Teach Access Study Away Silicon Valley Student Reflection

We had the opportunity to hear from six different industry giants and connect with each one of their accessibility offices through the Teach Access Study Away program. The chance to learn how each company capitalizes on its particular opportunity was exciting. For example, we never knew how a visual art company like Adobe could make their products accessible to someone with a visual impairment. In this case, we got the opportunity to talk to Rob Haverty, the PM from Document Cloud, who cares deeply about making PDFs accessible and worked with Microsoft to allow accessible Word documents. His workshop in making accessible documents through Word and Acrobat was completely new and contextualized how people with visual impairments interact with digital documents. Not only did we gain the skills to create our own accessible documents, but we learned about design principles for accessible digital interfaces.

This past week was also a great exercise in learning with students from completely different backgrounds. We did not give input into team formation, landing on pseudo random teams and learning to work across a variety of experience. Each team was formed to try and get 4 students from at least 3 of the 4 different schools present, each with different majors. Working on a week long project with marketing and design majors gave the project more dimension than a typical Olin project, and we got a variety of fresh ideas to create something in the space of accessibility. One of our projects involved working with a first year marketing major, who had less experience with design processes and accessibility. This allowed us to work together to learn from each other and build a product past the prototype phase into outlining a marketing strategy. Our design proposal and prototype went further than most UOCD and P&M projects, and it was exciting to scaffold the idea for something that felt real.

Finally, this week gave us a huge number of ideas for incorporating accessibility into Olin the curriculum. From creating a screen reader workshop to revising a Software Design toolbox on web applications, we're excited to ideate and document further opportunities for Oliners to grow their skills in the accessibility space. We are currently keeping these ideas in a separate document that we will continue to share with faculty.