize the social responsibilities of the profession towards the community. Some of their basic tasks are to not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, age, national origin, ethnic background or handicapped condition. Also, they should not exploit professional relationships with students, parents and other members of the educational community in order to gain personal advantage .From time to time it would be useful, the teachers should point out the relationship that should exist between them and their students, as they interact with each other. The scope of the ethical code is to guide teacher behavior reflecting the responsibilities of teachers to the stakeholders.

It was also pointed out that according to an ethical education, students must be approached as human beings, who need to be influenced at the level of their values and their ideals. They should maintain a healthy environment, free from harassment (even sexual harassment), intimidation, abuse and also discrimination .Their grades have to be evaluated and assigned upon their demonstrated performance and competencies independently . The educator should keep any personally identifiable information they have obtained for them during their courses in educational platforms strictly confidencial.

**Ethics and Accessibility for Designers**

Website accessibility is fundamentally an ethical responsibility shared by web developers and designers.

In one of the panels that took place at the Accessibility conference, there were some Technology Accessibility specialists form CUNY invited and they referred to the fact that the designers and developers are responsible for the best interaction of people with disabilities in educational platforms and software tools, which helps them use technology more constructively. They are also associated with the ethical commitments, as they develop technical specifications, guidelines, techniques and supporting resources that describe accessibility solutions. They need to be responsible about providing effective, workable and cost efficient solutions not only for people with disabilities but also for all the users that interact with those technologies.

When developing or redesigning a website, evaluating accessibility which is also called “testing” “audit” or “assessment” has to be taken under consideration. Some examples that were analysed in the panel discussion were alternative text for images (alt texts) in the markup code. This is helpful for people who cannot see and can use a screen reader that reads the information on the page . They also mentioned text audio transcripts as well as keyboard input where an accessible website does not rely on a mouse and makes everything available through the use of a keyboard. Then, people with disabilities can use assistive technologies that mimic keyboards, such as speed input.