

Just Say No....to PDFs

Digital Collegium Accessibility Summit 2026

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Presenters



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Why no PDFs?

- Not accessible/hard to make accessible
- Easily out-of-date
- Hard to update
- Not mobile-friendly
- Not searchable
- Duplicated content
- Made for print

972 PDFs

February 2025

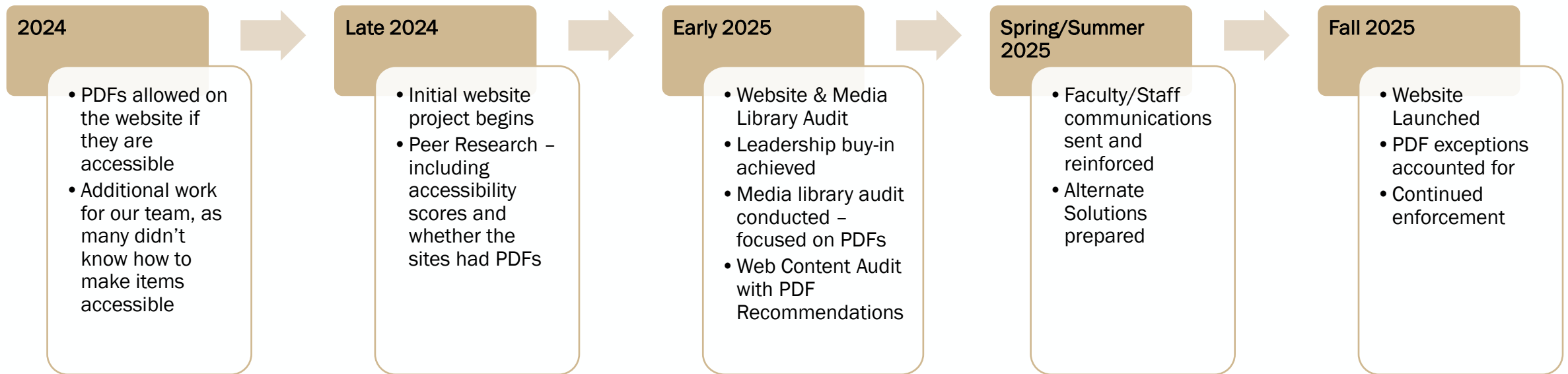


~~972 PDFs~~ 45 PDFs

~~February 2025~~ June 2026

So how did we do it?

Our Story



Let's start at the beginning...

- How to do the right research
- How to gain leadership buy-in
- How to conduct a PDF audit

How to do the right research

It's an academic world; we just live in it.

- Identify your goals
 - No PDFs, some PDFs, everything allowed, but accessible?
- Determine your peers
 - Institutional, State, National
 - Not sure of whom to include? – Ask your leadership!
 - Our peers were:
- Ask the right questions
 - Are our peers using PDFs?
 - How are they using them?
 - Are they using an alternate solution to something we currently use PDFs for?
 - If they use PDFs, are they accessible?
- Take copious notes
 - Spreadsheets, and more spreadsheets
- Examine your findings
 - Look for similarities and differences
 - Dos and don'ts

How to Gain Leadership Buy-in

- **Know your leadership!**
 - What appeals to them?
 - Research
 - Financial
 - Legal
 - Productivity
 - Campus leader
- Build your argument
- Present your findings

How to conduct a PDF audit: Step 1

Out with the old

- Export your media library
- Determine the accurate number of PDFs
- Review filenames
- Start deleting
 - Remove old versions of new files
 - Remove anything that's not currently on your site
 - If you're not sure, add it to your spreadsheet...

How to conduct a PDF audit: Step 2

Build a spreadsheet

- Create a spreadsheet of all the PDFs currently on your site and any you're not sure about
- What to include:
 - PDF filename
 - Where it's located (webpage URL)
 - Date Uploaded
 - Content Owner
 - Recommended Action
 - Removal
 - Alternate Solution
 - Any additional notes

PDF File Name	Webpage	Date Uploaded	Owner	Action
BFTF_Application_US_2025_Accessible.pdf	https://education.purdue.edu/ben-franklin-institute/apply/	12/5/2024	Anatoli Rapoport	Make into form
Spring-SSAT-2025-Course-Description-Flyer_accessible.pdf	https://education.purdue.edu/geri/youth-programs/super-saturday/	11/13/2024	Alia Medina	Convert to web content
Constitution-day-resources2024_accessible.pdf	https://education.purdue.edu/ackerman-center/programs/constitution-day/	8/5/2024	Anne Murphy-Kline	Remove
OGS-Student-Guide-2024-2025.pdf	https://education.purdue.edu/graduate-students/current-students/	7/11/2024	Abby Weiderhaft	Remove with new site

Sample Spreadsheets & Slides

- Scan the QR code or visit https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9sOPuioXt7xHw2i to download samples of the following:
 - Peer research spreadsheet
 - PDF Audit
 - Presentation slides



PDF File Name	Webpage	Date Uploaded	Owner	Action
BFTF_Application_US_2025_Accessible.pdf	https://education.purdue.edu/ben-franklin-institute/apply/	12/5/2024	Anatoli Rapoport	Make into form
Spring-SSAT-2025-Course-Description-Flyer_accessible.pdf	https://education.purdue.edu/geri/youth-programs/super-saturday/	11/13/2024	Alia Medina	Convert to web content
Constitution-day-resources2024_accessible.pdf	https://education.purdue.edu/ackerman-center/programs/constitution-day/	8/5/2024	Anne Murphy-Kline	Remove
OGS-Student-Guide-2024-2025.pdf	https://education.purdue.edu/graduate-students/current-students/	7/11/2024	Abby Weiderhaft	Remove with new site

Now, let's chat...

- How to communicate the overall change to faculty and staff
- How to address pushback

How to communicate with faculty and staff

- Be transparent
 - Why are we doing this?
 - What are the next steps?
 - Who else is doing this?
 - Provide examples
 - Where are you getting this information?
 - Cite your sources!
- Be flexible
 - Allow time to adjust
 - Provide an incentive (if needed)
- Be persistent
 - Continuous communication and reinforcement

How to address pushback

A case study on faculty CVs

Background

Individual emails sent to faculty members with PDF CVs letting them know their CVs would be removed and to use the new online profile update form to submit updates.

Problem

Faculty member upset that PDF version of CV would be removed

Faculty member believed users would not be able to view all CV-related items if PDF version was removed.

Cited PDF version as industry standard for CVs.

Solution

Reiterated that faculty could use the profile update form to include all information from the CV, – including links to LinkedIn, personal websites, and citation sites.

Shared research findings from PDF use on peer institution directories.

Provided an example of a completed online profile with updated CV information.

There's a better way...

- How to address alternate solutions

How to address alternate solutions...

- Convert PDFs to web content

OR

- Identify alternative solution options
 - What can you do within the scope of your position?
 - What do you have the capacity to do?
 - What platforms are available?
- Provide examples
 - Mock-ups/test pages
 - Peer examples

How to convert PDFs to web content

A case study on summer camp brochures

Background

One of our research centers hosts a yearly summer camp on campus and has done so for many years.

Every year, they create a large print brochure with camp information and course descriptions.

Every year, they want the brochure linked on the website.

Problem

Research center wanted parents to have access to brochure information.

Brochure was created print-first and lacked any accessibility tags.

We did not have the capacity to make the brochure accessible.

Solution

Expanded the existing webpage to include brochure information.

Created a custom content block to filter and search courses/descriptions.

Started with a sample page with filler content for client to review.

Referenced other areas of the website to generate ideas and maintain consistency.

Simplest solutions are the ones you've already done. Don't be afraid to reuse processes.

How to convert PDFs to forms

A case study on international fellowship applications

Background

Every year, Purdue hosts an international fellowship, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State.

Application information is located on the College of Education website, including various application documents.

Problem

Application documents are not accessible.

Some documents can be filled out digitally whereas others must be printed.

Website contains some documents that are only relevant to accepted participants.

Solution

Create one online form that includes information from all application documents.

Send documents that only pertain to accepted participants directly to them. No need for them on the website.

Other alternate solution examples

Problem

- Research study findings hosted in Dropbox

Solution

- Submit to the Purdue libraries to be added digitally

Problem

- Documents needed for student teaching

Solution

- Fill out a form, documents sent directly to email

- Don't be afraid to revisit solutions if something better comes along!
- Sometimes there isn't an alternate solution...

What to do when nothing else works...

- How to address exceptions

How to address exceptions

Because there will be exceptions.

- Sometimes a PDF is your only solution.
- If that's the case- make sure the PDF is **accessible**.
- Our exceptions:
 - Running Records
 - Research project documents meant to be printed
 - Accreditation documentation
 - Reports directly from the federal government

Running Record	
Student name: Allen Grade level: K	
Book title: Toy Store Author: Lindsey Domke Book level: K.1.6 (Scott Foresman Reading)	
Errors	Self-corrections
I am a little tiger.	
I am a little top.	
I am a little turkey.	
I am a little turtle.	
I am Tyrannosaurus Rex.	
I am a little teddy bear.	
I am walking to the toy store.	
Words read correctly ____ ÷ 37 total words = ____ %	
Self-corrections: _____	

95%+ = Easy
90%– 94% = Instructional
Less than 90% = Frustration

Now what?

- How to ensure compliance

How to ensure compliance

- Positive reinforcement
 - Recognize faculty & staff when they follow accessibility best practices
- Repeat your why
 - Remind faculty & staff of accessibility best practices, including new hires
- Establish a working group
 - Connect with like-minded faculty, staff, and students
- Be available
 - Keep your calendar open and answer questions as they arise – you are the subject matter expert
 - Consider holding a town hall to address frequently asked questions
- Stay informed
 - Stay up to date with the latest happenings in the accessibility community
 - Relay these updates to your faculty & staff as needed
- Be open to change/feedback
 - Consider revisiting a previous solution or trying something new if problems arise

Here's what we've learned...

- Key Takeaways

Key Takeaways

- Do your research
- Get leadership buy-in!
- Spreadsheets are your friends
- You will get pushback (it's how you address it that's important)
- Don't promise a solution you can't deliver (stay within your capacity and resources)
- There will be exceptions. (it's up to you how many you accept)

Thank you!



Please reach out to Kerri Richardson (richa741@purdue.edu) or Pablo Moore (moore539@purdue.edu) with any additional questions.

Scan the QR code to download the materials from our presentation.