Making accessibility accessible for online course development

This presentation by distance instructional designers details different techniques and guidelines to make online courses more accessible. Accessibility checkers and guidelines vary widely in their application and often require a thorough understanding of accessibility techniques within the particular Learning Management System (LMS). We will share our view and definition of accessible courses as well as some lessons learned from designing accessible courses at the University of British Columbia and Queensland University of Technology (Australia). Techniques and checklists developed for particular use within WebCT/Vista will be analysed alongside those used at an institution with its own in-house developed LMS to develop some generalisable techniques for making accessibility accessible to online instructional designers.

At UBC, the instructional designers work with programmers on the content and course design. The team has used W3C Web Accessibility guidelines as the main guidelines and has been developing an accessibility checker for others involved in course development at UBC. Depending on the subject of online courses, the team has taken different approaches. For example, to assure that the methods and techniques enhanced students’ accessibility, one course was tested with JAWS, a screen reader. A UBC student who is visually impaired, went through the course using JAWS in August 2007 and the result was satisfactory. [do we need this last sentence?]

At the second institution (QUT), the content design sometimes involved instructional designers but the content creation and uploading was the domain of the instructors. Therefore, the strategy employed was twofold. Firstly, making accessibility information required as part of the tool itself – for example, the system requiring ALT tags on images and transcripts of video and audio files. Secondly, a checklist for designers/developers and self-audits for instructors were developed according to the group’s knowledge of accessibility.

This presentation will share course developers’ experiences in how online courses can be designed to be more accessible from the beginning – in terms of strategy employed during planning stages, through to evaluating accessibility.