

VHEAP Lunch & Learn – Meeting Summary

Date: January 13, 2026

Time: ~11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Format: Virtual (Zoom)

Facilitator: Sarahbeth Dreis

Notes: Mark Nichols (with AI Support)

Opening & Context

- The session opened with informal check-ins and a reminder that **April 24, 2026 is 100 days away**, marking the enforcement date for the updated **ADA Title II** digital accessibility requirements.
 - Sarahbeth Dreis shared an overview of **current Virginia accessibility-related legislation**:
 - **Four bills total** related to disability access in higher education.
 - **Two bills** focused on **inclusive postsecondary higher education / CTP (Comprehensive Transition Programs)**.
 - **One bill** impacting **accommodations in higher education**.
 - Additional legislation anticipated, representing a record year for disability-access-related bills in Virginia.
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Discussion Question 1: Faculty & Leadership Training Challenges

Key Themes

- **Wide range of faculty readiness:** from basic awareness to advanced accessibility skills.
- **Lack of scalable solutions**, especially for:
 - Handwritten and STEM-heavy materials
 - LaTeX-generated math content
 - Large volumes of legacy PDFs
- Strong concern about **time burden** on faculty and the risk of transferring that burden to students when accessibility is delayed.

Tools & Strategies Discussed

- **AI and LLMs**
 - Broad interest in leveraging AI to assist with remediation (with appropriate guardrails).

- Recognition that AI tools can both help and inadvertently introduce new accessibility issues.
- **Google Ecosystem Challenges**
 - Limited built-in accessibility features in Google Workspace.
 - Use of **Grackle for Google Docs** as a remediation *guide*, with caution that fixes may not persist when documents are copied.
 - Reference: <https://www.grackledocs.com/en/>
- **STEM Authoring Tools**
 - Quarto via RStudio noted as a promising approach for producing accessible math content without full LaTeX complexity.

Course Content & Archiving Approaches

- **UVA Canvas archiving strategy:**
 - Courses automatically closed after ~91 days.
 - Archived courses remain viewable but not editable without intervention.
 - Significant faculty frustration due to added friction, but approach helps manage remediation scope.
- **Virginia Tech approach:**
 - Courses archived after 4 years and eventually purged.
 - Still leaves multiple years of “active” content requiring accessibility consideration.

Media Accessibility

- **Captioning**
 - UVA enabled **automatic speech recognition (ASR) captions** for all new Kaltura videos.
- **Audio Description (AD)**
 - Widely acknowledged as an unresolved challenge.
 - UVA Darden School developing **faculty-facing guidance** to encourage built-in description during video production.
 - Shared draft guidance statement:

“Audio descriptions are needed in certain circumstances when visual information is not being clearly conveyed to the user through sound. Contact the Digital Accessibility Coordinator to determine if your multimedia requires audio descriptions and to learn how to obtain them.”

- Cost and scalability concerns with human-produced audio description services.
- Optimism that **AI-generated audio descriptions** may follow a trajectory similar to ASR captions.

External Collaboration Opportunity

- **University of Massachusetts** planning a **monthly media accessibility meeting** focused on captions, transcripts, and audio descriptions.
 - Interested participants encouraged to contact kengland@umassp.edu.
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Discussion Question 2: Leadership Buy-In

Higher Education Perspectives

- **Increased leadership awareness** reported, largely due to sustained advocacy over 12–18 months.
- Effective strategies include:
 - Title II readiness plans at the college or department level
 - Support from deans and department heads
 - Emphasis on accessibility for *newly created content*
- One practical mitigation strategy discussed:
 - **Staggered release of course content** rather than publishing all materials at semester start, reducing upfront remediation burden.

K–12 Perspectives (Fairfax County Public Schools)

- Accessibility work described as **grassroots and foundational**, now beginning to gain system-wide traction.
 - Use of **CALM (Choose Accessible Learning Materials)** as a framework for professional learning.
 - Key developments:
 - Engagement of school-based technology specialists
 - Increased awareness among principals and assistant superintendents
 - Movement toward accessibility-aligned **IT procurement processes**
 - Ongoing concern for **rural K–12 divisions** with limited staffing and resources.
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Looking Ahead & Sustainability

- Consensus that accessibility work will **continue beyond April 2026**, not diminish.
 - Anticipated ongoing needs:
 - Support for new faculty
 - Emerging technologies (AI, VR, new platforms)
 - Application-level accessibility (beyond course content)
 - Acknowledgement that **accommodations will still be necessary**, even as baseline accessibility improves.
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Closing & Next Steps

- February Lunch & Learn announced:
 - **VPAT Part 2** panel discussion, continuing the fall series.
- Participants expressed appreciation for peer sharing and cross-sector dialogue.

These AI-assisted notes are intended as a high-level summary and do not represent a verbatim transcript of the VHEAP January lunch & learn.