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Understanding Faculty Experiences in Implementing Accessible Course Design Strategies

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Higher Education Leadership and Adult Learning

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Abstract

Faculty who have experience working with individuals with disabilities are likely to have positive feelings about accessibility however, that does not always lead to faculty adoption of accessible course design practices. A gap existed in academic research about what was known of faculty experiences in the implementation of accessible course design practices at a 4-year university in the Midwest. Exploring faculty experience gave insight to future programming needs. Guided by Mezirow's transformational learning theory, this qualitative project study explored faculty experiences while implementing accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities. Sixteen faculty participated in 1:1 interviews about their experience implementing accessible course design practices. Using In Vivo and open coding to explore the experiences of faculty in the implementation of accessible course design practices, feelings about creating accessible content, motivations and barriers to faculty developing accessible course content, and what resources faculty felt were needed were identified. This resulted in a position paper where strategies, such as the implementation of faculty learning communities (FLCs), to reduce identified barriers were recommended. FLCs foster community and have potential to increase faculty buy-in. The use of an FLC may be a key strategy in promoting university initiatives focused on positive social change leading to improvements in academic culture for faculty and students.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Despite an increased awareness of the need to implement accessible course design practices, there exists a struggle to make this a reality, leaving higher education institutions vulnerable to lawsuits or civil rights complaints (Coleman & Berge, 2018; Francis et al., 2021; Stevens et al., 2018). In reaction to class action lawsuits filed by the National Association of the Deaf against Harvard and MIT, and a refresh of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a public, 4-year university in the Midwest ramped up their focus on the legal obligation to comply with those standards adding to their long-range plan to improve efforts to engage with, and support, specific groups of students, such as students with disabilities.

During the summer of 2016, the faculty center at this Midwest university facilitated a professional development program with the goal of improving access to course content for students with disabilities across the university campus by encouraging faculty to adopt accessible course design approaches when creating or selecting content for their courses. Since the purpose of the program was to create a shift in faculty perspectives, with regards to students with disabilities and the faculty role in creating accessible learning environments, transformational learning theory guided the development of the program. Transformational learning occurs when a person's basic assumptions are challenged resulting in critical reflection over previously held beliefs that can lead to adoption of new assumptions (Hudson, 2020). Environments that encourage discussion, sharing of different perspectives, and reflections on

implementation and best practices are shown to yield positive results (Cordie & Adelino, 2020). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was introduced to faculty as a framework for proactively improving the learning experience for students.

UDL is a set of instructional design principles based in neuroscience that recognizes and appreciates the concept of neural diversity among learners and advocates the creation of flexible learning environments (Meyer et al., 2014). UDL proposes that it is not a person's disability that is a barrier to learning but rather it is the instructional design that fails to account for the variability in learners (Meyer et al., 2014). The UDL principle of multiple means of representation, which specifically addresses ways in which students interact with instructional content, was heavily emphasized during the professional development program. Faculty were encouraged to consider the needs of students with physical and cognitive disabilities, who may rely on assistive technologies to access course materials, as they developed and chose content for their courses. Assistive technology is any technology used by a person with a disability in their daily activities (Coleman & Berge, 2018). Examples include (but are not limited to) screen reading software, braille displays, screen magnification, speech to text technology, keyboard shortcuts, and closed captioning for videos or other multimedia (Coleman & Berge, 2018). Therefore, faculty need to learn to incorporate accessible design strategies in the content they create or procure. These strategies include using a learning management system (LMS) to provide access to course content, use of the various formatting tools available in word processing software to create a functional document structure (headings, bulleted lists, tables, hyperlinks), availability of appropriate

alternative text when images are used, and the creation or inclusion of closed captioning for all multimedia (Coleman & Berge, 2018).

Definition of the Problem

Literature supports the implementation of accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities (Basham et al., 2020; Freedman et al., 2020; Hsiao et al., 2019; Kain et al., 2019; Squires & Countermine, 2018; Stevens et al., 2018; Wynants & Dennis, 2018). In 2016, the university's faculty center provided professional development focused on accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities. While the post-program survey might answer the question of the program's perceived success, the data are old and do not provide information on faculty experiences in the implementation of accessible course design practices. Programming decisions made for future professional development offerings and decisions for improving programs are dependent upon the feedback gathered through participant evaluations (Okul & Nyonje, 2020). Since there was no subsequent follow-up data collected, the research problem is that little is known regarding faculty experiences regarding the implementation of accessible course design practices.

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Rationale

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Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

In the spring of 2019, the university integrated Blackboard's Ally with their LMS to promote course accessibility. Ally provides feedback to instructors about the accessibility of the content uploaded to the LMS and offers guidance on how to improve inaccessible content (Blackboard, Inc., 2021). Ally also provides students with accessible

alternative formats such as audio downloads, electronic braille, language translation, and color gradient to improve reading (Blackboard, Inc., 2021). Ally's overall impact is limited, as faculty are not required to upload content to the LMS, and the quality of the alternative format produced is dependent on the accessibility of the original document. To increase awareness of Ally, faculty who participated in professional development were invited to serve as Ally ambassadors. The Ally ambassadors would be points of contact within each college for help or training faculty peers on an "as-needed" basis within their colleges. While there has been some minor improvement in the university's overall accessibility score, 52% of all files uploaded to the university's LMS for the 2020-2021 academic year are reported as "not accessible" (University's institutional Ally report, 2021). The top issues, according to the Ally report, are lack of image descriptions, lack of headings in documents, and poorly scanned PDFs. There is no university requirement for faculty to use the LMS with their courses, further limiting the overall impact of Ally as a tool to improve content accessibility for students.

Approximately 3% (817) of students enrolled at the university were registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) during the fall of 2020 (Director of Disability Resource Center, personal communication, January 11, 2021). This percentage is far below the national average of 19% for undergraduate programs or 11% in postbaccalaureate programs (United States Department of Education, 2019). The DRC director stated that local university students with disabilities often continue to experience barriers to course content, even when a student presents the instructor with an accommodation memo (Director of Disability Resource Center, personal communication,

January 11, 2021). He indicated faculty often do not understand students' need for the requested accommodations (Director of Disability Resource Center, personal communication, January 11, 2021).

There is often a reluctance by students to disclose a disability, and receive academic accommodations, due to the concern about stigma's associated with having a disability (Freedman et al., 2020). Even if a student does present faculty with the accommodation memo, with the power dynamic between instructor and student, students with disabilities often find themselves needing to qualify their needs and seek approval from the instructor to use the legally required accommodation (Freedman et al., 2020). Other students with disabilities, particularly those with cognitive impairments, also referred to as invisible or hidden disabilities, forego the use of academic accommodations to avoid negative labels or stigmas associated with having a disability (Freedman et al., 2020). This increases the need for faculty to be less reliant on receiving an academic accommodation letter and proactively employ inclusive course design practices.

Having professional development opportunities for faculty to learn about, engage, and interact with students with disabilities to broaden their worldview would be a critical piece to the process of improving course content for all students, especially for those with disabilities. Therefore, it is not just important that professional development programs exist, it is also imperative these programs are accessible to the needs of varying participants. Institutions planning professional development for faculty need to consider alternative delivery methods like self-paced, hybrid, or fully online trainings to appeal to a broader campus audience (Hromalik et al., 2020). Failure to consider faculty

participation preferences and scheduling needs could continue to perpetuate a culture of noncompliance, putting the university at risk of legal ramifications, as students with disabilities would continue to experience barriers to their educational success.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

The challenge for higher education is that accessibility is often handled as a reactionary process, rather than proactive process (Francis et al., 2021; Freedman et al., 2020; Hsiao et al., 2019). Despite federal and state laws requiring content provided by federally funded institutions be accessible to all persons, and repeated calls to scale up adoption of frameworks like UDL, students with disabilities in higher education continue to be an afterthought (McGowan, 2018). The problem was made more evident when a sudden shift to online delivery, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated that many faculty are still unprepared to support students with disabilities (Basham et al., 2020).

The requirements that course materials be accessible, and academic accommodations for students with disabilities be employed, seems to evoke feelings of uncertainty, annoyance, and even anger amongst faculty (Hsiao et al., 2019). Unfortunately, many existing university programs that advocate the adoption of strategies for accessible course design are unsuccessful due to negative emotions and misguided faculty assumptions associated with making accommodations, time constraints, increased workload without compensation, lack of support received post faculty development, and a lack of support from university administration (Guilbaud et al., 2021; Hsiao et al., 2019; Tobin & Behling, 2018, p. 5). Challenges to successful accessibility training initiatives

are perpetuated by campus cultures which deny issues exist and are rooted in traditional teaching roles (Lowenthal & Lomellini, 2023; Moore et al., 2018). There is also a lack of understanding in the role of Disability Services on campuses and faculty assuming that accessibility concerns are not their job (Lowenthal & Lomellini, 2023; Stevens et al., 2018). Therefore, faculty often do not expend time or energy toward accessibility training, or any professional development activity related to instruction, until they are in a difficult situation (Cordie & Adelino, 2020; Lowenthal & Lomellini, 2023; McGowan, 2018; Stevens et al., 2018). The challenge is further perpetuated by a lack of support and funding for accessibility initiatives, as they are often not viewed as a priority from the upper institutional administration (Lowenthal & Lomellini, 2023; Wynants & Dennis, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to understand faculty experiences regarding the implementation of accessible course design practices at a public, 4-year university in the Midwest. For this study, accessible course design practices include use of the university LMS to provide digital access to course content, use of the various formatting tools available in word processing and presentation software to create functional document structure (headings, bulleted lists, tables, hyperlinks), availability of appropriate alternative text when images are used, and the creation or inclusion of closed captioning for all multimedia (Coleman & Berge, 2018).

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Definition of Terms

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The following are definitions of key terms as they are applied in this study.

Academic accommodation: Adjustments or services provided to a student who has formally identified themselves as having a disability with a post-secondary institution to ensure equal educational opportunity. Examples include extended time for tests, providing captioning for videos, sign language interpreters, screen reading software, or other assistive technologies (Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Section 504, 2000).

Accessibility: Content, technology, and tools designed to ensure equal access and opportunity for individuals regardless of their ability (W3C, 2018a).

Critical reflection: An act of reflection and critical consciousness where one becomes aware of their own world view and deep-seated beliefs in order to apply and act upon new understandings (Mezirow, 1998).

Disability: Defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a person's ability to participate in one or more major life activities (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2009).

Learning barrier: Factors in a learning environment that limit a person's ability to access or participate in educational opportunities. Barriers may be attitudinal, communication, physical, programmatic, policy, or social in nature (CDC, 2018).

Social model of disability: First coined in the 1980s, the social model of disability argues that individuals are not disabled by their impairments, but rather disabling barriers created in society (Oliver, 2013).

Transformational learning: Learning that goes beyond simple knowledge acquisition and results in a fundamental and permanent change in a person's worldview (Simsek, 2012).

Universal design: A movement to design products and environments so they are usable by all people, without a need for adaptation or specialized design (Center for Universal Design, 1997).

Universal design for learning: A framework for developing curriculum and supporting learning materials that are flexible and can be customized or adjusted for individual learner needs (CAST, 2021).

WCAG 2.0: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 is a globally developed set of technical standards for web content accessibility to make web content more accessible for all persons (W3C, 2018b).

Significance of the Study

Mezirow's (1997) position is that a person's worldview is shaped by their experiences which form their frame of reference. Transformative learning effects change by challenging a person's frame of reference causing critical reflection to occur (Mezirow, 1997). The faculty center at the site of research implemented a professional development program to increase faculty awareness of learning barriers experienced by students with disabilities and encourage faculty to adopt proactive approaches in their course design. Qualitative research allowed me to explore faculty experiences with implementing accessible course design practices to advance the knowledge needed in making decisions about future professional development programs or program improvements. The data gathered will allow the faculty center to maximize the value of existing programs and to provide tangible evidence of what accessible course design practices faculty are likely to implement following a training program focused on

accessibility. A program capable of creating change among faculty to be proactive in the implementation of accessible instructional practices could have a broad impact on the instructional community at the university.

The use of transformational learning in program development could serve as a model framework for the development of future professional development programs where the goal is to create awareness, encourage social change, and improve conditions for underrepresented populations. The potential for positive social change expands to a broader scale since the findings will be published at the conclusion of my doctoral journey. Through publication, this theory-based model for professional development could provide evidence of a framework for other institutions of higher education who are developing training programs where the goal is to go beyond simple compliance training.

Research Question

The research problem is that little is known about faculty experiences regarding the implementation of accessible course design practices. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore faculty experiences with regard to implementing accessible course design practices at a public, 4-year university in the Midwest. Scholars such as Wynants and Dennis (2017) have said while professional development programs focused on improving accessibility on college campuses do improve faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities, there is a need for research that go beyond faculty self-reporting. There is a lack of peer-reviewed studies that provide evidence to support faculty reports on their implementation of accessible course design practices (Charlier & Lambert, 2020; Hromalik et al., 2020; Wynants & Dennis, 2017). This basic qualitative

study was guided by the following research question: What are faculty experiences while implementing accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities?

Review of the Literature

Mezirow's (1997) transformational learning theory and the social model of disability form the conceptual framework for this study. Transformational learning theory is an adult learning theory that explores how a person's frame of reference influences their thoughts, feelings, perspectives, beliefs, and behaviors (Mezirow, 1997). The social model of disability states that society (in this case universities) create and perpetuate the barriers that hinder the success of students with disabilities (Bunbury, 2019; Oliver, 2013). Additional topics explored were increasing enrollment of students with disabilities in higher education, laws which mandate federally funded universities to provide equitable access to course content for students with disabilities, faculty as a barrier to accessibility, and efforts to train higher education faculty.

Conceptual Framework

Transformational Learning Theory, an adult learning theory introduced in 1978 by Jack Mezirow, is focused on how adults make sense of life experiences, and it defines learning as a change in a person's frame of reference (Merriam & Bamgartner, 2020). "Adults have acquired a coherent body of experience—associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define their lifeworld" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Two dimensions form one's frame of reference: habits of mind and point of view (Mezirow, 1997). Habits of mind are habitual ways of acting, feeling,

or thinking, that are influenced by assumptions which may be formed through cultural, social, educational, economic, psychological, or political experiences (Mezirow, 1997). Frames of reference are a result of influence from primary caregivers and cultural assimilation (Mezirow, 1997, p. 6). According to Mezirow's theory (1997) the process of transforming "occurs through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based" (p. 7).

Mezirow's transformative learning theory consists of ten steps and begins with a disorienting dilemma which challenges the person's belief or assumption (Merriam & Bamgartner, 2020). This challenge to an individual's frame of reference causes a need for self-reflection which can often result in feelings of anger, guilt, fear or even shame (Merriam & Bamgartner, 2020). This spurs a process of critical reflection where a need for change is identified (Merriam & Bamgartner, 2020). The process of critical reflection and discourse leads to the final step, action, where solutions can be put in place to implement change (Merriam & Bamgartner, 2020). In faculty development programs, where the purpose is to change habits of mind, the facilitator must create situations to challenge a learner's frame of reference and "foster critically reflective thought, imaginative problem posing, and discourse that is learner-centered, participatory and interactive, and it involves group deliberation and group problem solving" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). Mezirow's theory creates a framework for a process toward individual transformation, among a like-minded group of individuals, who begin to work together toward effecting change on a larger scale within an organization (Merriam & Bamgartner, 2020). In essence, using transformational learning theory leads to the

creation of a learning community among participants committed to the same educational and organizational goal.

Oliver's social model of disability, introduced in the 1980s, argues that individuals are not disabled by their impairments, but rather disabling barriers created in society (Bunbury, 2019; Moriña, 2017; Oliver, 2013). In the case of this research study, the practices, attitudes, and policies of the university's social context create barriers and/or supports that impact access and participation for students with disabilities (Moriña, 2017). The social model of disability also advocates against the use of medical labels that infer an abnormality or deficit when identifying students with disabilities and encourages the implementation of inclusive teaching strategies that support student success (Moriña, 2017; Oliver, 2013).

Connecting Accessible Course Design Practices & Conceptual Framework

The social model of disability states that it is not a person's impairment that is disabling rather that it is the practices, attitudes, and policies within society that creates barriers that exclude individuals with disabilities (Oliver, 2013). Moriña (2017) conducted a review of literature focused on students with disabilities and faculty in higher education. With regards to faculty attitudes, it was concluded that there was a positive attitude towards students with disabilities and a valuing of inclusive strategies. However, they did not implement them into practice (Moriña, 2017). Faculty perceptions are at odds with findings from research on students with disabilities. The most important barrier identified by students was negative attitudes displayed by faculty (Moriña, 2017).

Other challenges identified were structural barriers, inaccessible information and technology and instructional methods that did not favor inclusion (Moriña, 2017).

Faculty should be trained in how to carry out inclusive pedagogy and universal designs for learning (Moriña, 2017). Faculty assumptions around the concept of an average student needs to be challenged to create opportunity for critical reflection to occur. One of the key elements outlined in transformational learning is the creation of a disorienting dilemma and interaction beyond the facilitator (Mezirow, 1997). Individuals who have participated in professional development activities described as meaningful or "transformational" included peer-to-peer engagement and opportunities for critical reflection within that community of learners (Attebury, 2017; Merriam & Bamgartner, 2020). While colleges and universities are providing training to improve accessibility, the result of those trainings do not translate into implementation (Hsiao et al., 2019). Therefore, the proposed research question seeks to explore faculty experience of implementing accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities.

Review of the Broader Problem

The literature reviewed contributes to a narrative that the number of students with disabilities enrolling in higher education courses is growing (Durocher et al., 2017). Even with legal protections in place, students with disabilities continue to experience barriers to educational success (Freedman et al., 2020; Kain et al., 2019; Lightfoot et al., 2018; Moriña, 2017; Squires & Countermine, 2018). Barriers identified in the literature include negative attitudes of faculty, the process for seeking accommodations, faculty knowledge

about disability-related issues, and course design. I utilized Google Scholar, library access through Walden University, and the university where I am employed, to search the following databases, both individually and using Thoreau, for current literature related to the topic of study: Academic Search Complete, ERIC, Education Full Text, Encyclopedia of Human Services and Diversity, Professional Development Collection, Education Source, SAGE, Taylor and Francis, Disability Statistics, NCES Publication, ProQuest, and Wiley. In addition, I reviewed national reports and articles published by national organizations associated with college teaching.

Students with Disabilities: A growing population

Twenty-one percent of undergraduates enrolled in higher education institutions report as having a disability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, a 20-year study that follows participants from kindergarten through postsecondary education (NLTS2), indicated enrollment in four-year postsecondary education programs among students with disabilities is increasing with the rates for students with disabilities attending college now similar to nondisabled students (Durocher et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2011).

Even though research has identified supportive relationships with faculty as one of the keys to success, many students with disabilities have reported negative experiences with faculty (Freedman et al., 2020; Kain et al., 2019; Lightfoot et al., 2018; Squires & Countermine, 2018). Students with disabilities have reported feeling faculty lack knowledge around disability issues and were not receptive to student accommodation requests (Bartz, 2020). Unfortunately, the barriers experienced by students with

disabilities contribute to lower success rates. According to the NLTS2 and the most recent progress report from the National Council on Disability, students with disabilities experience lower retention and graduation rates with only 38 percent completing a 4-year program verses 41 percent of nondisabled students (Durocher et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2011). The number of students with disabilities on college campuses also make up a significant aspect of a university's diversity, yet they are often an overlooked population (Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019).

Students with disabilities continue to encounter significant barriers to success in higher education. One of the greatest barriers students with disabilities report encountering is negative attitudes and a general disregard for people with disabilities by faculty, staff, and peers (Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Lightfoot et al., 2018; Squires & Countermine, 2018; Stevens et al., 2018; Thompson-Ebanks & Jarman, 2018). Other barriers include the need to provide documentation to receive accommodations, being unaware of the disability resource offices and services they provide, inaccessible course materials, and pedagogical practices so prescriptive they limit a disabled student's capacity to demonstrate what they know (Fleet & Kondrashov, 2019; Moriña & Carballo, 2017; Thompson-Ebanks & Jarman, 2018). Students with disabilities have described faculty even going as far as to steer them out of their majors because of a perceived lack of ability (Squires & Countermine, 2018). Although often unintended by the institution, the process for seeking accommodations, including the need for the student to disclose their disability, and the delay in receiving alternative course materials present barriers (Thompson-Ebanks & Jarman, 2018). When students with disabilities enroll at a college

or university, it becomes their responsibility to contact the institution's disability support office and disclose their disability, to receive accommodations for aspects of a course which may initially be a barrier (Epstein et al., 2022; Thompson-Ebanks & Jarman, 2018). Interestingly, most students (65%) who were reported as having a disability by their secondary school did not report having a disability by the time they enrolled in a post-secondary institution (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

ADA, Section 504 and the 508 Refresh

Public institutions, such as universities and colleges receiving federal funding, are mandated to provide academic accommodations for students with disabilities through sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504. Guidelines for Educators., 2000). Most faculty at postsecondary institutions are familiar with section 504, which is the legal requirement to provide academic accommodations (LaGrow, 2017). However, faculty are less familiar with their role under Section 508 and often confuse the two mandates, which can cause potential legal issues for an institution (LaGrow, 2017). While both sections 504 and 508 address issues of access for individuals with disabilities, section 508 specifically deals with information and communications technology. There is a general lack of understanding of the difference between accessibility and accommodation (LaGrow, 2017).

Section 508 mandates individuals with disabilities should be able to acquire the same information, engage in the same or comparable interactions, and enjoy the same or comparable services as individuals without disabilities (United States Access Board, 2000). For example, an instructor who creates a video for an online class, and does not

include a transcript or captioning, would violate Section 508, even if the student was referred to the appropriate office for accommodations (LaGrow, 2017). The lack of access to the information provided in the video, from the start, would cause a delay or barrier in access to the necessary course content and could be seen as discrimination (United States Access Board, 2000; United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2011).

As a result of the rise in complaints filed with the Office of Civil Rights, in 2010, and again in 2011, the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division sent "Dear Colleague" letters to all college and university presidents in an attempt to clarify and provide guidance on these regulations (United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2011; United States Department of Justice & United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2010). Unfortunately, it was not until a series of federal lawsuits filed in 2015 by the National Association of the Deaf, against both Harvard University and M.I.T., over a lack of closed captioning, that higher education institutions started to take notice (Lewin, 2015). In 2017, eight lawsuits were filed against universities in New York over inaccessible websites (Wang, 2017). Fortunately, not all colleges or universities accused of noncompliance with disability law end up in the courtroom. The University of California, Berkeley, was under investigation with the Department of Justice after a complaint was filed over the accessibility of the content and platform used to deliver their MOOCs (United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2016). In these situations, to

avoid a costly lawsuit, the university implemented measures outlined by the Department of Justice to become ADA compliant.

By January 2017, the United States Access Board published a final ruling updating the standards for information and communications technology covered by section 508, with a goal of bringing it up to date with changes in technology and making the requirements easier to understand and follow (United States Access Board, 2017). One of the significant changes was the incorporation of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 with levels A and AA requirements for websites, software, and electronic documents, making these the minimum standards for accessibility compliance (United States Access Board, 2017). Since higher education is governed by the regulations in Section 508, the refresh had a direct impact on universities and colleges. The refresh also highlighted a need for faculty training on accessibility and strategies for developing accessible course content.

Faculty as a Barrier

Faculty play a significant role in the educational experiences of students with disabilities: 1) through the course's design and the delivery of instruction, 2) through their direct interactions with students in regards to accommodation requests and issues surrounding disclosure, 3) through their knowledge of the available campus resources and support options available for students with disabilities, 4) through mentoring relationships with students, and 5) through their influence within the organization (Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Kain et al., 2019; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019; Thompson-Ebanks & Jarman, 2018). While research has shown faculty who have taught at least one

student with a disability had a more favorable view of providing academic accommodations, the 'favorable view' did not translate to adopting inclusive teaching practices in the classroom (Cash et al., 2021; Hsiao et al., 2019).

Faculty with real-world personal experiences, interacting with individuals with disabilities, report a more favorable view of students with disabilities and the provision of academic accommodations (Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019). Negative attitudes toward the provision of academic accommodations, stigmatization of students with disabilities, and a lack of compassion or understanding for students with disabilities is still very much an issue with faculty (Freedman et al., 2020; Kain et al., 2019; Squires & Countermine, 2018). Misconceptions that the academic accommodation interferes with a faculty member's academic freedom or gives the student with a disability an unfair advantage and compromises the integrity of the course, are among the reasons cited for concern (Akin & Huang, 2019; Banks, 2019; Hsiao et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2018; Thompson-Ebanks & Jarman, 2018). For students whose disabilities are not readily apparent, such as those with learning or cognitive disabilities, the issue is further complicated because these students may not fit faculty members' perception of a person with a disability (Akin & Huang, 2019; Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018; Kain et al., 2019). Therefore, legitimacy of the academic accommodation is put into question by the faculty member (Akin & Huang, 2019; Bettencourt et al., 2018; Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018; Kain et al., 2019; Thompson-Ebanks & Jarman, 2018). Accessibility is also perceived by faculty as a reactionary process that is facilitated by a student's request of accommodation, not a proactive process (Freedman et al., 2020; Hsiao et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2018). This is

coupled with an absence in understanding as to who is responsible for the accessibility of content (Freedman et al., 2020; Hsiao et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2018).

Faculty are a key component in the success of students with disabilities therefore, it is understandable how universities would target this population as a crucial element in maintaining compliance. Professional development programs should be designed to dispel myths regarding students with disabilities, increase faculty awareness of common instructional barriers, and to define faculty roles in the creation of accessible content. Faculty also need to be provided with simple solutions to proactively fix accessibility issues using tools they already have access to. Universities may need to consider providing compensation for course redesign as a symbol of support for the adoption of proactive approaches that promote accessibility, like Universal Design for Learning.

Efforts to Train Faculty in Higher Education

Training and support have been identified as crucial factors in the improvement of faculty attitudes toward the adoption of accessible instructional strategies (Banks, 2019; Moriña & Carballo, 2017). While research has indicated universities are providing training and support for accessible instructional strategies, training efforts do not always result in implementation (Hsiao et al., 2019). The intensity of the training seems to matter less than providing a wide range of opportunities for faculty to participate (Hsiao et al., 2019). Unfortunately, participation in these programs is often low. Reasons cited for low participation by faculty are a lack of intrinsic motivation, perceived lack in value of the training offered, scheduling conflicts due to teaching schedules and work demands, lack of familiarity with technology, lack of time and tools needed to develop accessible

content, lack of support from upper administration and lack of financial resources (Hsiao et al., 2019; Wynants & Dennis, 2018).

Another contributing factor to faculty participation is the perceived risk associated with changes in instructional practice. When faculty perceive the risk to be high, they are most likely to resist change (Schaap & Vanlommel, 2024; Twyford & Le, 2019). However, when faculty perceive there is support from within the organization (among leadership and peers), the perceived risk is minimized, creating an environment in which they are more engaged and willing to take steps to bring about positive educational change (Hsiao et al., 2019; Schaap & Vanlommel, 2024; Twyford & Le, 2019; Wynants & Dennis, 2018). The perceived level of difficulty in the implementation of pedagogical change is also an issue. Faculty are often reluctant to provide accommodations or modify content to improve accessibility if it requires significant changes therefore, strategies need to be quick and easy to implement (Hsiao et al., 2019; Moriña & Carballo, 2017).

Participation in professional development focused on accessibility initiatives are shown to produce positive feedback from faculty, however, they do not always lead to implementation. Evmenova (2018) conducted a qualitative evaluation of a graduate level online UDL course where participants were asked to analyze their existing learning environments and revise lesson plans based on the UDL concepts. While the majority indicated UDL was valuable and the training effective, only 5 of the 70 participants implemented their UDL revisions (Evmenova, 2018). Evmenova's study did not explore why participants did, or did not, implement their strategies once the course ended.

Unfortunately, given faculty seem to play a large role in the success of students with disabilities, the research indicating success are focused on the faculty members' self-efficacy - whether or not they feel more comfortable working with and supporting this population of students (Banks, 2019; Cash et al., 2021; Hsiao et al., 2019; Moriña & Carballo, 2017). Unfortunately, the research does not include information on whether faculty adopted proactive approaches to content accessibility, and if adopted what those approaches were.

Implications

Professional development programs are often created in response to a perceived organizational need (Prosek, 2020). The professional development offered by the university's faculty center was developed out of an organizational need to support meeting the university's long-range plan and to improve the university's legal obligation to comply with federal accessibility laws. Qualitative research, such as this study proposes, will explore faculty experiences implementing the accessible course design strategies that were proposed in the program, to gather evidence about the faculty experience including what faculty implemented, if anything, and why (Prosek, 2020). The doctoral study deliverable (i.e., "The Project") could be a report which includes a summary of the data gathered through the qualitative study that provides documentation on faculty experiences implementing accessible course design practices, discussion of what faculty perceived they still need regarding support or training and provide evidence of what accessible course design practices faculty adopted, if any. This information could be used to inform development of future professional development programs or to

improve existing programs. There is a need for peer-reviewed studies providing evidence as to what accessible design practices faculty are employing (Wynants & Dennis, 2017). Therefore, data collected through this basic qualitative study could contribute to this gap in literature by providing evidence of what accessible course design practices faculty are employing.

Summary

Section one described the need for research that explores faculty experiences in implementing accessible course design practices. This basic qualitative study is focused on faculty experiences implementing accessible course design practices. Exploring faculty experiences provides the type of information that is beneficial in identification of future programming needs as well as areas for improving existing programs. Since the qualitative data collected is over 5 years old and there has been no subsequent follow-up data collected, little is known regarding faculty experiences with the implementation of accessible course design practices. Transformational learning and the social model of disability have been identified as the conceptual framework guiding the study. Transformational learning theory is an adult learning theory which implies that for lasting change to occur, a person's assumptions or frame of reference must be challenged (Merriam & Bamgartner, 2020). Transformation learning also highlights the need for peer-to-peer engagement in the facilitate of critical reflection. The social model of disability argues that the practices, attitudes, and policies in society create barriers and not the individual's disability or impairment (Moriña, 2017).

Section 2 includes discussion on the methodology used in this study, how participants were recruited, the collection and recording of data, the process for analyzing the data and a summary of the data analysis. It will conclude with a description of the project resulting from the analysis of the data.

Section 2: The Methodology

In this study, I explored faculty experiences implementing accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to understand faculty experiences regarding the implementation of accessible course design practices at a public, 4-year university in the Midwest. With Mezirow's (1997) transformational learning and the social model of disability as the conceptual frameworks, I explored faculty experiences with implementing accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities using a basic qualitative approach. This chapter will build upon the previous chapter to identify the rationale in choosing a basic qualitative methodology over other methodologies, my role as the researcher, how participants were selected, recruited, ethical procedures used to protect participant privacy, data collection methods, data analysis, validity, and reliability as well as the limitations of the study.

Rationale for Research Design

For this study, I considered several different research designs. Quantitative approaches would have provided useful data; however, those approaches rely on numerical data to explore relationships among variables to test a hypothesis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Schultze & Avital, 2011). I sought to explore faculty experiences with implementing accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities making the open-ended nature of qualitative data collection the most appropriate methodology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Harding, 2018). What is discovered during qualitative research is a result of the interaction between the researcher

and individuals being researched with a common methodology being face-to-face interviews (Harding, 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Phoenix et al., 2013). Therefore, a basic qualitative approach was determined to be most appropriate. Action research, a qualitative method, could have provided useful data, as it is focused on solving specific problems, applying interventions, and testing the effectiveness of an intervention (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). However, action research often requires the application of a solution to a problem in the moment, and I was not concerned with interventions and the effect of applied interventions, thereby disqualifying an action research approach (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I was also not exploring cultural influences or intending to develop a theory; therefore, qualitative research approaches such as ethnography and grounded theory were also not appropriate for this study. Qualitative research can be used to gather authentic accounts of the participant experience (Harding, 2018; Schultze & Avital, 2011; R. K. Yin, 2018). I chose this approach to acquire a more in-depth exploration of the factors contributing to, or hindering, implementation of accessible course design practices among faculty at the university (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Prosek, 2020).

Participants

The purpose of this study was to understand faculty experiences regarding the implementation of accessible course design practices at a public, 4-year university in the Midwest. The data collected for this study were 1:1 interviews that provided information about faculty experiences implementing accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities.

The population for this study were faculty from a public, 4-year university in the Midwest. The target population were current university faculty who had participated in some form of professional development with the faculty center at the university. A purposeful sample of faculty was selected to ensure representation from each of the colleges at the university. According to Ando et al. (2014), saturation can be reached in qualitative research within 12 interviews. I determined saturation, or an adequate sample, had been reached after 16 interviews, as no new insights, themes or categories emerged from the gathering of new data and representation for each college at the university was met (Ando et al., 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Harding, 2018).

The Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

With a participatory approach to qualitative inquiry, the focus is on engaging study participants relationally, as stakeholders, in the process of program improvement (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This type of collaboration has been found to foster organizational learning systems which lead to change (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This participatory approach is also in alignment with the conceptual framework, as Mezirow's (1997) theory promotes the formation of like-minded communities of people working together to effect change on a larger scale, within an organization.

Instructional designers rely heavily on building and maintaining faculty trust (Halupa, 2019). Trust is essential to professional success. The instructional designer's clients are faculty who, while confident in content knowledge, come with varying levels of confidence in their teaching or technology skills. An instructor may be a new faculty member or forced into a new teaching role which is not welcomed by them. Instructors

come to instructional designers in a vulnerable state therefore, an instructional designer

works as an advocate, a mentor, and resource providing support to the faculty member

(Halupa, 2019). As an instructional designer for the university, I have an established and

successful working relationship with the faculty. Since I am the lead instructional

designer associated with the development and delivery of professional development in

the faculty center, I have worked directly with each of the potential participants.

However, neither the faculty center nor I have a supervisory role over participants.

Ethical Considerations

Since qualitative interviews require work with human subjects, it was my ethical

duty to minimize any potential risk to the participants of the study. Following the ethical

guidelines established by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I

needed to obtain approval from the IRB before conducting research. The IRB approval

number is 03-11-22-0485146. Once IRB approval was received, the director of the

faculty center served as a gatekeeper provided the initial access to faculty participants.

I continued to implement ethical practices throughout the data collection process.

First, I sent the initial invite through the faculty center to protect the identities of faculty

who chose not to respond to the initial invitation. Those who did respond provided

informed consent to be interviewed. To protect the identity of the participants, I did not

use the research site's name or participants names; instead, participants were assigned the

letter "P" and a number to be identified by throughout the study.

Procedures were also taken to protect all data collected. To ensure participant

privacy, all files associated with this study are stored in the vault section of my personal

DropBox account. The vault adds an additional layer of protection by requiring an additional pin for access and cannot be accessed by third party applications (Dropbox, Inc., n.d.). Only I have the password and pin to access these files.

Participants Selection

The purpose of this study was to understand faculty experiences regarding the implementation of accessible course design practices at a public, 4-year university in the Midwest. The data collected for this study were 1:1 interviews regarding faculty experiences implementing accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities.

The population for this study were faculty from a public, 4-year university in the Midwest. The target population were current university faculty who had participated in some form of professional development with the faculty center at the university. A purposeful sample of faculty was selected to ensure representation from each of the colleges at the university. A total of 16 faculty were interviewed. According to Ando et al. (2014), saturation can be reached in qualitative research within 12 interviews. I determined saturation, or an adequate sample, had been reached after 16 interviews, as no new insights, themes, or categories emerged from the gathering of new data and representation for each college at the university was met (Ando et al., 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Harding, 2018).

Data Analysis Results

Procedures for Recruiting Participants, Collecting, and Recording of Data

On April 27, 2022, invitations were sent through the faculty center's main email address, on my behalf, inviting faculty to voluntarily participate in the study. The qualifications to participate included that they were a current university faculty and have participated in some form of professional development with the faculty center (Appendix B). The invitation provided information on the purpose of the study and expectations of individuals volunteering to participate. This included outlining participants' role in reviewing a summary of their interview to validate that the data collected through the interview accurately portrayed their experience. Allowing participants the opportunity to reflect on their interviews helped to validate the data collection process. It also increased the transparency of the process among the participants and minimized harm by allowing participants to confirm or deny accuracy of the data (Candela, 2019).

A total of 21 faculty responded to the invitation to participate. Upon indicating interest, I contacted all 21 faculty by email to arrange a meeting time and provided them with the informed consent form (Appendix C). Sixteen of the 21 faculty responded and scheduled interview times. Participants were informed there was no compensation for participation, that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and that they would receive a copy of the study's results. Consent to participate was established when the participant returned an electronic copy of their signed consent form and again verbally before beginning the interview process.

Interviews were conducted between May 3, 2022 and June 2, 2022. All interviews were conducted in the faculty center's small conference room, as this was a location easily accessible and familiar to participants. An interview protocol (Appendix D) I developed was used to guide the interview and maintain consistency across interviews and minimize my impact on data collected (Harding, 2018; Schultze & Avital, 2011). The questions from the interview protocol were reviewed by the director of the faculty center and a faculty member who teaches qualitative studies to receive feedback. No changes to the interview questions were suggested by these individuals. Interviews were recorded using Just Press Record pro, an application created by Open Planet Software, accessed through my iPhone. This application was chosen because it offered both recording and transcription services using artificial intelligence (AI). When the interviews concluded, participants were told they would receive a copy of their interview transcript and a summary of the interview to verify the accuracy of their interview, a process called member checking.

Evidence of Quality

It is important to remain true to the data being collected and to be transparent in its reporting. The purpose of qualitative inquiry is to interpret phenomena from the perspective of the individuals experiencing it (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Validity, or evidence of quality in a qualitative research study, is found in the instrument's ability to accurately measure what it has been designed to measure (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Harding, 2018). Creswell (2018) recommended the use of multiple validity procedures including establishing a chain of evidence and member checking.

Primary sources of data for the study were recorded and transcribed interviews with faculty. Each interview was recorded using Just Press Record Pro, an application accessed through my iPhone. This application provides both recording and transcription services using AI. Once the transcript had been rendered, I compared it with the recording of the interview to correct errors and verify accuracy of the transcript. I expected most faculty would feel positive about proactively making their content accessible since they volunteered to be interviewed around the subject of the accessibility in their course content. Therefore, strategies were employed to manage potential researcher bias.

To manage my own potential bias, it was necessary to be aware of my role and personal identity and how that might affect my interpretation of the data from each interview. This was done through the development of interview summaries, used to verify the accuracy of the interaction between the participant and myself (Appendix H). This summary, along with a copy of the transcript, was provided to the participant, allowing them to clarify, add, or correct any misinterpreted information gathered during their interview process, a process called member checking (Candela, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Member checking is more than just supplying the participant with a copy of their transcript; it is an active involvement of the participant in the research process (Candela, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The process of member checking is one way data is validated in qualitative research, by having the interviewees review data collected during their interviews (Candela, 2019; Harding, 2018; Yin, 1981). The quality of research is diminished when only a single perspective is represented (Yin, 1981).

Therefore, when data are reviewed by the participant, they should see an interpretation, which reflects their perspective and not the researcher's bias. Participants were given 5 business days to offer feedback on their interview summary. In the case where no participant feedback was received, it was assumed they agreed with the accuracy of their interview and had nothing further to add. The opportunity to have a follow-up phone call was offered; however, it was not needed by participants.

Reflective researcher notes were kept as I began analyzing the data to record assumptions and/or surprises in the data, to further manage personal bias (Appendix E). During the development of the codebook (Appendix F), descriptions and/or definitions of codes were recorded to ensure there was not a discrepancy or change in meaning to the codes during the coding process. The codebook was refined throughout the data analysis process.

Handling of Discrepant Cases

Different perspectives are characteristic of the real world; therefore, it was important to present any discrepant cases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Including contradictory evidence adds to the validity of the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Codes were compiled to eliminate redundancy and overlap. For example, when asked about how accessible they felt their courses were, phrases such as "I use Ally to check accessibility and use headers on documents," "If [Ally] shows anything red I review and make revisions, so everything is green," or "I am confident that they are the most accessible they've ever been" were compiled into the category "accessible." Phrases "I would give myself a C," "the PDFs are clean but I'm not as accessible as I would like,"

were coded under a category of "somewhat accessible," and phrases such as "not much is accessible," "no, but I don't have anybody using a screen reader," and "I don't think that they would be that accessible" were coded as "not very accessible." The use of member checking aided in corroborating my findings as the coded interpretation of those phrases were reflected in the participants' summaries.

Coding Procedures

Saldana's work on qualitative methods was used as a framework for my data analysis process. The use of first and second cycle coding approaches can enhance accountability and depth of study findings (Saldana, 2016). With the first 7 interviews, for the first cycle coding process, I utilized Saldana's elemental method of In Vivo and open coding using Excel to organize the data. Coding is a process of assigning a designation to data in order to easily retrieve specific elements; most often a word or short phrase (Durdella, 2019; Harding, 2018). The purpose in open coding was to create a starting point to reflect on the data and to aid in the development of a code book that would be used on the remaining interviews (Saldana, 2016). Open coding allowed me to look at the data with an open mind versus trying to fit data into a pre-defined set of categories (Seidman, 2019). The use of pre-established categories does not allow themes to emerge from the participant's interpretation of their experience, which is what was being explored (Seidman, 2019). The process of open coding helped to minimize researcher bias in the interpretation of the data. NVivo coding was utilized to preserve the faculty participant voices utilizing their language for the codes (Saldana, 2016). Phrases such as "great," "it's not difficult," "overwhelming," "it's part of my job," "it's a non-

issue," and "burden" taken from the interview transcripts were used as codes to describe the faculty participants initial reaction to describing how they feel about implementing accessible course design practices. The initial coding process, utilizing the first 7 interviews, was focused on data familiarization and coding as many significant elements as necessary to begin the development of a codebook (Appendix F). The codes identified during the first round of coding were then sub coded into preliminary categories as I transitioned to a second cycle of coding. All interview data was moved to NVivo before beginning a second cycle of coding. The codes established using the first 7 interviews were used as preliminary descriptive codes to be applied to all the interview data. Descriptive codes summarize in a short word or phrase the basic topic of a passage providing a categorical index of the data's content and is essential groundwork for second cycle coding (Saldana, 2016).

During the second cycle of coding, which included all 16 interviews, descriptive analysis was used. The goal during this phase of the data analysis was to identify themes that formed a "big picture" representation of the interview data and field notes (Ando et al., 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Next, a thematic analysis of the data was conducted. Four themes emerged from the coding of interview data; 1) Initial feelings toward the implementation of accessible course design practices, 2) Motivating factors to implement accessible course design practices, 3) Barriers to implementation of accessible course design, and 4) What resources faculty felt they needed to aid them in implementing accessible course design practices. The data were then arranged in a diagram to visualize the connections among the themes (Appendix G).

Additional findings that did not directly apply to answering the research question also emerged from the interviews. Participants, when talking about what motivated them to be proactive, described their experiences working with specific students with disabilities and how those experiences impacted them. It was also interesting to learn how they were specifically using Blackboard Ally as a tool to be more proactive in the creation of course materials. This additional data regarding the impact of the faculty experience working with students with disabilities and how Blackboard Ally impacts faculty work, regarding proactive accessibility, are interesting topics for further exploration.

Interpretation of Data

The faculty center at the research site sent out an email inviting faculty to participate in the study. A total of 21 faculty responded to the invitation to participate. Utilizing purposeful sampling, a total of 16 faculty were interviewed providing representation for each college at the university.

Table 1
Breakdown of Academic Programs

Academic program	Participants
Business	P13
Health sciences	P8, P14, P16
Liberal arts and humanities	P1, P4, P7, P11, P15
Natural and applied sciences	P6, P10, P12
Social science	P2, P3, P5, P9

Participants had a range in teaching experience from early career to seasoned instructors with more than 20 years' experience (Figure 2).

Figure 1

Years of Teaching Experience
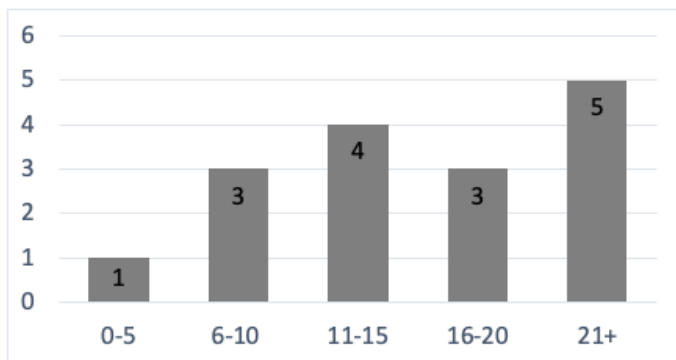
The purpose of the basic qualitative study was to answer the research question "What are the faculty experiences with implementing accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities?" Four themes emerged from the coding of interview data; 1) Faculty participants' initial feelings toward the implementation of accessible course design practices, 2) Motivating factors to implement accessible course design practices, 3) Barriers to implementation of accessible course design, and 4) What resources faculty felt they needed to aid them in implementing accessible course design practices.

Theme 1: Initial Feelings on Implementation of Accessible Course Design Practices

When asked how they felt about making their courses accessible proactively, all participants expressed this was something positive and beneficial to students. One participant expressed that they felt it was part of their job:

P12: I'm all for it. I mean, you can see the benefits, whether you're making it more accessible for one class of students or not, it benefits all of them, when you make

it easier to deal with. So yeah, I have no problem at all. I guess I see it as my job.

So, you know, I wouldn't be very good at it if I wasn't trying, for everybody.

Five of the participants described making content accessible as a "lot of work."

One participant (P4) lamented that while faculty really do want to do "everything

possible," they felt there "isn't enough support for making content accessible." They

described making course content as "extra work being put on faculty and that students

should communicate their needs better." They went on to suggest:

P4: Students should be taught to make very clear what they need and what they

don't need. So basically taught, you know, what they can let the professors get

away with, and what they really, really, really need.

In contrast, 4 participants reported that it was not that difficult to implement

accessible course design practices. Two participants, both faculty in health sciences,

when describing positive feelings toward content being made accessible, indicated it was

a "non-issue" for their departments because their programs were very competitive, and

they did not have students who needed academic accommodations. P14, a faculty

member in one of these programs explained, "we have not had students with obvious

disabilities as far as like visual impairments or hearing impairments, or any

accommodations, you know, not to where the content actually had to be adjusted."

Participants were asked about participation in professional development focused

on course accessibility. The opportunities mentioned by participants included Blackboard

Ally training, an online course development bootcamp, an institute focused on

accessibility, training for faculty teaching courses as part of a university-sponsored

program for students with intellectual disabilities, and a faculty showcase sponsored by

the university's faculty center (Table 2). Four of the participants mentioned participation

in multiple opportunities. One participant had not participated in any professional

development and one participant participated in professional development at a previous

university.

Table 2

Types of Professional Development Opportunities Focused on Accessibility

Professional development	Faculty participated
Institute focused on accessibility	P6, P11, P12, P15
Blackboard Ally training	P1, P3, P9, P11, P14, P16
Online course development bootcamp	P2, P4, P5, P7, P10, P12, P16,
University-sponsored program training focused on intellectual disabilities	P10
Showcase (1-day mini conference at research site)	P16
Training at previous institution	P13
No professional development/do not recall	P8

The first 3 professional development programs listed in Table 1 were offered

through the faculty center and have significant focus on building awareness around the

topic of disability and included training on the development of accessible course content.

The institute focused on accessibility was a 4-day, intensive program solely focused on

accessibility and Universal Design for Learning. This program included interaction with

students with disabilities who shared their experiences on the campus. Blackboard Ally

training consisted of two hours focused on the use of the Blackboard Ally tool and how to

make course documents accessible. The online course development bootcamp included 8

hours of accessibility training focused on building awareness and creating accessible

course content for online courses. The University-sponsored program training is a

program at the university focused on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities. The training was 90 minutes long and specifically focused on working with the program's students. The faculty showcase is a half-day mini conference, hosted by the faculty center at the university, with 50-minute breakout sessions covering a wide variety of topics focused on teaching and learning.

Participants were asked how accessible they felt their course were; 8 responded that their courses were "accessible", 5 responded "somewhat accessible", and 3 responded their courses were "not accessible" (Table 3).

Table 3
Perception of Accessibility in Course

Perception of accessibility in course	Participant
Accessible	P2, P3, P4, P6, P8, P10, P11, P15
Somewhat accessible	P1, P5, P7, P9, P12
Not very accessible	P13, P14, P16

Of the 13 participants who reported their courses were accessible or somewhat accessible, 12 had participated in training focused on building awareness around accessibility and creating accessible course content. One participant could not recall attending any professional development (P8). Two of the 3 participants who indicated their courses were not accessible reported attending at least one of the accessibility-focused trainings however, these individuals had also indicated that accessibility was not an issue due to the competitive nature of their programs they did not have students with disabilities (P14, P16). The third participant who indicated their courses were not accessible had not attended the professional development offered at the university but reported they had received professional development at a previous institution (P13).

Overall, most participants who attended professional development felt that it was helpful. Two participants felt initially "overwhelmed," but both expressed recognizing the importance and value in making their content accessible. One participant described not being in the "right frame of mind" during the training, but that Blackboard Ally was helpful in making them more aware of that they need to fix in a document. The more intensive the program was the more participants shared about their experience and impact participation had:

P6: Again, at the beginning, it was very overwhelming. But it really did, you know, break it down, step by step, I loved that we had the after-course check, I found that was really helpful in finding things …and actually, the putting in headings in everything in a document is something that I now teach in my […] class.

P10: I think that any time we are given tools to make our teaching better, I'm kind of a natural born educator. And so, for me, I'm very appreciative of those things. If there's pieces of a puzzle that can allow me to do my job in a more efficient way, and to make information more accessible to my students, that's a win-win.

P15: It was, without a doubt, the most beneficial professional development I have done in my career. It is not an understatement to say that it changed the way I approach teaching. Every faculty member should have an opportunity to participate.

P11: It was transformative to my teaching. I'm gonna be honest with you, I thought I was doing pretty well, in some ways I was.

Follow-up questions were asked of the 13 participants who indicated their courses were accessible or somewhat accessible. The first follow-up question inquired about the accessible course design strategies that they implemented in their courses. The responses indicated not just the course-specific strategies but also the resources that aided them in creating accessible course content. The top 3 course-specific strategies identified by participants were proper document structure in self-created documents (P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, P10, P11, P14, P15), flexibility with student work (P1, P2, P3, P4, P10, P12), and providing captioning or transcripts for videos (P5, P8, P9, P10, P15, P16). Other strategies discussed were providing image descriptions (P15, P16), making content available ahead of class (P15), and use of UDL (P11, P13). Two participants reported they included teaching about accessibility into the curriculum (P5, P6). One reported teaching students to use proper document structure, and requiring assignments being submitted with proper structure, to promote accessibility in their curriculum (P5).

Resources used to help them with implementing accessible course design included Blackboard Ally, third-party publisher platforms (specifically StreamLinEd), syllabus and course templates created by the faculty center, and human resources such as graduate/teaching assistants, staff in the faculty center, and the DRC. Blackboard Ally was the most mentioned resource with 8 of the 13 participants indicating its use (Table 4). Those participants credited Blackboard Ally with building an awareness around what needed to be fixed to improve the accessibility of the documents they created.

Table 4

Resources Utilized to Assist With Making Content Accessible

Resources	Responses
Ally	P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P9, P11, P15
Faculty center	P4, P5, P7, P9
Graduate or teaching assistants	P4, P7
StreamlinEd or publisher platforms	P6
Templates	P5
Working with Disability Resource Center	P5, P6

When asked if there were specific strategies that were more difficult or challenging providing transcripts or captioning of videos and remediating inaccessible 3rd party PDFs, such as those located in research journal databases were an accessible version was not available, were mentioned most frequently/often by participants (P1, P5, P6, P15, P16). Only one participant (P2) indicated that they personally remediated third-party PDF documents when Ally indicated it was not accessible and another participant mentioned they had a graduate assistant fix the PDF documents (P4). Participants that mentioned use of platforms, like Microsoft Stream or YouTube to host videos (which have auto captioning options), reported they had not checked the accuracy of the auto-generated transcript (P3, P4, P5, P10).

Theme 2: Motivating Factors

Participants were asked what motivated them to create accessible course content proactively. The most common motivational factor was experience with students or individuals with disabilities (Table 5). Fifteen of the 16 participants mentioned having experience with a student and/or an individual (friend or family) with a disability. P6

shared an experience they had with a visually impaired student prior to them participating in professional development and how those experiences together motivated them to be proactive:

> P6: I had a student who needed accessible materials, and I just flat out did not have them, I didn't even know where to start. I basically just made it up as we go. And I bless his heart, he was so sweet about it, but I am sure that he did not learn as much from the course as you could have if I had already had those things in place. And I will say that since then, not only have I used those materials for students with some kind of accessibility issues, but now they're just standard in my course.

Table 5
What Motivates You to Make Your Content Accessible?

What motivates you to make your content accessible?	Responses
Experience with students with disabilities	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14, P15, P16
Experience with individuals, friends, or family	P8, P12, P13, P15
Self-identify as having a disability	P8, P9
Policy or requirement	P5, P14
Student success	P1, P6, P12, P13, P16
Fairness to students and taxpayers	P4

Additional factors contributing to participants motivation to make content accessible included a focus on student success, policies, or requirements to make content accessible, and fairness to students and taxpayers. The participants that mentioned student success as a motivating factor most often described it in terms of how the strategies they implemented benefited all students:

P6: As we discussed in the training is so much of what will help a student that has an accessibility issue will actually help all students. And so, it's just become a standard practice of, you know, maybe there's not a particular student that I'm aiming for. But the wider I cast that net, the more likely you are to help those students.

P12: I mean, you can see the benefits, whether you're making it more accessible for one class of students or not, it benefits all of them, when you make it easier to deal with.

P1: Because I want all my students to succeed and I want to help them and if they need the extra help, I don't mind. Because, you know, honestly, it doesn't take that much more effort and time to do it. You just have to consciously think of, of, you know, what the student would need.

P13: My core goal is always student success. I feel like anyone could be successful in a class with the right resources. But you have to be mindful of all these things, right? I have to be mindful of their learning style, generation processes information different and learns different.

Theme 3: Barriers to Implementation of Accessible Course Design

When asked what the barriers to implementing accessible course design strategies, time or workload was overwhelming the most common barrier with it being identified by all 16 participants (Table 6).

Table 6

Barriers to Accessible Course Design Strategies

Barriers	Responses
Time or workload as barrier	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16,
Lack of knowledge or awareness	P1, P4, P6, P7, P13, P16
Lack of institutional support	P4, P5, P14
Lack of student communication	P4

P6, discussed how video captioning in their course is not "what it should be" and how the demands of the job often interfere with making sure all aspects of the course are accessible:

It's not difficult, but it's tedious. And so, it does take a lot of time. And being like going through the promotion and tenure process, it's one of the reasons why I haven't captioned either is just that man, that's a significant amount of time to devote to it. It's important, and it's worthwhile. But it's a lot of time when you're also saying like, hey, you better publish, or I'm not gonna have a job in a couple years, you know. Plus, you know, graduate students and the students that are coming into your office tend to take priority. And so, I think the biggest issue is, it's just the time aspect of getting it done.

P14: So, my feelings toward it are, of course, my whole career has been devoted to helping people with disabilities, so I totally get it and want to support access. The teacher portion is like, how in the world, like, from a time standpoint, do you, can you do it? So, it just, it's more of a, like, it's a time constraint issue across the board as far as what's not been adjusted.

P1: I think the biggest barrier to, for me to feel like I've totally been accessible to anybody who would want to use my course, is the time factor. It is I think, and because I have the resources, I know what to do. I am willing to do it is just okay, carve out something here.

P7: Some [strategies] are more time consuming than others. And so, I think that can generate some reluctance or you know, do I really want to go through and convert this 30-page document to something that's accessible? And the answer is probably not unless it's absolutely necessary.

The next most common barrier to implementing accessible course design practices was simply a lack of knowledge or awareness about either what the individual student with disability needed or how to make course materials more accessible. Participants who mentioned a lack of knowledge about making their content more accessible were specifically focused on inaccessible 3rd party PDF documents and/or video captioning. Three participants mentioned a lack of institutional support was a barrier:

P5: So, there's this piece where I know I mean, I need to make the content accessible. The process of doing it is a big hurdle. And there's not institutional support to make that happen unless I have a student with a diagnosed disability in my class. So, I find that that barrier is quite high. I feel like because there is a federal mandate to be accessible, the technology should be available to us provided by the University to meet that mandate.

P14: If that's really what they want us to do, we need some manpower to do it, because like, something's gotta give. I can, I can't, I can't do all things well, so if you want to do accessibility, well, when honestly, I don't have any students that need it. Okay. But then someone else is going to drop off.

P4: For the one thing, make it clear for professors that accessibility is a priority, make that clear at orientation, even before orientation, when professors are starting to think about syllabi, continue to make it clear that, you know, they don't have to do everything from day one, but that they should be working on it.

Theme 4: Resources Needed to Aid in Implementing Accessible Course Design Practices

When asked about resources faculty could be provided to support them in implementing accessible course design strategies, more training opportunities was the most discussed resource. P15, who had attended the institute expressed that it would be helpful for those who participated in the institute to come back together to share what strategies they implemented as a result of their participation. P10 expressed a similar interest, "I mean, there's great resources on campus, but I also think it's fun just to be able to get together with your co teachers on campus and just talk about things that worked or didn't work for us."

Table 7

Resources Needed

Resources	Responses
More training opportunities	P1, P2, P4, P8, P10, P12, P15, P16
Consultations	P1, P3, P8, P12,
Technology resources	P5, P12
Human resources (GA's, TAs, or work-study)	P9, P14, D16
Leadership priority	P4
Open lab	P7
DRC (resources created by office staff for students to be shared with faculty)	P5
Templates	P1

There were also several participants that mentioned the desire to have 1:1 consultations with accessibility experts to review the accessibility of their specific course and then provide tips to make it more accessible (Table 7). Other suggestions regarding resources needed were technology resources to assist with captioning or remediating inaccessible 3rd party PDF documents, having those accessible resources created by the DRC staff to be shared back with the faculty, access to more human resources like graduate assistants (GA's) or teaching assistants (TA's), open labs, templates, and prioritization of accessibility by the leadership at the university.

Summary

The literature supports that faculty, who have taught at least one student with a disability, may feel positively toward accessibility however, that does not always result in their content being accessible (Hsiao et al., 2019, Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019). Therefore, it was not surprising that all participants from this study reported that accessibility was important and beneficial for students. However, only half (8) of those

interviewed described their courses as accessible, 5 responded that they felt their courses were somewhat accessible and 3 participants reported their courses were not accessible. Four participants mentioned they felt that accessible course design practices were not difficult to implement however, in contrast five participants reported it was a lot of work or overwhelming and two felt accessibility was a non-issue due to the competitive nature of their programs. For those who indicated their courses were accessible or somewhat accessible, the most cited motivating factors for implementing accessible course design strategies were their experience with students with disabilities, experiences with other individuals like family and friends with disabilities, and student success. Participation in training may have also played a part in their implementation of accessible course design. Mezirow's transformational learning theory would suggest that their experiences with students with disabilities, other persons' with disabilities, and their participation in training may have contributed to a shift in their frame of reference, motivating them to be proactive toward accessibility and implementing accessible course design practices (Mezirow, 1997). In fact, 7 out of the 8 faculty who reported their courses were accessible had participated in the more intense programs like the Accessibility Institute or the Course Development Bootcamp. Those that previously attended professional development reported that the training experiences were helpful and that the use of Blackboard Ally increased their awareness of the potential issues in their content. Those that reported attending the Accessible Learning Institute reported it being transformative to their teaching, with one even stating they felt every faculty member should have the opportunity to participate.

For those that reported their courses as being accessible or somewhat accessible, a follow-up question was asked on what accessible course design strategies they were implementing. The top strategies were proper document structure in self-created documents, being flexible with student work, and providing captions or transcripts for videos. Other strategies included making materials available ahead of class time, and the integration of UDL. The resources they reported using to help them with improving accessibility in their classrooms included technology resources such as Blackboard Ally, third party publisher platforms, and course and document templates that were created by the faculty center. Blackboard Ally was the most mentioned resource. They also shared about the people resources they relied on for assistance. This included having graduate or teaching assistants to help with workload, staff in the faculty center and DRC.

When asked about barriers to implementing accessible course design, time or workload was identified by all participants as a barrier. The majority of faculty reported that they take the time to make sure any documents they create are accessible. However, when it comes to strategies such as captions for videos and remediating 3rd party PDF documents, they were less likely to spend time making those items accessible as they were more difficult or time-consuming to do. Research supports that faculty have competing demands on their time and are reluctant to implement strategies that require significant time and are more likely to implement strategies that are quick and easy to do (Hsiao et al., 2019; Moriña & Carballo, 2017). Lack of knowledge or awareness around issues of accessibility and how to create content to support students with disabilities was the second most discussed barrier followed by lack of institutional support.

Participants also shared what resources they felt were needed to support them in implementing accessible course design practices. The most reported need was training followed by consultations with experts who could help them improve accessibility in their courses. Two participants, both reporting their courses as accessible, expressed a desire to come together with other faculty to share what strategies they had implemented, share experiences, and discuss what is working and what isn't working. This is particularly interesting as it connects to Mezirow's (1997) transformational learning theory and the desire to create communities of people working together to effect change on a larger scale, within an organization. More "human" resources (such as graduate students and teaching assistants) and technology resources were also reported as a need.

With the results of the study, I feel it would be appropriate to produce a report that would be presented to the director the university's faculty center outlining where the strengths and weaknesses lie in faculty implementation of accessible course practices for students with disabilities. This report would outline what faculty have reported they are most likely to do to improve accessibility and what resources they feel they need in order to proactively make their course content accessible. This report would include recommendation for disability-focused training initiatives - much like the Accessible Learning Institute, the formation of a faculty learning community focused on improving accessibility in instruction, a proposal for a place on campus that faculty can go to gain access to technology their departments are unable or unwilling to purchase.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The goal of conducting this qualitative research study was to understand faculty experiences regarding the implementation of accessible course design practices at a public, 4-year university in the Midwest. The results provide a narrative that highlights how faculty feel about creating accessible course content, what they are doing to make their course content accessible, what resources they feel they need to aid them in creating accessible course content, and the barriers identified to being proactive in the creation of accessible course content. In this section, I introduce my project, a position paper (Appendix A) to be presented to the director of the faculty center, the center's staff, and the center's advisory council. The position paper will be used to deliver the results of this qualitative study and provide recommendations for resources and strategies to support faculty in the implementation of accessible course design strategies at the university. This section will also include justification for choosing a position paper and will include a review of the literature supporting the project recommendations.

Rationale

Faculty feel accessibility is important. However, it is a time-consuming effort to proactively create accessible course content, often competing with other university demands. While various training methods were identified by faculty participants, the goal of my research was not to evaluate a specific training. The goal was to understand the faculty experience in implementing accessible course design strategies. I wanted to gain insight into how faculty felt about creating accessible course content, what they were

willing to do or not do, and what barriers they felt prevented them from creating

accessible content. A need for training was reported by 50% of participants, which would

make the development of curriculum for professional development a possibility for a

project outcome, that was only one piece of the need identified by faculty in this study. A

need for people who could provide guidance or consultation on the overall accessibility

in their courses was also mentioned. The reason for selecting a position paper as my

project was because the needs identified by faculty were multi-faceted.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to support the choice in project genre and

to provide evidence of support in the literature for the recommendations advocated for in

the project. I used multiple databases provided though Walden University and my own

university such as ERIC, Academic Search Complete, and Ebscohost to locate peer-

reviewed sources published within the last 5 years. Keywords and phrases used were *use*

of position papers in qualitative research, use of white papers in qualitative research,

faculty professional development, faculty perception on students with disabilities,

experiences of students with disabilities in higher education, medical model versus social

model of disability, faculty learning communities, faculty learning communities,

transformational learning, and *change management in higher education.*

Guidelines and Goals of the Position Paper

A position paper is used to present evidence that aids in the development in the

understanding of a problem and to garner support for proposed solutions, and it is an

acceptable format for use in university or public policy setting (American Library

Association, 2007; UMSU Advocacy Service, 2018). Researchers seek to solve problems and advocate for solutions based on the findings. To advocate solutions, researchers must create a narrative in their writing that paints a persuasive picture of the data (Richardson, 1990). The problem identified by the study was that there was little known regarding the faculty experience in the implementation of accessible course design practices. My goal for this position paper is to educate university stakeholders about their faculty experiences in creating accessible course content and to guide stakeholders toward researched-based recommendations that work to improve these experiences. While all 16 faculty interviewed in this study reported that making content accessible proactively was something positive and beneficial for students, this did not translate to all 16 faculty implementing accessible course design strategies. It was discovered, in interviews with the faculty at the research site, what strategies they are willing to implement, what strategies they fail to implement, barriers to implementation, and what resources they feel they need to improve the accessibility in their courses.

The purpose behind a position paper is to influence change; therefore, it is critical to know one's audience as they should influence readability, structure, and the depth of the information included (Creswell, 2007; Newsom & Haynes, 2017). Because the audience for this position paper will be academic, it is important to provide extensive discussion on the methodology and current literature that supports the position and proposed solutions (Thody, 2006). Using Mezirow's (1997) transformational learning theory as a framework for the position paper guides the narrative for the research data and supporting literature to challenge assumptions stakeholders may have about the

faculty experience in implementing accessible course design strategies (Schnitzler, 2020). Using evidence gathered from the university's own faculty to challenging assumptions around the faculty experience in implementing accessible course design strategies, a reflective dialogue can be opened to foster discussion about potential solutions to improve the faculty experience (Schnitzler, 2020).

Included in the position paper is a discussion of the research problem, a summary of the research study findings, and recommendations on ways to address the problem based on the data from the study and current literature. The goal is to provide useful data about the faculty experience in implementing accessible course design strategies and to provide the following research-based, actionable recommendations to increase the number of faculty using accessible course design practices: 1) implementation of professional development focused on UDL and educational technologies to support creating accessible content, and 2) the formation of a faculty learning community, composed of those individuals who participated in the Accessible Learning Institute, to promote proactive accessibility among their peers.

A Continued Need for Professional Development

When it comes to what faculty need to improve the accessibility of their course material, the data overwhelmingly point to the need for more training opportunities (Aguirre et al., 2020; Carballo et al., 2021). Fifty percent of faculty interviewed as part of this study reported a need for more training. Student retention is an important issue in higher education with inclusive educational practices now being recognized as an indicator of quality (Collins et al., 2019). Research highlighting students with disabilities

learning experiences often report that faculty are the most identified barrier (Carballo et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2019). These students report negative attitudes toward disability as the main problem (Carballo et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2019). Another barrier is the lack of knowledge faculty have regarding educational technologies that could be used to improve access for students with disabilities (Perera-Rodríguez & Moriña Díez, 2019). One factor contributing to the negative attitude faculty may have about students with disabilities is in the diagnostic label of a disability. While the intention is to open the door to supports for the learner, many in higher education rely on a medical model definition which implies that there is something wrong with the person (Collins et al., 2019; MacLeod et al., 2018). Unfortunately, many faculty members still view disability though a medical model lens (Carballo et al., 2021; Makwembere, 2021; Morgado & Sánchez-Díaz, 2023). There also a lack of knowledge on the legal responsibilities faculty have in creating a more inclusive learning environment (Carballo et al., 2021; Makwembere, 2021). Participation in professional development opportunities that provide opportunity for faculty to learn from the perspectives of students with disabilities as well as their legal obligation to for creating inclusive environments has been shown to improve faculty perspectives about learners with disabilities, contributing to a shift toward a social model perspective and an increase in access to accessible course content (Aguirre et al., 2020; Carballo et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2019; Guilbaud et al., 2021; Valle-Flórez et al., 2021).

It is not enough to just create the shift in faculty perspective. As demonstrated in this study, even when faculty feel accessibility is important, it does not always result in

the adoption of accessible course design practices. The faculty in this study identified lack of knowledge on how to make content accessible as a barrier, second to workload/lack of time. While faculty have a legal responsibility for creating accessible content, they lack the knowledge about inclusive teaching strategies such as UDL or the digital tools that can be used to improve the accessibility of course content (Perera-Rodríguez & Moriña Díez, 2019; Sanderson et al., 2022).

Training in educational technology cannot be conducted in a vacuum. Technology training that does not include ways to use it inclusively and thoughtfully could potentially make the problem of access worse for students with disabilities (Perera-Rodríguez & Moriña Díez, 2019). Therefore, professional development needs to focus on the relationship between educational technologies and inclusive teaching strategies. Lack of time was also a barrier for faculty in implementing accessible course design practices. Traditional professional development requires faculty to sign up and attend training in a specific location (Kawas et al., 2019). Therefore, it would be necessary for the faculty center to consider faculty time and workload as a factor when developing training and aim to deliver professional development in a more scaled-down, flexible format (Kawas et al., 2019).

Faculty Community of Practice

One form of professional development that could be used to promote proactive accessible course design is through the formation of a community of practice. Wenger defined a community of practice as "a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in

this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, 2002, "What is a Community of Practice," para. 1). The formation of a faculty community of practice is a type of professional development that promotes educational change. FLCs are a type of CoP focused on topics or issues related to teaching and learning and are often formed organically as a way to exchange ideas and share knowledge (Wenger et al., 2002). The goals of FLCs are to identify problems, to research and share best practices, to be innovative, and to create job aids to promote best practices (Bond & Lockee, 2018). FLCs foster a climate that normalizes the challenges of teaching where faculty can share challenges and successes and can reach out for solutions and strategies (Bulancea et al., 2021; Kandakatla, 2021). As the sense of community among participants increases, a culture emerges where faculty feel comfortable receiving and providing constructive feedback in their commitment to their shared vision (Dancy et al., 2019; Kandakatla, 2021). Faculty who have participated in FLCs report that the experience influenced change in their teaching practice, increased their ability to be a reflective teacher, and increased their confidence and knowledge (Dancy et al., 2019). The participants of this study identified the desire for consultations with individuals who could help them identify accessibility issues in their courses. Based on the characteristics, forming an FLC focused on improving accessibility would make an appropriate strategy. The participants in the FLC could foster the adoption of inclusive instructional strategies among their peers as they could provide guidance and mentorship for those looking to improve their course materials for students with disabilities.

Project Timeline

The presentation to the director of the faculty center at the research site is anticipated for early December 2023. I will provide the position paper to the director ahead of a scheduled meeting, where I will meet with the director 1:1 to facilitate a conversation about the experiences of faculty in implementing accessible course design strategies and the proposed solutions for improving their experience. Upon the director's approval, I will then present my findings and recommendations to the center's staff at the following bi-weekly staff meeting. I will distribute a copy of the report to the staff so they will have time to read and digest the information ahead of the meeting to help facilitate the conversation and make best use of time. These individuals, which include an instructional designer and the coordinator for faculty development, will be valuable resources in the development and facilitation of any professional development programs or resources developed as a result of the proposed recommendations.

Traditionally, change initiatives within a university is a top-down approach which can contribute to some in the university community feeling disregarded by the process (Vlachopoulos, 2021). Using a faculty learning community is supported by the Kotter model for change management as this model promotes engaging a "coalition" of faculty as change agents who are better positioned among their peers to communicate the vision and value in an initiative (Vlachopoulos, 2021). One anticipated challenge or barrier to the recommendations proposed in the project is time. University initiatives that require the center's focus that are already underway could compete with the available time staff have to devote to developing workshops or resources. Fortunately, the formation of an

FLC is not labor intensive and can be done quickly. Two of the faculty interviewed who had participated in the Accessible Learning Institute expressed an interest in reuniting with their peers from the institute; therefore, it was decided past participants in the Accessible Learning Institute would make an ideal target group for this FLC. My role would be to coordinate the formation of the FLC and to facilitate the first meeting to help identify the group's goal and facilitate conversation on how to leverage the FLC to increase faculty knowledge around accessible course design strategies. I anticipate this FLC to start in the spring 2024 semester. It is also recommended that the faculty center reinstate the offering of the Blackboard Ally training beginning with the Fall of 2024. This would be quick to implement as this training had already been developed and offered previously.

Another potential challenge for this project is ensuring access to the technology that faculty need to improve the accessibility of their courses. A proposed solution will be the creation of a lab to house various technologies that academic departments might not normally provide to their faculty. With the proposed solution, I have identified two barriers: money and space. It would be my role to convince the director to allocate funds and space for the purchase of computers and the needed software. The center has space that is currently not being used and has been storing equipment and furniture from a recording studio that is no longer in operation. The equipment being stored is outdated and there has been discussion about sending the equipment to "surplus" to be disposed of. There are already tables and chairs in the existing space, and it would be an ideal location for a small computer lab for faculty. The advantage of this location is in its proximity to

my office and the other instructional designer's office in the center. The space is directly across the hall from my office, while the other instructional designer's office is next door. This would allow easy access to monitor and assist faculty using the lab. Since budgets have already been submitted for the 23-24 fiscal year, the earliest implementation, if approved, would be fall 2024.

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Project Evaluation Plan

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The goal of the project evaluation plan is to not repeat the same course of action that led to the research study's problem. Therefore, it will be important to collect meaningful data from faculty about their experiences in improving the accessibility of their courses. The success of the study's resulting position paper will initially be measured by the adoption and implementation of the recommendations. Once implemented, further success can be measured by collecting feedback on the strategies that were implemented to improve faculty experience in creating accessible course content. This will include the use of focus groups with the faculty learning community. Wenger (2002) provided a framework for evaluating FLCs. The framework includes assessing the quality and quantity of the engagement, the value faculty have placed on their level of engagement, the applied value of engagement, the impact the FLC has had on participant success, and the FLCs effect on institutional change. I feel the best way to capture this data is through interviews with faculty regarding their participation and the gathering of any physical evidence that was created (job aides, handouts, flyers, etc.) (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023).

There will also be collection of pre and post survey data from faculty who participate in the Blackboard Ally training provided by the faculty center. The faculty center staff involved in the development and delivery of professional development programs will work together to develop the survey instruments based on the goals of the program. These stakeholders can provide valuable insights on what information needs to be collected to ensure the usefulness of the data to future programming and institutional change (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023). Finally, institutional data will be gathered using Blackboard Ally about the accessibility of content uploaded to the university's LMS to look for trends in content accessibility.

Project Implications for Social Change

The university includes discussion on inclusivity and providing individualized support in its long-range plan. The recommendations made in the position paper provide research-based solutions that can be used to improve faculty's ability to contribute to the long-range plan. In listening to the experiences of faculty in the implementation of accessible course design practices, this study has identified motivations and barriers to faculty developing accessible course content. By identifying and addressing barriers faculty will be empowered to facilitate positive social change at the university by implementing accessible course design practices that improve access to course materials for students with disabilities. The resulting position paper recommends strategies to reduce those barriers. Providing more targeted training and access to digital tools for faculty is important; however, the use of a FLC will have the largest impact toward creating change within the campus culture. By utilizing FLCs to create a grass-roots

movement, we can build communities for faculty to feel comfortable in experimenting with new instructional strategies and digital technologies that will improve access for all students (Bulancea et al., 2021). Communities of practice, like the proposed faculty learning community, have shown to be successful in fostering faculty buy-in even with complex change initiatives such as improving accessibility (Hakkola et al., 2021; Sidman-Taveau & Hoffman, 2019). The FLC could serve as a researched-based model that can be implemented across the university, with a variety of audiences, to engage the campus community in university initiatives working to promote positive social change to improve campus culture.

Conclusion

Section three describes how the use of a position paper is an appropriate genre to report the results of this basic qualitative study. The position paper highlights the faculty experience in implementing accessible course design strategies. The research-based recommendations proposed in the position paper aim to address the barriers identified by the faculty participants with a goal of increasing the number of faculty implementing accessible course design strategies to improve access for students with disabilities.

In the final section the focus will be on reflection. I will reflect on the project's strengths and limitations, my growth as a scholar, and the importance of the work. I will also reflect on the potential impact this research has on positive social change and suggest directions for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

Faculty play a role in the success and retention of students with disabilities. Therefore, it is important that various supports are in place for faculty to help them understand their role in the creation of inclusive learning environments (Hsiao et al., 2019). Little is known regarding faculty experiences implementing accessible course design practices at a public, 4-year university in the Midwest. I interviewed 16 faculty in order to answer the question "What are faculty experiences while implementing accessible course design practices to improve access for students with disabilities?" Four themes emerged from the data collected through the 1:1 interviews: 1) Faculty participants' initial feelings toward the implementation of accessible course design practices, 2) Motivating factors to implement accessible course design practices, 3) Barriers to implementation of accessible course design, and 4) What resources faculty felt they needed to aid them in implementing accessible course design practices. Since my study was not evaluative in nature but rather about understanding faculty experience, it was decided to produce a position paper as my final project. This section will include a discussion of the project's strengths and limitations, alternative approaches to address the problem, a reflection on the scholarship and importance of the work and directions for future research.

Project Strengths, Limitations, and Recommendation for Alternative Approaches

In the development of content to support learning in their courses, there is a legal expectation that the content they develop is to be accessible to all students. The faculty

center did not have data exploring faculty experience in the implementation of accessible course design strategies; therefore, the purpose of this study was to address this gap and explore faculty experiences in the implementation of accessible course design strategies.

While what I learned from the participants was echoed in the current literature, this study is limited by the small sample size. I interviewed 16 faculty at the local university; however, it is a very small sample size compared to the total number of faculty at university, and therefore it may not be a true representation. One way to address this limitation would be to expand the length of the study in an attempt to increase participation among the broader faculty audience. Instead of 1:1 interviews, focus groups could be used. It might also be beneficial to create a questionnaire, based on the original study's interview protocol, to send to faculty. This could capture data from participants who are not interested or comfortable in a 1:1 interview. The data gathered could then be triangulated with the original interviews as a way to further strengthen the study.

A strength of this study is that it incorporated faculty voices representing each college across the local university who are tasked with the development of content for the courses they teach. By exploring faculty experience, one gains an understanding of their motivation to implement certain accessible course design strategies and what barriers are preventing the implementation of others. Another strength of the study is that it brought an awareness around the continued need for ongoing faculty support and advocacy around accessibility.

An alternative approach to the research problem would have been to evaluate what accessible course design strategies were being implemented or not implemented by faculty by exploring the data from Blackboard Ally. This would provide concrete evidence on specific strategies implemented and would be an indicator of the level of adoption of accessible course design across the university. This approach could also explore the relationship between the level of accessibility in a course and faculty use of the built-in tutorials that Blackboard Ally provides to assist in making content accessible. Another approach would be to explore the impact on students who are enrolled in courses where faculty implement accessible design practices compared to courses where faculty are not implementing accessible course design practices. This could contribute to the current literature by exploring what students identify as the most impactful accessible course design strategies.

Scholarship

The dissertation was my first experience with research using actual methodologies to guide my path. While I have created pre and post surveys to gather data from participants of a professional development program, the only analysis on the data gathered was to look at overall satisfaction. I now have experience in what it is like to go through an IRB process and what elements need to be considered and put in place in order to protect the privacy of the participants. I gained experience creating an interview protocol that is aligned with my problem and research question and used the protocol with each participant to ensure consistency. Once the data were collected, I became familiar with and used Saldana's (2016) work on qualitative data analysis to guide me

through multiple coding cycles, resulting in a thematic analysis of the data collected through 1:1 interviews. I used the analysis of my data and current literature to write a policy paper that shared the faculty experience in implementing accessible course design practices and to make recommendations for improving the experience for faculty at the local university.

In my educational journey, I have always chosen a practitioner pathway. This is why I pursued an Ed.D. versus a Ph.D. As an instructional designer, I am often involved in identifying "problems" in practice and finding solutions. Walden University has a commitment to grow scholar-practitioners who will integrate research within their practices to drive positive social impact (Walden University, 2023). My doctoral journey has contributed significantly to my professional growth. I have gained real-world experience in conducting qualitative research. I learned the importance of alignment and conceptual frameworks and their impact on the research process and overall quality in a study.

Writing is an iterative process and there is an incredible reflection process that occurs in writing a dissertation. As a result of this experience, I find myself now asking the question, "who thinks this is a problem other than myself" and looking to the current literature when I feel there is a potential problem in practice. I also do not just rush to solve but rather explore how various adult learning theories and previous research might guide the solutions to identified problems. This strengthens what I do on a daily basis because the solutions I present, whether it be training or creation of a resource, is

supported in theory and the current literature, strengthening the quality of the work I produce.

Importance of the Work

This study contributes to the literature by providing insights on faculty experience in the implementation of accessible course design, how they felt about accessibility, what strategies they adopted or did not adopt, barriers to accessible course design, and what resources they felt they needed. This information provided in this study has impact for positive social change at the local university by keying in on the intrinsic motivation of faculty who are implementing accessible course design practices and listening to the identified needs of those tasked with the job of creating accessible content. Understanding motivation could provide a pathway into tapping into the intrinsic motivation of faculty who are not implementing accessible course design practices and working to improve their skills. This would be especially valuable for those individuals who are responsible for the creation of professional development programs or leading positive social change initiatives on their campuses.

Directions for Future Research

Future research might explicitly explore implementation of accessible course design with faculty teaching in health professions. Two participants from this study teaching in the health professions reported feeling that accessibility was not an issue for them due to the competitive nature of their courses. Statistically, one in four adults in the United States have some type of disability, so it is likely that there are students in these programs who need academic accommodations or benefit from accessible course design

strategies (CDC, 2023). These programs are responsible for training future healthcare practitioners. Alternatively, it would be interesting to explore accessibility in healthcare programs from the student perspective. Does the competitive nature of the programs deter them from utilizing academic accommodations? Another suggestion for future research would be to explore the long-term impact of faculty learning communities focused on improving accessibility and inclusive teaching in higher education.

Conclusion

In Section 4, I reflected on the study's project strengths, limitations, alternative directions, and recommendations for future study. I also discussed how participating in this research process impacted me as a scholar and professional in higher education. While there are many factors that impact student success, interaction with faculty is one of the most important. Faculty at the local university are responsible for the development and curation of resources to teach the courses in their discipline and they are legally responsible for the accessibility of the content they create/use. Understanding the faculty experience in implementing accessible course design practices is an essential step in understanding where training efforts need to be focused. Taking on campus initiatives to improve accessibility in the classroom is not as simple as just providing technical training on document accessibility. Faculty do not know what they do not know, and unless a training is mandated, may choose not to participate because they do not see the immediate value. There may also be a misunderstanding about the faculty role in providing accessible content to their learners or that the steps to make content accessible

are too time consuming, both a barrier to implementation. It is essential to understand

individual perspectives and experiences if educators are to create opportunity for change.

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Appendix A: The Project

Understanding Faculty Experiences in Implementing Accessible Course Design Strategies

Introduction

To gain widespread adoption of faculty implementing accessible course design, we must first understand their experience.

Despite the need and legal requirement to implement accessible course design practices, there is still a lack of adoption among faculty in the creation of accessible content, leaving higher education institutions vulnerable to civil rights complaints or lawsuits (Coleman & Berge, 2018; Stevens et al., 2018). In 2019, the local university integrated Blackboard Ally into their learning management system (LMS) to promote course accessibility. Blackboard Ally checks the accessibility of files uploaded to the LMS and provides feedback on the level of accessibility and guidance to faculty on how the file can be improved (Blackboard, Inc., 2021). While there has been some minor improvement in the university's overall accessibility score, 53% of all files uploaded to the university's LMS for the 2020-2021 academic year are reported as "not accessible" (University's institutional Ally report, 2021). The top issues, according to the Ally report, are lack of image descriptions, lack of headings in documents, and poorly scanned PDFs.

The university provided professional development opportunities focused on accessible course design practices. However, there is a lack of data on the impact of those programs. No data was collected exploring faculty experience in the implementation of accessible course design strategies introduced through the programs. Programming decisions made for future professional development offerings and decisions for

improving programs are dependent upon the feedback gathered through participant

evaluations (Okul & Nyonje, 2020). Since there was no subsequent follow-up data

collected, little is known regarding faculty experiences regarding the implementation of

accessible course design practices. This position paper presents the findings from a

qualitative research study that explored faculty experiences while implementing

accessible course design practices to improve academic access for students with

disabilities. Data were gathered from 1:1 interviews with faculty to explore their

experience with implementing accessible course design practices. Recommendations for

addressing the needs identified by faculty are also presented.

About the Research

One-on-one interviews were conducted between May 3, 2022 – June 2, 2022,

with the purpose understanding faculty experiences regarding the implementation of

accessible course design practices at the university. The target population was current

university faculty who had participated in some form of professional development with

the faculty center. A purposeful sampling of faculty was used to ensure representation

from each college (Figure A1). A total of 16 faculty participated in the interviews.

Participants had a range in teaching experience from early career to seasoned instructors

with more than 20 years' experience (Figure A2).

Figure A1

Breakdown of Academic Programs
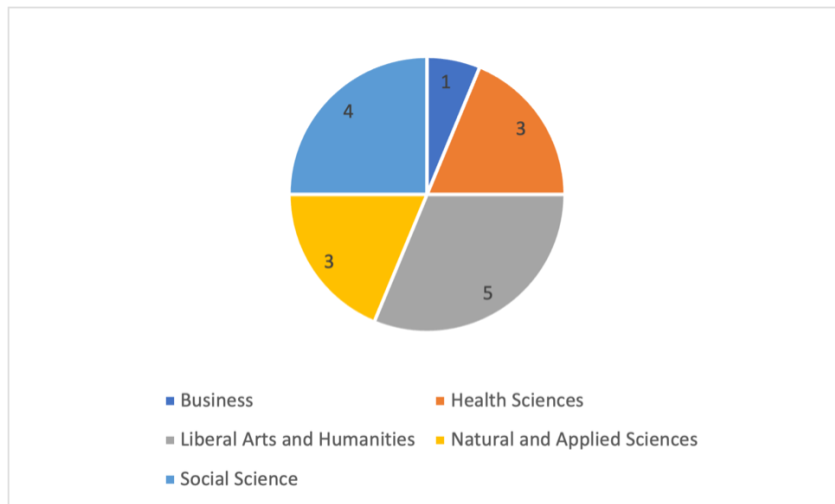
Figure A2

Years of Teaching Experience
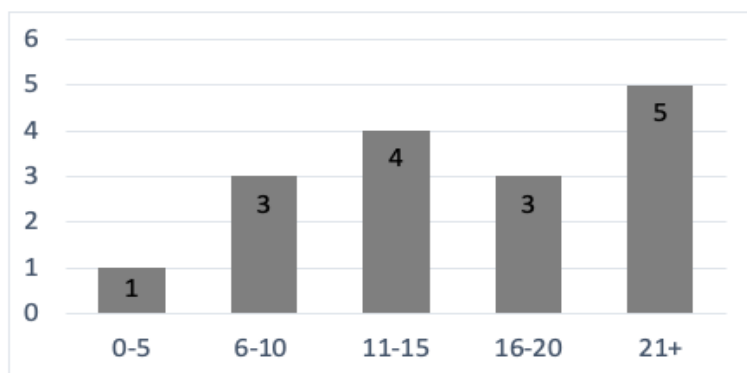
Saldana's work on qualitative methods was used as a framework for the data analysis process, using first and second cycle coding approaches to enhance the depth of study findings (Saldana, 2016). The first seven interviews were utilized in the development of a codebook. In Vivo and open coding was utilized during the first cycle

of coding. These codes were then sub coded into preliminary categories used in the second cycle of coding. During the second cycle of coding, which included all 16 interviews, descriptive analysis was used to identify themes and create a big picture representation of the data. Finally, a thematic analysis of the data was conducted in which four themes emerged from the interview data; 1) Initial feelings toward the implementation of accessible course design practices, 2) Motivating factors to implement accessible course design practices, 3) Barriers to implementation of accessible course design, and 4) What resources faculty felt they needed to aid them in implementing accessible course design practices.

Research Findings

Theme 1: Initial Feelings on Implementation of Accessible Course Design Practices

When asked how they felt about making their courses accessible proactively, all participants expressed this was something positive and beneficial to students. Five participants also described making content accessible as "a lot of work." One participant went on to express that while faculty really do want to do "everything possible," they felt there "isn't enough support for making content accessible." They described making course content as "extra work being put on faculty and that students should communicate their needs better." In contrast, 4 participants reported that it was not difficult to implement accessible course design practices. Two participants, both teaching in the Health Sciences, while describing positive feelings toward content being made accessible, indicated it was a "non-issue" for their departments because their programs were very competitive, and they did not have students who needed academic

accommodations. One participant explained further, "we have not had students with obvious disabilities as far as like visual impairments or hearing impairments, or any accommodations, you know, not to where the content actually had to be adjusted."

Participants were asked how accessible they felt their course were; eight responded that their courses were "accessible," five responded "somewhat accessible," and three responded their courses were "not accessible" (Figure A3).

Figure A2

Perception of Accessibility in Course
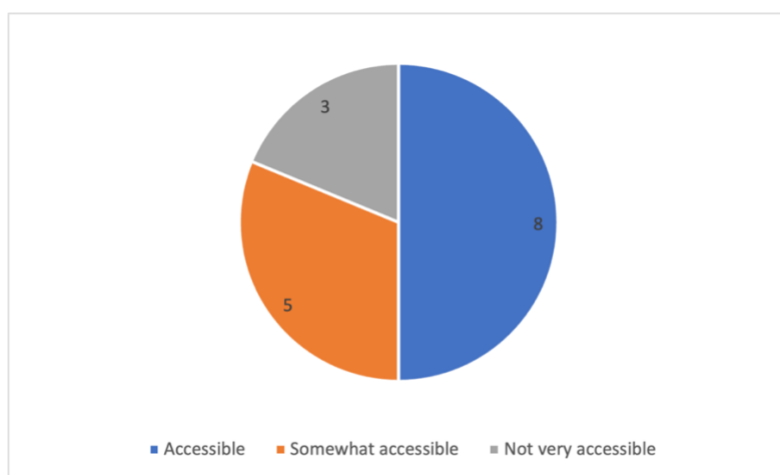
Of the 13 participants who reported their courses were accessible or somewhat accessible, 12 had participated in training focused on building awareness around accessibility and creating accessible course content. One participant could not recall attending any professional development. Two of the three participants who indicated their courses were not accessible reported attending at least one of the accessibility-focused trainings; however, these individuals had also indicated that accessibility was not an issue

due to the competitive nature of their programs they did not have students with disabilities. The third participant who indicated their courses were not accessible had not attended the professional development offered at the university but reported they had received professional development at a previous institution. Overall, most participants who attended professional development felt that it was helpful. Two participants felt initially "overwhelmed," but both expressed recognizing the importance and value in making their content accessible. One participant described not being in the "right frame of mind" during the training, but that Blackboard Ally was helpful in making them more aware of that they need to fix in a document. The more intensive the program was the more participants shared about their experience and impact of participation. One participant, who attended the Accessible Learning Institute (the most intensive of the professional development programs) commented:

It was, without a doubt, the most beneficial professional development I have done in my career. It is not an understatement to say that it changed the way I approach teaching. Every faculty member should have an opportunity to participate.

Follow-up questions were asked of the 13 participants who indicated their courses were accessible or somewhat accessible. The first follow-up question inquired about the accessible course design strategies that they implemented in their courses. The responses indicated not just the course-specific strategies but also provided insight on the resources that aided them in creating accessible course content. The top three course-specific strategies identified by participants were proper document structure in self-created

documents, flexibility with student work, and providing captioning or transcripts for videos. Other strategies discussed were providing image descriptions, making content available ahead of class, and use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Two participants reported they included teaching about accessibility into the curriculum with one describing this as teaching students to use proper document structure, and requiring assignments being submitted with proper structure, to promote accessibility in their curriculum. Blackboard Ally was the most mentioned resource for aiding in creating accessible course content. The university's faculty center was the second most mentioned resource by participants.

Figure A4

Resources Utilized to Assist With Making Content Accessible
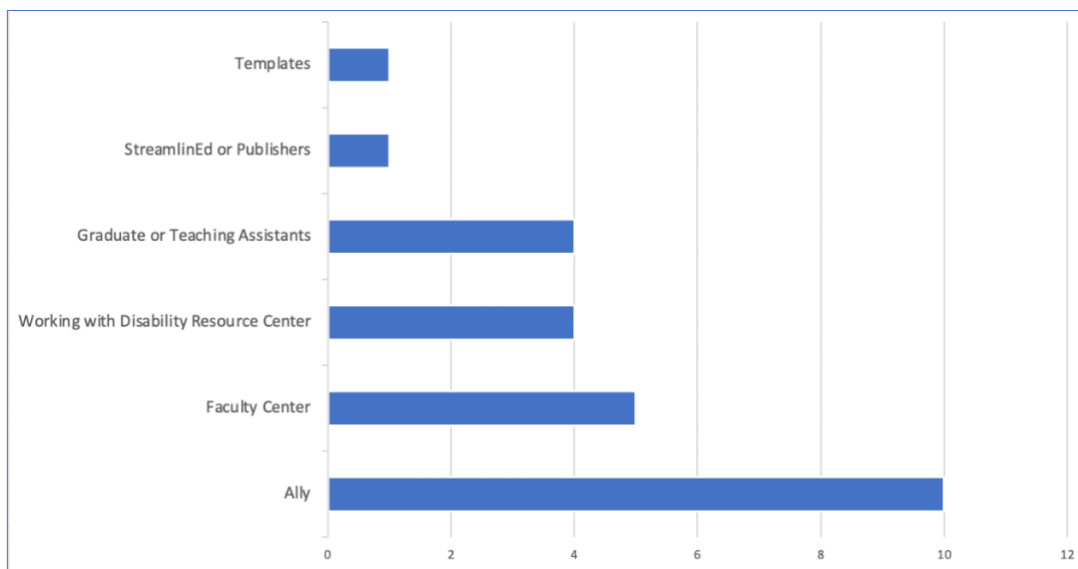
When asked if there were specific strategies that were more difficult or challenging providing transcripts or captioning of videos and remediating inaccessible 3rd party PDFs, such as those located in research journal databases where an accessible

version was not available, were mentioned most frequently/often by participants. Only

one participant indicated that they personally remediated third-party PDF documents

when Ally indicated it was not accessible and another participant mentioned they had a

graduate assistant fix the PDF documents. Participants that mentioned use of platforms,

like Microsoft Stream or YouTube to host videos (which have auto captioning options),

reported they had not checked the accuracy of the auto-generated transcript.

Theme 2: Motivating Factors

The most mentioned factor in motivating participants to create accessible content

proactively was personal experience with students or individuals with disabilities. One

participated shared an experience they had with a visually impaired student and how that

experience motivated them to be proactive:

> *I had a student who needed accessible materials, and I just flat out did
> not have them, I didn't even know where to start. I basically just made it
> up as we go. And I bless his heart, he was so sweet about it, but I am
> sure that he did not learn as much from the course as you could have if
> I had already had those things in place. And I will say that since then,
> not only have I used those materials for students with some kind of
> accessibility issues, but now they're just standard in my course.*

Additional factors contributing to participants motivation to make content accessible

included a focus on student success, policies, or requirements to make content accessible,

and fairness to students and taxpayers. The participants that mentioned student success as

a motivating factor most often described it in terms of how the strategies, they

implemented benefited all students:

As we discussed in the training is so much of what will help a student that has an accessibility issue will actually help all students. And so, it's just become a standard practice of, you know, maybe there's not a particular student that I'm aiming for. But the wider I cast that net, the more likely you are to help those students.

I mean, you can see the benefits, whether you're making it more accessible for one class of students or not, it benefits all of them, when you make it easier to deal with.

Because I want all my students to succeed and I want to help them and if they need the extra help, I don't mind. Because, you know, honestly, it doesn't take that much more effort and time to do it. You just have to consciously think of, of, you know, what the student would need.

Theme 3: Barriers to Implementation of Accessible Course Design

Time or workload was overwhelming the most common barrier with it being identified by all 16 participants. One participant discussed how captioning in their course was not "what it should be" and how the demands of the job often interfere with making sure all aspects of the course were accessible.

It's not difficult, but it's tedious. And so, it does take a lot of time. And being like going through the promotion and tenure process, it's one of the reasons why I haven't captioned either is just that man, that's a significant amount of time to devote to it. It's important, and it's worthwhile. But it's a lot of time when you're also saying like, hey, you better publish, or I'm not gonna have a job in a couple years, you know. Plus, you know, graduate students and the students that are coming into your office tend to take priority. And so, I think the biggest issue is, it's just the time aspect of getting it done.

The second most reported barrier was a lack of knowledge or awareness around how to create accessible course content.

Figure A5

Barriers to Accessible Course Design Strategies
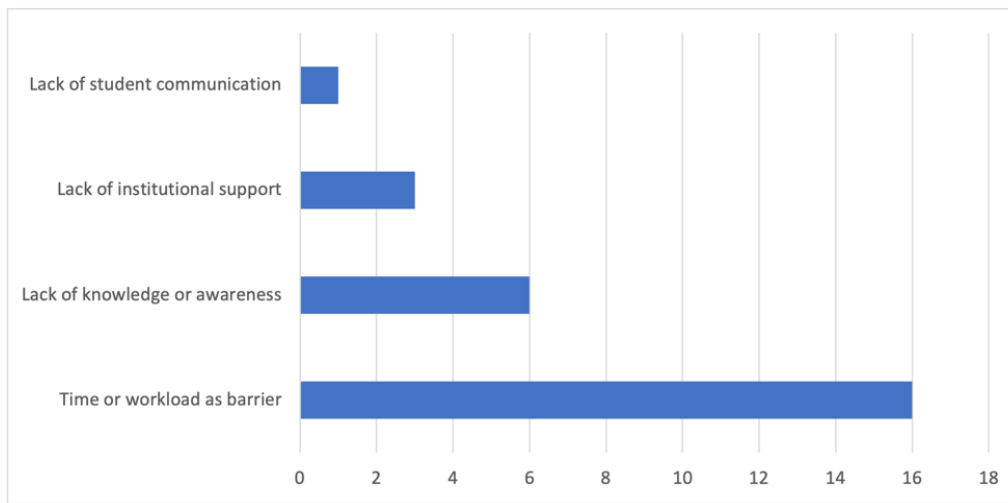
Three participants mentioned a lack of institutional support was a barrier:

So, there's this piece where I know I mean, I need to make the content accessible. The process of doing it is a big hurdle. And there's not institutional support to make that happen unless I have a student with a diagnosed disability in my class. So, I find that that barrier is quite high. I feel like because there is a federal mandate to be accessible, the technology should be available to us provided by the University to meet that mandate.

If that's really what they want us to do, we need some manpower to do it, because like, something's gotta give. I can, I can't, I can't do all things well, so if you want to do accessibility, well, when honestly, I don't have any students that need it. Okay. But then someone else is going to drop off.

For the one thing, make it clear for professors that accessibility is a priority, make that clear at orientation, even before orientation, when professors are starting to think about syllabi, continue to make it clear

that, you know, they don't have to do everything from day one, but that
they should be working on it.

Theme 4: Resources Needed to Aid in Implementing Accessible Course Design Practices

When asked about resources faculty could be provided to support them in

implementing accessible course design strategies, more training opportunities was the

most discussed resource. One participant, who had attended the Accessible Learning

Institute expressed interest in bringing that group back together to share what strategies

they implemented since participating in the institute. A second person, having also

participated in the institute echoed a similar interest: "I mean, there's great resources on

campus, but I also think it's fun just to be able to get together with your co teachers on

campus and just talk about things that worked or didn't work for us." There were also

several participants that mentioned the desire to have 1:1 consultations with accessibility

experts to review the accessibility of their specific course and then provide tips to make it

more accessible. Other suggestions regarding resources needed were technology

resources to assist with captioning or remediating inaccessible 3rd party PDF documents,

having those accessible resources created by the DRC staff to be shared back with the

faculty, access to more human resources like graduate assistants (GA's) or teaching

assistants (TA's), open labs, templates, and prioritization of accessibility by the

leadership at the university.

Recommendations

The literature supports that faculty, who have taught at least one student with a

disability, may feel positively toward accessibility however, that does not always result in

their content being accessible (Hsiao et al., 2019, Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019). While all 16-faculty interviewed in this study reported that making content accessible proactively was something positive and beneficial for students this did not translate to all 16-faculty implementing accessible course design strategies. In this section I outline the following three recommendations for supporting faculty in the implementation of accessible course design strategies at the university:

- Recommendation 1: The faculty center reinstates the offering of the Blackboard Ally training beginning with the fall of 2024.

- Recommendation 2: The faculty center engages with past participants of the Accessible Learning Institute in the formation of a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) focused on implementing accessible course design, to begin during the spring 2024 semester.

- Recommendation 3: The creation of a lab to house various technologies, used in the creation or remediation of accessible course materials, to improve access for faculty.

A Continued Need for Professional Development

When it comes to what faculty need to improve the accessibility of their course material the data overwhelmingly points to the need for more training opportunities (Aguirre et al., 2020; Carballo et al., 2021). Fifty percent of faculty interviewed as part of this study reported a need for more training. Student retention is an important issue in higher education with inclusive educational practices now being recognized as an indicator of quality (Collins et al., 2019). Research highlighting students with disabilities

learning experiences often report that faculty are the most identified barrier (Carballo et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2019). These students report negative attitudes toward disability as the main problem (Carballo et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2019). Another barrier is the lack of knowledge faculty have regarding educational technologies that could be used to improve access for students with disabilities (Perera-Rodríguez & Moriña Díez, 2019). One factor contributing to the negative attitude faculty may have about students with disabilities is in the diagnostic label of a disability. While the intention is to open the door to supports for the learner, many in higher education rely on a medical model definition which implies that there is something wrong with the person (Collins et al., 2019; MacLeod et al., 2018). Unfortunately, many faculty members still view disability though a medical model lens (Carballo et al., 2021; Makwembere, 2021; Morgado & Sánchez-Díaz, 2023). There also a lack of knowledge on the legal responsibilities faculty have in creating a more inclusive learning environment (Carballo et al., 2021; Makwembere, 2021). Participation in professional development opportunities, that provide opportunity for faculty to learn from the perspectives of students with disabilities as well as their legal obligation to for creating inclusive environments, has been shown to improve faculty perspectives about learners with disabilities, contributing to a shift toward a social model perspective, and an increase in access to accessible course content (Aguirre et al., 2020; Carballo et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2019; Guilbaud et al., 2021; Valle-Flórez et al., 2021).

It is not enough to just create the shift in faculty perspective. As the study demonstrates, even when faculty feel accessibility is important, it doesn't always result in

the adoption of accessible course design practices. The faculty in this study identified lack of knowledge on how to make content accessible as a barrier, second to workload/lack of time. While faculty have a legal responsibility for creating accessible content they lack the knowledge about inclusive teaching strategies such as Universal Design for Learning or the digital tools that can be utilized to improve the accessibility of course content (Perera-Rodríguez & Moriña Díez, 2019; Sanderson et al., 2022).

Training on educational technology cannot be conducted in a vacuum. Technology training that doesn't include ways to use it inclusively and thoughtfully could potentially make the problem of access worse for students with disabilities (Perera-Rodríguez & Moriña Díez, 2019). Therefore, professional development needs to focus on the relationship between educational technologies and inclusive teaching strategies. Lack of time was also a barrier for faculty in implementing accessible course design practices. Traditional professional development requires faculty to sign up and attend training in a specific location (Kawas et al., 2019). Therefore, it would be necessary for the faculty center to consider faculty time and workload as a factor when developing training and aim to deliver professional development in a more scaled-down, flexible format (Kawas et al., 2019). It is recommended that the faculty center reinstate the offering of the Blackboard Ally training beginning with the Fall of 2024. This would be quick to implement as this training had already been developed and offered previously.

Faculty Community of Practice

Another form of professional development that could be used to promote proactive accessible course design is through the formation of a community of practice.

Wenger defined a community of practice as "a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, 2002, "What is a Community of Practice," para. 1). The formation of a faculty community of practice is a type of professional development that promotes educational change. FLCs are a type of CoP focused on topics or issues related to teaching and learning and are often formed organically as a way to exchange ideas and share knowledge (Wenger et al., 2002). The goals of FLCs are to identify problems, to research and share best practices, to be innovative, and to create job aids to promote best practices (Bond & Lockee, 2018). FLCs foster a climate that normalizes the challenges of teaching; where faculty can share challenges and successes and can reach out for solutions and strategies (Bulancea et al., 2021; Kandakatla, 2021). As the sense of community among participants increases, a culture emerges where faculty feel comfortable receiving and providing constructive feedback in their commitment to their shared vision (Dancy et al., 2019; Kandakatla, 2021). Faculty who have participated in FLCs report that the experience influenced change in their teaching practice, increased their ability to be a reflective teacher, and increased their confidence and knowledge (Dancy et al., 2019). The participants of this study identified the desire for consultations with individuals who could help them identify accessibility issues in their courses. Based on the characteristics, forming an FLC focused on improving accessibility would make an appropriate strategy. The participants in the FLC could foster the adoption of inclusive instructional strategies among their

peers as they could provide guidance and mentorship for those looking to improve their course materials for students with disabilities.

Traditionally, change initiatives within a university is a top-down approach which can contribute to some in the university community feeling disregarded by the process (Vlachopoulos, 2021). Utilizing a faculty learning community is supported by the Kotter Model for change management as this model promotes engaging a "coalition" of faculty as change agents who are better positioned among their peers to communicate the vision and value in an initiative (Vlachopoulos, 2021). One anticipated challenge or barrier to the recommendations proposed in the project is time. University initiatives that require the faculty center's focus that are already underway could compete with the available time staff have to devote to developing workshops or resources. Fortunately, the formation of an FLC is not labor intensive and can be done quickly. Two of the faculty interviewed, who had participated in the Accessible Learning Institute, had expressed an interest in reuniting with their peers from the institute therefore, it was decided past participants in the Accessible Learning Institute would make an ideal target group for this FLC, which could begin during the spring 2024 semester.

Access to Technology

A potential challenge in implementing the recommendations is ensuring access to the technology that faculty need to improve the accessibility of their courses. Therefore, a third recommendation is the creation of a lab to house various technologies that academic departments might not normally provide to their faculty that are used in improving accessibility of course materials. The center has space that is currently not being used and

has been storing outdated equipment and furniture from a recording studio that is no longer in operation. There are already tables and chairs in the existing space, and it would be an ideal location for a small computer lab for faculty. The advantage of this location is in its proximity to the instructional designers in the center, which would allow easy access to monitor and assist faculty using the lab.

Conclusion

The university includes discussion on inclusivity and providing individualized support in its long-range plan. The recommendations proposed provide research-based solutions that can be used to improve faculty's ability to contribute to the long-range plan. By identifying and addressing barriers faculty will be empowered to facilitate positive social change at the university by implementing accessible course design practices that improve access to course materials for students with disabilities. Providing more targeted training and access to digital tools for faculty is important; however, the use of a FLC will have the largest impact toward creating change within the campus culture. By utilizing FLCs to create a grass-roots movement, we can build communities for faculty to feel comfortable in experimenting with new instructional strategies and digital technologies that will improve access for all students (Bulancea et al., 2021). Communities of practice, like the proposed faculty learning community, have shown to be successful in fostering faculty buy-in even with complex change initiatives such as improving accessibility (Hakkola et al., 2021; Sidman-Taveau & Hoffman, 2019). The FLC could serve as a researched-based model that can be implemented across the

university, with a variety of audiences, to engage the campus community in university

initiatives working to promote positive social change to improve campus culture.

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Appendix B: Email Invitation to Faculty

Subject Line: Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Study

As a faculty member who has participated in professional development with the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, I would like to invite you to take part in my doctoral study, through Walden University, exploring faculty experiences implementing accessible course design practices.

The purpose of this study, titled "*Understanding Faculty Experiences in Implementing Accessible Course Design Strategies*" is to promote the value in understanding faculty experiences with the implementation of accessible course design practices, which could advance knowledge needed in the development of professional development programs, making improvements to existing programs and to provide evidence of strategies faculty are willing to adopt.

I am seeking a minimum of 15 faculty who are willing to participate in a 1:1 interview-to share their experiences with accessible course design practices. Interviews should take no more than one hour and can be conducted in person or online using Zoom or Collaborate. Participants will also be asked to review a summary of their interview, in a process called member checking, to verify that the summary accurately portrays what was shared during the interview. The member checking process should take no more than 30 minutes and participants will be given 5 business days to return any summary feedback they may have. There is no financial compensation for participation.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please provide your contact information by accessing the "Yes, I am interested in participating" link below and I will follow up with you by email to schedule an interview at your convenience. If you have questions about the study, please email me at [email address omitted].

Thank you for your consideration.

Yes, I am interested in participating

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Before the Interview

- Provide information on the purpose of the study and informed consent form.

- Verify receipt of written consent via participant signature and begin to contact participants to schedule interview time and location preference (in-person or online).

During the Interview

- Thank them for their willingness to be a part of the study and convey appreciation for their contribution to the research study.

- Outline what the purpose of the research study is and how the information you gather will be used. Discuss how you will maintain confidentiality of their information.

- Let them know that the interview will not last more than one hour, including the time used for this introduction.

- Let them know that they are free to take a break or if they wish to stop the interview they may do so. Also, inform them they do not have to answer any of the interview questions if they do not want to.

- Encourage them to speak freely. The goal is to facilitate a discussion on their experiences.

- Ask permission to record the interview. If yes, let them know you will ask them again once you have turned on the recorder. If no, do not proceed with the interview.

- The interviewer should be attentive, actively listening, taking notes of nonverbal communication, and use probes and additional follow-up questions as needed to gain clarification.

  - If a non-verbal cue is noted, the researcher should comment in order to allow the participant to explain to ensure you have interpreted them correctly.

- It is important to remind the interview participant that since the interview is being audio recorded, they will need to express themselves verbally.

- Once the recording has begun, state the following:

  - "This is Stacy Rice"

  - "I am here with subject" (state the pseudonym you have assigned to participant)

  - "Do I have our permission to record this interview?"

Interview Questions

1. Please provide a brief background of your time here at the university.

   Possible probes:

   a. How long have you been teaching?

   b. What college do you report under?

   c. What types of courses do you teach?

2. How would you describe your feeling toward implementing accessible course design practices (such as… provide examples) to improve access for students with disabilities?

a. Have you ever worked with a student with a disability in any of your courses before or have you interacted with individuals who have disabilities?

b. How accessible do you feel your courses are for students with disabilities?

    i. Are there any areas where you feel they might struggle to participate or access information?

c. Have you ever participated in any professional development about accessibility?

    i. If yes: How do you feel about your participation in such programs?

    ii. If no: what is your reasoning for not participating in this type of professional development?

3. Do you currently use strategies (such as…provide examples) when developing your courses to improve accessibility of your courses for students with disabilities?

a. If strategies are implemented:

    i. What motivated, you to implement these strategies?

    ii. Where these strategies difficult to implement or were there strategies more challenging than others?

        1. Why do you feel those were more challenging?

        2. How did you handle those challenges?

iii. Would you be willing to share examples of content in which you implemented accessible course design practices or share your Ally report?

b. If no strategies implemented:

i. What do you feel prevents you from implementing accessible course design strategies?

4. What resources, if any, do you think could be provided to support you in implementing accessible course design strategies?

5. Is there any additional information you would like to include regarding your experience with implementing accessible course design strategies?

End of the Interview:

- Let the participant know you are stopping the recording

- Thank the participant for their time

- Remind the participant that they will receive a summary of their interview and copy of the transcript to check for accuracy.

Appendix E: Reflective Researcher Notes

Figure E1

Sample of Researchers Notes in Microsoft Word

Figure E2

Sample of NVivo Annotations

Appendix F: Codebook

Code	Description
Barriers	
Lack of Institutional Support	Lack of Resources Provided by University
Lack of knowledge or Awareness	subject identifies that there is a gap in their understanding of different disabilities and what strategies might benefit them or a lack of awareness in how to make content accessible
Lack of student communication	Lack of students communicating what they specifically need in an accommodation.
Time or workload as barrier	
Address it when need to	because of time issues they may wait until student presents accommodation memo
Seen as burden or extra work	Competes with other job demands
Current Accessibility in Course Content	
Accessible	Displayed confidence in level of accessibility
Not very accessible	Indicated course was not very accessible or not accessible
Somewhat Accessible	Does some accessibility but made comments about giving self a "C", rated themselves on a scale with score being average, commented accessible but "needs work".
Overall feelings about proactive accessibility	
A lot of Work or Burdon on Faculty	
Beneficial - Positive	Answers like "good", "benefits everyone", "all for it"
Integrating into teaching	feel it is important enough to integrate it into their curriculum either through discussions or teaching the technical skills.
It is not difficult	
Non-issue	Feel they do not have students or that their courses

	are structured in a way that accommodation isn't needed.
Overwhelming	
See it as part of their job	
Motivation to make content accessible	
Experience with individuals with disabilities Friends or family Students Self-Identify	Mentions family, friend, students or self-discloses disability
Policy or Requirement	Indicates that there is a legal motivation (policy or department requirement) for making content accessible.
Student Success Fairness to Student Fairness to Taxpayer	
Professional Development	
Accessibility Institute	4-day intensive training focused on accessibility and UDL (Significant focus on accessibility)
Blackboard Ally Training	2-hour focused on use of tool and remediating common issues (Significant focus on accessibility)
[Redacted]-Power Training	University-sponsored program training focused on intellectual disabilities
Online Course Development Bootcamp	Includes 8 hours of accessibility training (Significant focus on accessibility)
Showcase	1 day mini "conference" hosted by university faculty center focused on teaching strategies
Training at previous institution	Indicated has had some training but not at study site
None/Doesn't recall	
Resources needed	
Consultations	Indicates they would like someone to review or evaluate the accessibility of a course
DRC	DRC provides copies of content remediated for students back to the instructor to use in the future

Human Resources	GA, TA or work-study. Someone hired to convert content for the faculty
Leadership Priority	Communication from leadership that accessibility is a priority.
More training opportunities	Identifies need of additional professional development or training around accessibility or tools to improve accessibility
Open lab	A block of time designated where those who can assist faculty with accessibility are available.
Technology Resources	Software that aids in making content accessible.
Templates	Templates designed to promote accessibility and course design consistency.
Strategies Implemented	
Flexibility with Student Work	Indicates they are flexible with deadlines for homework or tests/quizzes, flexible with attendance, flexibility with how students demonstrate understanding
Image Descriptions	Providing alternative text to images so they can be read with screen reading software
Incorporates accessibility into instruction	Teaches students about document accessibility or integrates an accessibility lens into the content being covered.
Make content available ahead of class	
Proper structure in self-created documents	Uses built-in styles in word to enhance reading of documents for learners using screen reading software
Provides Captioning or Transcripts for Videos	
Remediates PDF documents	Corrects PDFs that are not accessible to screen reading technologies
Universal Design for Learning	References learning styles or creating multiple resources for content.
Tools and Resources Utilized	
Blackboard Ally	Mention use of Blackboard Ally to improve course content or improve awareness around the accessibility of content

Faculty Center	University's faculty center identified as a resource to improve course accessibility
Graduate or Teaching Assistants	Graduate or teaching assistants that are working within a participant's department
StreamlinEd or Publisher	Participant indicates working with publisher platform that ensures accessibility requirements are met
Templates	Use of the syllabus templates that are created with document accessibility in mind
Working with DRC	Indicates having worked with DRC staff in making content accessible for a student with an accommodation

Appendix G: Diagram of Thematic Analysis
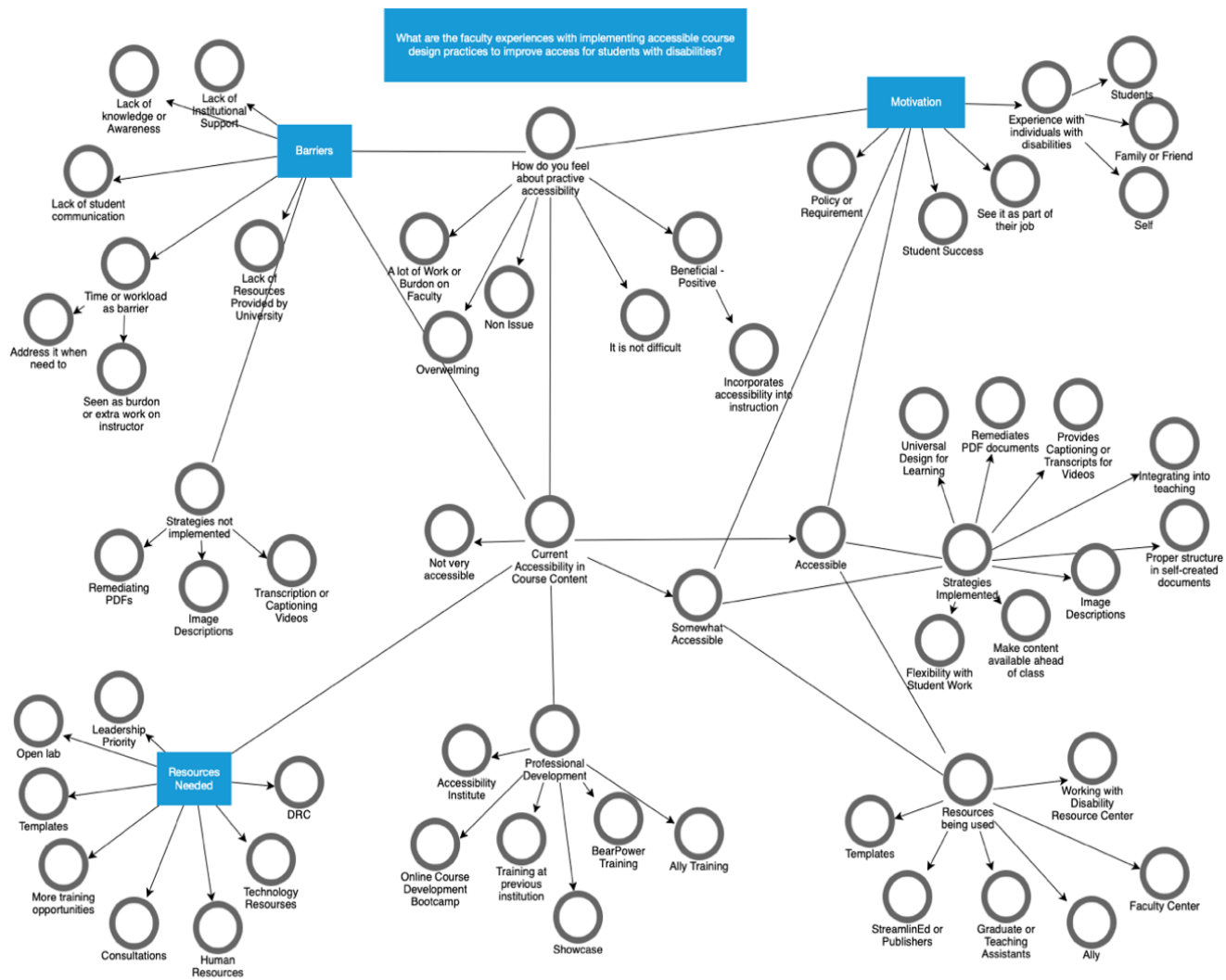
Appendix H: Sample Interview Summary

Q1: Please provide a brief background of your time here at the university.

P1 has taught for 23 years in Liberal Arts and Humanities at the university. Teaching courses in a variety of modalities (online, hybrid and traditional seated). The participant describes themselves as someone who like to learn and likes to try new things. P1 utilizes Blackboard in all their courses.

Q2. How would you describe your feelings toward implementing accessible course design practices (such as… provide examples) to improve access for students with disabilities?

P1 feel they do address some accessibility, and is very conscious about using the built-in styles in the creation of documents/handouts. P1 acknowledges that this improves the readability especially for those with visual impairments. Regarding the rest of the course materials, P1 is not as confident in the level of accessibility. Specifically identifying video transcription as something they struggle making available to students. While they intend to address the issue, time constraints are identified as a barrier. P1 focuses on making the overall course design in Blackboard easy to navigate. This includes organizing the module folders in a reverse order, so the most current folder is always on top, to minimize the need for scrolling. P1 indicated that their students found this modification to be very helpful.

P1 expresses a desire for students to succeed and "part of teaching is helping these people". Recognizing that there are differences in the way individuals think, P1 tries to be sensitive to that as a teacher and regularly engages learners in conversation about what is and is not working for them both in class and on an individual basis. There is also a willingness to provide accommodations for students who do not present an accommodation letter.

- **Have you ever worked with a student with a disability in any of your courses before or have you interacted with individuals who have disabilities?**

P1 has interacted with students who have disabilities, both apparent and hidden disabilities. E01 shared experiences working with students with depression, dyslexia, autism, and visual impairments. They expressed that in seated courses, for example, their practice is to not randomly call on students but rather allows the student to choose to engage in the discussion to avoid creating an uncomfortable environment.
P1 feels that students with disabilities are often not given the care or "break" they need from teachers to succeed. They are very capable of success with "just a little more discussion" to check in or on understanding - simple acts that can make a big difference

in student success. P1 reflected on "how cool" it is when trust has been established to the point the student will share their personal experiences with their disability or disclose having a disability, something P1 feels students with disabilities have struggled with (building trust with faculty).

- **How accessible do you feel your courses are for students with disabilities?**
  - **Are there any areas where you feel they might struggle to participate or access information?**

P1 feels their courses are about 70% accessible. They mention it is hard to say for sure how accessible they are as they have not been evaluated in that way. Ally is helpful and will provide instructions on how to fix most issues. However, they suggested it would be nice to have consultations where someone could evaluate overall accessibility. They share they are struggling to get videos transcribed and feel this is a skill that they are lacking. A lack of training, as well as time, are contributing factors. They are very comfortable using the built-in styles function to make documents accessible and rely on Blackboard Ally to confirm documents they create are accessible. P1 says most of the documents in the courses on Blackboard are "green" (this is an indicator they are accessible in Ally) however, acknowledges that older PDFs they have shared with students are not accessible. P1 hopes that they have created an environment where if something wasn't accessible or if they struggled with content or assignments that students would feel comfortable communicating what they need. "The solutions are probably best because we've all worked together and figured out a way that works for more people than just ourselves."

  - **Have you ever participated in any professional development about accessibility?**

P1 recalls participating in trainings offered by the Faculty Center. While not remembering the specific training names, identifies attending the Ally training and two related to videos. They like to learn and enjoyed their participation in those professional development programs finding the instruction helpful and more confident about their teaching. P1 conveyed that the Faculty Center was helpful, the instructional designers accessible, and they knew if they had questions or needed help, they could receive it there.

Q3. Do you currently use accessible course design strategies (such as…provide examples) when developing your courses to improve accessibility of your courses for students with disabilities?

P1 reiterated using the built-in styles in Microsoft Word to make documents accessible. They also shared non-tangible strategies such as setting appointments during office hours with students to help them stay on track and a willingness to reach out if a student seems to "disappear". If a student seems to have test anxiety P1 will schedule time for the student to take a test in their office instead of in class with everyone else. They state that sometimes seeing others turn in tests can heighten anxiety – especially if other students are finishing faster. P1 discussed how they didn't feel that students had to provide or have an accommodations letter for them to provide accommodations and that the Disability Resource Office having moved to a new system where accommodation letters are now emailed (verses students having to hand deliver them) makes keeping the whole process more confidential by eliminating the paper trail. The important thing is a line of communication.

- **(If yes) What motivated you to implement these strategies?**

A desire to be the best instructor they can and for their students to succeed was identified as a motivator to implement the strategies that have been implemented. P1 stated that it didn't take much more time or effort and feels like human nature to want to do what they can to help.

- **Were these strategies difficult to implement or were there strategies more challenging than others?**

P1 describes video transcription as their "nemesis", however, time was identified as the largest barrier to making course content accessible. The resources were there, it was just carving out time to review the transcripts and make corrections. Also, being aware of all the different elements, besides text, in a course that needs to be made accessible, like images and PowerPoint. Not being confident about how to make PowerPoints accessible was mentioned.

Q4. What resources, if any, do you think could be provided to support you in implementing accessible course design strategies?

Suggestions included training on how to make PowerPoint accessible and more assistance with video transcription. P1 stated that for them it is about not being comfortable "pressing those buttons", going on to describe a lack of confidence with the technology and a fear of messing something up.

Another suggestion was to have a consultation on the overall accessibility of their course, possibly followed up with a training on understanding how to make their Blackboard site more accessible overall such as quick and easy fixes because it will help their students to be more successful, even those without documented disabilities.

Q5. Is there any additional information you would like to include regarding your experience with implementing accessible course design strategies?

P1 stated that as the leadership in the university, deans and department heads, makes accessibility a key point and expresses more concern and establish requirements more people will follow. They feel that kind of leadership and direction from the top makes a big difference.