Best Practices and Checklist for Accessible Course Content

- **Content** - To comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, provide all course materials in accessible formats.
- **Structure** - present content that is logical, hierarchical and meaningful and with structure that reflects its importance.
  - HTML, Word, PowerPoint, PDF content uses headings (h2 through h6) instead of formatting (font family, size, color) to give importance to content.
  - Assistive technology should be able to read the content in the correct order.

*Adobe Dreamweaver, and the Blackboard Text Box Editor can all be used to add content to Blackboard courses. However, pasting text from external applications may add some inconsistent formatting to the content. To avoid this, paste plain text into the Blackboard Text Editor and then format using the Text Editor. An alternative is to paste HTML code into the Text Editor when it is in code view. You can access the code view by clicking the < > symbol in the second row of buttons in the Text Editor. (Blackboard Learn Course Sites)*

- **Syllabus** - provide the syllabus and other teacher-created materials in a text-based, electronic format.
  - Use Model Syllabus for IPFW Faculty or similar to create and accessible syllabus.
- **Files / Documents** – all uploaded documents should be in an accessible format.
  - Instructional materials purposed for reading should be in accessible PDF format.
  - All other instructional materials that may be needed in an editable format such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint should be accessible.
  - Note: reference Information Technology Services documentation entitled Accessible Documents for more information.
- **Scanned electronic versions of printed materials** – use optical character recognition (OCR) to ensure that the content is accessible.
- **Simple Text** - avoid unnecessary complexity and define new terms when they are presented. Create materials and instructions in simple, intuitive formats.
  - Paragraphs - clear, concise, short.
  - Use of ordered and unordered lists (numbered, bulleted) whenever possible and replacing table format.
  - Pyramid writing – most important information first.
  - First use of acronyms explained in every document.
    - Consider adding a course glossary for technical terms and jargon used in course materials.
  - Make more pages rather than long pages filled with small type and jammed with images.
Blackboard provides the navigation and frame formatting, but a consistent page format within your content area will make it easier for students to go through your material. Consistent formatting increases the readability of your material, helping students orient themselves quickly and absorb information. A clear consistent presentation will especially assist people with learning disabilities who have difficulty following complicated presentations. (Blackboard Learn Course Sites)

- **Images / Alternative Text** - images and graphics need alternative text whenever/wherever they are used.
  - Use the ALT tag only for informational graphics. Set the ALT tag for stylistic graphics to Null (alt=""). This way screen readers will skip over the tag.

- **Graphics** - Information conveyed using graphics should also be conveyed using text.
  - Charts, graphs, figures.

- **Color** - information conveyed using only color, such as organizational elements or other important cues also provided as text?
  - Remember colors have significant and sometimes powerful meanings for people from many cultures.
  - Provide enough contrast between background colors and text.
  - Do not use combinations of color, e.g. red/green that might cause problems for people with color blindness. (See URL reference to colorblind checker in URL’s at the end of this document).

- **Tables** - using tables for layout should be avoided whenever possible.
  - Note: Tables for data are acceptable as long as they are properly coded to identify the contents of each cell.
    - Do not simulate a data table by using tabs to align rows and columns. This confuses a screen reader. Properly constructed data tables are the best way to present data to students using screen readers.
    - Try to construct tables with seven (7) or eight (8) columns maximum. More than that can be overwhelming when read out loud.
    - Define column and row headings using the TH element.
    - Provide a unique ID for each column and row heading.
    - Associate each data cell with its corresponding column/row headings using the HEADERS attribute.
    - Keep the table “homogenous” and avoid colspan/rowspan and nowrap.
    - Provide a summary for each data table.
    - If links are present in tables, use descriptive text for the link so the student can understand the target of the link. Don’t use "Click here" or "More..."

- **Navigation** - can content be navigated in the correct order using only a keyboard?

- **Course Menu/Map**
  - Clear, concise; remember that this list is repeated every time content is accessed.

- **Links / Hyperlinks** - clearly labeled hyperlinks
  - Don’t use terms like ‘click here’.
- Use Blackboard’s built-in **Check Links** feature to make sure there are no broken links in the course.

- **Availability** - instructional materials should be accessible to students with disabilities at the same time it is available to any other student enrolled in that program. They should not have to wait for accessible content.

**Universal Design for Learning** - the process of making course concepts accessible and skills attainable regardless of learning style, physical or sensory abilities.

- Apply universal design to all lectures, classroom discussions, group work, handouts, web-based content, labs, fieldwork, assessment instruments, and other academic activities and materials to maximize the learning of students.

**URLs for web sites listed in this document are given below in alphabetical order.**

Blackboard Learn Course Sites Workspace - Universal Design and Accessibility for Online Learning: https://www.coursesites.com/webapps/Bb-sites-course-creation-BBLEARN/courseHomepage.htmlx?course_id=1263_1

Model Syllabus for IPFW Faculty: http://new.ipfw.edu/dotAsset/2dbb4317-e0f1-4bbb-9036-e133085c9d64.doc.

Online Syllabus Suggestions: http://new.ipfw.edu/dotAsset/1c5aa14b-6eb1-4fe1-bbc5-19db4700161e.doc.

Syllabus Example: http://new.ipfw.edu/dotAsset/1413347a-c1da-42c5-bcd8-e97c5bdec34f.doc.

Web Accessibility (Office of Institutional Equity): http://new.ipfw.edu/offices/equity/accessibility/.

Web Accessibility FAQs (with resources): http://new.ipfw.edu/training/accessibility/faqs/section-508.html.

Colorblind Web page filter: http://colorfilter.wickline.org/