The GenAI and Accessibility Paradox: Are we Removing Barriers or Reinforcing Them?

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Land Acknowledgement

- Are we using technology that was designed in the spirit of interdependence and collective care?

- When we use AI tools, are we reinforcing ableist assumptions that have been coded into digital systems that replicate exclusion and othering by ignoring outliers?

- What considerations must we give to the exploitation of the land and water that sustains our lives but is being drained and tapped and depleted in unprecedented ways to support the infrastructure of AI?
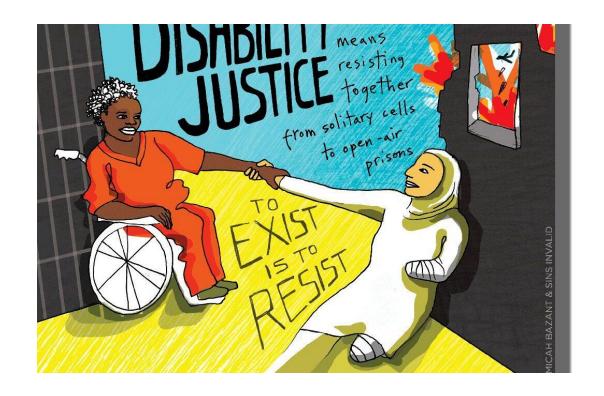

Image by Micah Bazant & Sins Invalid (2019)

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Access Check

Please engage in this session in ways that meet your own access needs. Access is a shared responsibility, and it's okay to name what you need.

If you are attending online:

- Live captions are available
- If you miss something or need us to repeat or rephrase, please ask using the chat. You don't need to explain why.
- We'll aim to speak slowly and clearly, but feel free to flag if we're moving too fast.

If you are attending in-person:

- Feel free to move around, stim, eat, and drink as you need to.
- Is there anything about the space (light, sound, temperature, layout) that we should address now?
- Are there any other access needs that might affect your participation in the workshop that we could also address?

If you're using a screen reader or other assistive tech or you need materials in a different format, let us know and we'll follow up. We will send out our slideshow after the presentation.

Icon courtesy of the
Accessible Icon Project

Access Check is adapted from:
https://tatp.utoronto.ca/teaching-toolkit/effective-strategies/access-checks/

TRUTH IN TECH

THESE WOMEN TRIED TO WARN US ABOUT AI

Today the risks of artificial intelligence are clear — but the warning signs have been there all along

By LORENA O'NEIL
Photographs by Gioncarlo Valentine

AUGUST 12, 2023

Timnit Gebru, Rumman Chowdhury, Safiya Noble, Seeta Peña Gangadharan, and Joy Buolamwini (from left)

Activity: Open Conversation (10 minutes)

When you think about accessibility within your portfolio, what do you think of?

What are some of the accessibility features you look for, or rubrics you use, to consider whether or not to recommend a tool?

Defining our terms

Accessibility: Accessibility refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience disabilities (Accessibility Services Canada, 2024).

Kate Brothers (2025)

This definition is also ever-evolving. Because accessibility is so unique to the person, it can never be fixed. It is not binary (one thing or the other), rather the disabled person co-constructs it with the world around them. It is adaptive and constantly shifting in time and space. Accessibility can help the disabled person adapt to the world around them that is not built for them.

Academic Ableism "Discrimination of disability and people with disabilities within academia. An institutional system which constructs disability as in opposition to the university space" (Dolmage, 2017).

Accessibility in higher education: "is about removing barriers from learning and provide equity and equality for all learners, regardless of ability or experience" (eCampusOntario, 2023).

Five Levels of Accessibility: "Deep Accessibility"

1. **Movement**—getting there—how we get to a space.

2. **Sense**—being there—how we access material, conversations, etc.

3. **Architecture**—orienting—how the space and layout structure belonging and understanding.

4. **Communication**—how we join the conversation, engage, understand, and how we are understood.

5. **Agency**—autonomy—how we come to have a shaping role in the class, as well as the right to define our own identity and involvement.

- Who can access AI tools and how (movement)?

- Can GenAI-generated content help with access to materials, conversations etc. (sense)?

- Do AI interfaces foster clarity, understanding and/or belonging (architecture)?

- Do they enable equitable dialogue and/or representation (communication)?

- And perhaps most crucially, do they enhance or limit students' capacity to define their own learning paths and identities (agency)?

Star Ford (2016) in Jay Dolmage's *Academic Ableism*, p.119, 2017

Accessible Learning at the course and curriculum levels

Architecture

Learning Outcomes & Objectives

Content & Material

Assessment & Evaluation

Communication

Classroom Activities & Participation

Learning Environments (physical/digital)

Feedback & Communication

Sense

Movement

Agency

Disability Justice in Higher Ed

1. **INTERSECTIONALITY**

2. **LEADERSHIP OF THOSE MOST IMPACTED**

3. **ANTI-CAPITALIST POLITIC**

4. **COMMITMENT TO CROSS-MOVEMENT ORGANIZING**

5. **RECOGNIZING WHOLENESS**

6. **SUSTAINABILITY**

7. **COMMITMENT TO CROSS-DISABILITY SOLIDARITY**

8. **INTERDEPENDENCE**

9. **COLLECTIVE ACCESS**

10. **COLLECTIVE LIBERATION**

Sins Invalid, www.sinsinvalid.org

How does accessibility and disability justice intersect with GenAI in Higher Ed?

Can GenAI really save us?

6 Myths About GenAI and Educational Equity

More data = better outcomes	It will automatically reduce inequities	It delivers perfect personalization
It democratizes access for everyone	It can replace teachers in underserved areas	All students are ready to use it effectively

Tool Analysis for Accessibility (20 min)

- OpenAI's ChatGPT

- Microsoft's Copilot

- Google's NotebookLM

- Grammarly

- OpenAI's Dall-E

- Otter.ai

- Get into groups of 2-3 people (or do it by yourself!)

- Pick a tool you want to investigate for accessibility

- Find and use the product's VPAT (Voluntary Product Accessibility Template) to answer the following questions:

  1. Is the tool WCAG 2.2-compliant?
  2. Is the tool compatible with screen readers?
  3. Can the tool be navigated by keyboard only?
  4. What is missing? And if you were to recommend this tool to an educator, what would you share about it?

Thank you!

Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or want to connect.

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