

Accessibility Subcommittee recommends offering live captioning

Date: May 2019

I. Introduction

The ISR/DACCD Accessibility Subcommittee would like to encourage our community to implement live captioning of webinars, and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) for live events. Doing so would allow those who are deaf or hard of hearing, or even just having problems hearing in a noisy room, to participate fully in ISR events.

Following, we outline the ADA law on captioning and estimate the frequency live captioning would be needed, its cost, and recent potential breakthroughs to consider.

II. ADA law on captioning

According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), approximately 15 percent of American adults (37.5 million) 18 and older report some trouble hearing, with about 2 percent of adults 45 to 54 having disabling hearing loss.

As a public institution, the University of Michigan is required to provide accommodations for people with disabilities. The specific requirement related to live captioning is found in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, section 1.2.4¹: “Captions are provided for all live audio content in synchronized media.”

¹ <https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/quickref/?versions=2.0&showtechniques=124#captions-live>

Christina Kline, University of Michigan's ADA Coordinator for the Office of Institutional Equity, gave the subcommittee details on accommodation requirements for in-person and virtual events: ISR is required to include on all event announcements a statement that accommodations are available. In other words, ISR's current statement ("If you require an accommodation to participate in this event, please contact Anna Massey at abeattie@umich.edu at least one week in advance of this event.") is sufficient. However, it must be on *all* materials advertising the event, including posters, monitor slides, etc., and this is not always done.

If there were a request for live captioning, the event would then be required to provide the accommodation. The University of Michigan can provide, for a fee, sign language interpretation, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), and/or note taking services. Presenters could also make use of the closed captioning features of Google Slides or Skype.

III. Frequency of ISR live webcasts; requests for live captioning

The subcommittee believes that, institute-wide, ICPSR does the most live webinars, with roughly two per month. Anna Massey, ISR's meetings and special events manager, shared that since she has been including the request for accommodation statement in emails, no one has made such a request. Massey also stated that she knows there are attendees who could benefit from closed captioning but have not made the request. Kline suggests that asking all attendees to fill out an RSVP form with check boxes for the accommodations needed might encourage people with disabilities to ask for the accommodations they need.

IV. Cost of live captioning

Currently, live captioning services average approximately \$130/hour. University of Michigan's ITS department provides post-event closed captioning for live streams

delivered to YouTube and Wowza streaming cloud. They currently are not set up to handle webinars. ITS uses U.S. Captioning, which charges \$130/hour, one hour minimum, charged in 15 minute increments after the first hour. A 1.5 hour session would be \$195. Working with ITS in this manner would require specific equipment on our end.

The most common webinar interfaces used at ISR appear to be GoToWebinar (used by ICPSR) and BlueJeans. Neither offers integrated closed captioning. GoToWebinar, for example, recommends using a separate service, such as U.S. Captioning, to provide a transcript of the meeting.

V. Recent technological advances

[Google Slides](#) (October, 2018), [Skype](#) (December, 2018), and PowerPoint (January, 2019) have added closed captioning to their applications. The subcommittee tested these features and determined that they work well, with some limitations: academic jargon is not translated well; and audience comments/questions are not captured unless the audience microphone is feeding directly into the presentation computer being used for auto captioning.

VI. Peer institutions

The University of Michigan offered the first captioned commencement in 2001², and continues to offer its students video captioning, CART, and notetaking services.³

OSU provides real-time captioning for students.⁴

MSU seems to offer captioning at no cost for credit-based classes, and for a fee for extra-curricular events.⁵

² <https://news.umich.edu/first-school-to-caption-commencement-for-the-hearing-impaired/>

³ <https://ssd.umich.edu/article/speech-text-services>

⁴ <https://slds.osu.edu/accommodations-services/sign-language-interpreting-transcribing/>

⁵ <https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/programs/signlanguage>

VII. Subcommittee recommendations

The Accessibility Subcommittee makes the following recommendations based on the above information:

1. Units should prepare in advance to accommodate accessibility requests, including live captioning of webinars, and using CART or software with captioning activated for live in-person events.
2. ISR should adopt an RSVP form for all attendees that offers specific accommodation options.
3. ISR should post a general flyer containing our accommodation statement to each bulletin board in both ISR buildings.
4. ISR should appoint a committee to investigate Skype as a possible replacement for BlueJeans and GoToWebinar. If Skype is not an option for a unit, they should request closed captioning functionality from their chosen vendor or use Google Slides or PowerPoint (with captioning) within the webinar or call.
5. ISR should appoint a committee to explore the feasibility of using Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) for live events, or Google Slides or PowerPoint with closed captioning enabled.
6. ISR should provide presenter training on how to use such as Skype, Google Slides, and PowerPoint with their captioning features.