

ADA Compliance, Technology, and Innovation for Accessibility in Libraries and Beyond

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Proposal: Center For Accessibility Diana Rosenthal, centerforaccessibility.wordpress.com



BACKGROUND: Though many libraries offer some semblance of assistive technologies to aid patrons with disabilities—like computer stations with screen readers, screen magnifiers, or supplies of audiobooks—there are few places that make it their primary focus. This project draws inspiration from some of the most impressive innovations at libraries across the country for an imagined space—the Center for Accessibility (CFA)—that would cater to providing all library patrons with unprecedented access, whether or not they have disabilities or learn differently.

USER DEMOGRAPHIC: The CFA will be outfitted with technology to serve the needs and interests of a number of users, including adults with developmental disabilities who have aged out of the school system and will benefit from classes and programs that teach them to use iPads and computers, students in high school and college who learn differently and will benefit from the use of screen readers, dictation software, or other research help while they complete their coursework, elderly patrons who suffer from hearing and vision loss who also require instruction on using computers, and people who are full-time caregivers of children or adults with disabilities.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF PROPOSED SITE: The CFA is a concept that could be applied in many different settings. Though it is easy to imagine a large, single-floor, fully accessible library center existing in cities like New York, Seattle, or Washington, D.C., some unexpected cities have larger percentages of their populations classified as people with disabilities. The United States census conducted in 2000 did an extensive study of populations of people with disabilities who are not institutionalized or veterans. This report (Waldrop and Stern, 2003) pinpoints a list of 10 cities whose population percentages of people with disabilities rank the highest in the U.S. The census data provides a general look at the U.S. population with disabilities by state and region and concludes the southeastern United States has the largest percentages of people with disabilities. Based on this census brief, ideal locations for the CFA could be the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library in Buffalo, New York, the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library in Atlanta, Georgia, the Kanawha County Public Library in Charleston, West Virginia, and the Miami-Dade Public Library in Miami, Florida.

TECHNOLOGY COMPONENTS:



Intellikeys keyboards, Denver Public Library.



ADA-standard desk, School Outfitters.



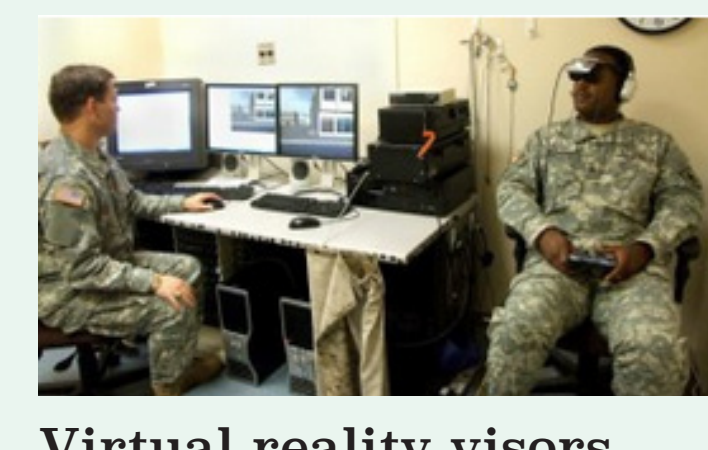
Soundproof studio pods, Experience Music Project Museum, Seattle.



Audiobook studio, New York Public Library.



Accessibility Arcade, D.C. Public Library.



Virtual reality visors, University of Southern California.

REFERENCES
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Schaeffer, Cory. (2014). Using new technology to comply with ADA assistive listening requirements. Public Library Quarterly, 33(2), 131–144. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2014.910724>
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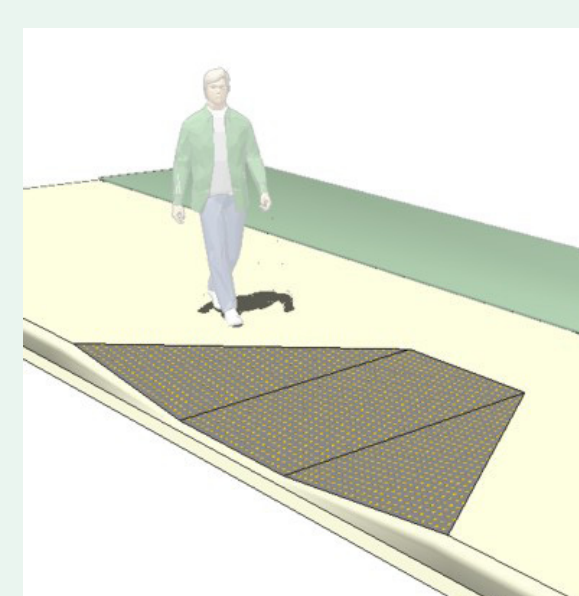
In celebration of **Global Accessibility Awareness Day** on May 21, 2015 and the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), we have compiled information from three different projects in the hopes that it will enlighten and inspire students and professionals in the library and information science fields to provide equal access to people with mental and physical disabilities.



ADA Compliance, from the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to the Internet and Beyond Diane Dias De Fazio

Crossing the street in any American city, one might not think twice about how—or why—the pavement slopes downward to meet the road surface at the corners of a block. Likewise, hovering the cursor over linked content on a website, one might casually ignore the small window of descriptive text that often appears. Ostensibly inconsequential, these **alt tags** on websites and **sidewalk curb cuts** are, in fact, a vital part of a decades-long effort to make the world a more accessible place to people with disabilities.

Beginning with the **Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (VRA)**, the federal government ratified a series of legislative measures that prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities, and required all institutions receiving federal funding to comply with accessibility standards. The VRA led to House Resolution 8070 (the **Rehabilitation Act of 1973 [RA]**), which inspired the **Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)**, which was substantially amended in 2009.



But back to sidewalks and site tags for a moment. To a casual observer, the ADA only applies to making places accessible to people who use wheelchairs, but the history and breadth of the law's coverage is much wider. The VRA was inspired by returning Vietnam veterans who used wheelchairs, who came home to cities they could no longer navigate . . . because each sidewalk corner had suddenly transformed into a physical obstacle, and obstacles amounted to discrimination. (Think about *that* the next time you see someone with a stroller, crossing at a streetcorner.)

Without alt and longdesc tags and screen-reader software, accessing much of the Internet is an obstacle, or is completely unavailable, to people who are blind or have low vision—again, creating a kind of discrimination. Those functions—simple coding changes, mostly—are not yet compulsory for every website created in the U.S., and many websites still lack this level of accessibility. What may be more surprising is that, before the ADA was even introduced, the RA was amended to make “electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities” (**Section 508**), and that happened *almost 20 years ago*. Still, the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) lacked formal requirements in this regard, and finally released official regulations on ADA accessibility and the web in March 2015.

For institutions that receive grants from the National Endowments for the Arts (NEA) and Humanities (NEH) as well as the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), ADA accessibility has long been a part of funding agreements: projects must be accessible under all points of the most recent ADA regulations, and recipients must prove their accessibility compliance in final reports or risk funding revocation. Institutional funders attempt to make this compliance easy with checklists, instructional sessions, and other educational efforts.

It remains to be seen how the new DOJ regulations will manifest themselves in the future Internet universe, but librarians should be more than prepared to meet these challenges.

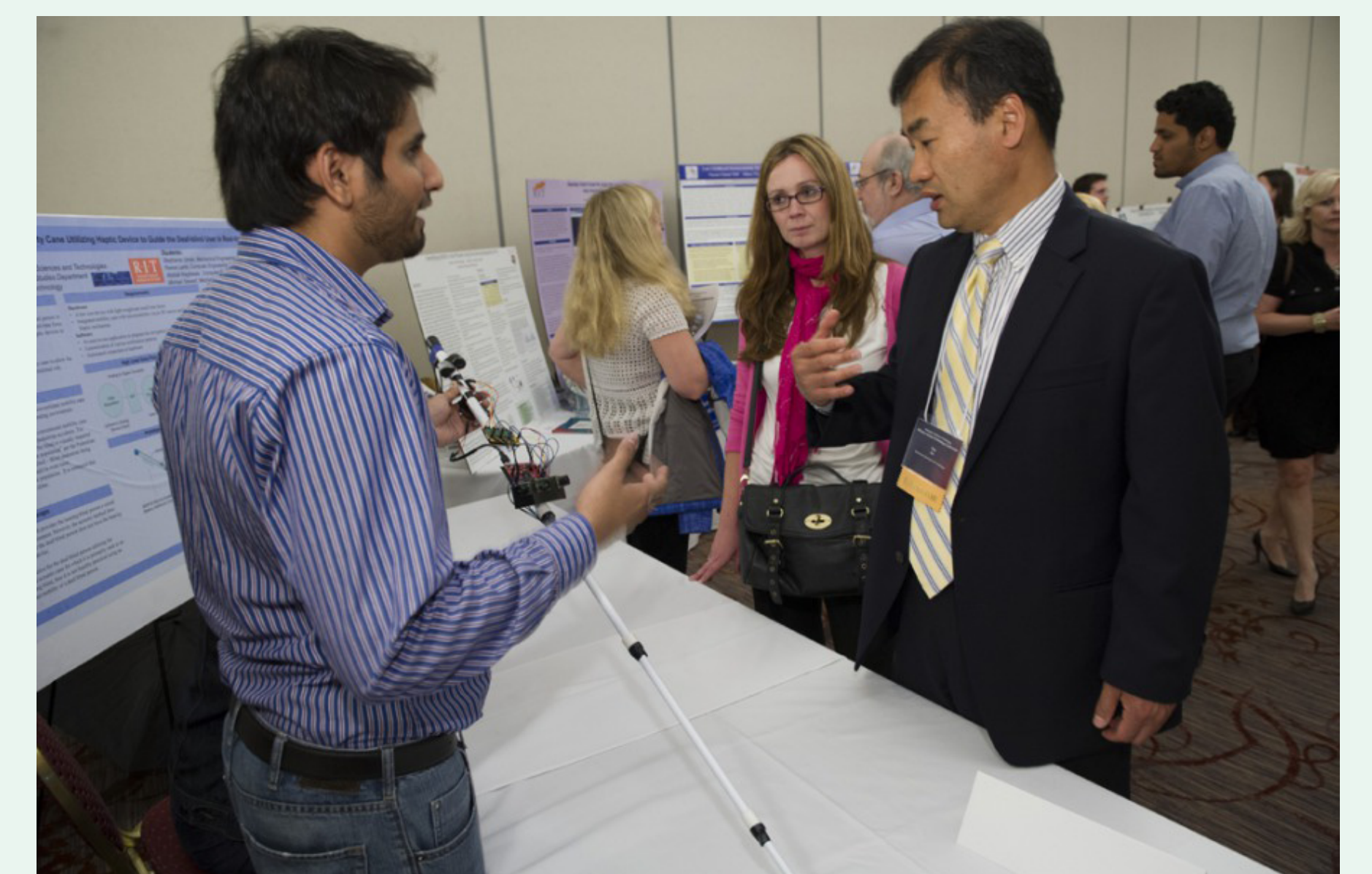


Proposal: A Center of Innovation for Accessibility Abigail Purcell

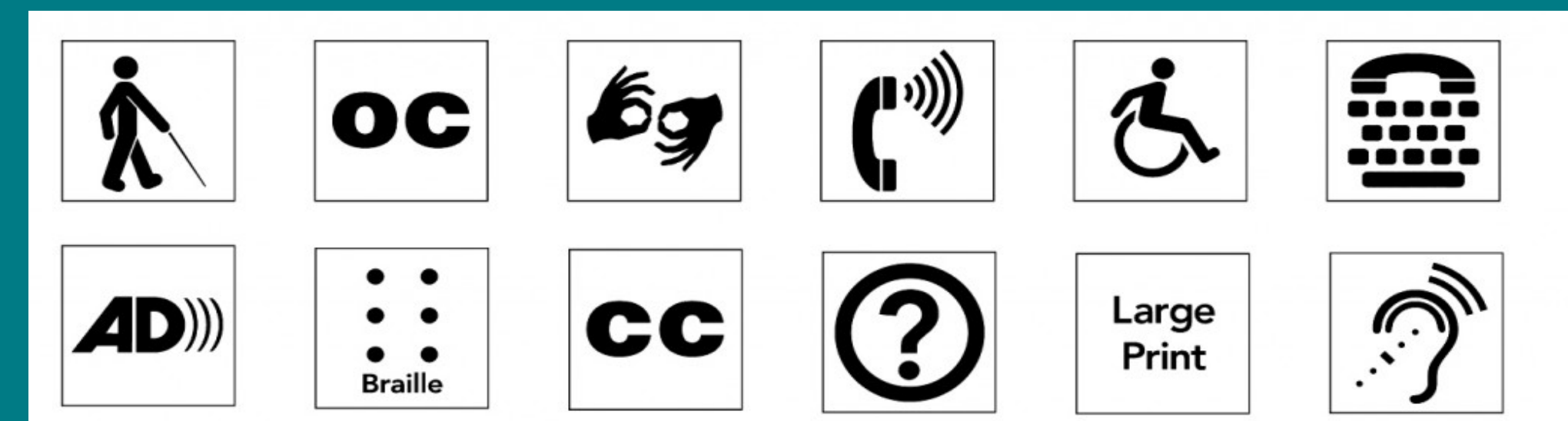
The Center of Innovation for Accessibility is a site catering to students and faculty of a partnering university, researchers, developers, engineers, designers, sociologists, psychologists and other sciences to share, foster and create innovations that would benefit physically disabled people, mentally disabled people and people with mental illnesses. All ages, genders and races would be able to utilize the facility whether it is to learn more about a specific disability or to see what projects are being worked on that could benefit a disabled patron. I want it to be a site of inspiration for future inventors as well as a place of camaraderie for disabled patrons and innovators alike. The Center's mission would be that it is a place that allows anyone to gain access to the latest information and resources on the current and future developments of the improvement of life for those with physical, mental disabilities and mental illnesses.

The Center will be run by a small staff of librarians that specialize in disabilities, technology and/or grant-writing. There would also be someone employed to maintain and oversee the invention lab and to train patrons on the equipment. The staff will be very hands-on, engaging people who have the ability to bring people together for a common goal, motivate patrons to accomplish their objectives and be accommodating to disabled patrons. The staff will coordinate programs for their patrons: training for the equipment in the Invention Lab; training or presentations on disabilities and illnesses; presentations by guest speakers, service providers and agencies; coordinate measures with local and national businesses for its patrons, coordinate the local disabled community with innovators; host conferences showcasing new innovations quarterly or biannually; keep up-to-date on scholarly journals and publications that relate to the mission of the Center and its patrons; release interesting information through social media and newsletters, whether it is an event or a profile on an invention being showcased at the Center; and above all else supporting the mission of the Center to be a nurturing, informative place where accessibility can develop and grow.

For additional information on this proposal, please contact me at: apurcell@pratt.edu



RIT University News: Elizabeth Lamark



Accessibility symbols, clockwise from top left: individuals who are blind or have low vision, open captions, sign language interpreter, assistive listening services, international symbol of access, Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD/TTY), audio induction loop, large print, universal information symbol, closed captioning, braille information, audio description.