

# Content Management Systems & Accessibility: Efforts at the University of Illinois

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Illinois Web Accessibility Conference

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# Overview

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- ❖ What is the University of Illinois doing to ensure that the content management systems we implement comply with IITAA guidelines?
- ❖ Formation of CMS Evaluation Committee
  - ❖ More on that committee from Tim Offenstein...
- ❖ How did we get to this point?



# Historical Background

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- ❖ Intersection of two initiatives
  - ❖ Provost's Initiative on IT Accessibility (ITaccess)
  - ❖ IT@Illinois

# ITaccess

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- ❖ The group is in its second year
- ❖ Consists of 4 FT staff members: Christy Blew, Jonathan Hsieh, Tim Offenstein, Nicholas Hoyt (me)
- ❖ Coordinated by Mona Heath, Deputy CIO
- ❖ Two-pronged mandate: Assess campus IT accessibility and act as agents of change in improving the accessibility of both existing and new IT efforts.
- ❖ In other words: (1) find the accessibility problems and (2) create corresponding solutions.



# ITaccess: Brainstorming

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- ❖ With guidance from Mona Heath, we began to focus on “multiplying impact.”
- ❖ This entails going beyond solving one problem at a time to looking for solutions for entire classes of problems.

# ITaccess: How to do web development right

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- ❖ I personally had gained experience with a web application framework named Django, which includes:
  - ❖ an HTML forms package that automatically adds labels to form fields and controls
  - ❖ a template system that makes it easy, for example, to tie together the title and h1 of each page



# ITaccess: Web Development

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- ❖ It became apparent that you could “build in” to a web application certain accessibility features (i.e., follow certain best practices in publishing web content) across a very large number of pages by using web frameworks.
- ❖ Tim and I coauthored a couple of papers that promoted the use of web frameworks for these and a few other reasons (e.g., leveraging various technical and non-technical roles more efficiently).



# ITaccess: Web Development

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- ❖ Some of the IITAA guidelines for web content that can be enforced in web applications:
  - ❖ Correct document structure: using markup correctly for headings, paragraphs, lists, quotations, etc. (semantic markup)
  - ❖ Form fields and controls must have proper labels
  - ❖ Tables: header cells for columns and rows



# ITaccess: Web Development

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- ❖ Implications for web accessibility:
  - ❖ Templating systems offer possibilities for building in compliance with these best practices. CMSes utilize templates.
  - ❖ Another important accessibility issue with CMSes: authoring tools (e.g., WYSIWYG editors)

# IT@Illinois

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- ❖ During the first year of the ITaccess group, another initiative was begun: IT@Illinois, with a mandate for finding more efficient ways of providing IT services at the University.
- ❖ Among various means of achieving this, many ideas put forward included the creation of “centers of excellence” aka “guilds of expertise” for the provision of IT services.



# IT@Illinois

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- ❖ The simplest definition I've found for CoE: a place [or group] well-known for doing a particular type of work extremely well.
- ❖ How do we implement centers of excellence, and how can they be used to guide units and departments in implementing accessible CMSES?
- ❖ What type of IT governance will be required to support virtual guilds of expertise so that we can leverage the knowledge we acquire in building accessible CMSES across all units and departments?



# CMS Evaluation Committee

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- ❖ The CMS Evaluation Committee is a collaboration attempt among IT professional at the University who have some familiarity with CMSES.
- ❖ Currently working on a set of evaluation criteria.
- ❖ Two of our top criteria:
  - ❖ Accessibility of published content
  - ❖ Accessibility of authoring tools used by content contributors