

Accessibility Research Centers: What They Are and How to Become Involved

Richard E. Ladner, University of Washington, Moderator

Jonathan Lazar, University of Maryland at College Park, Panelist

Clayton Lewis, University of Colorado, Boulder, Panelist

Jacob O. Wobbrock, University of Washington, Panelist

Abstract

Accessibility research is a broad field that addresses the needs of people with disabilities to engage more fully in society. Accessibility researchers design, build, and study technologies that benefit people with disabilities. They also investigate the intersection of technology and disability from a policy perspective. There are three notable centers of excellence in accessible computing research, namely, the [Trace Research & Development Center](#) at the University of Maryland at College Park, the [Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities](#) at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and [Center for Research and Education on Accessible Technology and Experiences \(CREATE\)](#) at the University of Washington in Seattle. Each center is a collaboration of researchers and practitioners from multiple degree granting departments and schools within their universities. Leaders from these centers comprise the panel. They will describe the goals and activities of their centers and how students can get involved. Generally, students working in these centers are from various departments and schools within the particular university. This means to work in one of these centers as a graduate student you need to apply to the graduate program in at least one of the affiliated departments and schools.

Panelists and their Centers

Jonathan Lazar

Jonathan Lazar is a Professor in the College of Information Studies (iSchool) at the University of Maryland, where he is the incoming Director of the Trace Research and Development Center. He has authored or edited 14 books, including “Ensuring Digital Accessibility Through Process and Policy” (co-authored with Dan Goldstein and Anne Taylor). He has received research funding from the National Science Foundation, National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR). He is the recipient of the 2020 ACM SIGACCESS Award for Outstanding Contributions to Computing and Accessibility, and the 2016 ACM SIGCHI Social Impact Award. He was also inducted into the ACM CHI Academy in 2021.

The Trace Research and Development Center, founded in 1971, is the nation's oldest research center on technology and disability, and is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2021. By contributing to cutting-edge industry and policy standards, as well as by innovating through research and development, the Trace Center has helped millions of people interact with the world using common, everyday devices such as telephones and computers. Trace researched and developed tools and accessibility features are now found in billions of devices used by people with disabilities every day.

Clayton Lewis

Clayton Lewis is a Professor of Computer Science, Fellow of the Institute of Cognitive Science, and Co-Director for Technology at the Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He has served previously as a technology advisor to the director of the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education. He is well known for his research on evaluation methods in user interface design. He has also contributed to cognitive assistive technology, to programming language design, to educational technology, and to cognitive theory in causal attribution and learning. He was inducted in 2009 into the ACM CHI Academy and was the winner of the 2011 ACM SIGCHI Social Impact Award.

The Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities works to catalyze and integrate advances in technology that promote the quality of life of people with cognitive disabilities and their families. Cognitive disabilities include: intellectual disability (ID), Alzheimer's, brain injury, stroke, and serious, persistent mental illness. Its activities include work on public policy and research. Since 2001, The Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities has hosted an annual conference devoted exclusively to the research, policy, and development of technology for people with cognitive disabilities.

Jacob O. Wobbrock

Jacob O. Wobbrock is a Professor in The Information at the University of Washington and a Co-Director of CREATE, the Center for Research and Education on Accessible Technology & Experiences. His research seeks to scientifically understand people's experiences of computers and information, and to improve those experiences by inventing new interactive technologies, especially for people with disabilities. His specific research interests include input & interaction techniques, human performance measurement & modeling, HCI research & design methods, mobile computing, and accessible computing. He is the winner of the 2017 ACM SIGCHI Social Impact Award and the 2019 SIGACCESS ASSETS Paper Impact Award. He was inducted into the ACM CHI Academy in 2019.

CREATE is the newest center on the panel, founded in 2019 with a generous gift from Microsoft. The goal of the center is to catalyze and amplify the work in accessibility in different parts of the University of Washington. The mission of the center is to make technology accessible, and to make the world accessible through technology. This involves accessibility research, education, and translation to practice. A major theme of the center is diversity, equity, and inclusion, whereby people with disabilities are not just subjects of the research, but are themselves the researchers.

Moderator

Richard E. Ladner is a Professor Emeritus in the Paul G. Allen School of Computer Science and Engineering at the University of Washington. He is the Principal Investigator for AccessComputing and AccessCSforAll, both of which have the goal of increasing the participation of people with disabilities in computing fields. He is the Director of Education for CREATE, leading the effort to educate and empower the next generation of technology creators to prioritize accessibility. He is the winner of the 2014 ACM SIGCHI Social Impact Award and the 2016 ACM SIGACCESS Award for Outstanding Contributions to Computing and Accessibility. He is a founding member of the Board of Directors of CMD-IT.

Panel Structure

The panel will begin with introductions of the panelists, who will describe the work in their respective centers. The moderator will follow with questions about the process of getting involved with these centers and which departments or schools graduate students should apply to. The panel will end with questions from the audience.