

Awareness and Competence of South Carolina Master Gardeners in Synchronous Online Instruction During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

- To earn Master Gardeners (MG) certificate, 40 hours educational service required
- COVID outbreak resulted in cancelling face-to-face meetings
- Large learning curve for web video conferencing
- Some MG used online speaker's bureau to earn credits (Fawcett, et al., 2020)



- Human capital theory
 - As individual increases knowledge or skills, productivity may equally increase (Sweetland, S. (1996)

Objectives

- Identify MG knowledge and self-perceived competence levels of synchronous learning features related to effective instruction, and
- Identify MG knowledge and self-perceived competence levels of best practices for assuring ADA compliant Microsoft PowerPoint and Word files.

Methods

- Surveyed 122 SC MG in Fall 2020 webinar series
- MGs were provided with a URL and a scannable QR code for researcher-developed survey in Qualtrics

Findings

Demographics



- 45% response rate (55/122)
- Ages 39-80
- 27% used synchronous technology prior to pandemic
- Zoom — most used platform (96%)

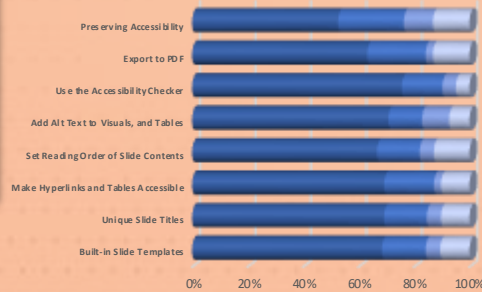
Highest level of education



- 18% perceived they were competent at inviting participants to a Zoom meeting
- 40% were unaware of accessibility tools in Microsoft Word and PowerPoint (see below)

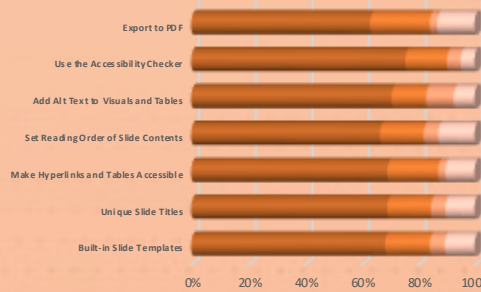
Master Gardeners Knowledge & Self-perceived Competence Levels

Accessibility Skills Using Microsoft Word



Legend: Not aware of this feature (white), Not competent (dark blue), Somewhat competent (medium blue), Competent (light blue)

Accessibility Skills Using Microsoft PowerPoint



Legend: Not aware of this feature (white), Not competent (dark orange), Somewhat competent (medium orange), Competent (light orange)

Conclusions

- Zoom was the most popular web-based synchronous platform
- A low level of competence with common platform features
- MG largely unaware of tools to assure accessibility for ADA 508 standards



Recommendations

- Qualitative research should be utilized to further understand the needs of MG
- Examine best synchronous web-based platforms for nationwide outreach

References

- Fawcett, J. E., Parajuli, R., Bardon, R., Bobby, L., Kays, L., & Strnad, R. (2020). Tools for Quickly Adapting During Pandemics, Disasters, and Other Unique Events. *Journal of Extension*, 58(2), Article v58-2tt1.
- Sweetland, S. (1996). Human Capital Theory: Foundations of a Field of Inquiry. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(3), 341-359. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1170527>