

Culture Shift

Building a Movement Toward Inclusive Learning

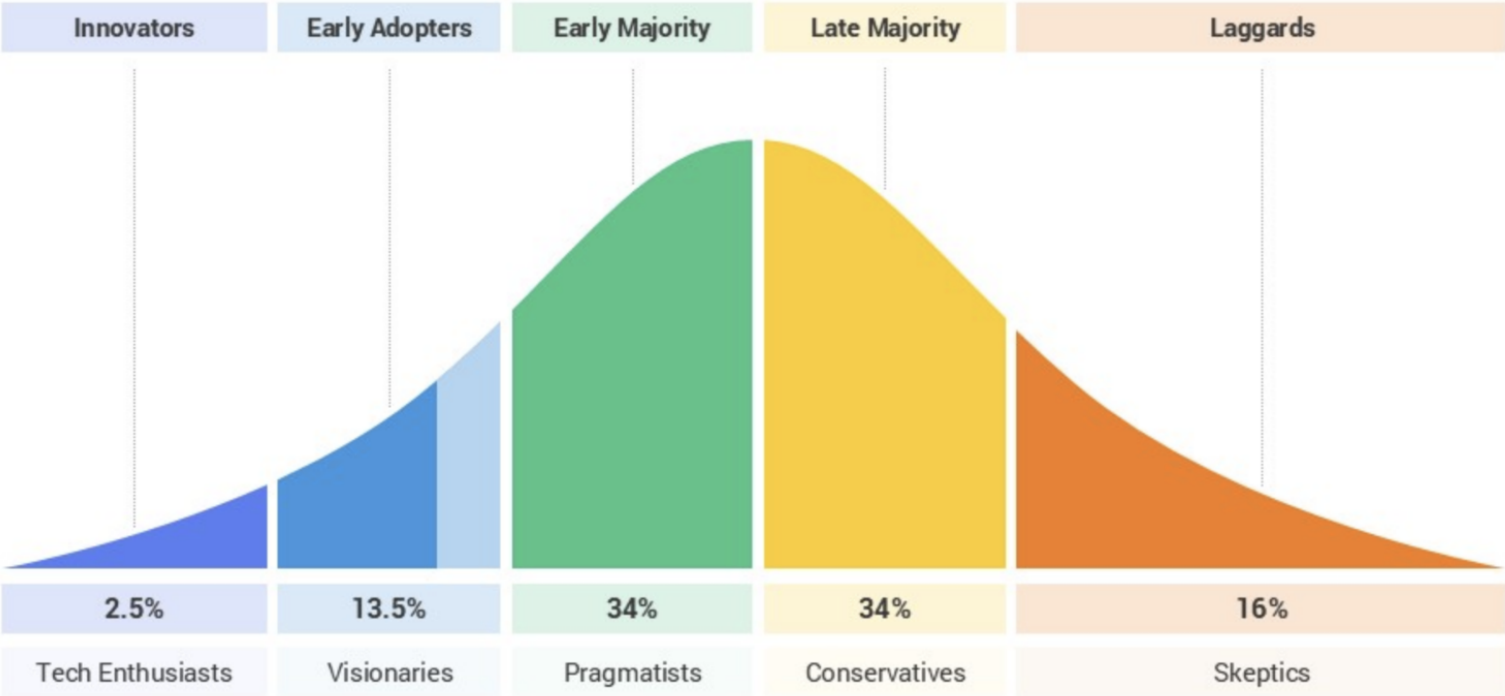
Emily Baker, University of Chicago
Jim Stachowiak, Northwestern University



This presentation is part of the
Accessibility Track, sponsored by:



Culture shift pattern



Why culture change?

- Most accessibility fixes are one off adjustments that don't carry over from term to term
- Shifting a culture results in accessibility being built into the design process
- Shifting culture = changing habits

In session poll question 1

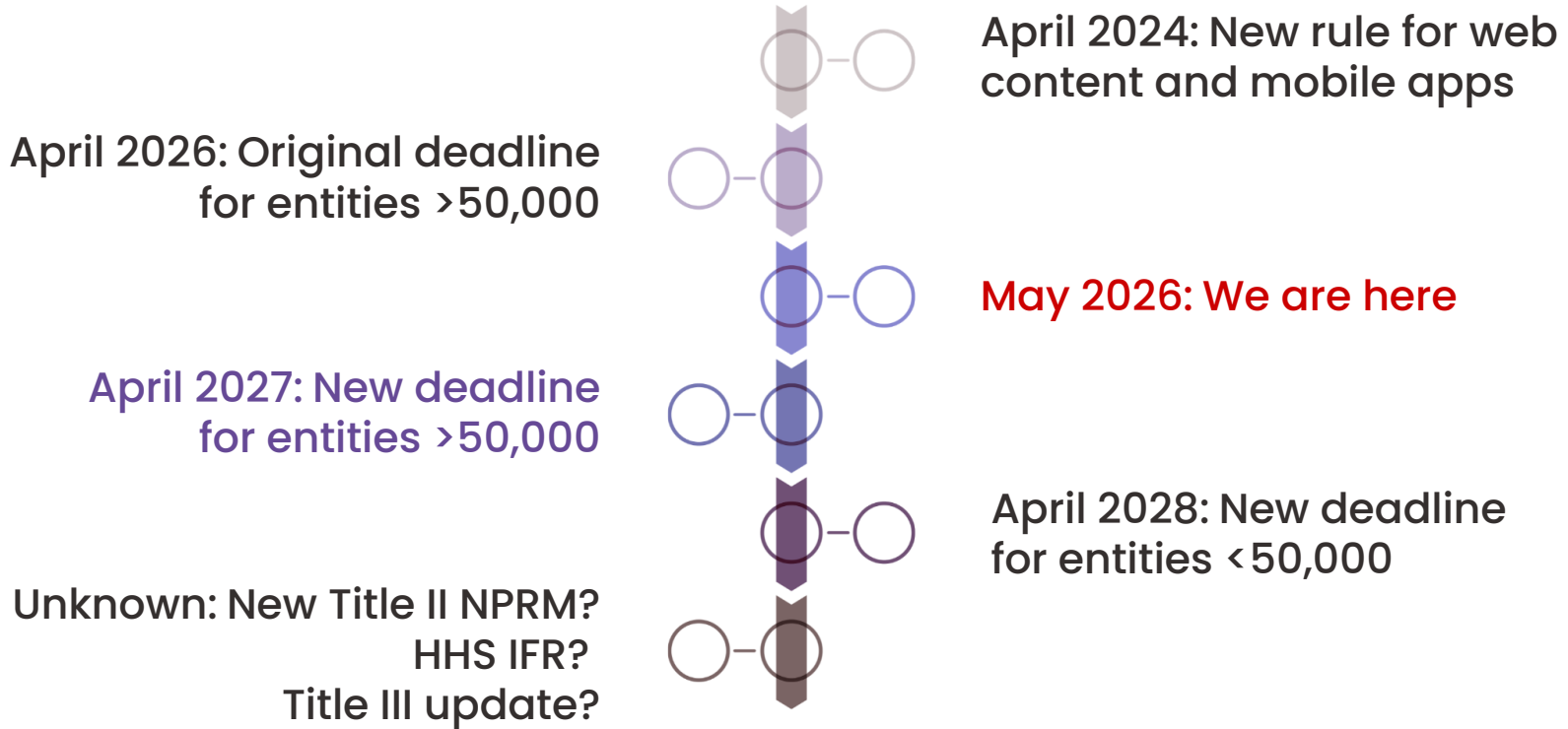
How often do you consider accessibility when designing course material?

- Always
- Sometimes – when I remember
- Rarely – but I know I should
- What is accessible design?

DOJ Rule on digital accessibility

- April 2024 – DOJ published rule for digital accessibility
 - Title: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability; Accessibility of Web Information and Services of State and Local Government Entities
 - Part of ADA Title II and includes government agencies, public universities, hospitals, libraries, etc.
- Deadline recently shifted from April 2026 to April 2027

Title II timeline



Keep the momentum going

- Interim Final Rule adjusts compliance deadlines by 1 year
- “No matter the deadline, the rule’s substantive requirements bind covered entities.”
(IFR p. 12)
- We know what’s required, because of decades of cases and settlements



Partnership



Collaborations



Ivy
Plus 
Consortium

Partnership components

- Monthly Zoom calls
- Sharing
 - Updates
 - Strategies
 - Tool ideas and experiences
- Bounce questions and ideas off each other
- Moral support



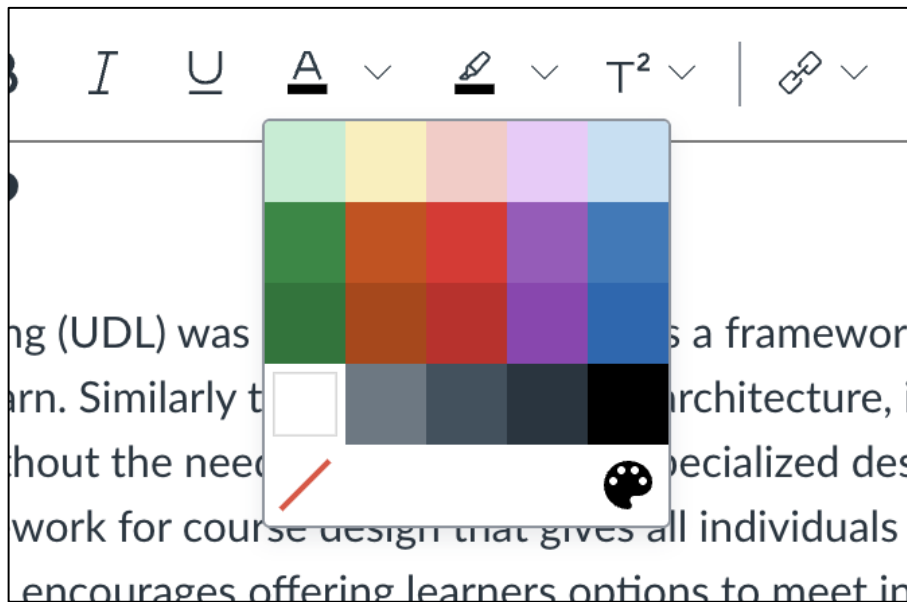
Northwestern
University



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

Partnership accomplishments

- Canvas
 - Color palette change
- Pope Tech
 - Code snippet issue
- Find and replace
 - Color contrast
- Approach
 - Persistence
 - Same message
 - Hearing from us at similar times



Crossover episodes



- May 21, 2025
TEACHx (Northwestern)
- November 14, 2025
Graduate Business Curriculum
Roundtable
- November 21, 2025
Accessing Higher Ground
- February 11, 2026
Aim for Accessible Event
(UChicago)
- *May 13, 2026*
TEACHx (Northwestern)



Branding

Mission: Accessible



Aim for Accessible



Seven core accessibility skills



Top errors found by Pope Tech



- Very low contrast



- Empty links



- Empty headings



- Missing or suspicious alt-text



- Missing table headers

Mission: Accessible



Mission: Accessible phases

Phase I (Sept 2023 - April 2024)

- Create resources and branding
- Develop the Mission: Accessible Challenge & Power App
- Mass communication
- Self identification and participation
- Provide rewards for completion

Phase 2 (Dec 2023 - Present)

- Introduce Pope Tech
- Use data to target specific schools/units
- Conduct targeted workshops with support
- Share successful data with other schools/units

Phase 3 (Sept 2024 - Present)

- Use data to identify individual classes with the most issues
- Use data to identify classes with most of a single issue
- Offer one-on-one consultations
- Administrator Dashboard for maintaining progress

Administrator Accessibility Dashboard

Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences

ADMINISTRATOR DASHBOARD > WEINBERG COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

This dashboard provides a snapshot of the accessibility of Canvas courses in this school in the current academic term, as of last week. The data is refreshed weekly on Tuesday. The accessibility of the Canvas courses is evaluated against seven criteria that assess the use of headings, links, alternative text, tables, color contrast, lists, and video captioning in course content. If you have questions about the data or error criteria, contact canvas@northwestern.edu.

Last Week at a Glance

0.8

average errors per course out of
640 active courses

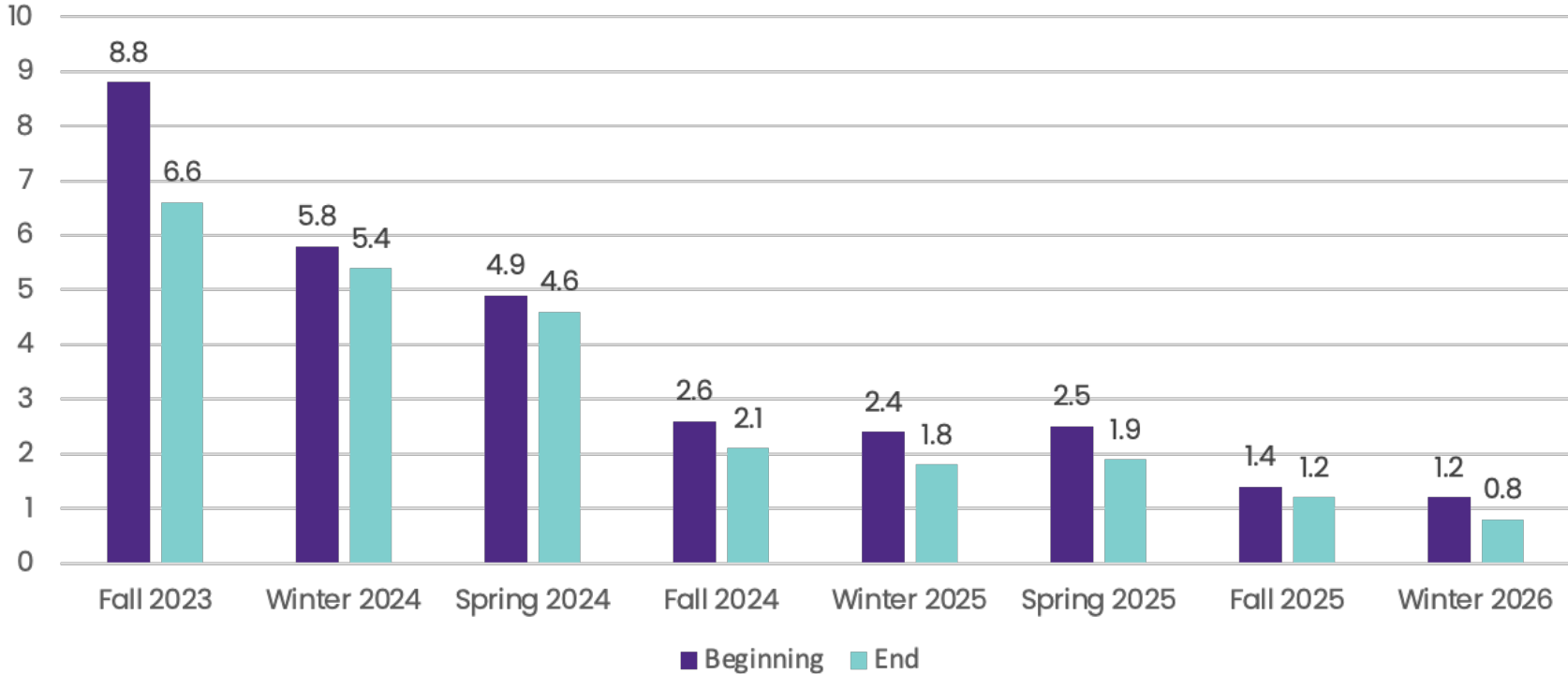
-75

new errors since Apr 14, 2026







75.9%

courses with zero errors

Northwestern - accessibility errors per course



Mission: Accessible's impact

	Error	Fall 2023	Winter 2026	Percent Improvement
	Color Contrast	16869	1313	92.3%
	Suspicious Link Text	6491	2187	76.4%
	No or suspicious alt text	25610	6432	74.9%
	Possible Lists	5490	3146	42.7%
	Missing Headings	84270	40665	51.8%
	Layout Table	18573	4323	77.8%

Impact statements

Easy for instructors

“ Pope Tech made it so easy to incorporate accessibility best practices in my Canvas course, so I didn’t inadvertently forget anything. But the real magic has been our accessibility and IT teams, because they taught us not only what to do, but why we were doing it, and who it was meaningful to. The document remediation team addressed issues with my materials, so I started with a clean slate, which meant accessibility became less daunting. But better yet, they taught me how to incorporate those practices myself. It’s become second nature to me now.”

Noelle Sullivan

Program Director and Instructor
Global Health Studies

Improves course for all students

“ This work and these changes have made me more cognizant of ensuring that all my students have the tools and resources they need to be successful in my courses. No one is left behind, even unintentionally. Students don’t need to ask for anything because it’s already done, allowing them to focus on their work and not trying to figure out how to read an assignment or book chapter. It levels the playing field without students asking for it to be leveled.”

Desiree Hanford

Medill Professor

What's next?

Expand the culture shift to other areas

1. Training
2. Websites
3. Documents
4. Purchasing third party tools



Aim for Accessible



Aim for Accessible phases

Phase I (2024)

- Introduce Pope Tech
- Get a sense of our baseline
- Publicize via mass communications
- Offer general workshops



Phase 2 (2025 - Present)

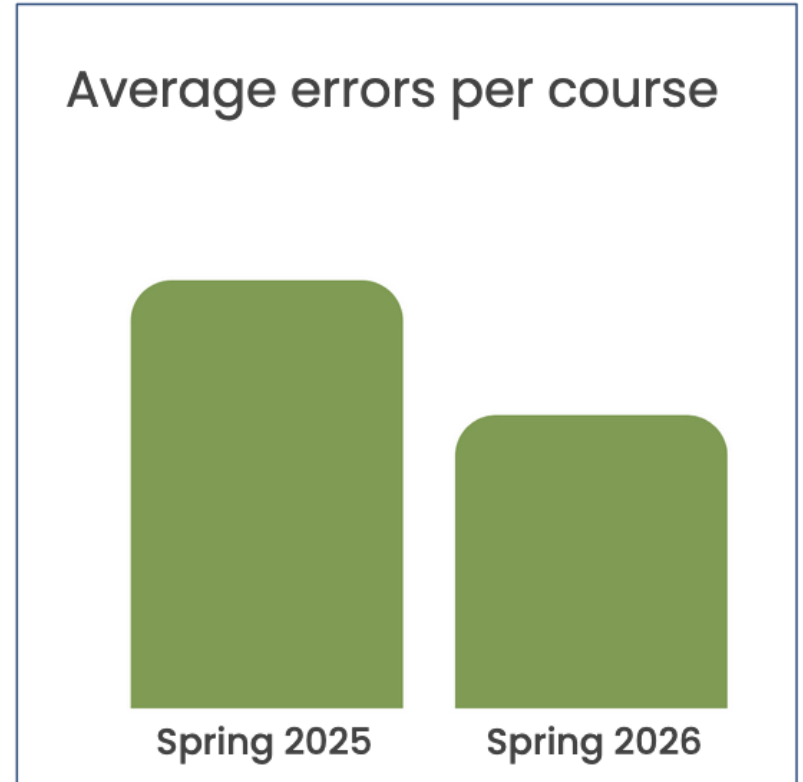
- Launch Aim for Accessible
- Self identification and participation
- Offer targeted workshops with support
- Use data to develop targeted outreach strategies

Phase 3 (2026 - Onward)

- Invite A4A participants to one-on-one working sessions
- Identify the most common issue: very low contrast
- Identify individual classes or programs with the most contrast issues
- Offer specific low contrast intervention

Signs of progress

31%
improvement
compared to Spring 2025



Future focus

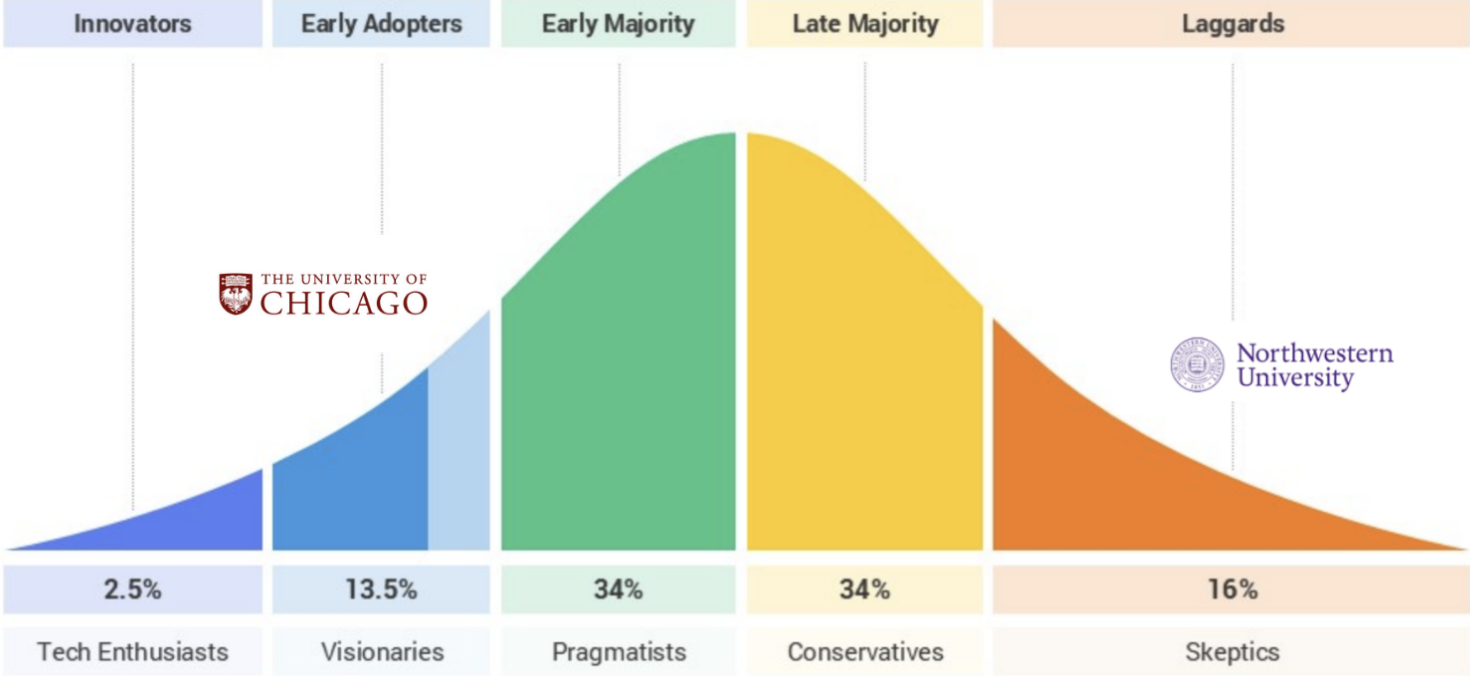
- Video captioning
- Document accessibility



Lessons Learned



Culture shift progress



Lessons learned

1. Culture Shift takes time

2. Partnerships are key - in and across universities

3. Data helps focus the approach and tell the story

4. Make changing as easy as possible

Lessons learned, continued

5. Combine general awareness and targeted outreach

6. Be nimble and able to shift approaches

7. You get more traction out of face-to-face workshops

8. Add accessibility to the “check process”



Emerging Issues



Emerging issues

- AI impacting accessible design
 - Alt text or caption “poisoning”
 - Embedding “invisible” text in content
 - Providing screenshots instead of live text
- Extended Title II and HHS/504 deadlines slowing momentum

In session poll question 2

What types of issues are you losing sleep over?



Questions?

