CASEY PEARSON: Thank you for joining us today for the presentation *Guide to Digital and Communication Accessibility in Higher Education.* I'm Casey Pearson from 3Play Media, and I'll be moderating today. I am a young, fair skinned woman with long, light brown hair. I'm happy to welcome Katherine Vance today. Katherine Vance is a professional ASL English interpreter and the associate director for accessibility at the University of Cincinnati, where she oversees the communication and digital access team. Thank you. Katherine, for joining us.

KATHERINE VANCE: All right. Thank you, Casey. As Casey said, my name is Katherine Vance preferred pronouns are she, her. I want to say thank you to Casey for this opportunity. She and I connected at the head conference in Cleveland last month after I presented there. And she reached out and asked if I could present about digital and communication accessibility in higher education.

So that is going to be the framework of our presentation today. And getting started, I wanted to do a brief introduction about myself. As Casey said, I am a certified professional sign language interpreter. I have been working in the context of higher education for the last 10 years where I work at the University of Cincinnati, which is a large research one urban institution with about 48,000 students.

I have a master's degree in interpreting pedagogy. And I also have a specialty in legal interpreting. Before we get started, I also wanted to define and situate the context of the presentation. So this presentation is going to be through the lens of higher education. However, it is applicable to a variety of industries and context. And it will be particularly focused on students, but the context of my daily work also focuses and intersects with employees because of the nature of the service delivery of the team that I oversee.

I also think it's important for me to acknowledge the privilege that I have as a hearing, white, cisgendered woman and what that means as I provide services to people who are deaf and hard of hearing or blind or visually impaired, or just interacting with the disability community in general. In my expertise-- which someone defined to me recently as just having more than an average person's knowledge of something-- is situated in ASL English, interpreting the provision of those services and operations, but I am not an expert on the lived experience of people who are deaf, deaf blind, hard of hearing, visually impaired or people with other disabilities that make use of auxiliary aids and services.

And so it's really important to get the context of the lived experience from those individuals. And the context of this presentation will be centered around how do we take in those lived experiences and then capitalize on that to provide those services? And as such, this is also not speak for all of the people in the disability community because there is a spectrum of disability and identity. People with disabilities are not homogeneous. So it's also important to know that sometimes I'll be using person-first language. Sometimes I'll be using identity-first language.

Within the community of people with disabilities, there is a lot of variety and so, today, I'll probably be using those somewhat interchangeably. I also want to make note that it took the team that I oversee, which is truly an incredible team that I couldn't do the work that I do without them, about a decade to start to perform and provide the work that we do in a really integrated manner. So the things that I'm going to be providing today are not something that I expect for you to do and institute overnight. It is something that takes time, but it's really just more or less a guide path as you move your way forward.

And lastly, I also just want to say that the lens that I operate from is that disability rights are civil rights and that I truly believe that having access to communication and having independence and autonomy in your daily life is just a general human right. And so that's the lens and the focus that I'll be presenting from today. So looking at today and what our outcomes are, this is, again, just a starting point for how we can consider how you can implement an operational model for providing digital and communication access.

And at the end of this presentation, I'm not expecting you to be an expert. I'm just hoping that it will get you thinking critically about your own team and practices and what, if any, changes you think that you can implement at some point. So today, what we'll be discussing is key regulatory guidelines, theoretical models of disability, engaging key stakeholders, modifying your operations, and commonly utilized tools.

So let's get started first talking about these key regulations. There are foundational regulations and guidelines that help to provide, essentially, a road map for this work. And as just a quick reminder from your civics class, in the United States, we have laws that get passed and then in order for those laws to get enforced, government agencies start to draft regulations. And then within those regulations there are various titles or sections.

So when you're looking at laws, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, or the Americans with Disabilities Act, you have a hierarchy there, where you have the law and then you have the associated regulations. So these laws provide the rights that people have. And then the regulations become those legal requirements that you need to adhere to. And sometimes they come with a lot of specifications that you have to do them exactly. And then sometimes, they come with some greater flexibility, or some deference to the entity.

When we're looking at these foundational laws and regulations that provide a roadmap for this work, it includes the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which is a foundational law that was passed that piggybacked off of the Civil Rights movement. Specifically, when we're looking at the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, we're focusing on Section 504, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability for entities which are receiving federal financial assistance. And then also Section 508, which is the Section that governs the requirement that federal agencies' electronic and information technology must be accessible.

So the intent with Section 508 was to regulate the government's own websites, but that has since been adopted and applied in other contexts outside of just the government websites. Coming off of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, we have the Americans with Disabilities Act, or also the Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended. And under the Americans with Disabilities Act, that expanded what was codified into law about prohibition against people with disabilities and then also additional requirements. And it started to apply, not just to entities who had federal financial assistance, but those regardless of their federal funding.

So Title II, which is widely applicable in the context of higher ed applies to state and local government, again, regardless of that federal funding. And just recently in July, the Department of Justice announced an intention to actually amend Title II with new web accessibility regulations. The intention is that the comment period will open up next spring and then they'll draft new guidelines because when it was originally written, to where we are now with technology, we're seeing that change. And the way case law has started to unfold, that entities aren't just brick and mortar, but they're actually online as well.

And so they're seeing that under Title II, we actually need to develop more clear cut regulations. A lot of people are expecting that those will be aligned with the WCAG, the WCAG guidelines. Then Title III is applicable to businesses and non-profits that serve the public, regardless of federal funding. When I think about Title III and how that might apply to your campus, I often think about the football game, or the theater experience, or the visitors at your university that are coming and are experiencing and interacting with your campus or the events on your campus, but might not necessarily be an enrolled student.

So the next key guideline is the World Wide Web Consortium, the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, often called the WCAG guidelines. The most commonly used standard that I've seen at the moment is 2.0, although they did modify and pass 2.1. So that's why this slide says 2.x, because there are some people who are still transitioning from 2.0 to 2.1. And a AA standard.

So these standards are international standards that were designed to make the web more accessible to people with disabilities. And it's broken into four guiding principles, often referred to as POUR, P-O-U-R. The 2.1 guidelines work to focus on improved accessibility for mobile. And I suspect that as technology continues and they develop guidelines for future technologies, that we'll start to see recommendations for AI and other technology that has not yet been developed.

And that's one thing about communication digital accessibility, that it really is living and ever evolving. It is not static. It's very dynamic. And so just because there is a regulation, as time passes, those regulations might become outdated, just like as we saw with Title II and the announcement that they're going to be looking at digital accessibility under that. These guidelines and regulations really lay the foundation for, minimally, what needs to be done by an entity to not discriminate against someone on the basis of disability.

My supervisor at work likes to say that these laws are essentially the baseline for how not to be a criminal, right? So we're talking about, at a very minimum, this is what the government has said that you need to do so that you don't get fined, someone doesn't bring a lawsuit against you, a student doesn't file an OCR complaint. And when we look at these regulations now, they start to outline specifications for communication disabilities. And communication disabilities include people who are deaf and hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired. So often sensory disabilities.

And in that, it says that people who have communication disabilities qualify for auxiliary aids and services. And that's just a really fancy way in legal speak to talk about a variety of services that are listed here, including qualified-- in quotation marks-- '"qualified" ASL English interpreters, real time captioning, note takers, assistive listening devices, closed captioning, videophones, "qualified" reader-- again, in quotations-- Braille materials, screen reader software, magnification software. The regulations go on to actually define what it means to be qualified in the context of a reader or an ASL English interpreter.

And it simply means to interpret or to read effectively, accurately and impartially. The intent of these auxiliary aids and services are to provide equal access to effective communication. And effective communication means that whatever is written or spoken must be as clear and understandable to disabled people as to those who are not disabled. Preference for effective communication is given to the qualified student with a communication disability. And in the context of higher ed, you can talk about what is a qualified student with disability?

"Qualified" meaning that the student has met one of the three prongs or three elements for being disabled. And that they are able to then indicate the most effective pathway to effective communication. So entities have some difference in how they comply with these regulations, but you have to give preference to the person with the disability, and knowing that they are best positioned to determine which aids and services that they receive. And I intentionally put aides or services here with the parenthetical because an individual, depending on the nature of their disability, might use a variety of aides or services in the list that we just saw in order to achieve effective communication.

It's not always a just pick one and everything will be OK. So that's something that you really need to remember in giving preference to the individual and trusting that they know themselves, this is their lived experience. They live in this world every day and they experience what it's like to communicate with people on a daily basis. And so it's important to make sure that you have that trust in them. Entities, like I said, have some difference in how they're complying with these regulations, but the regulations and the laws are, essentially, just a reactive starting point because that's often placing responsibility on the disabled person to notify an entity of a barrier or a communication need.

This is where we can start to describe the different theoretical models of disability. So when we look at the different theoretical models of disability-- and there are a variety out there, I just picked the most common that we typically see in higher ed-- are the medical model, the social model and then the social identity model. Under the medical model, disability is seen as the problem of the person, which needs direct intervention by a medical professional and/or a device to effectively, quote, "cure" the individual of the disability.

And some of these instances, there is a medical component to an individual's disability, whereby, medical treatment is necessary. So if we're talking about, let's say, a student with diabetes who needs to utilize insulin, that is definitely a necessary medical component. But it generally overlooks the broader societal constraints that environmental barriers put on an individual. And so instead of looking at the individual as a whole, oftentimes under the medical model, you're looking at a condition and trying to determine how that condition can be eradicated from the individual because it's being perceived as negative.

And in my experience, what is most common is seeing this model utilized in the K-12 environment, where the implementation of accommodations are quite focused on outcomes and what you're trying to get a student to do, and less focused on barriers. And so that's a really interesting point that comes into play when you start to see students transition from the K-12 environment, where their accommodations, their 504 plans, their IEPs are all dictated and governed by their parents and their teachers and the school administration. And now in the context of higher ed, the burden is actually on the student to disclose that they have a disability and to engage in the interactive process under Section 504 and the ADA in order to receive those accommodations.

It's interesting to see what happens with that shift in students, and sometimes in parents when they come into this environment. Then we have the social model of disability, which views individuals not being disabled by their bodies, but really by their environments, often which are inherently inaccessible and therefore allow them to be disabled because design is most often generated for those in the majority. So when you think about going up to a building and you have a person who's a wheelchair user, if there's only stairs there and they're not able to get into the building, it's not because they're utilizing a wheelchair that they're disabled. They're disabled because the building doesn't have a ramp.

But if you eliminate the stairs and the building has a ramp, now it's no longer the barrier where the individual can't get into the building. They're able to access that freely, no matter whether they're in a wheelchair or not. So in this context, it views the societal responsibility to reduce barriers and allow disabled individuals to participate in life with equal footing.

And then the last model here is the social identity model, which really is deriving the person's personal identity from membership within a group of like-minded individuals. The most prominent example of this is the deaf community because they have a shared linguistic experience as sign-language users and shared lived experiences. And in this context, in the social identity model, people who are very comfortable and much prefer to use identity first language. So you would say a deaf person and that's how they would identify themselves, as I am deaf.

And in this context, people view themselves as a whole person, that their identity is not separate from their disability, but that their disability lends itself to who that individual is and those two things cannot be uncoupled. Then we want to talk about moving beyond compliance. So that minimum regulation, how do we not be a criminal, into a culture of access and inclusion.

When students experience equal access and inclusion, which is a proactive initiative instead of this reactive initiative when you are responding to people telling you that the environment is inaccessible, the impact includes independence, autonomy and belonging. And when students feel that they belong in the campus community, outcomes will improve, including improving student retention and graduation. So situating your program or your services within a framework that is guided and informed by the social model of disability allows your office or institution to make the shift beyond a standard into a culture of compliance and access and inclusion.

Additionally, when students participate and have access to higher education, it improves the disparate outcomes for disabled students. Disabled students bring an invaluable character, experience, and diversity to the classroom and to the university experience. And having access to this means that disabled students can meaningfully add value to the university.

And their accomplishments at the university add value to them, not only individually, but to us as a society. And so it's important to know that disproportionately, people with disabilities have higher rates of poverty, are on or underemployed, or have significantly lower median incomes. And so when disabled people have access to higher education, they graduate and can meaningfully participate in society, you're starting to reduce those gaps for them individually, but also those gaps for us as a society.

What's really important next then is that we're learning from and understanding key stakeholders. There is a saying in the disability community that is nothing about us, without us. And that is, I think, really important because it's conveying this idea that it shouldn't be a group of non-disabled people, and quite often, in the context of my work, hearing people, hearing interpreters who are making decisions for deaf people without deaf people being involved in that process.

And that's really important because you want to make sure that what you're providing to students is actually what they want. And you don't know that unless you have them involved in that process. So I think it's really important that you start to consider a couple of questions here when you're evaluating your own programs to figure out, where am I rooted in this? Am I still in this compliance-driven model, where all of my systems and everything are very reactionary, that it is operating under the assumption that disabled people will tell me when they are here, or am I starting to move and shift into a shared culture and a shared responsibility to provide access and inclusion to disabled people on campus because we know that they're here.

We know the numbers of the students that we have enrolled in our university. We know the number of students that are enrolled in our offices. And because we know that they're here, we're going to do things proactively for them. So it's considering things like what are the types of services you're providing and the way that you're interacting with students and the modes of communication, are they aligned with the wants of disabled students? How are you actually eliciting their input and what methods are you using to know this information.

Looking at my office, things that we have done to elicit some of this information is surveys, we have a static feedback form that lives on our website that is actually routed to our executive director for accessibility. So that way, if anyone ever wanted to bring any concerns or shared feedback about myself or someone on the team, that goes out to a third party so that they felt like they had more freedom. And then those are routed appropriately, depending on the nature of the feedback.

You can also find this out just through direct questions and interactions. So quite often, we like to engage in dialogues with our students to just ask them how are things going? Did this work the way that you wanted it? What's your preference for us to contact you? Do you want this type of event to actually be happening? Does this work in the way that you see it fit? Because getting their feedback is really important to us.

And as students, register with your Accessibility Resource Office, your disability office. The interactive process is really critical to understand what effective communication means to a student who has what's coined or lumped in as a communication disability. And it's in that process that you can start to ask them and identify what's the true barrier here? How are you identifying that intersection between their disability and the environment?

And for a lot of students, when they're coming into higher education, they really struggle with identifying the barrier because, like I said, in K-12, they're so focused on outcomes and measurable things. And maybe operating from this medical model of disability that they haven't taken the time to really say, oh actually, the barrier is that there's no interpreter. And so I can't engage in the environment or the barrier is this document wasn't OCRed and so I can't interact with it as I need, or this form isn't accessible. And so I can't register for the event.

So you're talking about what are you hoping to do? How is the environment built and what are the barriers then that the student is encountering? And in equipping and empowering students to be able to look at their lives and start to articulate that is a skill that, I think, as someone working in higher education, is one of the outcomes that we hope to give our students across their time at the university because, again, when they leave the university, we're hoping that they are able to go out and get meaningful employment. And that in those environments, they're also able to clearly articulate any accommodations that they might need now as an employee and that they're able to do that with confidence. And so it takes some time for students to start to learn that process and to work their way through that. And those are tools and things that we can provide to students as we work through that situation with them.

So it's important to think about how are you collecting this information from students and how do you know that what you're doing is actually what they want? Then it's also really important, like I said earlier, to listen and observe the lived experience of disabled students. We have to start to envision all of these touch-points where a student may encounter barriers as they enter the university environment.

And I think that you can start to do that, not just in your own office-- and this might potentially depend on the size and scale of your team and where you are situated currently in your campus culture and support from your administration, the relationships that you have with cross-functional teams or other campus partners where, yes, we're talking about our office, but now we're also talking far more broadly about as the student starts to discover the university and they want to come to the university, well what does that look like for a student? They have to fill out the application form. They have to potentially come for a prospective student visit. So there's another registration form.

So they're coming for a tour then they have to wait for their admittance, then they're filling out housing information, then they're filling out dining information, then they're registering for courses. So there are all of these touch-points that a student goes through before they even get to your office. And as your team grows and as you're starting to influence this shift from just being compliant into this culture, you can start to look at, oh, is our ecosystem that we've built at the university accessible to students because when students are looking for a place to go, they're looking for campuses that are-- oftentimes, in the deaf community, they call it deaf-friendly.

So as they're looking at materials, are things already captioned? Are they proactively providing sign language interpreters? Is this a place that believes disabled people exist? And not only that, but they actually want them to be part of the university community and as you're looking at that ecosystem starting to figure out what are we going to do about that. What does that look like?

And it's also important to know that each student is on their own intersectional journey of discovering their own identity. So it's really important to know that each student is going to have different ways that they identify themselves. So some might prefer identity first language, depending on what their background is. Some might prefer person-first language. And that's just because of the environment from which they came, but what's really a privileged experience is to witness a student's journey as they enter this post-secondary environment and they begin to explore the intersectional identities that they hold. And in particular, their identity as a person with a disability.

And so as I mentioned, a lot of these students are learning self advocacy from you and shifting out of that medical model, which is really prevalent in K-12, and starting to focus on this social model of disability, or many of them learn to accept themselves wholly, for who they are. And that they identify that really it's society and our expectations, which are disabling them. And so it's been just a really wonderful experience for me in higher ed as I see students come in as freshmen and they are very timid and they aren't so sure if they want to use sign language interpreters. They might use sign language for support in that, over time, they gain a lot of confidence and they're able to fully experience campus and that they start to explore areas of themselves that maybe we're never handed to them because of the environment from which they came.

So it's really important to look at that and to know that a student is just on a journey in and of itself being in higher education. And that is going to be coupled with who am I now as a disabled person and what does this mean to me? And then lastly, it's also really important to embrace collectivist values. And that's a value particularly of the deaf community, but something that I've seen in the disability community, in general, where everyone is supporting everyone else. People's values, people's opinions, people's efforts, people's successes are valued as the group. And that is in stark contrast with the general values and community and the culture of the United States, which is an individualist culture.

And so sometimes it can be difficult to shift into that collectivist culture, but when you start to see it in play, it actually is for the benefit of everyone. And an example of this, if you haven't seen it play out in front of you, if you've seen *Crip Camp,* Judy Heumann, who was actually on a three day webinar a couple of weeks ago, and part of that was at Camp Jened. And she was leading a meeting one evening about what they wanted to have for dinner because the cook was going to be away from camp. And Judy took the time to let everyone there give their opinion about what food they liked and what they wanted to do. And she took time to let that happen, no matter how long that took.

And as people who are working with people with disabilities, it's important that we're conforming to their norms, to their cultural values and not asking them to conform to ours. And in that space, when you're adopting that collectivist value, you are looking to them for ideas and making sure that what we're doing is actually what they need and actually what they want. And in order to actually implement this, you have to start to identify your campus partners.

Which campus partners do you need to come alongside you in order to shift into an operational model that is more proactive? So it's important to examine relationships-- here, you can see in the diagram-- with faculty, with administration, with housing, with academic supports, and with IT. And start to look at how can you build a cross-functional network at your institution that shares a common goal of eliminating environmental barriers for students so they can just simply show up and be a student in a way that is equal to their peers.

Just this week, I interacted with all of these campus partners in order to get our services up and running. Our IT team has been incredible to us, especially as we've been working through some integration issues as we transferred over to a new video repository system, a new captioning vendor. Also were working with faculty this week to notify them that students with disabilities would be in their courses, working with administration within colleges on things like audio issues, as we're trying to make sure that we have audio sources for students who are receiving remote services.

Also this week, just last night, we have a deaf student who is living in a residence hall. And so our staff went to their staff meeting at 9:30 last night to talk to them about what does it mean to have a deaf student in your building? What are the things that you need to consider? How can you get the students' attention? How can you make sure that they're safe? What are normalized practices and expectations and cultural values within the deaf community?

So it's really important that in order to have this operational success that as you shift in your values in the way that you're looking at your campus partners and that you start to influence their view about disabled students on campus, that you're coming together to make sure that you're breaking down those barriers in all areas of the campus experience. And as I was talking about briefly, once you're able to solidify that framework and the lens that you take as you're looking at your work and deciding how am I going to actually deliver these auxiliary aids and services, you start to assume a shared institutional responsibility to cultivate access and inclusion.

And in that, you can modify some of these practices. So you're changing this operational model to shift from this reaction to the notion that disabled people exist and we know that we can do something about it. And we don't just have to sit idly and wait for them to say, hey, I'm here. We can actually do things at the point of creation to eliminate the barriers so that people aren't disabled by their environments.

And we have an institutional responsibility to cultivate that. And in doing that, you're starting to eliminate disparate treatment and disparate impact for students. And that happens when you're starting to change internal policies and procedures. So we can do some of these things in the following ways. The first of which is creating accessible intake and request forms.

When a student starts to interact with your office through intake forms or records management systems, online request forms, ensuring that those things are accessible. So they're digitally accessible through screen reader technology text to speech technology maybe you need to have closed captions on some of your options. You need to make sure that you actually have a digital version available.

It's interesting to think that a lot of times, we spend a lot of our focus focused outward, on academic content, what's happening in other offices. And we fail to look firstly at our office because what kind of value is that showing a student what we're asking them to do to even register with our office to engage in that interactive process is not accessible to them. You also then want to design your interactive process to collect as much information as possible to reduce the number of times that you need to go back and forth with students.

So an example of this is students who use text to speech software versus students who utilize screen readers. And those two pieces of technology function very differently and they need different elements in the source file. So if a student is utilizing JAWS or NVDA as a screen reader, headings, tag structure, those kinds of things may be very descriptive Alt text on images, depending on what it is going to be different than a student, who is using text to speech software, something like Read and Write, where they just need to listen to what's being read on the screen maybe because they're dyslexic, or maybe because they have ADHD or something else where they need a little bit extra support.

So making sure that your intake forms are capturing, what is the type of output that the student needs? Do they need an EPUB? Do they need an HTML, or can they just have a plain, digitized PDF and that meets their needs? But trying to make sure that you're reducing the number of times that a student has to go back and forth with you. You also, like I mentioned previously, want to give students deference and preference in choice of accommodations. So not limiting them to selecting only one.

An example of this for my team is we have a semester service request form that students who use ASL English interpreting and speech to text services-- so that could be cart, real time captioning, or C-print services-- our students complete that each semester. The request form asks students to put in the course and which accommodations they want to be using for that particular course. We have found that a student has a lot of variability, depending on the environment with which they're interacting, where some students say, oh, you know what, I'm taking a yoga class and I actually don't need services at all, or this class is in a lecture hall with 300 people. And my amplification on my cochlear implants isn't working. And so I actually do need services in this particular context.

So we allow students to tell us what they need, based on what they know of themselves and of the environment. And in that, students can select a combination of sign language interpreters and cart services. And if they need a note taker because they're not able to look at the board, and their books, and the sign language interpreter, and real time services. So it's really important to not tell a student, you can only use one mode of communication because that might not be fully eliminating the barriers that they are experiencing in that particular environment. And that does not afford them effective communication or equal access.

You also want to consider the audience that's intended for an event and make a decision when certain accommodations will be automatically available. So for example, for today's event, I knew the audience was going to be focused on communication and digital accessibility. And I knew that I was going to be sharing this event with people who were deaf and hard of hearing. And I wanted that to be accessible to them. I didn't want them to have to say, hey, I want to participate.

So I proactively asked for ASL English interpreters to be here so that participants could decide at the last minute, you know what, my schedule is free, I actually want to join that event. And that's similar to your events on campus, trying to determine what office events or university events that you strategically can implement services there because your community has people who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired. And so you want to make that available to them. So that just like their peers, they can decide at the last minute that they want to show up for that event.

And then you also want to evaluate your workflow and timelines and determine how you can modify practices to be proactive. So on our team, we have a policy that we have really worked on iteratively for the last 10 years, where we notify professors in advance that they will have auxiliary aids and services provided in their courses. So that students can enter the class day one without being behind. So that means that we're working proactively weeks in advance on captioning courses videos, re-mediating the syllabus or other course documents, securing digital textbooks.

And there is an element there where you want to empower the faculty member. So that they know how to provide these services, but that you're also assuming some of that shared responsibility and you're providing them with that guidance, but it's really important to see the human element of a student participating in a class, that when captions aren't there the first day, or the syllabus is not accessible to them the first day, that it becomes a domino effect, that it really impacts them moving forward and starts to cause them a lot of stress and then leads to that disparate impact and possibly some of that disparate treatment.

So when you shift that model and you're working proactively, you start to eliminate some of those barriers that a student is facing. And like I said, this is a lot of trial and error. Figuring out iteratively what has been successful, what can we do differently, and also looking how can you potentially pilot something? Can you choose a smaller population of a student group that you're trying to implement services with. And then take from that, and learn from that and implement that in a semester moving forward.

The last portion that I wanted to talk about today were commonly used tools. And these are market solutions for auxiliary aids and services. I am not endorsing any of these specifically, but this is a list that I have put together of some things that you can start to consider if you're looking for solutions for your team, depending on the size and scale of the services that you provide in your environment.

So when you're thinking about ASL English interpreting, it's important if you don't have staff in your office, that you also have access to direct contractors, or third party agencies that can provide remote or on site interpreting. There are agencies that provide this nationwide, and then there are also agencies that provide it locally, depending on the area in which you live, your access might vary. But having something on hand so that when you get a request, you already have contracts in place and can utilize those services.

Depending on the scale and size of the services that you deliver, it might be worth moving into a scheduling specific industry software. Systems include Usked, which is the system that we use. And Interpreter Intelligence is another one that I've seen that's pretty popular. And then also understanding the integration with various video conferencing platforms like Zoom teams and Webex.

When COVID 19 happened, our team spent a considerable amount of time understanding what did we need to do to spotlight the interpreter, to pin the interpreter, to make sure that deaf participants had access to us, visually. And it's important to make sure that you are aware of that so that you can train your students and empower them to be able to utilize those tools successfully. Then looking at live captioning, again, making sure that you have an entity, whether that be a direct individual or a third party who can provide both remote and on site services.

Now a standard of practice is the ability to view captions on a device of choice. And that most popular and number one platform for that is called Stream Text, really great platform where you get a link and you're able to see the live captions and download a transcript of that. A student can pull that up on their phone, on a tablet, or on a computer. And you're able to send the audio feed offsite. So you can have a writer who is situated wherever and that student has a lot of autonomy and freedom within the classroom.

It's also important for cart writers to understand the integration with video conferencing platforms. So how do you assign them as a captioner within a Zoom webinar, how do you turn on professional transcription instead of auto generated? And then also understanding when and how you can tell a student that auto generated captioning, which can be available in Zoom in teams might be sufficient for them, depending on the barrier that they're experiencing.

When you're looking at closed captioning and audio description, I like to call it the trifecta for an integrated model, which is your learning management system, your video repository, and your vendor are all interconnected through APIs, or LTIs, or other systems setups so that a student can integrate with that material, interact with that material in a really seamless way.

They don't have to go to another platform to view it, that videos are housed in the course, just like with other students, that captions return into the course very seamlessly. And of course, 3Play Media is a great place for that. And now moving into audio descriptions, making sure that you have players and platforms that can support multiple audio tracks so that as you have students who are requesting audio descriptions, that those can be made available to them.

Depending on the size and scope of your captioning need, you can also utilize open source platforms like Cadet. Looking at speech to text technology, those are tools that actually read aloud to an individual. Popular ones are Read and Write. And then there's also a tool provided by Text Help called Equatio, which turns math into digital elements and it can be read aloud to students.

And then you also can utilize mobile or system accessibility features. So whether that be on your computer, or on your phone or tablet. When you're looking at alt format for textbooks, common sources to look and to search are Vital Source, Read Shelf, Amazon, Access Text Network, Open Source Libraries, or contacting the publisher. The textbook search can sometimes be pretty arduous. But depending on what you're utilizing, it can really speed up that process. And then there's also some education that can happen where you're interacting with faculty members to have them select digital versions of textbooks. So that way, students aren't even having to make a swap from a physical book over to an Alt textbook.

But then when you're looking at alt format for documents, you're talking about what kind of output does a student potentially need in order to interact with that content? And that could be a variety. This is not an inclusive or exhaustive list, but most common types include word documents, PDF, EPUB or HTML. When you're creating documents at point of creation. You can utilize integrated accessibility features and checkers in Microsoft suite of products and the Adobe Accessibility Checker.

And then depending on the type of remediation that might happen because a student or someone has identified a barrier, there are various software programs that you can use, like Equidox or Common Look. And also vendors to which you can send materials for remediation. And then there's also something called Ally for Canvas, or Blackboard, which is an integration that allows a professor to look at their course content and to see a visual gauge for how accessible content might be within their course.

So this is not a all-inclusive list of market tools, but just simply something to get you started, a place of really common vendors that work in higher education so that if you're looking for solutions or you weren't really sure where to start, this is a place that you can look to for auxiliary aids and services. So in closing, I just want to wrap by saying that providing these services in the context of higher education creates a really unique intersection where disabled students gain independence and autonomy, while also exploring their own identity and communication preferences.

By eliminating barriers at the first touch point for students, and even for employees because employees have a very similar interaction with their environment and the things and tasks that they need to accomplish at the university, that you're retaining them and you're ultimately fulfilling the institutional mission. So as I mentioned, today's presentation was by no means comprehensive, but just a way to help you start identifying paths to shift from this idea of compliance as a requirement over to an inclusive culture in order to create a sense of belonging.

So hopefully, today's presentation gave you some grounding points to start this journey to establish proactive practices that cultivate belonging and eliminate societal barriers. And now at this point, I'm happy to take any questions. If you have any, you can put those in the chat. I also have an extensive list of references that unfortunately didn't fit in my slide deck. So if you have questions on that, I'm happy to share those with you. And if you have any other questions, you can reach me later after this presentation via email, which is Katherine.Vance@UC.edu, or on my LinkedIn profile.

CASEY PEARSON: Thank you so much, Katherine. That was a phenomenal presentation. I do have a couple of questions that I think we have time for. So we'll go ahead and jump into those. The first one is, in your experience in this film-- field, excuse me, working with folks with various ability differences, are e-learning or virtual learning tools that serve training content to students or learners-- in particular, Articulate Storyline, or Adobe Connect-- are these tools meeting the mark for sufficiently delivering engaging content and/or successfully training disabled folks?

KATHERINE VANCE: So one thing that we found with some of those third party tools is that you actually have to look at them from two different perspectives. Is the tool itself accessible for someone generating the content? And then simultaneously, is the content that is generated accessible?

And so in something like Articulate Storyline, in the past, we have found that there were accessibility issues there. And so when you're identifying that, I think, what's really important is that you're coming alongside someone and that you're not just saying to them, this isn't accessible, you can't use it. But you're saying, you know what, we've identified and accessibility barrier and here are your options. Here are other tools that function similarly that can provide you with the same outcome that you're looking for, or we need to actually come up with an alternate access plan so that if a student with a disability needs to interact with this tool and there is no other alternative available, what do they need to do to be able to interact with that?

CASEY PEARSON: Thank you. The next question asks, can you touch on some of the ways your team advertises the various accommodations out there for folks that are deaf or hard of hearing? I wonder how many college students that could be approved for accommodations don't actually know there are accommodations available until they see some sort of advertisement.

KATHERINE VANCE: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I've seen some statistics that say there's about 10% of college students are disabled. That is all self disclosed information. We know statistically when people self report that numbers are drastically different, potentially.

And institutionally, we know that the number of students registered with our office against that 10% is nowhere near even. So what our team does is we put that in emails. It's standardized now as students come in to the university, we've worked really hard with our admissions team, with our orientation team to make sure that as students are registering for these events, that it's made known to them when these services will be provided. And that's said in the advertisement, or a link out to our team's website.

That's a public facing website with a public facing form that was done really intentionally to not have it behind single sign on so that anybody can access that. And then I'm also in the process of working with our president's office and board of trustees group to identify expectations for various levels of accommodations that will automatically be provided at various campus events. And an associated accessibility checklist with that when you're planning and hosting events.

So I think it's a combination of making sure your campus partners are aware that services can be available. How you advertise those, whether that be on your email, on your social media channels. If you have other means of communication on campus that advertise campus events.

And then as students attend those events and they start to see that accommodations are available and that they can interact in their environment without barrier or reduced barriers, then they start to tell one another. And there's also a lot of talk between students. So I don't think it's a sole, one way to have that made known. I think it's a multifaceted approach to making sure that people know that your office exists and how to request those services.

CASEY PEARSON: That's great. Someone asked, how do you manage ASL interpreters? Do you have some on staff, or do you use an external service?

KATHERINE VANCE: Yeah, so our team is really robust. Like I said, it's taken me about a decade to help lead and to fulfill the mission of our team. So when I started, it was just me. And now I have three staff interpreters. One that works 100% year round. We have two that work 80% of the year, but we front-load their schedules so they work full time during the academic year, but they're off in the summers. We have a full time 80% cart writer who's on staff with us.

We have about 30 direct contractors with the university that get a 1099. And then we also have third party agencies that we use for any overflow. Right now, our team is situated at a 2575 model, where about 25% of our services are covered in-house and 75% of those are covered externally. We're in the process of putting forward a rightsizing request in order to shift that so that about 75% of those services are provided by a staff member and 25% by a third party. But those are some nuances that because of the ebb and flow of how many students are on your campus, our team also provides services for people who are employees.

That's a whole other presentation. That was the one that I gave at ahead about how I worked to centralize the operations of our work on campus, so that as the experts, we were providing services to our ASL department and our team members there. But depending on what is happening in your environment, a combination might be perfect for you, or only using contractors if you only have one student. So tracking that over time can help inform how you actually want to model your service provider hierarchy within your office.

CASEY PEARSON: Perfect. Well, we're out of time, but thank you again, Katherine. And thank you to our ASL interpreter, Kelly, and our live captioner today. Finally, a big thank you to everyone who joined us today for this presentation. Again, please contact either 3Play, or of course, Katherine, if you have follow up questions. But we hope you have a wonderful rest of your day.

KATHERINE VANCE: Thank you.