Grand Valley State University

## ScholarWorks@GVSU

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# Roadmap to Improved Accessibility for the GVSU Libraries' Institutional Repository and Library Publishing Services

Grand Valley State University Libraries

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# Roadmap to Improved Accessibility for the GVSU Libraries' Institutional Repository and Library Publishing Services

## Overview

### Summary

This roadmap outlines the context of accessibility needs for digital materials published through the University Libraries' institutional repository and/or library publishing (IR/LP) services, and identifies priority areas for improving the accessibility of IR/LP content. Given available resources and constraints, making all new and legacy content fully accessible is not feasible. However, the GVSU Libraries have identified specific priorities for making content accessible, and commit to providing accessible versions of IR/LP content on request.

### Obligations

Grand Valley State University and the University Libraries are legally required to ensure that the services and resources to which the university provides access are equally accessible, under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. This obligation is affirmed and reinforced by GVSU policy as well as the University Libraries' Mission, Vision, and Values. Furthermore, accessibility is integral to the philosophical and pragmatic aims of the open access movement, which seeks to remove barriers between academic information and people who wish to benefit from that information.

### Challenges

The University Libraries currently uses the Digital Commons platform from bepress (an Elsevier company). In general, webpages built with Digital Commons are highly accessible, with well-structured webpage design as well as clear metadata for published items. However, the digital files uploaded to ScholarWorks@GVSU are not inherently accessible. Screen readers and other assistive technologies may be able to make sense of a majority of the content due to optical character recognition (OCR) software, but can fall short with content containing complex page layouts, tables, images, or other elements.

Basic document accessibility for assistive technologies, like a screenreader, requires recognizable characters, tagging to indicate the reading order and document structure, and alternate text for all image elements. While Microsoft Word and other programs include accessibility tools, many content creators do not know about or use them. Adding metadata tags and alt text after a document is created can be extremely time-intensive, sometimes exceeding five minutes per page.

ScholarWorks@GVSU contains over 15,000 downloadable items, the majority being textual PDF files which are unlikely to contain proper tagging or alt text. The campus offices and external partners whose faculty, students, and contributors provide the material shared in ScholarWorks@GVSU do not currently mandate the creation or submission of accessible files, and the University Libraries are not in a position to monitor or enforce such a mandate.  With nearly all of our partners and collections, we have little leverage beyond ending the partnership, which would directly harm the core mission and function of IR/LP services, as well as users of ScholarWorks@GVSU around the world who downloaded items 1.4 million times in 2019.

Given what could easily represent years of full-time work to fix accessibility issues in legacy documents, recommended practice in similar contexts typically centers on individual, need-based responses for legacy content accessibility. Unfortunately, ensuring accessibility of current and future content remains an unresolved challenge, without either significantly increased resources or a drastically reduced rate of submissions from our campus and publishing partners.

# Roadmap

## Legacy Content: access upon request

We plan to formally document and implement a process for providing accessible versions of IR/LP content upon request. We are currently obligated to do this under GVSU policy and legal requirements, but have not explicitly documented the practice. Formally documenting this practice will include a public statement of our responsibility to provide accessible content as needed, within the one week timeframe we apply to other requests. We will prioritize requests from current faculty and students seeking accessible files for a current course or research project, followed by other requests from the GVSU community, followed by requests from the general public.

## Open Educational Resources: active accessibility improvements

We will develop accessible versions of our legacy OER textbooks and work with OER creators to ensure new publications have appropriate tagging and metadata. Our OER collections are highly used, including among GVSU courses, and high-visibility given the university's growing interest in OER initiatives.

When exploring new OER creation tools or publishing platforms, we will prioritize accessibility improvements to our OER. We are beginning this in late 2020 with a pilot of PressbooksEDU, which we will evaluate in part by migrating existing OER into the multi-format PressbooksEDU platform.

## ScholarWorks@GVSU: website & metadata improvements

The online elements of ScholarWorks are largely in compliance with web content accessibility standards. We will work with Digital Commons to carry out a redesign of the ScholarWorks@GVSU web content, with particular attention to any issues identified through accessibility checkers like WAVE from WebAIM.org.

To further improve accessibility in the online user experience, we will standardize and systematize the metadata we gather from partners and provide for ScholarWorks@GVSU content. This will be a multi-stage and longer-term effort, reliant both on the expertise to select and adapt a suitable metadata schema for our content as well as resources to carry out widespread revisions to our existing metadata.

## Ongoing & Future Collections: education & collaboration

With current and future partners who provide IR/LP content, we will periodically discuss the accessibility of that content and encourage those partners to consider requiring or creating accessible versions of the content they produce or oversee. . We will primarily emphasize education and resource-sharing rather than compliance, which is outside the University Libraries' authority and role. Where possible, we will work with authors and community partners to make high-use legacy content accessible.

We will encourage prospective partners for IR/LP content to build accessibility measures into their workflows. We will likewise take prospective partners' accessibility plans into account when evaluating the proposed partnership. As the practical implementation of GVSU's Web Accessibility Policy evolves, we will watch for opportunities to align our IR/LP requirements with university practice.

As we improve and redesign the ScholarWorks@GVSU website, we will incorporate resources on creating born-accessible documents

## Relevant Resources

GVSU Web Accessibility Policy, SLT 9.7.  https://www.gvsu.edu/policies/policy.htm?policyId=1BEF5B2E-01A1-0A6C-E2FDBE2C401DA7B2

University Libraries Mission, Vision, and Values statement. https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/0862059E-9024-5893-1B5AAAC2F83BDDD8/library_mission_vision__values_2016_march_22.pdf

Digital Commons Voluntary Product Accessibility Template. http://bepress.com/reference_guide_dc/voluntary-product-accessibility-template-vpat/

Guide to Making Documents Accessible, from GVSU Disability Support Resources. https://www.gvsu.edu/dsr/making-documents-accessible-90.htm

WAVE Web Accessibility Checker developed by Web Accessibility In Mind. WAVE from WebAIM.org.