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ARTICLE

Building bridges: Fostering dynamic partnerships between the library department and office of student disability services in higher education

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ABSTRACT

Building effective communication and interdepartmental partnerships are essential components of strengthening services, policies, and procedures to meet the individual information needs of students, faculty, and the college community. Despite major advancements in library services for users with disabilities, there are ongoing challenges, which need to be addressed. It is essential to develop inclusion and accessibility frameworks that serve mutual departmental interests to share and document lessons learned along the way.

This article explores the evolving shared leadership between an Architecture Librarian/Liaison to the AccessAbility Center; and the Director of Student Disability Services at the City College of New York to examine strategic methods of managing, enhancing, and integrating, universal inclusivity and diversity in library services. The Librarian Liaison must take an active role in matters of accessibility policies and practices to meet user needs with cultural sensitivity. Merging the individual experiences, both authors deliver tangible solutions in creating more accessible services and environments, including an assessment checklist to demonstrate whether the Libraries have barriers and/or accessible spaces. The collaborative observations and strategic methods may be applicable to similar academic institutions that are considering transformative outreach initiatives to aid underserved populations such as library users with various disabilities.

KEYWORDS

Access; collaboration; individuals with disabilities; academic libraries; library liaison; user services

Introduction

Despite a growing number of students with disabilities attending postsecondary institutions, there is a dilemma ensuring that equal access is prevalent among universities throughout the United States and around the world. In a report generated by U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2016, p. 516), approximately 11% of students in the years 2011–2012 disclosed their disability status to their respective college.

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It should be noted that this percentage may not accurately reflect the number of students with disabilities in attendance, given that disability disclosure is voluntary at the postsecondary level. Due to the greater number of students known to the university, it is essential to understand the physical, attitudinal, and academic barriers to access that prevent full co-curricular participation. This case study explores library access and how information is made readily available to students with disabilities.

The City College of New York (CCNY) is the flagship college of The City University of New York (CUNY), which originated as the Free Academy in 1847. Since inception, the college has embedded access into its history and mission to be a school for the “whole people” by promoting “Access to Excellence.” Based on the school’s deep-rooted commitment to inclusion, students with disabilities are deserving of a higher education that is free of stigma, stereotypes, and barriers. Taking libraries into consideration, how does one embark on understanding and creating access for students with disabilities in this specialized area?

CCNY has seven library divisions situated in five separate buildings across campus and its library system is currently the largest within CUNY. The divisions are as follows: Architecture Library, Art and Visual Resources Library, Morris R. Cohen Library (Archives and Special Collections, Government Documents, Reference Services, Inter-Library Loan, and Technical Services), Center for Worker Education Library, Dominican Institute Library, Music Library and the Science/Engineering Library. The Library’s mission statement prioritizes access to quality resources as a means to stimulate creativity, facilitate instruction, research, and life-long learning in support of the campus and wider academic community. A collaborative assessment process between the library department and other campus entities for disability matters will help remove or diminish many access barriers. Libraries preserve, organize, provide access, and delivery of information—regardless of format—directly in line with CCNY’s library mission.

Conducting a needs assessment is a preliminary step to achieving universal access in academic libraries, which guides current and future evidence-based decisions, regarding users, services, spaces, and online platforms. Initially, the CCNY Office of Student Disability Services analyzed the number of students registered with disabilities that required accommodations, in addition to assessing their particular needs (data gathered from an annual student satisfaction survey). The AccessAbility Center/Student Disability Services (AAC/SDS) survey results demonstrated an exponential growth in students disclosing their disability status, which more than doubled from 250 to 650 students in a 3-year period. The outcome also confirmed that a large number of students disclosed multiple disabilities

and required several accommodations (e.g. exam accommodations, note-taker, recording of lecturers, assistive technology). According to Nichols & Schnitzer (2015), the number of students with disabilities continue to rise in postsecondary education, including both undergraduate and graduate levels; thus making it vital to focus on access barriers in academic environments. Furthermore, “the survey revealed that” AAC/SDS students expressed various concerns with the CCNY Libraries’ level of access provided to them.

An overview of library access

Throughout U. S. history, libraries were known for amassing collections of resources and materials to facilitate the process of learning. The drastic explosion of information technology paved the way for libraries to advocate for equitable access to information, services, and pedagogical resources. Today, despite holding a rich wealth of knowledge in many accessible formats, libraries remain largely inaccessible to people with various disabilities. Academic libraries are in support of providing access to resources, irrespective of format, to meet the needs of their diverse communities. Teaching and learning styles are changing; as information gatekeepers, librarians help tailor and disseminate resources based on individual needs. Evolving learning outcomes in a digital age are a driving force for libraries to customize and delegate Librarian Liaison responsibilities to enhance opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Therefore, appointing a Librarian Liaison is paramount to engaging and strategically connecting students with a vast array of library resources critical to their research/learning needs. This liaison role goes beyond research; it requires serving as primary point of contact for subject area, attending accessibility training workshops, and becoming familiar with user information needs and expectations. These commitments allow for enhanced knowledge-base, direct engagement between user community, and library services. Prior to assigning new liaison responsibilities at the CCNY libraries, progress remained stagnant with respect to leading efforts of inclusive access for individuals with disabilities. Under new direction for the past year and in collaboration with the Director of AAC/SDS, an endeavor to revamp interdepartmental engagement is underway to improve access college-wide. Ideally, an assessment of the library’s current state of access to services, physical facilities, and information technology are critical in helping redesign successful pathways to universal access.

The perspective gained from this journey lead to a broader approach in providing inclusive library services. Access can mean something vastly different from one student to another, even within the same disability category.

Kaufman-Scarborough & Menzel Baker (2005, p. 1), found that “an estimate of the population with disabilities vary, given the lack of definitional exactness as to precisely what qualifies as a disability”. For instance, students on the autism spectrum generally present unique challenges, which vary from person to person in one way or another (e.g. life experiences, symptomology manifestation, combined diagnoses, resources, intervention, and treatment). Therefore, these variations must be taken into consideration when developing a plan to improve library access and services. The best practices and potential directions in research are garnered through the implementation of universal design principles. The following access points to consider at the CCNY Libraries are:

- Physical: books, journals, bathrooms, height of desks/tables, entrances/exits, and signage.
- Digital: databases and computers.
- Website: general information and LibGuides.
- Staff knowledge and perceptions: different abilities and techniques to provide service and information, including use of language (i.e. referring to person(s) as handicapped or wheelchair-bound, instead of people first language).

Through the preliminary needs assessment and access barriers outline, the Director of AAC/SDS enlisted the Librarian Liaison to ensure inclusion, equity, and successful access initiatives—especially when a single complaint could lead to an undesirable consequences. Myers, Lindburg, & Nied (2014, p. 83), state that advocating for inclusion is not about reactively addressing disability barriers following a grievance; instead, proactively implementing policies that embrace diversity. This cross-collaboration between departments and other experienced liaisons help develop strategic methods to fulfill individual user needs and facilitate access to information services. The library partnership with the Director of SDS is a team effort committed to expanding services and resources to implement new ways of cultivating an accessible environment—physical and virtual— across the college-wide community. Moreover, CUNY is taking proactive measures in educating students, scholars, and professionals to embrace diverse learning styles and supportive library services that are indicative of a welcoming and inclusive campus culture.

Universal design principles

The notion of Universal Design (UD) originated from architecture, design, and the composition of buildings. There are seven principles of UD that aim to remove barriers in order to maximize access, services, and usability

for all people, regardless of age, size, ability or disability. UD is fundamental to the delivery of high-quality library services for individuals with diverse backgrounds, needs, and unique learning styles in postsecondary settings. Nevertheless, some libraries overlook cost-effective and straightforward techniques to increase their accessibility for individuals with various disabilities. Partnering with other campus entities to incorporate library accessibility and UD principles help facilitate user access to information resources.

In light of UD principles, the entryway and circulation desk pathways for the following CCNY library divisions meet the requirement of minimal physical effort: Cohen, Architecture, Science and Engineering, and Center for Worker Education. The reading rooms require *Low Physical Effort* with appropriate spaces for patrons to work, including adjustable chairs and tables within reach. Each library design provides individuals with diverse abilities adequate space to efficiently use assistive devices in the main area. At CCNY, the library department and Student Disability Office are taking eager steps in understanding and advocating benefits of diverse learning styles through library services.

Furthermore, *Equitable use* principles were applied to the cross-collaborative project underway between the Librarian Liaison and the Director of SDS to redesign the CCNY Cohen Library student accessibility area for a more marketable design. The restructured space will include state-of-the-art equipment, assistive technology, adjustable furniture, and in-house knowledgeable staff to create an inclusive environment. Prior to this project, the library's accessibility area appeared under-utilized with outdated equipment and inaccessible furniture—partly due to financial constraints—prompted students to use the AAC/SDS lab. Since the lab is located outside of the library premises, this limits access to resources and reference librarians. The forthcoming area will offer comparable furnishings and computer hardware to handle the capabilities of multiple assistive technology software.

Accessibility partnerships

Thompson et al. (2018) indicate that individuals assigned duties on disability matters tackle numerous responsibilities on their college campus. Therefore, hiring a library accessibility specialist can help develop a network of committed individuals to remedy access barriers across the City University of New York. CCNY had not created a new position explicitly devoted to library accessibility, however, responsibilities of Liaison to the Office of Student Disability Services were designated to a librarian on staff. The partnership initiated when the Director of AAC/SDS consulted with

the chief administrative officer of the libraries regarding new directions in diminishing inequities and improving all points of access for library users. The department appointed an Assistant Professor/division Chief Librarian as Liaison to AAC/SDS, due to her long history at the college, and professional interest in the area of disability services. Thus, propelling the Director of AAC/SDS and Librarian Liaison to devise a comprehensive strategy to fully integrated disability services into the CCNY Libraries' workflow (Grassi, 2017).

Implementing, managing, and sustaining organizational change is at times a strenuous process; though, necessary to achieve inclusivity and equal access. The seven principles of UD serve as a roadmap to cultivate solutions to expand accessibility, all while staying practical about what can and cannot occur. According to Thompson et al. (2018) the increased reliance on web content requires using practical measures and collective resource sharing to remediate accessibility challenges in higher education. As a method of assessment, the Librarian Liaison created a checklist of access points, which the Director of AAC/SDS reviewed in-depth to determine whether the library had areas in need of improvement. This included an overview of online digital resources, website accessibility, and an audit of each access point (see [Figure 1](#): A detailed assessment of the CCNY Libraries by division). Conducting an audit allowed for the identification of problem areas to be remedied in short-term and documenting issues that need to be addressed long-term, as it required financial resources and support from other departments. During the course of this assessment, we developed mission objectives for CCNY Libraries accessibility to:

1. Achieve equal and full access for individuals with disabilities who utilize their services;
2. Weave Universal Design perspectives into this collaboration;
3. Encourage critical conversations and continued outreach with other campus entities focused on its importance; and
4. Ensure tangible achievable goals, since it is fairly easy to be wildly optimistic.

The nature of mutual responsibilities, accessibility goals and concerns of both parties led to this cooperative college-wide effort in expanding services. As with any burgeoning partnership, this initiative opened the potential opportunities to learn collectively and shape each other's work and expectations. The Director of AAC/SDS began his tenure at CCNY "on the ground running" in September of 2015, due to a large number of students with disabilities registering and requiring accommodations (registration data indicated earlier in the article). The Director brings a

Assessment Categories	
Excellent =	3
Good/OK =	2
Needs Work =	1
Not Evident =	0

Area(s)	Morris R. Cohen Library	Dominican Studies Institute Library	Science & Engineering Library	Architecture Library	Music Library	CWE Library	TECH Center
Building/Location	North Academic Center (NAC) Building 2 nd fl. Main entrance	North Academic Center (NAC) Building 2 nd fl. Room 2/202	Marshak Building Room J29	Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Arch. Building Room 101	Shepard Hall Room 160	25 Broadway 7 th fl. Room 7-28 * downtown campus	North Academic Center (NAC) Building Room 1/301 1 st fl. in Cohen
Entrances & Exits	Entrance and Exit on 1 st & 2 nd floors 3	Entrance and Exit on 2 nd floor 1 Entrance/exit doors need an automatic "push to open" power button or doors should be kept open during hours of operation	Entrance and Exit on 1 st floor 2	Entrance and Exit on 1 st floor 2	Entrance and Exit on 1 st floor 1 Entrance/exit doors need an automatic "push to open" power button or doors should be kept open during hours of operation	Entrance and Exit on 7 th floor 1 Entrance/exit doors need an automatic "push to open" power button or doors should be kept open during hours of operation	Entrance and Exit on 1 st & 2 nd floors 3 * 1 st fl. of Cohen Library
Wheelchair Ramps	0	0	2 Near building entrance on ground level	1 Near building entrance on ground level	1 Near building entrance on ground level	0	0
Elevators	2 Frequent breakdowns	0	0	0	3	0	2 On ground level
Signage	1 Add signage regarding services to people with disabilities on floors 2-5 and narrow aisles	2	1 Add signage regarding services to people with disabilities on each floor and narrow aisles	1 Add signage regarding services to people with disabilities on each floor and narrow aisles	1 Add signage regarding services to people with disabilities on each floor and narrow aisles	0	3
Stairs	2	0	2	3	2	0	0
Restrooms	3	2 No restroom in the library. However, there are accessible exterior bathrooms on the second floor, across the rotunda.	1 Limited bathroom accessibility	2 No restroom in the library. However, there are accessible exterior bathrooms on main floor.	1 There are accessible bathrooms on the lower level.	2 No restroom in the library. However, there are accessible exterior bathrooms on main floor.	3
Drinking Fountains	3	2 No water fountain in the library. However, there are accessible exterior fountains on the second floor, across the rotunda.	2 No water fountain in the library. However, there are fountains near the entrance.	2 No water fountain in the library. However, there are fountains near the entrance.	2 No water fountain in the library. However, there are fountains across the hall.	2 No water fountain in the library. However, there are fountains near the entrance.	3
Computers	1 Renovation underway to install state-of-the-art equipment and furniture (see article)	1	3	3	1	3	3
Wheel Chair Lifts	0	0	3 Located outside the library	3 Located within the library	0	0	0

Figure 1. Assessment Checklist of the City College of New York Libraries by division.

decade of professional experience ranging from social service agency settings to higher education, including the private and public sector. His professional training in social work helps utilize clinical skills and a systems perspective in developing human relationships. Disability fits into the service paradigm of the social work profession because social workers understand the challenges encountered by this population through empathy, compassion, assistance with resources, and helping clients reach their goals.

The AAC/SDS Director has conducted research on the intersectionality of disability and LGBTQ identities in the context of challenges encountered in academic settings. This study helped examine the social constructs of disability through a disability studies lens rather than a diagnostic or medicalized lens, not taking into account the innumerable environmental obstacles presented to individuals with disabilities (LoGiudice, 2016). The Director chose this line of work not as a job, but a profession devoted to promoting a community of access, inclusion and equal opportunity for students with disabilities. He identifies as a gay man with a learning disability; however, for a long time faced challenges due to internalized cripophobia.

Landing in the Office of Student Disability Services at CCNY, the Director is able to make strides for individuals with disabilities through his contributions.

As a solo Architecture Librarian, and Liaison to AAC/SDS, there are certain professional obligations and expectations to help raise accessibility standards in support of diverse needs and populations (Joint, 2005). Solo librarians in higher education are tasked with balancing the academic tripod of scholarship, teaching, and service, while liaising and managing the daily operations of an academic library. In addition, full-time library faculty at CUNY are required to meet demanding research/publication standards for tenure and promotion, alongside the challenges of day-to-day work in various settings. The Librarian Liaison is preeminent in collaborating, advocating, and marketing services through the Office of Student Disability Services to demonstrate her value to students, faculty, staff, and college communities. Her responsibilities include managing collections, access services (circulation and reserve), reference, disseminating information, database usability testing, dismantling service barriers, and applying principles of universal design in all aspects of library services. These obligations are upheld, not only to follow federal regulations and ADA compliance, but to live up to the library's ethos, which states its commitment to the "education of the whole person, fostering information and communication literacy for academic and career success, preparing a highly diverse population for leadership and service to our city, nation, and the world" (The City College of New York Libraries, 2000). The ethical obligations of the library profession in academia embody the commitment to promote access to quality information and support intellectual freedom and creative expression based on the principles stated in the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights*.

The journey of advocating for AAC/SDS encompasses learning to recognize the intricacies of diverse disabilities—many of which are invisible to the untrained eye—by educating and coordinating with library staff and understanding the organizational culture at large. Creating an environment of equity, inclusion, and diversity starts by helping other staff members understand disabilities, and how this impacts job responsibilities to transform ideology and demystify misperceptions. The professional bond between the Librarian Liaison and Director of AAC/SDS influence future decision-making in more formal educational activities regarding accessibility within both departments to exceed user expectations. The objectives of this collaborative effort plans to assess and/or modify services between disability services and the library department to accommodate individuals with disabilities.

Inclusive and accessible design: services

Collections

CCNY Libraries provide extensive print, electronic, and non-print information resources in support of the college's instructional programs, scholarships, and research mission to elevate academic success. The Libraries' collection encompasses over 950,000 print volumes, media, and special collections, and provides access to more than 980,000 electronic books. It also maintains subscriptions to 280 bibliographic and full-text databases and more than 118,000 electronic journals. A growing number of online databases feature an official accessibility statement pledging their commitment and compliance to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act and the W3C Web Content Accessibility. Each focuses on periodically testing the interface for screen reader accessibility using JAWS with particular web browsers during implementation. Due to the complex nature of these web resources, content, and services, this continued effort requires further exploration. Many libraries contend with the challenges of ensuring their databases are fully accessible in terms of navigation while using a screen reader for those with visual disabilities; this continues to be an obstacle to access for this population (Power & Lebeau, 2009). The full list of electronic resources is available through the Databases A–Z of the City College Libraries <http://libguides.ccnycuny.edu>. In an effort to make these databases more accessible, AAC/SDS also pairs students with the Librarian Liaison to identify specific challenges and steps to remedy the obstacles of obtaining information.

Currently, the Libraries' print collection is not available in alternative format, such as MP3, audiobook, Braille, or large print. However, the department has teamed up with AAC/SDS to provide materials in alternate formats to remediate inaccessible print and electronic/digital materials for users with disabilities. Even though CCNY Libraries are taking necessary steps to accession and develop accessible print and digital, this is a complicated task that will take years to accomplish. Nevertheless, CCNY's AAC/SDS provide eligible students access to: *The AccessText Network* (ATN), which helps college students with print disabilities connect the Office of Student Disability with major publishers to obtain textbooks in alternative formats, free of charge; *Bookshare*, one of the largest online platforms for individuals with various print disabilities with over 609,958 eBooks available in various formats; and *Learning Ally*, one of the largest resources that produces and maintains educational audiobooks produced for individuals with disabilities, among other available resources.

Fortunately, the Libraries have a continuously increasing number of online databases, many of which offer electronic books—such as, *ProQuest*, *JSTOR*, *Ebrary*, *SpringerLink*, and *Web of Science*—as well as digital full-text articles in a broad range of databases.

Policies & procedures

As user demands shift, libraries must have a mindful awareness of universal design practices and policies to reasonably accommodated individual needs. The American Library Association (2006) policy on accessibility states that:

libraries play a catalytic role in the lives of people with disabilities by facilitating their full participation in society. Libraries should use strategies based upon the principles of universal design to ensure that library policy, resources and services meet the needs of all people.

Prior to this accessibility initiative between both departments, the CCNY Library Website offered minimal information on services, policies, and procedures for individuals with disabilities; amenities were practically hidden. To address library service guidelines and procedures requires mutual inter-departmental communication on all levels. The responsibility of liaison work encompasses partnering and making direct connections with key personnel in the Library department, the Office of Student Disability Services, and the Office of Information Technology to jettison traditional roles and increase service awareness to people with disabilities. It is imperative to encourage collaboration, administrative support, and participation throughout campus departments.

Diversity and inclusion training

An essential component to ensuring inclusive and equitable access to information is establishing the reciprocal collaborations between library staff, people with disabilities, and the Office of Student Disability Services. Diversity and inclusion training helps overcome certain attitudinal barriers, which may hinder equitable library service. The implementation of diversity and sensitivity training heightens the importance of strategies to include: identify self-reflection of behaviors and differences; recognize and demystify any presumed stereotypes. Continuously developing strategies facilitates change, improves understanding, and widens exposure to people with disabilities. The Librarian Liaison and Director of AAC/SDS are exploring the integration of ongoing workshops to inspire an exchange of ideas that highlight positive collaborations and practices of assisting people with disabilities. As a result, these interdepartmental interactions may render areas

in need for improved understanding of staff roles and professional expectations.

Technical training

CUNY is dedicated to providing reasonable modifications and auxiliary aides by enforcing policies, practices, and guidelines to ensure equal educational opportunities for all constituents. According to Burgstahler (2009), “libraries and their professional organizations are well positioned to be leaders in the development and promotion of policies for the procurement, development, and use of accessible information technology.” Bringing assistive technology training to the forefront of library services is an initial step to adopting a user-friendly and universal culture of access. For these best practices to take place in the library, one must implement them institution-wide— administrators, faculty, staff, and student assistants— for participation and cooperation across the college community.

As part of a CUNY-Wide commitment to meet accessibility standards in accordance to Americans with Disability Act, the CCNY Office of Institutional Advancement and Communications (OIAC) developed an ongoing campaign to remove/fix inaccessible PDFs and videos without closed-captions from every website associated with the college. Content authors or editors are now required to confirm that screen-readers and other assistive technology software can properly interpret multimedia, HTML, and PDF documents. Previously, PDF documents were scanned as a graphic image, making it impossible for screen-readers to detect the text. It is crucial to generate a world where individuals are included regardless of abilities or disabilities. Yet, many times internet content, such as Websites, library online catalogs, journal articles, and LibGuides are not readily available to individuals needing assistive technology.

The OIAC campaign is also leading several ongoing accessibility training workshops on the legal and technical requirements of accessibility mandate. The Director of AAC/SDS provides: an introduction to the applicable laws surrounding accessible communications; the advantages of promoting universal design in higher education institutions, along with the available assistive technology programs; and followed by OIAC addressing faculty and staff on the technical requirements of making communications accessible. Library staff can further enlist the involvement and cooperation of the Library’s IT department to address learned practices, as they are most acquainted with maintaining all hardware and software technology. The participation of cross-campus alliances accelerate change and understanding on matters of disability and accessibility to fortify continuous improvement.

Inclusive and accessible design: information technology

Web accessibility

Furthermore, CUNY established a series of external and in-house sessions that address digital content policies and procedures to raise awareness among librarians and develop a culture of accessibility. As a representative of both the library and AAC/SDS, the Liaison keeps staff well-informed of how to maintain ongoing compliance with accessibility standards through regular communication, resources, and support services, which follow the outcome of relevant professional development workshops. According to Deque Systems (2016), a leading provider of digital software, “accessibility has to be built in from the ground up – and while accessibility tools are a huge component of that, the proper planning and training are of equal importance.” Through professional development events related to accessibility, the delegate for AAC/SDS gains practical information that enhance peer learning and implement services to accommodate all user groups. These frequent accessibility training sessions are aimed to support the next steps of introducing disability etiquette and resources on web content accessibility to library staff. There are several open source tools that should be applied to evaluate webpages in conjunction with individual assessment to oversee accuracy. For example: the *WAVE – Web Accessibility Tool* <http://wave.webaim.org> WAVE, is a browser-based tool developed by Web Accessibility in Mind (WebAIM) to ensure website content compliance. This assistive tool makes it easier for content creators and/or web developers to identify and rectify accessibility errors within web pages. This mechanism provides content editors with the initial good practices in establishing and adopting Website accessibility. The evaluations occur instantaneously within most website browser, like Mozilla Firefox and Google Chrome. In addition, the *Colour Contrast Analyser Tool* <https://www.visionaustralia.org> provided by Vision Australia, a leading supplier of services for broad range visual impairments, checks foreground and background color combinations to determine whether it provides sufficient color visibility. These resources are not mentioned to endorse any particular product, but to use as a point of reference to indicate which facilitate access.

Libraries play a fundamental role in facilitating creative interactions between academic departments and their representatives. King, Cataldi-Roberts, and Wentz (2017) (p. 27) recommend that “good quality relationships between libraries and their IT departments are essential due to the interconnected nature of their services, which in turn leads to successful collaborative ventures that bode well for the future of both services”. Active engagement and continuous dialog between the library’s web developer and

the Director of AAC/SDS regarding best practices are paramount to the work of Library Liaisons. These direct connections assist in building strong relationships, as well as cultivating interdepartmental alliances alongside both parties in hopes of embedding *Browse Aloud*, a CUNY browser accessibility tool. *Browse Aloud* is support-software, which adds speech, reading, and translation to websites by facilitating access and participation for people with dyslexia, low literacy, English as a second language, and those with mild visual impairments. However, due to the limitation of campus network security, the consensus was a temporary solution to embed the Word Press Accessibility Helper Plugin, which provided a more accessible alternative. King et al. (2017) clearly explain that “the IT department act as gatekeepers for many library activities, hence meeting users’ demands for easy-to-access, digital services requires cooperation between” stakeholders critical to building efficient and friendly working relationships. In addition, website accessibility is an essential resource in many aspects of life, literature, and society. The Liaison developed a library accessibility webpage and resource LibGuide in an effort to provide equal access and opportunity to individuals with diverse abilities. IT and the Director of AAC/SDS approved the decision to publicize on the library’s homepage. From a librarian’s perspective, partnerships solidify mutual interests to improve student learning and achieve professional growth.

Computer use and assistive technology

The CCNY Libraries are equipped with computers, assistive technology, and a broad-range of information to equitably accommodate a variety of users, including individuals with various disabilities. Selected computers are provided and supported by AAC/SDS and the Library’s IT support team manages the functionality of the assistive technology software and periodic updates. These computers are password protected requiring prior authorization from the Office of Disability Services; however both advocates are campaigning for open access computers. Throughout this collaborative process, the Director of AAC/SDS worked with the Office of Information Technology (OIT) to designate and install assistive technology software on 57 computers throughout the TECH Center on campus. Each designated workstation has an identifying AA (AccessAbility) sticker, and the following three software programs: *JAWS* (screen reader), *ZoomText* (screen reader, enlarges text), and *Kurzweil* (educational technology designed for learning disabilities). Stakeholder engagement is critical to integrating and sustaining accessibility improvements in the Library, including administration, campus financial accounts, facilities, Information Technology (IT), staff, and students with disabilities.

LibGuide

Further meetings between the Librarian Liaison and Director of SDS have elicited the prospects of maximizing resources, combining sources of funding, collective goals, and effectiveness to our student population. The Liaison explored mapping the design of an accessibility web-based resource guide using LibGuides software, a Content Management System made by *Springshare*. Cassell & Hiremath (2013, p. 10) indicate that guides are resource sharing systems that help develop critical thinking and invites cross-department collaboration with librarians. LibGuides serve as pathfinders to abundant subject/topic/course specific library and web resources, which help direct individuals to appropriately synthesized information. The platform uses simple and easy methods to create, edit, and store HTML content in a manageable way. Cassell & Hiremath (2013) state that librarians are agents of information and change who guide users to identify, evaluate, and access the most appropriate curriculum resources. The Liaison persuaded the library administration to embed an accessibility tab and LibGuide on the homepage to increase visibility and impact. Reese & McCain (2017, p. 1) explain that “burying research guides can make it difficult to access and can lower their impact on student learning and their value to researchers.” This resource tool expands web accessibility awareness and offers students, faculty, and visitors helpful information regarding accessibility compliance and assistive technology worldwide, all of which are available 24/7, on site and/or off campus.

Inclusive and accessible design: physical environment

Physical space

General and physical access to campus facilities should align with universal accessibility standards or at the very least, accommodate individuals with a variety of disabilities. The indoor/outdoor pathways of each building and library need to be clear, safe, and barrier-free when traveling to and from each facility. For some, the library’s physical environment can seem like an overwhelming place. Now, imagine a library user with a disability (i.e. wheelchair users, visual impairments or blindness, etc.) trying to navigate through multiple library facilities. Samson (2011, p. 271) found that “physical spaces can be reconfigured with universal access as its focus to welcome students and normalize accessible design for everyone to use.” Fundamentally, libraries should be mindful of how their library users maneuver the physical environment. Keeping accessibility in mind, library administrations have a few things to consider: Is the library entrance/exit clear and wide enough for wheelchair users? Are the bathrooms, elevators,

water fountains, and public areas (i.e. circulation desk, reference or information desk, stacks, etc.) accessible to individuals with disabilities?

The libraries are continuously working towards integrating equal access to the college community and across CUNY. The work of both the Director of AAC/SDS and the Librarian Liaison anticipate creating a detailed online map that demonstrates accessible areas, including easy access entrances, push-button or keypad automatic doors, and barrier-free routes to different access points of each library facility. It is also vital to review immediate access to the physical space within the library, as well as transporting to and from each facility on campus to visit the library. Lack of universal access may inadvertently deter library users with disabilities from coming to and/or using the library. Samson (2011, p. 272) mentions that ADA sanctions walking through the entire library “wearing mittens” to pinpoint barriers and/or accessible space. During the spring and fall 2017 semester, the Librarian Liaison conducted several inspections of each library space with a designated staff member of AAC/SDS to review library physical access.

Restroom accessibility

Historically, the design of bathrooms and toilet facilities are generally and at times unintentionally overlooked. Margolin & Poggiali (2017) stress that:

bathrooms that are small, ill-equipped, infrequently cleaned, dark, covered in graffiti, or even just numbingly institutional may belie a library’s overall service ethic. When our patrons include racial, ethnic, or sexual minorities, or those with disabilities, these conditions risk reinforcing social hierarchies that libraries strive to counteract (p. 483).

Library users have the fundamental human right to accessible bathrooms. Article V of the American Library Association’s *Library Bill of Rights* unequivocally maintains that libraries and librarians have an obligation to provide services, materials and programs to all members of the community it serves without regard to disabilities, sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation (American Library Association, 1996). Yet, libraries may not have their facilities fully equipped to accommodate every user. The minimum provisions of ADA compliant restroom facilities usually include at least one larger wheelchair accessible compartment for easier access. The CCNY campus library facilities have accessible restrooms or that, which are within close proximity. However, some areas leave much to be desired, such as lack of proper signage, stalls without dual grab bars, and inaccessible fixtures should be remedied with accessibility in mind. [Figure 1](#) provides a detailed assessment of the CCNY Libraries by division

Wayfinding and signage

The serendipitous experience of perusing library stacks for books is a great way of finding relevant library resources and to deepen user experience. Nevertheless, Bosman & Rusinek (1997, p. 81) indicate that signage and wayfindings help users navigate through library facilities to efficiently fulfill information needs and minimize confusion at various access points. Signage can help to enhance library service awareness by informing, promoting, and/or directing users where to go and how to get there. Library signage is an essential visual method of communication, which displays different aspects of information, such as wayfinding, informational, directional, and emergency, among other. Stempler and Polger (2013) state that “signage represents more than directions or policies; it is informational, promotional, educational, navigational, and sets the tone of the environment.” Libraries are urged to have large, clear, and consistent signage that is appealing and user-friendly for everyone, including individual’s visual disabilities. As it relates to the CCNY Libraries, there are several areas in each division that have either an overabundance or a lack of appropriate signage. The established collaboration between the Librarian Liaison and Director of AAS/SDS has inspired further involvement of other campus entities to address shared challenges and opportunities for more sustainable signage development going forward.

Implications/recommendations

In view of the foregoing circumstances, this study embarked upon cross-collaborative efforts to harness long-standing partnerships and increase services for individuals with disabilities. Nevertheless, the prime focus of this article serves as a starting point for conversations between the Library and its constituents in the hopes of increasing library universal access and offering possible suggestions to applicable academic environments. Preferably, alternative assessment techniques are more effective when incorporating multi-sourced strategies on a continuous basis to ensure progressive outcomes. Achieving cross-campus engagement is a driving factor to the work of Librarian Liaisons and library services; resulting in the following recommendations:

- Solicit feedback from key stakeholders and administrators through surveys, focus groups, and incentivized input to monitor programing and services i.e. workplace film discussion groups exploring diversity and inclusion.
- Team up with community organizations in the neighborhood that serves this population to develop events and programing.

- Promote customizable library services during orientation workshop for new and returning students and faculty, which specifically targets feedback.
- Regularly attend institutional meetings and professional development sessions to keep the Librarian Liaison well informed on daily activities, important events and/or curricular changes in disability services.
- Participate in campus-wide efforts/events sponsored for or by the Office of Student Disability Services.
- Use social media as an instructional tool to promote services the college community may not be aware of i.e. assistive technology apps.
- Create individual course guides for students, faculty, staff, and other affiliates of CCNY's academic departments, programs, and researchers to use as a point of reference, which lead student resources held in the library.
- Encourage college community to acknowledge and disclose areas on campus that may require acceptable accommodations, whether speaking for themselves or on someone else's behalf.
- Proactively advocate for the freedom to equally access resources, technology, and services to support individuals with disabilities.
- Reduce barriers of communication through access, signage, telephone, in-person interaction, service announcements, and various forms of articulating information to accommodate patrons with disabilities.
- Set periodic policy reviews and staff training sessions to discover new methods of effectively upholding the principles of equal access to information.

Conclusion

The partnership between both the Library and AAC/SDS has led to efforts in improving the accessibility of library facilities, print collections, and existing electronic resources. Stakeholder collaborations and campus-wide communication facilitate decisions that shape the library, which include open access scholarship and inclusive learning spaces. Collectively and individually, library users of all types are entitled to an environment that helps stimulate diversity and are conducive to academic success. Ongoing advocacy for universal access to library resources and services *starts* with progressive communication and guidance from individuals who best understand their own support needs.

Through our partnership, its challenges and successes, it behooves various universities throughout the world to consider and think about the importance of library access. We attempted to map out a plan of action using UD principles and collaborating with other necessary departments

that likely should be involved in this change process, and of course, do not forget to include your patrons with disabilities in this process, who are the experts of their own life experiences.

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