Library Accessibility Services Environmental Scan

Chadwick Dunefsky and Carrie Wilson

This report summarizes key findings of the library accessibility environmental scan conducted during November 2021 (see this spreadsheet). The foundations of this environmental scan were a preliminary evaluation of the DUL Services for Patrons with Disabilities webpage, an analysis of a survey of users with disabilities, and AUX graduate assistant Candice Wang's literature review on the same subject.

We surveyed seven academic libraries and two public libraries for the design of library accessibility information webpages, the types of services and resources provided, and the staffing models for both addressing the needs of patrons with disabilities as well as internally assessing library accessibility improvements. We also interviewed Accessibility Coordinator Andy Andrews (University of Washington Libraries) and User Experience Librarian Robin Davis (NC State University Libraries) to gain further insights into accessibility liaison positions within their respective libraries.

Key Findings and Takeaways

Library Accessibility Services Websites

Book Delivery

Pionke, in 2017, interviewed patrons on how they "view the library's accessibility at a large academic institution" (p. 48). These patrons shared that "there were a wide range of inconsistencies regarding physical access to spaces and materials from poor lighting to aisles not wide enough for wheelchairs" (p. 52). Library stacks are generally not designed to be accessible for patrons with physical disabilities.

Dartmouth, NCSU, and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor (UMich) provide book retrieval services for students. At Dartmouth and NCSU, students can request books to be delivered to a circulation desk using the respective library's digital platforms. At UMich, students can request books to be delivered to over 200 departmental locations on campus with an option to request additional locations. All of this information is located directly on these academic libraries' accessibility pages.

Facilities & Maps

North Carolina State University (NCSU) and the University of Washington (UW) feature comprehensive maps that list accessible entrances, study spaces, and unfriendly accessibility areas on campus. Dartmouth University (DU) provides a static list of accessibility entrances at their libraries. Brunskill et al. (2021) write that floor maps were one of the most commonly

mentioned important library website elements in a 2019 survey of university students" (p. 938). Floor maps provide helpful information both for students on the autism spectrum disorder and for students with physical disabilities (Brunskill et al., 2021, p. 938). In the interview with Robin Davis, she discussed the new Sensory Friendly maps that highlight spaces in NC State's Hunt and Hill libraries that tend to be less crowded and have sound masking study rooms, predominantly natural light, and light control rooms for neurodivergent users and those with sensory sensitivities.

Assistive Technology

All of the libraries surveyed either listed or linked lists of their available assistive technologies, both electronic and digital. All academic libraries surveyed listed location and/or contact information for accessing or checking out assistive technologies. When scanners were listed as assistive technologies, they were explained as having scan-to-text capabilities and location and/or contact information for accessing the scanners was provided.

Website Recommendations

- Consider conducting a usability survey regarding how patrons with **disabilities interact with library stacks**.
- Consider clearly listing **book retrieval assistance options and contacts** on the DUL Accessibility page.
- Consider featuring **static maps** on the DUL Accessibility page of accessible parking, entrances, and study spaces as well as any barriers to accessibility in each of Duke's libraries. These can be consulted more quickly and with greater ease than the current Apple maps.
- Consider featuring a link to the **Find Library Spaces** page on the DUL Accessibility page. This will make it easier for neurodivergent patrons to find quiet spaces in the libraries. Additionally, **more filters** can be added to Find Library Spaces for warm lighting, potential crowding, and any study rooms that have light adjustment and sound masking capabilities.
- Consider listing the **available assistive technologies** on the DUL Accessibility page.
- Consider explaining the **text accommodations** provided by DUL's scanners on the DUL Accessibility page. If they can convert text to OCR, for example, this should be stated.

Accessibility Staffing Models

Accessibility Coordinator Position

In addition to creating a committee, DUL should also consider the value of expanding the designated accessibility coordinator's responsibilities and developing staff training. Schroeder, in a 2018 article evaluating accessibility resources at Michigan State University Libraries (MSUL), emphasized the importance of designating a specific person to accessibility resources. The MSUL coordinator "identified top priority training topics and also surveyed library staff about their accessibility training needs." (Schroeder, 2018, p. 402) This coordinator led to MSUL

creating "29 total accessibility training sessions." (Schroeder, 2018, p. 402) Schroeder writes that these trainings allow library staff to think "about accessibility in a variety of areas… and incorporate it in their daily work." (2018, p. 403) The accessibility coordinator's role can create a ripple effect across the library system and embeds accessibility within the daily responsibilities of library staff. It is important to consider how this coordinator can best connect with the library staff and to ensure that these trainings are specifically created in response to the institution of the library system.

-See Samson (2011) for information on accessibility coordinator position description and staff training recommendations

Committees and Working Groups

Montana State University (MSU) and NC State both have committees in their libraries for addressing accessibility. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) created an "Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility" (IDEA) council within their libraries to develop inclusive collection projects. Brannen et al.'s article in 2017 provides additional models on how committees bolster accessibility resources in an academic library. At The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) campus, The Libraries' Diversity Committee "assigns liaison librarians to academic departments… [and one librarian is assigned] to the Office of Disability Services." (Brennen et al., 2017, p. 66) In addition to this committee, UTK also has an Assistive Technology and Access Committee (ATAC) which both explores how the library can improve its accessibility resources and training it can provide to its library staff (Brennen et al., 2017, p. 67). These two committees led to UTK creating a tour specifically designed for "self-identified students with disabilities." (Brennen et al., 2017, p. 67)

-Models for best practice appear to be for the library to have a designated accessibility coordinator as well as training for all library staff. Montana State and NC State both have committees in their libraries for addressing accessibility, and UNC-CH has the IDEA research council within the library that develops inclusive collection projects.

-See Schroeder (2018) for how Montana State established an accessibility coordinator, working group, and library internship program for library accessibility purposes.

Staffing Recommendations
- Consider providing evidence of **ongoing accessibility assessment** on the DUL website.
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