Sam: Welcome to the UP Tech Talk Podcast, coming to you from the new Academic Multimedia Studio on the University of Portland campus, produced by Academic Technology Services, with your hosts, Maria Erb and Sam Williams.

Welcome to the UP Tech Talk Podcast. Today we have with us Melanie Gangle, the program manager, and Christa Hill, the program assistant for the Accessible Education Services. I wanted to welcome you to the podcast.

Melanie: Thank you.

Christa: Thank you so much, Sam.

Maria: It's so nice to have both of you here today. We've heard that there's new training available for faculty. Can you tell us something about that?

Melanie: Yes, absolutely. The advisory committee for Accessible Education Services, which is made of up the provost, Dr. Green, as well as the associate deans for each school and college, had asked Accessible Education Services to provide training and outreach to specific faculty around specific accommodations for students that they could use in their classrooms. Academic Technology Services has been a wonderful partner in that process, and we've had very positive feedback from faculty about the training that we've been able to provide.

Sam: The training, and I would say it's been great co-facilitating in a way with AES, not to be mistaken for ATS ... We're so collaborative that our names are very similar.

Female: Yes, they are, yeah.

Sam: We're eventually morphing together. The training that you're providing has been very beneficial to my team as well, because not only are we answering questions for faculty and looking at what needs to happen and the changes that possibly need to take place in the classroom or captioning a video, and we can talk more about that, but also we get to understand how people are using the classroom. I know I've walked away from those trainings going, "I would not have thought of that."

Now, this is brand new training that is being offered to faculty at the university, and this past fall was the first session, I believe. You brought us all together to the table. Can you give us an idea of what one of those training sessions looks like?

Christa: Sure. With the training sessions, for the fall meeting we looked at specific accommodations for particular disabilities to really address and hone in on things. What that does is inviting faculty to attend, other staff members to attend, allows you to sit around the table and look at: You're all in this together, you're not one person trying to do all of this, that we each have a small part, and our energy and our strength together can make a lot of differences and change. Melanie, I don't know if you have anything to add with that.

Melanie: Yeah, absolutely. As both of you have said, it's been a great opportunity for us all to learn. I too have learned about some new technology that's available in the classroom for faculty to use that benefits all students, especially certain populations of students with disabilities. It's been a great opportunity to delve deeper into how faculty can plan ahead and quite easily utilize some specific strategies that make a huge difference in the learning opportunities and the access that students have to the learning environment.

An example is we've been talking about accessible listening and captioning and ways of making the auditory learning environment more accessible for students. We've been talking about captioning for video. We've also been talking about simple strategies like ensuring that faculty are facing the class when speaking, and even when notating on whether it's an ELMO or a Tablet. That's where ASTs come in with some of those opportunities.

We brainstormed how can the faculty member continue to face the classroom, which is really important for specific students with hearing impairments, but also for a lot of other students, whether it's needing to pay attention, students looking confused and the faculty member being able to clue into that a little earlier. There have been really great opportunities to help improve the learning environment for everyone.

Sam: I know one of the takeaways I had from that particular one, because I hadn't thought about just presentation etiquette in a while ... I don't get to necessarily present. I'm not in the classroom daily. One of the ones that was interesting is just the ability to be able to be facing the students at all times and what technologies that we might apply to that. Of course, then you start thinking about all the presentations you've been in and somebody turns their back to you and are mumbling towards the board, and you're like, "What did they say?" I think it is proper etiquette to be facing the audience while you're talking.

Some of the things that we've looked at are the multi-touch displays. If we have faculty there listening to the podcast, we have installed Planner, or I believe they're Planner, displays. I could be wrong on the exact brand. There are multi-touch displays that were installed in I would say 85% of the classrooms on campus. We're working on the remaining classrooms. That way you can annotate directly onto the display. That allows you to progress through your PowerPoints. That allows you to write on a PowerPoint slide or on Excel or Word, directly annotating on the screen itself while you're looking at the students, so instead of having your back to the student and writing on the board and talking, but you can actually still face the student.

This can also be accommodated with an iPad, with a Microsoft Surface, or the ELMO. Some people are like, "I will never use a mobile device ever," and so we really want to make sure that we're providing a classroom that has that flexibility, so we do have the ELMOs that you can turn on, it projects in the room, and you can put a piece of paper underneath and be facing the students and writing. Definitely there's opportunity for different teaching styles I think with the different technologies that we're trying out in the classroom.

Since we have people's attention, if they want to learn more about that and want to work with somebody on the classroom technologies, they can contact Ben Kahn, who's our academic technology specialist and trainer, at kahn, K-A-H-N, @upd.edu. I'll throw that plug in there.

That's my long thing on that part of it, but what do you think are some other takeaways that we've had from that training?

Christa: I interact with students everyday in establishing and getting their accommodation started. It's putting them in motion, keeping them going from semester to semester. My takeaway really is that small, effective changes happen when I am aware and I recognize: Can I do this differently? How is someone else interacting with this or responding to me? Things like, when we talked about captioning of videos, if you were to turn the sound off, if your speakers don't work on your computer, you can't participate in what's going on in the video, so why captioning is important not just for those who may be hard-of-hearing but for those who struggle to learn audibly or maybe don't have speakers. It's things like that, to look in my everyday life, and I think those are great takeaways.

Another one for me was we're not changing everything all at once. It doesn't work that way. It's probably not going to happen that way, and it's way more overwhelming to think of it that way. It's just one small thing, to recognize one thing and attempt to change it, seek out help from other people. Those were takeaways for me.

Melanie: Yeah, absolutely. I would also add that, as you had mentioned, Sam, many of the things that we are talking about, strategies, technologies available, use of certain pedagogical strategies, are certainly specific in terms of need for one student, say with a disability, in the classroom, but more and more it's really important that all of us, and certainly the students, most importantly, that we're teaching, are learning these strategies. These are necessary in the business environment, certainly in government. You won't see any television programs, for example, without captions available. It's required by law. Certainly, students going into the communication realm need to know how to use captioning. That's just a small example.

The more that we can all learn about these opportunities for increasing the accessibility of the learning environment, the benefit is absolutely to perhaps the one or handful of students in the classroom with a specific immediate need, but the benefit also is for all of us and for all of the students that we're teaching. It's wonderful to have the leadership and guidance of the AES advisory committee really asking AES to make these opportunities more available to faculty. We want to provide these training opportunities for all faculty.

It's often most effective when we're talking about a specific student and we're talking about a specific class, because that is just more hands-on in terms of looking at applicability, but we certainly invite faculty to contact AES, as well as ATS, if you are wanting to look at a particular course and how you might be making it more accessible. We're very glad to do that, and the advisory committee has also asked us to do that. You can also talk with your associate dean as well if you have ideas or questions, and your associate dean certainly can provide leadership and guidance around this as well.

Maria: It sounds to me like what I hear both of you saying is we're really moving towards a universally accessible classroom, accessible to all learners with all styles. As Sam was pointing out to me, students don't always ask if they need a specific accommodation or they need to have something presented in a certain way. A lot of times you're not even aware that you as a learner may need to have something presented in a different way. I love this idea that we're moving towards this classroom that's just going to be so much more accessible to everyone here.

Melanie: Absolutely. You make a great point, Maria, that the student may not always ask. I think we like to think that a student will always be a good self-advocate. We in AES talk about that all the time. It's very important that students do advocate for themselves and their needs. At the same time, all of us work with students and we know that there can be many different reasons students can be shy. There's a recognized power differential, of course, between students and faculty, and that sometimes can prevent a student from asking for something that really might help them in the classroom.

By making this a more universal framework and working incrementally toward a more accessible environment for everyone, again, it helps all students. It also helps send a welcoming message to students, so that if a student does have a need that hopefully they may feel more comfortable approaching the faculty member and talking about that. Again, AES is always available as questions come up.

Christa: Yeah, and it's not just the undergrads that we're talking about. I'm a graduate student and I'm in class with certainly lots of other adult learners, and I can see that there's a lot of shyness still, it's not like it goes away when you graduate, and a lot of not wanting to hold the rest of the class back, or, "What if I'm the only one who maybe needs to have something?" You know that time is valuable in the class. This is to help across all fronts.

Sam: Yeah, and I would say as an adult learner, even though you're a more savvy consumer hopefully, I think that you might get more people that are a little bit more apprehensive to necessarily have the conversations. Depending on who's listening to the podcast, really we just want people to understand that there are ways to create accommodations in the classroom and that we have teams that are working together here at the University of Portland to try to find solutions as much as possible with our current infrastructure, but then planning for the future of our classrooms. It really takes this faculty input.

Even though these are very targeted trainings that are happening at typically the beginning of a term ... At least that's been what's happened, and it's been wonderful. Myself and Ben Kahn have attended the last two. Really that insight for us and being able to bring that back to information services and saying, "Hey, maybe we should change this about the classroom," it really helps bring that full loop in there that I think has been missing in some of the conversations.

There is a myth, though, on the technology side on captioning that I just want to wrap up with. I know we're at our 15-minute mark with the podcast. There was an e-mail that was put out that the provost said all video must be captioned on the campus. We do definitely encourage all online video to be captioned. This is something that we're passionate about here at the university. We want to make sure that everybody can participate in our content. If you would like to know more about how to caption your content, please contact Brian Cutler, and that's cutler@up.edu, or Ben Kahn, so kahn@up.edu. They'll be able to help you with getting that content captioned. When really you want to think about that is, if you cannot determine the audience for your video, caption it. It's a very simple rule of thumb.

There was also talk that went around that made it sound like captioning was going to be this giant hurdle, and it really is not. ATS, the other A in here, Academic Technology Services, will be paying for the captioning of that content. Really, it's just about understanding how you can order those captions. We've got a new process and media space, and we'll be putting out some training in the spring, where it's a one-click order. You create your content, you upload it, you click the button that says "order caption," and that is it. We're trying to make it very simple for ordering captions.

I just want to make sure that people understand that we're working hard to try to remove barriers, or at least perceived barriers, for creating accessible content. That's my little spiel at the end here. I don't know if we have any final words from AES.

Christa: I think one thing from AES would just be "thank you" to our faculty for all the work that they do to provide accommodations for the students here at the University of Portland, for attending the training sessions, for rethinking their classroom design and management and course content. It's a lot of work, we know, but we also see how the students really appreciate those efforts. I don't want to walk away with them thinking, "You should do all these things," when I know many, many, many of our faculty are working so hard to provide services to our students, and we just are grateful for them.

Melanie: Yes, and I would echo that, that you as faculty are the heart of our institution, and all that you do for students is already what sets the University of Portland apart, and that the amazing support and individualized attention that you give to students is just so important for students. What we're talking about here is just about moving forward. As education becomes more technologically oriented, it's important that we're all together in the learning process. Yeah, I would say thank you, faculty, and we look forward to being a partner with you.

Sam: I will say we're blessed to work with some amazing faculty, just to echo that even further.

Maria: Absolutely.

Sam: That's one of the things that keeps me here at the University of Portland, is just the way that we're able to collaborate together. I would like to thank AES for the great collaboration with ATS and the wonderful work that we get to work on together and just finding ways to find solutions in the classroom.

Maria: Thank you so much for coming today.

Christa: Thank you so much for having us.

Sam: Thank you for joining us for another episode of the UP Tech Talk Podcast. Just a reminder that we post a new podcast every Friday morning, and you can find us at techtalk.up.edu.