Q&A: Barbara Seasholtz, Ruth Grove

“Developing Curated, Accessible, Course-Specific Resources in the Writing Center”

**Question:** I have had a similar project both at my current institution and previously...what were some roadblocks or barriers that you experienced that you might be able to help others through? For example, we had some faculty who insisted on "approving" some of the resources or demanding access to the page (and the students who used it)...which is concerning of course.

**Answer:** I think our biggest barrier that we faced was the curation process. There were so many there were so many documents out there when we started really searching for things that we would struggle with finding just the right document. We would find a specific document and it would be almost, but not quite the right thing, or it would be too long and the students wouldn't read it, or we would find a 15 resource. We would take one section of each one, so I think the thing that we had to keep in mind was the goal. We wanted students to read it, we wanted them to not look at it and say, “I don't get it. This is Greek.” Keeping our goals in mind, we were able to whittle down our list of available documents that we could post on our page. Then there had to be a place where we would say “we're wasting time trying to find a document when we could just create one.” For instance, one of the steps in the fastest development of an annotated bibliography, and it's done a little differently from what I've done in the past, and students don't often understand and they think that you just randomly pull up a document a source, you read enough of it to write a paragraph, and then you develop a citation. That style of doing it will not get you through this assignment, and students don't realize that. Also, the next step in the process for this class is developing a synthesis based on these sources— if they hadn't figured out good sources, then there is no synthesis. We couldn't find anything that would help our students with this, so I created a video explaining it and saying, “You can't do that, this is not a throwaway assignment. This is crucial to the next step.” My short answer is to keep the end in sight. Be willing to toss a source if it's not going to meet your need. Don't waste too much time looking, when you can exact just create it yourself.

**Question:** Were there any challenges you found when reviewing the materials, specifically for accessibility?

**Answer:** Yes. I have to confess that I still struggle with understanding the accessibility issue. Just creating and making sure that our document was accessible was a challenge for me, because I'm just learning some of these things. I have to confess that we have not fully checked everything yet. This is this is definitely something that we need to get back to doing. We have an accessibility checker in Canvas based on the pages, so it'll look at the accessibility of the resource that has been created, but it's not reaching out into the pages that we are linking. It checks our page that we created, but if we want to make sure that everything that we linked to is accessible, we have to do it on our own. I've done some of those but I have not done every single one of them. I have a feeling that's going to be an issue coming up that we are going to have to deal with, and I envision, as we move through this, that we'll be creating more and more original documents anyway. When we started working on this, it was course specific. We pulled from a fair number of resources that we already had, but then went out looking for other sources—things that we had in our files and things we created. It's multimodal; we have links, we have videos, so dealing with the accessibility issue is going to be something that we're going to have to do. One of the positives of using Canvas is that if it is a document you've created, it will be very specific about what you need to fix and why. Your IT department might also have somebody in the role of checking for accessibility, somebody that is looking at the accessibility of the technology and resources on campus.

**Question:** But would would it ever be possible to incorporate some materials in languages other than English in your support system? They're just kind of like building in some like translanguaging to kind of legitimate and automate it. For those students.

**Answer:** There's more and more need for that. We have a lot of students who are multilingual, and this work on developing resources for them is definitely a work in progress. I think getting them involved with creating documents, with them in mind, is something that we really do need to work on. Be as involved as possible with the students themselves and getting their regular input and feedback, so that we're not designing for a fictional audience

We have created our Canvas page with real students in mind; we've worked with these students and we know where they're going to run into trouble. This course is a foundational English Composition course and forms a basis for their all of their research writing down the road. I's really an important class for them. Working with them and seeing them run up against the same roadblocks every single semester was frustrating. When we were working on it, we had that student in mind. We can't just like imagine, “Okay, here is this particular student who is fluent in these languages and will likely need structure here”; we need to get the students involved, to say “Okay, where in this process do you feel like more help is needed? Where can you add to it?” They have a tremendous number of resources themselves that they can bring to the table.