

# THE DIGITAL DIVIDE



A BRIEF GUIDE FOR  
LIBRARIES, HIGHER  
EDUCATION FACULTY, AND  
DESIGNERS

# FACULTY

## THE PROBLEM

For faculty, at SAU the digital divide is mostly likely to manifest as individual students who don't have the skills or confidence to create and publish digital content.

Also, it's always important to be mindful of your learning environment and how it may present challenges to students with disabilities in a digital space.

Here are some things to be on the lookout for:

- Students not engaging with technology in the classroom.
- Consistently late or missing assignments from students where significant technology integration is involved.
- Students who consistently mention having problems with technology, or ask for extensions for technology related issues—this may indicate a level of discomfort, or aging technology that is failing them.
- A student who requests a disability accommodation for a particular assignment—especially if they can't access or use a particular material or activity you've selected.

## IMPROVING IT

The good news is, these skill gaps and technology troubles can be solved. Once you've identified an issue, there are several resources on campus at your disposal that you can use to get the student the assistance they need.

You can even adopt some strategies right in your classroom to help. Whether a student needs greater access to technology, resources, or just more confidence, here are some things you can do to help!

- + Give students multiple attempts and drafts to complete assignments that require creating content. Give them room to fail and improve.
- + If a student needs a disability accommodation, contact the Academic Student Connections office—they'll be able to provide direction on what you need to do.
- + Call eLearning! The eLearning office has libraries of research and materials that you can use to help students struggling with technology. They can even provide training for you or your department on how to best integrate technology in your classroom.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

[Center for Equity in Learning: The Digital Divide](#)

[Digital Accessibility in Higher Education](#)

[The Digital Divide: Pew Research Center](#)

# DESIGNERS

## THE PROBLEM

As designers the digital divide is mostly likely to manifest in two ways—individuals who can't access content, or individuals who don't know how to use or have access to the technology that is the gateway to that content.

13% of students have a disability that interferes with learning, and you never know what any student's (particularly a distance student's) technology access level is. Here are some things to be mindful of:

- You won't have direct access to students most of the time—you'll have to rely on your knowledge and research to design experiences that bridge the digital divide.
- When designing a course, you're often on tight deadlines with competing goals—if you don't prioritize the digital divide with your SMEs early in the process, it may be too late to retro-fit items before the course runs.
- Your SMEs may not be as aware of access or digital divide issues as you, so you may have a training process when you work with them the first few times.
- It takes a lot of energy to develop activities that all learners can access, and you'll probably never get to 100%.

## IMPROVING IT

Thankfully, you're a designer, and a lot of the time you get paid to think about stuff. Use that to your advantage.

Don't rush in to projects, take the time to train people, and build networks to discover new solutions, and you can help bridge the digital divide, no matter what organization you are in—be it higher education or the corporate training world.

Here are some great places to start!

- + Attend conferences. DevLearn, ATD International, and Learning Futures are great places to start. Chances are there's also a local conference or two where you can share ideas with other learning professionals.
- + Take a UDL approach. If possible, try to design activities that take a low/medium/high tech approach to completion—that way, students can demonstrate mastery no matter their technology situation.
- + Get on social media. The #edchat and #lrnchat are great weekly Twitter hangouts where L&D professionals share their wisdom about a specific topic. LinkedIn groups and Reddit are a great place to show off your work and get feedback at the same time. /r/elearning is a favorite!

[Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG 2.1\)](#)

[UDL Guidelines](#)

[The Digital Divide: Pew Research Center](#)



WANT MORE  
INFORMATION?

# LIBRARIES

## — THE PROBLEM

Librarians and libraries are the front line for the public—and often some of those who are most aware of the digital divide in society.

It's not an uncommon sight to see people using public computers to look for and apply for work, pay bills, do homework, or perform other digital tasks that they may not have the technology access to use at home.

- Lower income, rural residents are less likely to have access to technology and services, and so rely on public support like libraries when they need to.
- Without the technology at home, a skill gap often develops with these users too—since they don't regularly practice, they often get frustrated at relatively simple tasks.
- Some people don't want to learn—they "aren't computer people" and want you to do everything for them.
- Patrons in very rural areas might not even be able to get to the library conveniently, particularly those who may be advanced in age, suffer from a disability, or are under the effects of bad weather.

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Here are some great places to start!

- + Offer ways for people to get access remotely. Can your library offer a program to allow people to check-out wireless hotspots, or even laptops?
- + Digital skill classes can be a huge boon to those who need to bridge a gap in ability. See if you can find the staff and resources to offer things like basic social media classes, how to apply for jobs online, or other core internet skills.
- + Go mobile! If people can't come to you, can you bring technology to them? Bookmobiles were a large part of libraries in the past—can that idea be adopted for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and bring a technology roadshow to your patrons?

[The Library's Role in Bridging the Digital Divide](#)

[TED Talk: Libraries Bridging the Digital Divide](#)

[The Digital Divide: Pew Research Center](#)



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