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Accessibility and Discoverability. A Report on the ALCTS CaMMS Catalog Form and Function Interest Group Meeting

The ALCTS CaMMS Catalog Form and Function Interest Group Meeting was held virtually via Zoom meeting on June 30, 2020 for an hour and a half. The program for the meeting included two presentations. Russell Michalak (Director of the Library, Archives, & Learning Center at Goldey-Beacom College) and Dr. Monica D.T. Rysavy (Director of Institutional Research & Training at Goldey-Beacom College) gave the first presentation, titled “Assessing the Accessibility of Library Tools & Services When You Aren’t an Accessibility Expert.” The second presentation, “Remote User Testing and the Share-VDE (Virtual Discovery Environment) Linked Data Discovery Interface at the University of Pennsylvania,” was given by Beth Picknally Camden (Goldstein Director of Information Processing, University of Pennsylvania Libraries) and Jim Hahn (Head of Metadata Research, University of Pennsylvania Libraries). There were over 40 participants during the live virtual meeting, and the recorded meeting has been posted on the [ALCTS CaMMS Catalog Form and Function Interest Group ALA Connect page](#). Bela Gupta, vice-chair of the interest group, introduced the presentations.

Russell Michalak and Dr. Monica D.T. Rysavy presented first. Michalak and Dr. Rysavy both work at Goldey-Beacom College, which Michalak explained is a private, coeducational college in Delaware offering programs predominantly in business but also in psychology, criminal justice, English, and economics. Dr. Rysavy is the Director of Institutional Research & Training, and one of the major roles of her office is to support faculty development and conduct internal reporting from an educational technology perspective. Michalak serves as the Director of the Library, Archives, & Learning Center, overseeing the budget and library staff, as well as manages the delivery of research, information, instructional services, tutoring services and archives. All Goldey-Beacom College first year students, whether undergraduate or graduate, are required to participate in the First Year Information Literacy program. The Hiron Library & Learning Center at Goldey-Beacom College offers a myriad of resources, but in 2019, when a blind student with 100% loss of vision enrolled at Goldey-Beacom College, they did not know how many of those resources were actually accessible.

Michalak and Dr. Rysavy decided that, in order to meet the needs of this student, it was imperative for them to do an accessibility study of the library resources most used as part of the First Year Information Literacy program: Gale, ProQuest, EBSCO, SpringShare, JStOR, Adam Matthew, SAGE Research Methods, Encyclopedia Britannica, and YEWNO Discover. Both Michalak and Dr. Rysavy felt it was important to note that they are not accessibility experts, nor have they ever taken classes focusing on accessibility. In previous roles, Michalak acquired experience creating digital collections and accessibility through descriptive metadata. Dr. Rysavy is a trained educational designer, and has previously worked in a role which included best

practices in creating accessible training, on such topics as how to embed accessibility tools within text editors (importance of headings, etc.), closed captioning, and using alt text for images. Goldey-Beacom College tends to address accessibility issues on an individual level, informally on a case-by-case basis. There is no office or department of accessibility, rather accessibility issues are handled by the office of Academic Advisement.

In order to become more familiar with accessibility efforts at other colleges and universities, Michalak and Dr. Rsyavy conducted a literature review of previously published research that discussed state statutes for accessibility, university policies on accessibility, and librarians' audits on web accessibility and vendor-supplied databases. They found that students with disabilities frequently had to be proactive advocates in order to get equal access to education. There are many instances where advocates for equal access to digital content filed ADA lawsuits against several universities in order to get them to make their web pages accessible, but meeting library users' accessibility needs goes beyond just the library website. Both Michalak and Dr. Rsyavy reiterated the need for librarians and educators to be proactive when it comes to accessibility. One way that librarians, even if they are new to issues of accessibility, can do this is by conducting accessibility audits of library vendor databases and other online resources.

They began by looking at vendor VPAT's or Voluntary Product Accessibility Templates, which is a document showing how an information and communications technology product or service complies with the accessibility standards outlined in Section 508 of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973. However, they found that not everyone's VPAT was accurate--this became especially obvious when trying to support the blind student's research in the First Year Information Literacy program. They noted that it is important to look at a vendor's VPAT, and then also look at what students are experiencing in real time.

To better determine the accessibility of their subscribed tools and services, Michalak and Dr. Rsyavy used the WAVE online accessibility checker to audit the main library electronic resources: Gale Power Search, ProQuest, Yewno, EBSCO, LibGuides, SpringShare A-Z Database List, JSTOR, Adam Matthew, SAGE Research Methods, and Encyclopedia Britannica. WAVE is also available as a Google Chrome extension called the WAVE Evaluation Tool. Running WAVE on a vendor website doesn't provide a "pass/fail" when it comes to whether the online resource is accessible, rather it provides a list of errors. WAVE gave Michalak and Dr. Rysavy a place to start, giving them information to remediate issues and alerted them to which databases tended to have more errors than others. User testing also played a key role in their research. They hired the blind student to help them determine whether the issues that the accessibility checker reported were being replicated by the screen reader or otherwise in the student's experience when looking at the resources. It was also important for them because they wanted to hear from the student what obstacles they were actually experiencing. In some cases

the student wasn't able to reproduce the issue that WAVE reported, in others they might have experienced an issue WAVE did not catch. They found that 32 of the vendor supplied databases they audited failed to meet the most basic accessibility requirements established by federal law: Tatomir Accessibility Checklist (TAC). One such finding was that the load time for users of adaptive technology can take several minutes rather than several seconds, greatly impeding the discovery process of online materials.

The next step was to connect with the vendors of those resources, as librarians are not able to make changes, and pass along the accessibility recommendations. When they communicated with vendors, some vendors were more receptive to requests for change than others. They noted that some vendors have no accessibility office or lack the resources dedicated to fixing issues caught in accessibility checks, whereas other vendors have full departments. It is incredibly unfortunate that a lot of changes to make things accessible for our library users are retroactive and not proactive. Librarians need to do more, particularly when it comes to pushing back against vendors, asking why materials are not accessible during contract negotiations. More libraries need to be doing accessibility checks and reporting inaccessibility about VPATs. Libraries need to keep drawing attention to this issue so that vendors stop ignoring it.

To learn more about the research conducted by Dr. Monica D.T. Rysavy and Russel Michalak and how one can do a similar accessibility audit at their institution, check out their multipart series in the Journal of Library Administration, also titled "[Assessing the Accessibility of Library Tools & Services When You Aren't an Accessibility Expert.](#)"

The second presentation also focused on improving discoverability of library resources and user-testing. In their presentation, "Remote User Testing and the Share-VDE (Virtual Discovery Environment) Linked Data Discovery Interface at the University of Pennsylvania," Beth Picknally Camden and Jim Hahn, both from University of Pennsylvania Libraries, shared their process for remote user testing of a prototype (UX/UI design, mock-up, technology review, etc.) linked data discovery interface.

The University of Pennsylvania has been engaged with the [Share-VDE \(Virtual Discovery Environment\)](#) project since its inception in 2016, and, in 2019, embarked on a special project with Casalini Libri, @cult and Samhaeng for further development on the user interface. In order to continue with this project in 2019, past the initial inception phase, Picknally Camden needed to advocate for linked data to the administration. Even though the initial prototype was not pretty, it did illustrate the level of power of having so much linked data to support delivery to library users--recognizing the value of a large dataset to support delivery to library users and including the potential of using APIs or embedding APIs into Share-VDE. The Share-VDE project is built on [BIBFRAME](#) and is an engaged global partnership evident in the collaborative effort between 22 international research libraries, Casalini Libri, @cult, and Samhaeng. The

project development is very library-driven and Picknally Camden currently serves as the chair of the advisory council.

The Share-VDE project encompasses enrichment and conversion from MARC to BIBFRAME/RDF, creation of a cluster knowledge base, development of manual and automated tools for interacting with data, and the creation of a linked data discovery environment. The Penn Libraries' goals in the project are to demonstrate discovery in a linked-data user environment and to enhance usability with APIs that will allow users to find resources and request delivery either locally through the University of Pennsylvania or through InterLibrary Loan (ILL). One such goal is to support user delivery needs by using APIs to find all available versions of a resource, streamline interlibrary loan options in a single interface, and list all available options based on data from many institutions. Another goal of Picknally Camden and Hahn is reproducibility and allowing other libraries to benefit from the development of this research done at Penn. They note that there is an existing community for Share-VDE, similar to those one might find for development communities like Islandora or Samvera, where people can participate in the project. There is also the possibility for libraries to add local customizations to the Share-VDE interface specific to their library.

In order to make sure that they were meeting their goal of supporting user delivery needs, they needed to not only develop a linked data discovery interface, but also test their prototype to see how linked data supports user discovery needs. They worked with the UX/UI designer from Samhaeng, created a mock-up of the site, and went through a tech review and development with @cult. The next step is to have a prototype with live data in order to conduct library and user testing.

The presentation also included a tour of the current Share-VDE prototype used at Penn Libraries. The goal of the prototype is to support general users with a simpler interface, which may not necessarily have all of the bells and whistles librarians are used to. Keyword searches bring up a hitlist of both name authorities (referred to as people entities) and works, with clusters set up around those entities. People clusters can pull images and metadata from Wikidata and other authority sources. Result clusters also pull in related works at the work level rather than a publication level (i.e. one will only see one result for the play "Hamlet" under the person entity for William Shakespeare, rather than entries for every version of Hamlet). Navigating to "Hamlet" work brings users to a landing site where they can request it at the work level. From the request level, users can choose whether they want to get an online version or the most easily available copy at the library. Users also have the option at this page to select a specific publication of the work from the library, or further narrow it down to the specific instance of the work.

Looking forward to user testing, Hahn developed metrics for linked data discovery interfaces based on the five IFLA-LRM User Tasks: Find, Identify, Select, Obtain, and Explore. He came up with the following research questions:

- Can expressions of a work in a given language be easily ascertained in a linked data discovery search result page?
- As compared to non-semantic interfaces, is disambiguation better supported in linked data search?
- Do linked data discovery interfaces better support relationship exploration in a subject domain (e.g. browsing online)?

Remote testing is becoming the de facto method of user studies during the global health crisis. They selected the remote user testing software from [Loop 11](#) alongside other tools. Loop 11 provides the “how” and “why” with regard to how the website is being used. This greatly enhances the information one might get compared to search logs which only tell us “what happens” but doesn’t really reveal how or why a user may have not found the answer to their search. In addition to being used by several big name technology companies and corporations, Penn Libraries chose this software as it also can provide task completion rates and other metrics such as click stream analysis, heatmaps reports, and trying to understand lostness. The system focused research aims to articulate a set of interface metrics for linked data discovery. In a virtual environment this is imperative to our understanding of when users are unable to find a known resource when they are navigating the library interface. Currently Hahn and Picknally Camden have proposed testing by library staff, and hope to circle back with Share-VDE development in order to iterate the design before conducting testing remotely with library users, possibly in the fall.

One question that arose was whether Share-VDE was intended to connect with existing LSP/ILS, such as Alma, or whether the expectation was for it to be a stand-alone system that would have library bibliographic information entered directly into it in linked data form. Share-VDE can work as a discovery layer for LSP/ILS such as Alma, in terms of getting the data into Share-VDE, they have to export records from Alma via Alma APIs to manipulate the metadata for ingest into Share-VDE. Currently, Penn Libraries is using a Blacklight stack on top of their existing catalog to produce a usable front-end for students to navigate, though they hope to create a robust search interface for students to use. They have to send records regularly to Share-VDE, but this is not so different from the process a library would undertake to update holding information with OCLC.

Institutions wishing to find out more or interested in participating in the Share-VDE may contact the group at info@share-vde.org and there is also [a brochure](#) with more information about participating in the community.

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