FREE
Faculty Resources for
Educational Excellence

Upcoming Events
Download our **3-months-at-a-glance calendar**.

Accessibility in Everyday Teaching: Small Changes, Big Impact
By
Vianne Greek, MBA, CPWA | *Director of Digital Initiatives for Medical Education, VTCSOM*
S.B. Chandler, PhD | *508 Compliance and Digital Accessibility Officer, Virginia Tech*

Introduction to Accessibility in Everyday Teaching
When we talk about accessibility in education, many assume it is only about legally required accommodations. In reality, accessibility is about creating inclusive learning experiences that benefit all learners—not just those with documented disabilities. In busy medical education environments, where educators interact with students, residents, fellows, and even colleagues, small, intentional changes can make a lasting impact.

Why It Matters
Accessible materials help level the playing field and remove barriers that can prevent learners from engaging fully. For example, a resident with a hearing impairment may need captions to access lecture content, but so might a student reviewing content during a night shift in a noisy environment. Accessibility is an act of fairness—it ensures everyone has a fair opportunity to learn and contribute.

Why Now
New federal and state accessibility regulations under ADA Title II go into effect in Spring 2026, clarifying expectations for both instructional and administrative content. These updates remove previous ambiguity and reinforce that accessibility is not optional—it is a shared responsibility across all areas of higher education, including medical education across the UME-GME continuum. Enforcement comes from the federal government and civil lawsuits.

Who and What Does It Impact?

Providing flexible access to accessible materials impacts a broad range of learners: those with visual, hearing, cognitive, or motor disabilities, those using mobile devices, and learners for whom English is not their first language.

What Can We Do as Educators?
Below are steps you can take to reduce barriers and improve learning experiences through quick shifts in your approach.

Idea 1: Use Built-In Heading Styles and Accessibility Checkers
When writing in Word or Google Docs, use the built-in Heading 1, Heading 2 styles instead of just bolding or enlarging text. This creates a logical structure that screen readers use for navigation. Similarly, when building PowerPoint presentations or emailing content, use the Accessibility Checker (under the "Review" tab in the Microsoft Ribbon) to catch and fix common issues.

Idea 2: Communicate Accessibly in Emails and Flyers
Event flyers or important announcements should never be image-only. Include a plain-text version of all key information in the body of the email. Use meaningful link text (e.g., "Register for the faculty session" instead of "Click here"). Avoid using color as the only cue for emphasis and maintain high color contrast to ensure readability.

Idea 3: Caption Your Videos and Use Descriptive Alt Text
If you share recordings—whether lectures, short tutorials, or Zoom sessions—be sure they are captioned. Platforms like Panopto, Zoom, and YouTube offer automatic captioning tools that can be reviewed and edited for accuracy. Likewise, when using images, add captions to describe what the image conveys, especially in teaching materials and emails.

For accessing these resources, please go here:
https://teach.vtc.vt.edu/educators/educator-resources.html

Office of Continuing Professional Development (OCPD)

Shari Whicker, EdD, MEd
Interim Associate Dean, Faculty Affairs
Assistant Dean, Faculty Development
Senior Director, Office of Continuing Professional Development
Director, Teaching Excellence Academy for Collaborative Healthcare (TEACH)
Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics
Carilion Clinic
Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine

Professional Development
Mariah Rudd, MEd, Director, Office of Continuing Professional Development
Sarah Harendt, PhD, MS, Manager, Education & Faculty Development
JT Addair, Curricular & Media Coordinator
Deborah Ferron, Administrative Coordinator

Continuing Medical Education
Paul Dallas, MD, MACP, Director
Linda Wells, CHCP, Senior Manager

Paula Robertson, CHCP, CME Specialist II
Carol Gibson, CME Specialist I
Susan Curtiss, AS, Department Secretary

Email OCPD or click the button below to visit our website.

Office of Continuing Professional Development