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Balancing accessibility and aesthetics in redesigning an asynchronous Information Literacy course

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Background

- Large metropolitan research university, 71,948 enrolled students, 50% first-time-in-college students, 48.5% minority students
- Introduction to Research Strategies asynchronous course in Canvas LMS
- All Composition II and Student Success classes automatically enrolled in course each semester
- Pre-COVID: students completed the course before a face-to-face library instruction session
- Since spring 2020, nearly all library instruction has moved online, decrease in the number of synchronous library instruction requests
- Redesign of course in summer of 2020, focusing on improving accessibility and usability

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1)

- Developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)
- 4 principles, 13 guidelines, 3 levels of conformance (A, AA, AAA; lowest to highest)

1. Perceivable (e.g. contrast ratio)
2. Operable (e.g. adjustable timing)
3. Understandable (e.g. consistent navigation)
4. Robust (e.g. complete start and end tags)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- [UDL Guidelines](#) "offer a set of concrete suggestions that can be applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities."
  - Provide multiple means of engagement
    - The Why of learning
  - Provide multiple means of representation
    - The What of learning
  - Provide multiple means of action & expression
    - The How of learning

Accessibility and aesthetics

- Anthony Tseng (2019) "[The aesthetic-accessibility paradox](#)"

- "In general, the more accessible an interface is, the less aesthetic appeal it will have."

- "There are accessibility extremists who tend to discount aesthetics. They believe an interface should be as accessible as possible for the minority without considering how it hurts the average user. These extremists need to understand the aesthetic-accessibility paradox before demanding the highest degree of accessibility."

Features of the original course

- Organized into 2 modules
  - Course content
  - Final quiz
- 6 practice quizzes included in the first module
- Content pages included text, hyperlinks, embedded images, videos, and tables

Areas to consider

- Consistency of layouts, navigation, and fonts
- Readability of text and images
- Use of headings and lists
- Use of tables, gifs, pdfs
- Alt text for images

Tour of Redesigned Course

Accessibility Tools

- ➡ W3C Alt Decision Tree
- ➡ WebAIM Contrast Checker
- ➡ UCF Universal Design Online Learning Tool (UDOIT)
- ➡ WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool

Lessons Learned

- The "aesthetic-accessibility paradox" is a false paradox
- Improving accessibility improved the aesthetics and usability
- Benefits of UDL thinking
- Ensuring accessibility and usability is an on-going process

References

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Thank you!

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