[00:00:00] Bonni Stachowiak: Today on episode number 293 of the *Teaching in Higher Ed* podcast, Christina Moore joins me to discuss inclusive practices through digital accessibility.

[00:00:12] Production Credit: Produced by Innovate Learning, maximizing human potential.

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[00:00:21] Bonni: Hello and welcome to this episode of *Teaching in Higher Ed*. I'm Bonni Stachowiak, and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches, so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

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[00:00:49] Bonni: Joining me on today's episode is Christina Moore. She's the virtual faculty developer for the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Oakland University in Southeast Michigan. She's the editor and regular contributor to a weekly teaching tips series. While she is tech reserved and limits screen-time, her world is continually expanded by learning with others online and she works to bring faculty together online. She's a doctoral student in educational leadership, researching how faculty use online spaces to expand their teaching practices.

Christina's work has been published in TechTrends, EDUCAUSE, Faculty Focus, and other journals and books. Prior to her current role, she was a special lecturer of writing

and rhetoric. She enjoys feeding people, meal preps like MAD, and takes occasional excursions into sci-fi. Christina, welcome to *Teaching in Higher Ed*.

[00:01:49] Christina: Hi, thanks so much for having me.

[00:01:51] Bonni: I appreciate you contacting me about this topic and suggesting it. You didn't say this in your e-mail, but I had a feeling when I got it that this is definitely something that's been missing, so thank you for filling in this hole in the *Teaching in Higher Ed* back catalog. [chuckles] It's an important topic and speaking of which, I'd like you to start a little bit and talk about-- I know you gave extensive workshops and I'm so excited about all the things I'm going to get to link to in the show notes that you're going to share. You have a comprehensive set of resources for us, but if you had to narrow it down to just one thing that you'd like faculty to know specifically about the legislation surrounding digital accessibility, what would that one thing be?

[00:02:32] Christina: Well, as far as the digital side of accessibility, it still is very rooted in general law regarding accessibility, which is the ADA, the Americans with Disabilities Act. What has come out of that being passed in 1990 is this consideration of, "Oh, how does this apply to web or electronic environments?" The Rehabilitation Act was brought in and updated to cover and consult this. There actually isn't a specific legal standard that very clearly defines what makes sure web environments meets ADA requirements, but there are often-consulted guidelines, that are used when people on a case by case basis, are needing to decide, "Is this web content accessible enough?" That is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, which are sometimes called WCAG or W-C-A-G. That's why those are the main guidelines that are referred to when we're talking about web accessibility.

[00:03:49] Bonni: One of the things that I've heard of and read is that we're not just dealing with current legislation, as you said, it's not very well-defined, but also watching what's happening when other campuses-- hopefully other campuses, sometimes our campuses [chuckles] receive complaints and watching how those decisions are made and how those campuses decide to resolve things. I know also, we as educators, want to go deeper than that. For you as an educator, what do you

think of wanting to educate us faculty about beyond the law, just in terms of ethical frameworks that we should be thinking about for our students?

[00:04:26] Christina: Well, a leading value that is coming increasingly to the forefront of our institutions is diversity and inclusion. Making sure that our classrooms are places that students can come as they are and be appreciated for the experiences and strengths that they bring and that there aren't barriers to them being able to learn and excel in the classroom. Our students with disabilities is a huge part of this as well. We talk about disabilities not just being students who are visually impaired or have hearing impairments, but students with those visible disabilities, cognitive disabilities, with learning disabilities. It really becomes a huge group that we often have a hard time quantifying.

Our web environments can be wonderful places of accessibility. It allows us to record our classes. It allows us to make material available to students before coming to class. They can customize it in a way that works for them. I think what's paying attention to the accessibility of those web documents and materials does, is that makes sure that we are making those materials as clear and as usable as possible. It's not just the very important consideration of helping students who otherwise have a really hard time accessing the content, but really making our material clear for everyone.

Those accessibility guidelines do this in a way that's continually important for our teaching. We look at these guidelines and we say, "Oh yes, I never noticed that tool," or, "Wow, this makes my material so much clearer." It's really about increasing access for everyone, but especially making sure that we're not leaving out students with disabilities. There are students who have wonderful intellectual capabilities, but because they might be blind, they might decide, "I'm not going to go to graduate school. It was hard enough for me to even be able to do the readings for my class," even though they have the full potential.

I think we hear stories like that and we never want students to have an experience like that. When faculty really learn about web accessibility and the things they can do now or that they can work towards, then I think it really improves all of their instruction material.

[00:07:20] Bonni: I appreciate so much how you've helped us think a little bit about the legislation. You talked about the WCAG 2.0 guidelines and then also going beyond that so that we're able to reach all of our learners and help them in sometimes very needed ways, but other times just helping them in ways that make it more convenient. I think about the classic example where I always now on my iPad have the captions turned on. Some of that is because I'll watch things in bed and maybe our daughter's fallen asleep next to me, or maybe I just have it turned down a little bit lower the volume, but I can still hear what it's saying.

Even if it's a-- I've watched television series that had different linguistics than I'm used to hearing. I didn't want to miss some of the humor I totally would have missed if I couldn't see those things. There's lots of reasons why we want to do it. Let's transition now to talk about how we do it. We know why, but then what's the process we can go through to plan to create these kinds of accessible digital materials.

[00:08:22] Christina: I've provided this resource ahead of time, but what I try to do when I'm talking with faculty about web accessibility is take the very extensive web content accessibility guidelines and boil them down to some basic practices and things to pay attention to whenever you're creating instructional material or you're finding instructional material online that you want to make sure is accessible. There's six main traits that I recommend faculty pay attention to. That is some simple things that we probably often do already, which is paying attention to how the font is displayed in our documents and especially our slides. Using font that isn't very loopy and has the scripts where all the letters are connected that can be difficult for lots of students to perceive.

Also, paying attention to our use of color. This is both whether our color contrasts are high enough in our slides and our documents, but also making sure we're not just using color to show meaning such as color-coding. We often do this in our syllabi and we'll say, "The red things are required," which is really good and it helps a lot of learners to have that visual reinforcement, but what the web accessibility guidelines often preach is to have multiple means-- that's also Universal Design for Learning phrase, multiple means of communicating that idea. If you do use color to show some sort of meaning then just also make sure you have some text equivalent to that.

Maybe just include the word "required" whenever you're doing that. Then you'll find even as a sighted reader, it's much clearer to flip through and see those things so you can search the document more easily. Another simpler one that we recommend is how you're using your web links. When you're sharing a URL instead of writing out www.such and such, that you're hyperlinking that phrase so that students know where it's going by just looking at it. Again, the visual enforcement of that is really helpful, for everyone.

One of my favorite ones is what we call sequence, but it's really just how you're organizing your content. Whenever we're organizing a document we want to have sections, we typically show our sections by making the font larger manually or bolding it or using a different color. Whereas if a student or a fellow faculty member is using a screen reader, that organization is not there for them if they don't perceive that there's not a way that they can tell which can make going through a document really frustrating. What we tend to ignore in our Microsoft Word or Google Docs is that there are heading styles built right into your toolbar so that you can set what those heading styles look like.

Then what is really convenient about that is it creates an automatic outline on the side of your document and then you can click through easily. What my colleagues Dan Arnold and Nick Bongers who do this training with me, say is, how useful that would have been to know when they were writing their dissertations and they realized, "Oh I've done all my heading styles wrong, now I have go back and fix them all." By using those automatic heading styles you can not only get through your navigation so much easier, but you can make those automatic updates.

Then the last two which require a little bit more attention and practice is making sure that your visuals have what we call text equivalent to that. If you have an image such as a graph or something that's displayed on your slides that is showing an important concept, then you provide what's called in an Alt text to that. You describe what is the basic educational meaning behind that in case a student can't clearly see that at a glance. Then the next element of that which Bonni, you referred to is captions and transcripts for those real-time visual elements such as videos or podcasts as we're

doing here that you have a text equivalent that compliments that so that people can follow along and have that extra reinforcement.

We order those into the things that are simplest or might already be on our radar to the things that are really significant and important but might require a little bit more time and practice and maybe some resources. That's your point that you made earlier about the importance of captions and how all of us use them at this point. There's actually been research that offering captions on our instructional material really does help learning outcomes for all students. We find that being repeated over and over again with even the use of a microphone in class that by projecting your voice, all the students are able to actually engage, focus, and pay attention more.

The more that we're paying attention to those stories about how accessibility really makes us more creative thinkers as far as what helps the class design in general, you'll just start hearing that over and over again and that's certainly been true in my classroom and my work.

[00:14:39] Bonni: When I think through people's challenges sometimes with learning new technologies or new skills, when that comes up often that I think about oh my gosh, if you could push through is this idea of applying styles or headings within whether it's a web document or as you mentioned Microsoft Word. Not only the things that you mentioned where it creates that outline, you mentioned being able to auto-format everything. I wanted to actually make that bump the font size up or change a color or what have you, but also the fact that it'll auto-create a table of contents for you that you can, later on, go update if you add additional headings just by right-clicking and choosing "update" field.

It's amazing that one skill-- and I think probably you and I are probably forgetting 10 things that we haven't even mentioned that one skill that you can learn which is not hard to learn in any application. Again in Word, they call it styles and other places especially web-based tools they're calling it headings, heading one, heading two et cetera. It's really going to carry you far. In fact, we didn't even talk about CSS, on the web, that being helpful if you've applied styles instead of applying formatting. It goes on and on so that's an important one.

[00:15:48] Christina: That's always the aspects that will actually demonstrate in our workshops and faculty will like audibly, "Ah," that would make everything so much easier. That's definitely one that we focus on, it's a tool that's always been there and we're just like, "That's nice," and we don't realize just how powerful and really how necessary it is for students.

[00:16:10] Bonni: That really makes such a difference. You were mentioning too about adding the alt text. I don't know how recent this is, but certainly, the awareness of it or people expressing that people should be doing this on Twitter, is adding-- I don't even know if they call it an Alt text on Twitter, but that if you're going to post an image people are encouraging us to include that alt text to describe the image that we're posting.

[00:16:34] Christina: I think it is called alt text on twitter. It might be text description elsewhere.

[00:16:39] Bonni: I have a hard time because I'm not sure it's showing up everywhere, I'm trying to add it. I'm trying to be better about that practice and then I go, I'm on my phone and it looks different than when I'm on the web version of Twitter. That's what one that I'm really aspiring to do a better job of but is not built into my habits. These are just things that we need to--

[00:16:57] Christina: A lot of these are about switching some habits. If you can take those foundational habits to how we're creating our material or evaluating what we're linking to, it becomes a lot more doable than it initially hits us with.

[00:17:12] Bonni: Well first we have to decide it's important to us and that we want to make a change, you've helped us to do that as well. The other thing I was curious about I keep reading about but haven't experimented yet that PowerPoint and Google Slides now have auto captioning available. That it's just so amazing to me that well, we are presenting it can be generating those captions right inside of a classroom, for example. Obviously, you would need to be close enough to that microphone or using some kind of a device that you're close enough that it can hear

what you're saying but have you experimented with any of those things or had your faculty experiment with them.

[00:17:48] Christina: I have experienced it with the one in Google Slides. I actually used it recently for Universal Design for Learning workshop because we wanted to demonstrate a lot of ways we can increase access to learning in our classrooms. I am amazed at how well it does with captioning, although there was one particular thing that it got very wrong. For the most part it must have been 90 or more percent accurate. I've done it Google Slides and actually two of my colleagues in same fields have been using and recently presented it at an ALA conference on their use of PowerPoint Translator.

That one is a lot more powerful because students can actually have it displayed on their own devices whether it's a phone or a laptop and they-- Not sure how good the translator is but it'll not only provide those captions, but you can also choose which language it translates to. It's just that extra layer of access depending on what the learning goals are in your class. It can be a lot more accessible and understandable to our students who are not native English speakers.

[00:19:07] Bonni: I was not aware of that part of that, how exciting. I was waiting because I had read about it and they talk about cascading the various new features throughout the Microsoft Office 365 suite. At the time, it hadn't quite cascaded it's way over, either to my institution or the educational-- I wasn't sure what was the holdup, but I do need to get back in there and experiment, that'd be really a fun thing to try out and see how it works.

[00:19:32] Christina: I'm glad that you brought up that tool because I think it's a really good example for faculty who hear about this and feel a sense of being overwhelmed with, "How I'm I supposed to be able to caption?" This often comes up with faculty who do lecture capture in their courses. They record their classes live and that recording's available for their students, which is a wonderful accessibility practice. Especially for students with those invisible disabilities who may have chronic illness and often they might have miss class more than their classmates. This is a wonderful practice but faculty when learning more about web accessibility and the

need to have captions, they were really worried that their recordings were going to be taken down because there wasn't this live captioning option. What I tell faculty is that this is something that we do want to work toward but in the meantime, keep doing this good accessibility practice of making the recordings available and then see--

The technology is catching up to help with the accessibility. It's not like we have to have it all figured out perfectly right now or else we have to not use the internet anymore if it's not all accessible. I think that's a really good example of some exciting tools that are making this work a lot easier and all of our students are really...

[00:21:09] Bonni: That has been such a thing for me not even necessarily specifically related to accessibility, but just teaching in general, it can be pretty easy to feel overwhelmed. In fact, just even this morning, I was reading somebody talk about it on Twitter, they were saying some kind words about the podcast that they've learned a lot from it. Then she had too much probably like a feeling of overwhelm. I think some people think that I conduct these interviews and somehow magically incorporate everything that you've just shared today. I've gone through all your resources and I'm like, "I'm perfect now come into any course. It's perfect."

[00:21:42] Christina: That's a superpower, you just absorb it all immediately.

[00:21:47] Bonni: It's sometimes the way I think we give ourselves an out for not living up to our values. To me, and maybe this is more my personality, but just do something. Decide that this is important to you, you can't be perfect today. Actually, you can't be perfect any day but then start somewhere. Speaking of which, what would be some good places for us to start? You mentioned some of them already but what are some things you think of like, "This is very doable as a place to get started if you care about this and you want to start to change your classes over."

[00:22:18] Christina: Well, I, as sort of a cook, I tried to have faculty think about that one video or that one document that they use from semester to semester that they consider really foundational to their course and work through some of these guidelines. In your syllabus, can you insert heading styles so that it's easier to navigate

through that syllabus? A lot of us have 10-page syllabi, so to have heading styles makes it much clearer to say, "Okay, where do I go with the grades?" Paying attention to some of those core documents and trying out some of these accessibility guidelines, I think is a really good place to start.

As far as your slides, many of us still use slides in our classrooms, paying attention to our color contrast and the size of our font I think is really helpful for not only students with maybe some sort of visual impairment that makes it harder for them to see the screen but it also just helps students who are sitting further back. Now I'm at the point where when I look at slides at a conference or in a classroom where a contrast isn't great or there's just tons of text on the slide, I'm like, "Ah." Now I noticed it a lot more since I've been paying attention to this. Even just breaking that up over multiple slides so that we're not relying on this one slide to do so much as far as stuff that we read.

I think just paying attention to those slides and probably looking at some of the things that we already suspect may not be the best as far as communicating or engaging your students and applying some of these accessibility guidelines. I think those are two good places to start. Then I also challenge faculty to think about accessibility in larger terms as well. One common practice that I asked faculty to reflect on is how early can you give students access to your content? There's sometimes where a professor might not share with the bookstore what books they're using until the first day of class because--

I know I was in this boat, you might assume students are just going to order the book somewhere cheaper perhaps but this really puts students with disabilities behind because if they need a different format for that book it's going to take longer. Then they're not doing the reading and the learning that you want them to do at the same time. We also know that having those orders ahead of time also helps students who are financially strapped and need to make sure they know what plan is as far as how to pay for their textbooks or they want to read ahead.

As far as early access, just how early can we give students our slide presentations or the assignment description so that they can decide to bring that material to class in whatever format works well for them. I've been doing this in our faculty workshops just

to demonstrate that practice, I've been sending the materials to whoever has signed up for the workshop ahead of time. These are normally slides and handouts. What I notice is faculty come to our workshops with a print copy in their hand, the slides with note lines on the side or they might bring it on their device and be typing in the notes section during the presentation.

I observe this and I'm this like, "Well, I don't have to know if any of these students have an impairment or disability but they are now equipped to come to this learning session and engage with the material in whatever way works well for them." Also, they don't have to do anything before they come to the workshop. It's just by making that material available early on that we're already helping our students so much including our students who have disabilities who might be getting support from the university disability office.

[00:26:38] Bonni: Thanks for all of these great guidelines around digital accessibility. I mentioned it earlier, but I'm going to encourage everyone to head over to the show notes at teachinginhighered.com/293. If you're listening on your mobile device, they also show up there in a window too where you can access those links. Lots of excellent resources to dive further. I've such a good time looking at all the stuff that you sent over, thank you for that. This is the time in the show where we each get to share our recommendations. As I was browsing your materials, I came across something that doesn't have to do with digital accessibility but is so helpful to us and that is an article that you wrote called *Plagiarize-Proof Your Writing Assignments.*

This is something that's come up on the show all the way from back on episode 19, I believe it was with James Lang and his book called Cheating Lessons. I still feel like even after all these years of doing the podcast it's still something I can improve on and you give such practical advice for how to do that. I see so many times people think that the answer to this is just more plagiarism detection software and there's certainly some ethical considerations we want to make around that. You give us real ethical ways that we can approach this to make our assignments more meaningful for students and also to enhance their learning. This is something I recommend everyone go check out and read and follow your advice.

The second thing I'd like to recommend is a thread from Twitter and it is one of those things that I read and just found myself getting teary-eyed right away. It's from a man named Graham steel and I'm just going to read it. He writes, "I cleaned out my office yesterday @DalBizLawProf is no more. My contract at Dalhousie is expiring and will not be renewed. Come October 1st, I won't be at Dal. I won't be teaching business law and I won't be a prof so I can't call myself @DalBizLawProf anymore, can I? When students heard I was leaving most wished me a happy retirement. Students have only the vaguest idea of the age and employment status of their professors.

How do I say I'm too young to retire and I'd love to stay? I'm not retiring, I'm leaving because my position is being cut. Dal's Business School is in a budget hole and cutting my position is an easy way to save money. I don't have tenure that's it. I think I brought value to the faculty and the university but the administration's spreadsheets have room only for course coverage on salary. There's no room in this spreadsheet for being a positive influence or igniting the spark of learning or catching a failing student. I'm not complaining, nobody promised renewal, nobody owes me a job.

In 2016 I fit into the faculty plans, in 2019 after two dean changes and two director changes and the discovery of a budget hole, I don't. That's life in the modern university. I loved my time at Dal more than I can say. When I walked in front of my first class in 2016, nobody really knew what would happen. I hadn't taught before so I worked hard, I listened, I experimented. I never taught the same way twice and it worked. As I leave Dal a shout-out to teaching colleagues Tammy Crowell, Laura Cumming, Oksana Shurska, Linda Macdonald, Scott Comber. Carrie Hunter in the advising office was my go-to for everything. Jennifer Ziobrowski held Rowe 5 together. You all rock." Then he goes on to share, "As I leave my teaching position at Dalhousie, a shout-out to the thought leaders from whom I learned so much." He links to James Lang's Twitter account, Sarah Rose Cavanagh, myself, Geeky Pedagogy and Teach Prof. "I'm a devoted follower of your posts, books, and podcasts. Thanks for all you do."

Here's the part where the tears really came for me. His last tweet in this thread, "As I leave my teaching position, it leaves a student-sized hole in my heart. I've been the professor for 1,000-plus young people, each unique, each ready to learn, each ready

to take a chance on me. What a gift. What an honor. From DalBizLawProf. Thank you. Over and out." I'm so sad for him. It makes me so sad when people have such a heart for teaching and they care so much, and for whatever reason not any of their own doing, they're not able to keep doing it. Thanks to him for all of the work that he did over all those years. I hope that he lands somewhere, but I know that my idealism doesn't quite get to work these things out the way that we wish they would sometimes.

[00:31:24] Christina: I definitely sympathize that as a previous part-time faculty member. It's…

[00:31:31] Bonni: Yes. Christine, what do you have to recommend for us today?

[00:31:34] Christina: I have one more substantive, serious recommendation and one sillier one, but still important and helpful in my life. The first is a weekly teaching tip that I wrote for my institution, which shares what I call the productivity calendar. This has been my time management system for making sure I'm making the most of my unstructured time that I'm dedicating to my work. I do a lot of productivity reading. I know that you just wrote a book on this topic as well. That's on my list. I'll definitely be consulting that. What I do with this productivity calendar is I created a Google calendar that is private only to me.

I just called it productivity calendar because it just structures my time so that I am working towards short-term and long-term goals. If I know that I need to be working on a manuscript over the next three months and I know that I should probably be working on it three hours a week, I can schedule that time regularly. Then it also allows me to take those tasks that are important but tend to be distractors as well, such as attending to our e-mail and doing just some of those miscellaneous to-do list things. It gives me one set time in the day where I do that work so that I think, "Oh, I need to write that e-mail," instead, I can put a note within that event that says, "Write this e-mail," or, "Do this small thing."

I know if I just attend to that all day, that I'm constantly being distracted and I don't have that focus time to work on the things that are larger term and are really

important. This has just helped me be so focused in whatever I need to do. I've been using it for about three years. It's been incredibly helpful. I have a little write up on that that I can share.

Then my second recommendation actually came from my husband. It's a tip on how to care for your fish. We have a fish and a snail. My husband Sean and I were continually going back and forth saying, "Have you fed the fish? Have you fed the fish?"

We would have to keep up with this, so his idea was to use one of those weekly medicine dispensers to track the fish food in beforehand so that you could easily see [chuckles] if the fish has been fed that day because we could just dump it all in for that day. Then as an added benefit, it's much easier for my young children to feed the fish because they can just dump that one portion in. It's also been a way for my son to learn the [chuckles] dates of the week because he's starting to learn to read. It's just one of those small things, but when I first heard that, I'm like, "Oh, that's a solution looking for a problem." It's actually been really useful and helpful.

[00:34:37] Bonni: That is a fabulous recommendation. We do have those things that when you start to assign different kinds of responsibilities to kids to help them gain that independence and sense of responsibility. In our case, we don't want to kill all of our plants because they get it wrong for a week or something. [chuckles] It's a way of just being able to visually check. I love it. I will not say which child because I don't like to speak disparagingly of any of my child, but let's just say that a friend showed our kids how to feed their fish when they were over there and one of my children went back in the room and fed the entire canister of fish, which I'm sad to report does not bode well for a fish.

They actually will die from eating too much fish food. I know you have kids younger than mine. It sounds like a really good way to help teach them the days of the week, but also that they know they're only supposed to feed one of those portions to the fish. [laughs]

[00:35:34] Christina: That should explain the amount. Yes.

[00:35:36] Bonni: I love it. This has been such a delightful conversation. Speaking of accessible, you've made this accessible to us that we can actually have confidence that we can go in and start to make a difference in our teaching. As someone who has done this over time and still has a lot more work to do, it does get easier as time goes on. You learn one skill and you switch over a set of resources to be more accessible and then it's just easy to tackle the next challenge in my experience. Thank you for all of these ways we can do that.

[00:36:05] Christina: Oh, thank you so much for letting me share. It's a great way of just speaking about your teaching, and really about your work as well.

[music]

[00:36:16] Bonni: Thanks once again to Christina Moore for joining me on today's episode of *Teaching in Higher Ed*. The episode number was/is 293. Head on over to teachinginhighered.com/293 to access the links to so many of the great resources that Christina brought to us today. I want to also take this time to thank you for listening to *Teaching in Higher Ed*, as we start out a new year together. I know many of us are thinking about ways that we want to improve our teaching. I'm so grateful for this community that we have to just bring these ideas to each other and continue to shape each other's teaching through community. Thanks so much for listening. I'll see you next time.

[music]

[00:37:10] [END OF AUDIO]

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