

Access FSU

Episode 01 Transcript

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KimBoo: Welcome to Access FSU, the podcast for the office of accessibility services at Florida State University. Your hosts are accessibility specialist Shannon Bernick and accessible technology coordinator KimBoo York. We are here to shine a solutions-oriented spotlight on issues and concerns for university students of all levels, including undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate, and non-degree seeking. Thank you for joining us!

KimBoo: Welcome everyone to episode one of access FSU! We're really happy that you decided to join us. Today we're going to just have an introduction episode where Shannon and I talk about our goals with this podcast and what we hope to accomplish with it and what we hope you will get out of listening to what we have to say. So we have a lot to go over actually today and what we're going to start with is a little bit of overview: I'm going to talk about what the Office of Accessibility Services is here at FSU and how we help and assist students, and then Shannon's going to go into a little bit more about why we decided to start this podcast. The Office of Accessibility Services at FSU has been around for a long time although under multiple different names. It originally originated in the 70s and then in the 90s with the introduction of the ADA at the federal level we became a lot better funded and a lot bigger. Although we were under a different name, Student Disability Resource Center, back then and we've just managed to grow and find many ways to assist students in advocating for themselves and accessing the accommodations that they need with their classes, so we're really happy of the work that we've done. We've actually -- I don't know what, we've got over 6,000 registered with us now?

Shannon: Over 7,000 now!

KimBoo: man when i started in 2013 we had a little over that maybe 1,500, so it's grown a lot over the last few years, it's grown a lot. We're really proud of that. What we decided to do when we started a podcast is look into what we can share with students and Shannon's going to talk a little bit more about our focus and our goals in regards to that, but I do want to say that our our timing... frequency I guess is the word I'm looking for -- I'm still working on my coffee y'all so give me a little bit, give me a little bit of room here -- we're hoping to do this every two weeks. It's going to be a mix of interviewing and one-on-one topics, again Shannon's going to go over that in a little bit more detail. I'm kind of the tech person, I'm working behind the scenes and we're both doing this as an addition to our regular full-time jobs with the Office of Accessibility Services so we appreciate you listening in, giving us a little bit of flexibility on getting this produced. What I would like to do now is turn it over to Shannon who can talk a bit more in depth about what our goals are and, you know, the focus, the ongoing needs -- go for it Shannon I'm flubbing it up now!

Shannon: Absolutely so, KimBoo, when you first came to me about doing this podcast together I think one of the things that stood out to me most was how accessible podcasts are and of course accessibility

is our primary focus at the OAS and the benefit of a podcast is that it can be accessed across all populations by students who experience a variety of disabilities from any location and pretty much at any time that they feel that they need the resource. Our focus then is to be very solution oriented and in doing so we want to address those common experiences that we see in the symptomology of students as well as address their unique challenges that they faced based on the multiple identities that they identify by and by that I mean the intersectionality of their disability, perhaps their race and ethnicity, their sex or gender, identity their socioeconomic status, because we know that all of these identities work together to create a unique situation for each student with disabilities. So toward that end we of course want to address skills so we see those common experiences that are a concern for students with disabilities, things like organization, time management, goal setting, and we definitely want this podcast to be a place where students come to find skills with tips and strategies that they can implement to help them resolve some of those concerns. But of course we also want to address those larger macro issues that affect all of the identities that students maintain so we also want to address issues of advocacy where students are able to promote their own self needs and also promote the group the needs of the group whether that be students with disabilities in general or students who experience a specific disability so that they can improve their daily living and of course their overall social and emotional well-being.

KimBoo: That's great and I'm gonna pause for a second here, okay, we decided to do a podcast kind of on the fly i don't know, Shannon, if you were actually there for that meeting?

Shannon: No, I wasn't a part of that!

KimBoo: so there was a, I don't even was it a departmental meeting, it doesn't matter, where another individual was talking about a podcast that was being done by university, I don't even remember if it was FSU at this time or if it was UF and I, in the chat, I didn't even say this out loud i was just like, hey Jenn wouldn't it be great if we did something like that? And so the danger here is when you suggest something like that you will immediately be volunteered to do it, right? But I was really excited about it and Jennifer and I talked about it and then we both volunteered Shannon...

Shannon: Yes, I was volun-told to do the podcast !

KimBoo: and I felt so bad about that, I was like, oh no! What if she really hates the idea?

Shannon: not at all it's a great opportunity.

KimBoo: yeah so Jen and I thought that too. The more I got into it and the more Shannon and I talked about it, we realized we could really do some excellent work sharing the information out there so very pleased, very pleased to get this off the ground. So what I'm going to do now, is we're going to turn this into kind of a mutual interview situation so that you guys can get to know us. We're going to talk about who we are, how long we've been with the OAS, and a little bit our background, and then we're going to exchange some interview questions and just discuss who we are as your hosts of Access FSU! So: Shannon! Tell us a little bit about your background, your educational background, your credentials, and you just got hired with OAS this year, although you worked with us previously, so give us a little bit of background about how that came to be and how you ended up here and going forward what's your plans!

Shannon: Absolutely! So yes, I am the newest member of the OAS staff and I just started this semester in January, however I did complete an internship with the OAS last spring as part of the masters of social work program and i am also finishing up that program this semester. So as of April I will also have a master's in social work which is really exciting because I think it's the perfect complement to my background which is a master's in education, however –

KimBoo: You just got all the masters going on, you just got, like pokemon, you're out there collecting them!

Shannon: Right that's right! As many as i could get! but my master's Sin education is actually not at the higher education level my focus was in elementary education, and I taught for many years over the course of 14 years throughout the country because I moved around with my husband who's in the military and during that time I was the regular education inclusion teacher. So that meant that students with disabilities which at the elementary level is often called special education were in my classroom so that I was able to work with them and their parents and the special education teacher and of course any other resources that they had available to them in order to implement their IEP plans and that proved to be the perfect background for this position because those accommodations that are provided in IEP plans at the k-12 level translate quite nicely to higher education although they are implemented in slightly different ways, so the working on this side of it, where I'm no longer in the classroom, but in the office providing intake meetings accommodation reviews teaching skills is very much the social work side of education, so the position is really the perfect fit for me by combining my two passions, education and social work.

KimBoo: well that's fantastic, actually I hadn't even heard quite that background and I was on the interview team when you applied for the job! So well done thank you yeah and it has been great to have Shannon with us, as we mentioned earlier we have over 7,000 students registered with our -- I'm sorry y'all, I'm still boggling with that -- and we have don't have a lot of turnover, we're a pretty steady department which we're proud of but we had had a couple of people leave, progress in their own careers, move to other places, and we've had of course the expansion so getting Shannon on board was a really relief and we're thrilled to have her back!

Shannon: I'm super excited to be with you guys. Okay so KimBoo, tell us a little bit about you your background what brought you to the OAS and what you do here in our office!

KimBoo: well my official title is accessible technology coordinator and it's odd, a little bit, because my actual master's degree is in library and information studies. When I was getting my master's and I got it here at FSU in their library and information studies program, which is a really good program, I ended up working part-time here at the OAS doing book conversion for alternative texts -- so we would take textbooks the students were using and usually turn them into digital formats so that they could use them with screen readers or text-to-speech readers. A lot of stuff along those lines, I won't go into those those technical details right now! When I graduated things were really tough on the job scene and so i was hanging around FSU and this position opened up. The director at the time who -- of course I'd, like you Shannon, I had been working with these people for a little while before the position opened up -- she was, like, please come and apply, we'd love to have you as an applicant for the position! I applied, I got the job -- that was 2013. You know history was written after that! A lot of people ask me well you went to school to be a librarian, how is this in any way shape or form similar to that? Because I honestly did not plan to work in higher ed, but when I was working here and as I got familiar with the position

and then when I applied for the position, one of the things I found so important about it that really feeds into my library and information studies background is that it is focused on making information accessible to students, and that isn't just about being able to borrow a library book it's being able to access the information that's in textbooks and that's not always just text, sometimes it's graphs sometimes it's very large tables of information sometimes it's images. And for me as a librarian by training it's important to find a way to get that information to the person who needs it, so this actually proved to be a really good match for my own personal goals in my career even though it wasn't the original career track I intended to make on it. So I'm still here and still love the team that I work with, and our director, Dr. Jennifer Mitchell -- she's just excellent, she's really wonderful, very forward-looking! I'm hoping eventually we'll actually have her as an interviewee on the podcast because I'd love to talk to her a little bit more about her goals for the future of the OAS and disability services, so I'm just really really happy.

Shannon: she has a tremendous vision for where the OAS is headed. So, it would be fantastic for her to share that!

KimBoo: I agree! So we'll definitely have to, uh, volun-told her!

Shannon: Yes!

KimBoo: You know, payback right?

Shannon: I just wanted to comment on what you had shared. I loved that you looked at the library sciences from an accessibility perspective, so, yes it's important to have information there but more importantly it is accessibility and that is such an important part of what we do, is making that information accessible to students within the symptomology that they experience with their diagnosis.

KimBoo: absolutely at the classroom level, at the class materials level, at the physical classroom level, the virtual classroom level -- it's really all about making sure that the information is getting to the students whether it's a lecture. textbook... it covers a lot of bases, I've discovered over the years.

Shannon: absolutely!

KimBoo: So i wanted to ask you, Shannon, though, so now that you've got this new position, and you know congratulations! What is the biggest challenge you've had with your role here at the OAS over the past year -- which i know has been a year for all of us so that's kind of a leading question isn't it?

Shannon: absolutely! We have had the pandemic obviously with an overarching theme but i i think one of the biggest challenges of the job is actually one of the most exciting parts of the job so every day is different here at the OAS. I never have the same day two days in a row! And we have...because we are a smaller staff we all wear a lot of hats and we fulfill different responsibilities, so i love that every day is different and that we get to exercise the freedom that that Jen allows us in developing projects like this podcast while also meeting students needs with what what we were originally, you know, dedicated to do which are things like intakes and accommodation reviews. However sometimes in doing all of those activities I have to transition from one hat to the next hat very quickly and that can mentally and emotionally be exhausting --

KimBoo: we are actually recording this as a break in between your appointments are we not?

Shannon: absolutely we are! So I think in terms of managing that it's self-care is so important you know so i um i walk stairs on my lunch break I take a lot of deep breaths before I respond and of course you know outside of work I love to run with Crosby, my border collie, so he makes sure that I get my exercise in! And I just try to do, you know, even short, just like 10 minute activities like a crossword puzzle in the evening just to bring myself back down and to take my mind, you know, off of some of the more stressful circumstances that we assist students in resolving.

KimBoo: yeah it's definitely a challenge, i totally hear you there. Especially during the busiest time of the semester which is the start of the semester at least it is for me, I know you guys stay pretty busy through the whole thing with intakes and stuff, but yeah it could definitely be a challenge with your new job and you're pursuing your master's degree and the internship... you've got a lot of irons in the fire, but I'd love to know what are some of the things that you're researching or working on right now that that really interest you, that's got you excited -- I mean aside from this podcast which is obviously the most exciting thing going on!

Shannon: well of course it is! I guess in addition to topics that we've identified that we want to research for the podcast I am I have been researching autism support programs and so these are relatively new in development over about the last 20 years or so at the college level and they vary greatly from university to university some of them are as simple as one-on-one appointments each week to check in with students on how they're doing and to assist them with executive functioning skills like time management and planning and then others go all the way to daily check-ins where students who participate in the program have separate housing and are very intensive support programs so it's our hope that one day FSU will have an autism support program here that is offered through the OAS so I've been doing a tremendous amount of research on what that would look like if we were to develop a program such as an autism support program and what research there is to support the outcomes of the programs the cost of the programs and of course what level of intensity we would want to offer here or even have the resources to offer within our office.

KimBoo: that is really very exciting and I've been hearing you talking with Jen during some of our staff meetings about it and wow! I couldn't even imagine doing something like this five years ago, to be honest with you. I mean, listeners, you do not know the sea change that has happened in our in our office and while we always did our best and strived to provide the best services we could, but with the changes that have been going on both technologically (which of course i really love talking about but won't bore you with right now) but also at the level of, you know, the social justice level, the changes in the paradigm that we're using to address these issues, something like this...I mean that's just that's a dream come true if we can -- if you, you're the one working on it, managed to push this forward so I'm really crossing my fingers for it, yeah.

Shannon: I'm really hopeful for it too, I think there's absolutely a need for it and it could be very beneficial for students. Yeah okay! Great! So, KimBoo, I've gotten to share a lot about me so let's talk a little bit more about you, and I guess we'll kind of pick up where I left off. And so obviously with technology, it's rapidly developing and there are always new instruments and tools available to students. So how do you continue to learn in order to stay on top of things within your role as the accessible technology coordinator?

You are so right, technology has changed massively over, well, the last five years much less the last 20 years. The office that we're in now -- Shannon you may not be aware when the building was built back in

2003, our office was designed into the building so when you look at our testing center and our computer study lab -- which for people who are listening haven't been there are pretty pretty substantial spaces in our department. We're very fortunate a lot of universities don't have that kind of room to do that, they were built in. And one of the reasons they were built in at the size they were my computer lab for studying has 18 computers in there, 18 spaces, was because back then licenses were so expensive for the software that students were using -- screen readers, text-to-speech readers, dictation software, magnification software... just tens of thousands of dollars so it had to be corralled into user space that was manageable and could be managed by us by our department. These days you can download those exact same types of software and apps for you know less than twenty dollars on your phone or your tablet! So things have changed a lot! I honestly find that there's journals, there's you know trade magazines out there, what i generally find (this is kind of funny) what i generally find most helpful is honestly: social media. I'm on twitter a lot, my professional main twitter, under my name, I have a lot of links to both the disability community and also to the higher ed disability services community and we chatter. We talk a lot about things we've tried things we haven't tried issues that have been coming up. When the emotional support animals started becoming an issue it hit it hit social media first you know it's where people were starting to talk about how do we handle these requests and it's the same with technology. I also like keeping up with listservs, another techie kind of thing that we like to do -- you know the email list serve it's so circa 1995 and yet it's still very valid and we talk a lot within our communities on those specialized listservs about things that we're trying and things that we're not trying because they didn't work. I belong to several of them, I belong to one that's for music accessibility for translating music into braille, I belong one that's for math specifically because math technology is very difficult, then I have one that's just disability services in higher ed that talks about a lot of different issues, keeps an eye on things like testing and new and different accommodations that nobody's ever had to deal with before. So that's really how i managed to keep up with what's going on in in my field and what other people are doing

Shannon: yeah, and that's fantastic because it is such a rapidly developing field and so useful for our students at the OAS and also useful for the OAS staff like myself who are who are not as technologically inclined, so i definitely appreciate you staying on top of all of that as well.

KimBoo: I try!

Shannon: and then of course you know here at the OAS our primary function is to help students overcome their own challenges and so to that end, what's the biggest challenge that you have with your specific role right now and how are you going to overcome it?

KimBoo: well not to sound like a meme you know but it's definitely been the pandemic year and for me it's been the pandemic year in in my role specifically as a technology assistive coordinator because we made the move so quickly -- it's been a year now, we went into lockdown, our university went into lockdown, on March 18th last year so it's literally been a year and a day since we went into lockdown and all the classes moved online and everything everything changed so fast and so I know with the accessibility specialists you all had a lot of issues with how to deal with accommodations in the new online environment. I had to deal with students who really had technological hurdles not just students who didn't have technology that worked, they may have had a tablet or they may have had a laptop they may not have had access to cameras, but also when they were dealing with things they hadn't encountered before online textbooks online textbooks have been coming in slowly creeping into higher

ed for over 10 years now but they suddenly became much more important when no students were on campus anymore. You couldn't go to the bookstore and get your book if you hadn't gotten it yet and some students literally don't get their textbooks until later in the term either because of financial reasons or just you know time management reasons there's a lot of reasons why a student may not have their textbook right off the bat. So those were particularly challenging for me even though I'm steeped in technology and as Shannon knows, I kind of love it, you know I talk about this new app and then everybody just gives me a blank look because they have no idea what I'm talking about! But I do love exploring those parts of the technology not because it's just so neat although that's part of the reason but because I want to see how it can assist students and faculty and staff to make information more accessible to make communication more accessible, you know, as you know we have a sign language interpreter on staff -- we had some issues with well how do we bring a sign language interpreter into a virtual room? Not an issue we've ever had to deal with before! So those were some elements that were... I won't say they were so challenging that I couldn't deal with them, but they were just outside of the box problems that I hadn't dealt with before. I think we've done a great job! It certainly seems like the students have been able to function really well. We've had some stumbling blocks, honorlock has been a particular issue with testing uh not that I'm slamming them or anything but it's just you know things are different and it's a learning curve and some students work well with that and some students don't, some faculty work well that some faculty don't, so it's just a matter of trying to figure out what's going to work for everybody so yeah that was a challenge

Shannon: absolutely and um I know when I left my internship at the end of last spring we were still pretty much in the process of making that transition because as you said it happened right before spring break so we had that second half of the spring semester and then summer time. I think that was really a difficult transition period to make, especially for our students with disabilities who who rely so heavily on that in-person interaction to help you know, manage the symptoms of their diagnosis and to receive that extra support that they need within the classroom. And then when I came back this fall everything was just running so smoothly! I was I was just so impressed I felt like I needed to catch up! I was like wait! No one's talking about it anymore! And I was like, I had to catch up on some of the things that that our office had implemented because I was unaware of them, of course, during that time between my internship and taking the position. So the OAS really did a tremendous job and and you of course is the the head of that with the technology coordination just really did a tremendous job transitioning students into remote learning.

KimBoo: It was it was an all hands on deck yeah issue believe me everybody has really stepped up and I just shout out to Ann Clutter who's our testing center supervisor. Man, she went through the ringer with with dealing with all the changes in testing going to online. So we love you Ann, if you're listening to this, you did fantastic!

Shannon: she did amazing, yes!

KimBoo: well we're gonna wrap up now, we've had a good long podcast, we hope that you all who are listening in learned something about us as your hosts, we're gonna be moving forward next week -- Shannon tell us a little bit about our next episode it's pretty exciting we're gonna have some interviewees on there!

Shannon: yes I am so excited about this one because as you know we sent out the survey to staff and students regarding what they were most interested in hearing about on the podcast and--

KimBoo: we got some a lot of feedback, a lot of great feedback, shocked me -- we normally our you know surveys like that we like get a couple of dozen we got well over a hundred!

Shannon: and that was evidence to me that you had a good idea because so many people saw podcast survey and they responded. But by and large intersectionality was rated so highly among both students and staff so we thought let's let's do it let's let's just dive right into it and with march being national women's history month we thought it would be great to explore a topic related to the intersectionality of sex and disability. So toward that end we're going to have Sarah Lull who is the program director for the victims advocate program and Beth Thompson who is a sexual health coordinator for the Center of Health and Wellness here on campus and we are going to be discussing sexual health from the perspective of how it is impacted by disabilities and by also identifying as a female. And of course we'll explore ways that students can improve their sexual health, preventative measures, and then of course what students can do when their sexual health has been compromised and what resources we have available on campus for them to to turn to when they need support.

KimBoo: and I'm really excited about it, I've worked with Sarah obviously for a long time -- back in the before times when we used to do actual staff retreats where people would see each other in their human form, she's always been very interesting, I've always loved talking with her about her role. It's a challenging role that she has here at FSU so yeah i'm really looking forward to that myself! And I've seen, I actually got a sneak peek at some of the questions Shannon has come up with for them, really deep stuff, interesting interesting interesting topics y'all you just you need to be looking for that podcast it's going to be great.

Shannon: yeah well that's top secret information there so keep those secrets those questions a secret!

KimBoo: I won't tell anybody!

Shannon: And then of course we have a transition series coming up. We of course finished our spring into success series which was --

KimBoo: tell us a little bit about what those are because listeners may not be familiar with what we offer here at the OAS.

Shannon: yeah so I believe these became developed out of the remote learning situation that we found ourselves in during the pandemic and not being able to provide services in person for students so these are all offered remotely through zoom meetings and they're very skill oriented in terms of addressing specific concerns that we see across a variety of disabilities for example time management, or for example, which one of your ideas was managing social media, which had great turnout to the meeting because it is difficult right? It's difficult to interact in social media any day but --

KimBoo: it's pretty much my job and I'm still bad at it.

Shannon: right! And then especially when you're trying to manage the symptoms of your diagnosis on top of that, so it's our series are tend to be very skills oriented in terms of helping students address the needs of their educational programs while also managing the symptoms of their diagnosis and so we earlier in the semester finished up the spring into success series and we're going to end the semester with the transition series because we know many of our students are graduating this semester and of course with moving from college to career they're going to be looking for employment or even just possibly internships where accommodations are quite different than...

KimBoo: very much so yeah.

Shannon: right? So the goal of the transition series the college to careers transition series is twofold: number one it's to help them build those skills with writing resumes searching for jobs interviewing with prospective employers, but also to help them understand how the ADA fits into that process. So addressing issues like what information do I disclose about my diagnosis, when do I disclose it, who do I disclose it to, what types of accommodations can transfer from college to the workplace, what is my provider expected to provide under reasonable accommodations? And we have a tremendous resource who is going to be our guest presenter for that, her name is Emily Kennelly and she is a senior advisor at the career center and she's going to be heading up the presentation, especially regarding the skills area and then I'll be jumping in to help her as well with the ADA information and questions that students have.

KimBoo: yeah, those sessions are open to FSU students and FSU staff and faculty correct?

Shannon: yes!

KimBoo: right! What I'd also like to, you know, propose is we we should get her on the podcast too down the road.

Shannon: absolutely! she and I met to discuss the series and she just had a wealth of knowledge and ideas so I'm super excited to have her share that with our students.

KimBoo: well that's going to be great so fantastic! We've got a lot going on at the OAS despite still being kind of sort of on lockdown remote virtual, who knows how that's going into summer, we certainly don't! But we're going to stick with it as best we can. So that's pretty much it for this podcast! We really appreciate everybody listening in! If you are listening to this on itunes, please rate the show, it helps increase our visibility, helps other people find us easier, it will show up better in the algorithms -- that's my technology background talking there -- but it does help us whenever you can rate and listen to the show. I guess we'll see you guys on the flip side! Next time Shannon has promised me she'll come up with a catchy sign off for us to use and so it won't just be me rambling until the microphone goes off.

Shannon: I will it's on my list of things to do i promise!

KimBoo: excellent! All right everybody, thank you for listening and we will catch you next time!

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