

# Library Accessibility Services Environmental Scan

Chadwick Dunefsky and Carrie Wilson, AUX Practicum Students

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

We surveyed seven academic libraries and two public libraries<sup>1</sup> for the design of library accessibility information webpages, the types of services and resources provided, and the staffing models for both addressing the needs of patrons with disabilities as well as internally assessing library accessibility improvements. We also interviewed User Experience Librarian Robin Davis (NC State Libraries) to gain further insights into her accessibility liaison position (see [Appendix A](#)). We also contacted Accessibility Coordinator Andy Andrews (University of Washington), but due to time constraints, we were not able to set up an interview.

## Key Findings and Takeaways

Our key findings from this environmental scan are divided into two sections: first, how different libraries make accessibility information available on their websites and, second, what different staffing models are possible for addressing library accessibility.

### Accessibility Services Information on Library Websites

In this section, we will cover how different libraries make information about book delivery, facilities, maps, and assistive technology available on their websites.

#### Book Delivery

In 2017, JJ Pionke interviewed patrons on how they “view the library’s accessibility at a large academic institution” (p. 48). These patrons shared that “there were a wide range of inconsistencies regarding physical access to spaces and materials from poor lighting to aisles not wide enough for wheelchairs” (p. 52). Library stacks are generally not designed to be accessible for patrons with physical disabilities. Academic libraries can provide resources to combat the inaccessibility of library stacks on their library website. These resources might include book delivery to various locations on campus or maps detailing the structure of the library.

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<sup>1</sup> For academic libraries: University of Washington, NC State University, University of Michigan, Dartmouth University, Syracuse University, UNC Chapel Hill’s Davis Library, and Montana State University. For public libraries: Durham County Main Library and NC Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

Three of the academic libraries we surveyed advertised Interlibrary Loan services as an accessible method of document retrieval. All of the surveyed libraries' websites prominently featured information about communicating with circulation staff for hold-for-pickup and/or book retrieval assistance services. UMich was unique in providing information about how students can request books to be delivered to over 200 departmental locations on campus, including an option to request additional locations, which is linked on their main Accessibility page.

## Facilities & Maps

North Carolina State University (NCSU) and the University of Washington (UW) feature comprehensive maps that list accessible entrances, study spaces, and unfriendly accessibility areas on campus. Dartmouth University (DU) provides a static list of accessibility entrances at their libraries. Brunskill et al. (2021) write that floor maps were one of the most commonly mentioned important library website elements in a 2019 survey of university students" (p. 938). Floor maps provide helpful information both for students on the autism spectrum disorder and for students with physical disabilities (Brunskill et al., 2021, p. 938). In the interview with Robin Davis, she discussed the new [Sensory Friendly maps](#) that highlight spaces in NC State's Hunt and Hill libraries that tend to be less crowded and have sound masking study rooms, predominantly natural light, and light control rooms for neurodivergent users and those with sensory sensitivities. These maps are collocated with lists of accessibility resources and information about the facilities within the Hunt and Hill libraries on NC State's "Accessibility Resources, Technology, and Facilities" page.

## Assistive Technology

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

## Website Recommendations

- Consider conducting a usability survey regarding how patrons with **disabilities interact with library stacks**. The results of such a study could make clear what information these users need on the library website to more easily navigate the stacks.
- Consider clearly listing **book retrieval assistance options and contacts** on the DUL Accessibility page.
- Consider featuring **static maps** on the DUL Accessibility page of accessible parking, entrances, and study spaces as well as any barriers to accessibility in each of Duke's libraries. These can be consulted more quickly and with greater ease than the current Apple maps.
- Consider featuring a link to the **Find Library Spaces** page on the DUL Accessibility page. This will make it easier for neurodivergent patrons to find quiet spaces in the libraries. Additionally, **more filters** can be added to Find Library Spaces for warm

lighting, potential crowding, and any study rooms that have light adjustment and sound masking capabilities.

- Consider listing the **available assistive technologies** on the DUL Accessibility page.
- Consider explaining the **text accommodations** provided by DUL's scanners on the DUL Accessibility page. If they can convert text to OCR, for example, this should be stated.

## Accessibility Staffing Models

In this section, we will cover the scope of roles and responsibilities both for accessibility coordinator positions as well as larger committees and working groups.

### Accessibility Coordinator Position

DUL should consider the value of expanding the designated accessibility coordinator's responsibilities and developing staff training. Schroeder, in a 2018 article evaluating accessibility resources at Michigan State University Libraries (MSUL), emphasized the importance of designating a specific person to accessibility resources. The MSUL coordinator "identified top priority training topics and also surveyed library staff about their accessibility training needs" (Schroeder, 2018, p. 402). This coordinator led to MSUL creating "29 total accessibility training sessions" (Schroeder, 2018, p. 402). Schroeder writes that these trainings allow library staff to think "about accessibility in a variety of areas... and incorporate it in their daily work" (2018, p. 403). The accessibility coordinator's role can create a ripple effect across the library system and embeds accessibility within the daily responsibilities of library staff. It is important to consider how this coordinator can best connect with the library staff and to ensure that these trainings are specifically created in response to the institution of the library system.

Implementing accessibility internships for students can also be a helpful facet to the accessibility coordinator's role. As the point person for accessibility services in the User Experience department and the chair of the accessibility committee at NC State University Libraries, Robin Davis collaborates within and across departments to improve web accessibility and conduct user research. She helps coordinate restructuring web content so that it is more accessible to users and, more specifically, readable for screen readers. For errors in web content, she collaborates with student workers for improvements. Schroeder (2018) similarly details how the MSUL accessibility coordinator oversees student interns who work 10 hours per week. These interns can help share the workload and expand the reach of accessibility coordinators' work.

### Committees and Working Groups

Montana State University (MSU) and NC State both have committees in their libraries for addressing accessibility. NC State's committee was established this past summer as a result of a collaboration between Robin Davis's User Experience department and the Student Success department. It has 17 members total, with roughly 1-2 representatives from each library department, and is divided into four working groups that address different accessibility services: one for service, instruction, and events; one for digital accessibility; one for spaces and communication; and one for collections. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

(UNC-CH) created an “Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility” (IDEA) council within their libraries to develop inclusive collection projects. Brannen et al.’s (2017) article provides additional models on how committees bolster accessibility resources in an academic library. At the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) campus, the Libraries’ Diversity Committee “assigns liaison librarians to academic departments... [and one librarian is assigned] to the Office of Disability Services” (Brennen et al., 2017, p. 66). In addition to this committee, UTK also has an Assistive Technology and Access Committee (ATAC), which explores how the library can improve its accessibility resources and what training it can provide to its library staff (Brennen et al., 2017, p. 67). These two committees led to UTK creating a tour specifically designed for “self-identified students with disabilities” (Brennen et al., 2017, p. 67). Committees of varying sizes can share the commitment of internal assessment, which can be published to library websites so that users are aware of ongoing improvements to accessibility in the libraries (University of Washington Libraries presents their progress in a [timeline](#) and Montana State University Libraries lists their assessment approaches on their [accessibility homepage](#)).

### Staffing Recommendations

- Expand the **scope** of the accessibility coordinator position.
- Provide **interdepartmental staff training** that is uniquely suited to the library’s needs.
- Consider establishing **accessibility internships** for students interested in user experience and library/information science.
- Form an **accessibility committee** with representatives from different library departments. Consider dividing the committee into working groups with specific long-term goals in mind.
- Consider providing evidence of **ongoing accessibility assessment** on the DUL website.

## Appendix A: Interview with Robin Davis

1. Can you describe your role and how it relates to services for users with disabilities?
  - One of three UX librarians at NCSU--focuses on content strategy and how online information is made accessible and understandable.
  - Also conducts user research as the user research team chair
  - Chairs recently formed accessibility committee, which is a cross-department, collaborative effort within the library. Focuses on web accessibility, liaises with accessibility office, and advocates for accessibility every day.
  - a. What services and resources for users with disabilities do you help coordinate/oversee? For how long have you helped coordinate or oversee these services?
    - All of her work is very collaborative.
    - Accessibility services pages describing resources like parking on campus
    - Update language on web content that is more inclusive and readable (e.g., making web content more bite-sized and accessible to screen readers)
    - Great pdf purge: modifying pdfs to be more accessible or transferring their information to actual web content
    - Coordinate fixing accessibility errors with web content with student workers on web team
    - Accessibility committee was formed this past summer, but she has been in her UX position since June 2019
2. Can you tell us about the training public services staff typically receive on accessibility services at your institution?
  - Can't speak for public services staff because she's not a part of that, but
  - Those involved in instruction have great accessibility workflows and accessible instruction information
  - Have had both staff and public events regarding accessibility (e.g., colorblindness awareness, services for neurodivergent users)
3. How do folks learn about library services and resources available for users with disabilities?
  - Disability resources office
  - Ask Us desk
  - Library website
4. What do you think are the most impactful services your library provides? How are these services made available/accessible to users?
  - Access to library spaces (e.g., motorized doors)
  - Access to library stacks (e.g., hold for pickup)
  - Document delivery (e.g., training in OCR)

- She observes web analytics, and their citation builder is consistently in the top ten most-used aspects of their website. Recently made accessibility updates for screen reading thanks to feedback from a user.
5. Approximately how many students do you receive requests from each year at your university? Has this number changed over time?
- Have gotten two submissions from feedback form in the past year (one regarding screen reader issues with citation builder and one regarding parking)
  - Form has only been up for roughly a year
  - Try to have multiple ways for students to reach out with questions and feedback (e.g., email, in-person, library chat, form)
6. Can you tell us how your position/committee was formed? How has your position/committee evolved over time?
- Ramped up interest in accessibility over the past couple of years even though it has been a constant concern that predates the UX dept.
  - Committee was formed through a proposal co-written between her dept. and the Student Success dept.; formed because needed an established accessibility point person for each library dept.
    - 17 committee members total; members represent almost all depts within library
    - Divided into four working groups: one for service, instruction, and events; one for digital accessibility; one for spaces and communication; and one for collections.
    - Split into these working groups because the committee is so large. This helps to make sure that they can focus on detailed, specific work.
    - Service & Instruction working group just proposed to HR dept that accessibility training (regarding accessibility *for* library staff) be a part of the onboarding process for new employees--got approved!
    - Interested in libraries-wide training rather than department-specific training because staff have overlapping responsibilities
    - Digital Accessibility Work Group (DAWG) is putting together an approachable, well-formatted guide for making web content more accessible
    - DAWG has also scheduled lightning talks with library staff next year and will be following up with accessibility discussions specifically regarding web content
7. What projects are you currently working on?
- One of the Libraries Fellows, Katharine Frazier, was interested in accessibility for neurodiverse users--spearheaded a project on sensory-friendly maps, inspired by MET museum's maps detailing natural light, crowding, etc.
    - Criteria: natural light, adjustable light, low noise level, low crowding

- Accessible for printing in black and white and for different types of colorblindness
  - Will print maps to keep at Ask Us desks
- a. What technology or services have you recently added to your library? What technology or services do you plan to add, or would you like to add?
- Twitch channel--library staff stream every weekday regarding different topics like book repair, using the makerspace, and disability in gaming
    - Some videos are recorded, saved, and posted to library website
  - Having lots of video content produced during pandemic has drawn attention to what needs captions when saved to library website--need to be captioned by humans
  - Considering adding a readability widget that can adjust library website for contrasting text and backgrounds, hiding images, having warm background, changing text to Open Dyslexia, highlighting links on page.
    - In pilot phase--not sure if it will happen, but user feedback has been largely positive.
8. What other services, technologies, spaces, or programs do you wish you could incorporate into the support your library provides for users with disabilities?
- Sectioning off spaces in libraries that limit food and drink for users with misophonia
9. Based on your experience, how would you recommend library workers stay involved with innovations in disability services?
- Attend conferences sessions and workshops
  - Certification programs--Library Juice Academy
  - Following disability and accessibility advocates on Twitter

## Appendix B: Works Cited

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