

Humboldt State University

High Marks for Pivot Accessibility



HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

A thorough review of Pivot's accessibility at Humboldt State University found more than checked-off boxes. It found a degree of transparency and attention to detail that the review team hadn't encountered with any other software.

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Cassandra Tex, Humboldt State University



About Humboldt State University

One of 23 institutions that are part of the California State University system, Humboldt State University offers 51 majors and 12 graduate programs in three colleges. Programs in natural resources and sciences are nationally known, and faculty members are among the top teachers and researchers in their fields. Faculty, staff, and student researchers annually work on nearly 500 funded projects representing a total award value of \$86 million, secured by the university's non-profit Sponsored Programs Foundation.

Supporting Strategic Research Goals

The strategic plan for Humboldt State University outlined several research goals. They included developing a campus-wide focus on externally funded research, and fostering collaborations for grant writing and research. To support those efforts, the university adopted Pivot from Ex Libris. Pivot combines a comprehensive, curated source of global funding opportunities and scholar profiles into an intuitive, web-based discovery and workflow tool. With Pivot, researchers, faculty and research administrators are able to easily search for and identify new funding opportunities, and communicate and share information about opportunities with potential collaborators.

Before the decision to adopt Pivot was finalized, though, it had to meet the university's high expectations for accommodating persons with disabilities. Cassandra Tex, Assistive Technology Specialist with the Student Disability Resource Center, is one of two leaders of the team that performs accessibility reviews of products to be implemented on the campus. “Our team reviews what we consider to be high-impact items,” she explains. “That includes items that are accessed by all faculty, students, and staff, or that are required for an academic program. Since Pivot is public-facing and just about anybody can use it, it qualifies as a high-impact item.”

Thorough Accessibility Review

The team's review process begins with requesting the **Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT)** from the software company, followed by a hands-on review of the product and then a meeting with the company representatives. “If you go to other California State University campuses — and there are 23 of them — every single campus has a different process,” shares Tex. “I know ours is probably one of the more thorough processes that are in place.

“When I get the VPAT, I read through it. Many, many times, I've seen documents that say all the accessibility items are supported with no exceptions and, basically, that the product is 100% accessible. After our manual review, we find that they're really not.” Something was very different with Pivot. As Tex relates, “When we dove into our manual testing, I realized that their report was highly accurate. We seldom see that.”

“Everybody we met with was great... They were very willing to work with us and listen to what we needed.”

Reina Hutton, Humboldt State University

Full Understanding of Accessibility Issues

Reina Hutton is a disability consultant and also a member of the accessibility review team. “I was surprised with the level of detail that went into the explanation column of the Pivot VPAT,” she recalls. “Others simply say ‘supports with exceptions.’ I was taken aback by the Pivot document. It clearly stated the exceptions and went into great detail. In some cases, it went so far as to note exceptions that aren’t critical to using the program, but they noted them anyway for completeness. Nobody else does that.”

In the meeting with Ex Libris, the review team was impressed by the Ex Libris representatives' knowledge of the accessibility issues. As Tex explains, “One of the issues is being able to use the keyboard only. I didn’t have to say, put the mouse away. They knew exactly what we were asking for and showed us.” Another is being able to skip over multiple levels of repetitive navigation and go immediately to the content. “Ex Libris had set up two skip navigation links. That stands out in my mind,” she states. “I said to myself at the time, ‘These people get it. If anything is not compliant, it’s not because they’re trying to snow us.’”

Pivot also met the specifications on items such as screen contrast and alt-text for images. On a few such as the ability to resize text, event notification, individual document accessibility and captioning videos, Ex Libris knew about the shortfalls and furnished a timeline for remediation. “All in all, Ex Libris did a fabulous job,” Tex summarizes.

Believing in the Unicorn

“When I see a report that says supports, supports, supports, all the way down for all of the guidelines, my joke is that, ‘Ooh, look. I just found the unicorn,’ confides Tex. “I’m sure I made that comment when I first read Pivot’s. Then we did the manual evaluation and the accessibility demonstration. In fact, at some point in the accessibility demonstration, it became a little peppering conversation on our part, for lack of a better word. ‘Oh, hey, here’s an error. Here’s an error.’ It sounded completely negative, bringing up a few errors, but the Ex Libris folks took it all in stride. They looked at what we were talking about and said, ‘Okay, we’ll get that fixed.’”

“Everybody we met with was great and whatever questions we had, they answered them,” echoes Hutton. “Their attitude was this wasn’t really a huge, hard thing to deal with. They were very willing to work with us and listen to what we needed.”



The Accessibility Warriors

“Accessibility is not always on the forefront of everybody’s minds, but we’re always working to improve that,” states Hutton. “I know that we’re making positive change. I have to remind myself of that sometimes. We call ourselves the accessibility warriors on campus.”

“I feel very strongly, and the others in our group do as well, that it’s important for all software to be usable by anybody regardless of any physical or visual limitations,” declares Tex. “With Pivot, they’re going to be able to use screen readers and whatever other assistive technology products they want to use, and access it without any problems.”

In fact, since meeting with the Pivot team, Tex learned that accommodating persons with disabilities isn’t a one-time effort for Ex Libris. It’s become ingrained in the Pivot development process. “In this role of reviewing products, it’s great to know we’re actually affecting change across software, across industries,” she pronounces. “Knowing Ex Libris has baked this into their development process is extremely rewarding for all of us.”



About Ex Libris

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