Accessibility Evaluation Report: Duke University Press Platform
(Duke University)

February 13, 2025

Conducted by: Accessiblü, LLC

For: Library Accessibility Alliance (LAA)

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Summary of Accessibility Findings

Accessiblü conducted a **high-level accessibility evaluation** of the Duke University Press platform to assess its usability for individuals with disabilities. The review was conducted using the JAWS and NVDA screen readers, keyboard-only navigation, and manual inspection for conformance to select WCAG 2.2 AA success criteria.

Key Findings

This evaluation offers a general assessment of the platform's accessibility, focusing on navigation, searching, and content access using assistive technologies (AT). Testers were able to complete critical functions—such as finding content, searching, and navigating main sections—though they encountered usability challenges related to heading structure, menu behaviors, form labeling, and focus management.

While no critical, system-breaking barriers were discovered, various accessibility issues exist, which may diminish efficiency and overall usability for blind or low-vision users, keyboard-only users, and those using screen readers or other assistive technologies.

Top 3 Issues Identified

1. **Insufficiently Labeled Interactive Elements**
   a. Impact: Screen reader and keyboard-only users often cannot discern the purpose of buttons or links that lack descriptive labels. This can significantly slow down navigation and may lead to missed functionality.
   b. WCAG Success Criteria: 1.1.1 (Non-text Content), 4.1.2 (Name, Role, Value), 2.4.4 (Link Purpose).
2. **Improper Heading Structure and Landmark Regions**
   a. Impact: Headings that are out of sequence or repeated at multiple levels confuse users who rely on heading navigation. Missing landmarks (especially the "main" region) also limit efficient keyboard or screen reader navigation.
   b. WCAG Success Criteria: 1.3.1 (Info and Relationships), 2.4.6 (Headings and Labels).
3. **Focus Management and Menu Behavior**
   a. Impact: Opening menus and dialogs without sending keyboard focus inside or failing to return focus to a meaningful location when menus close. This may frustrate users and lead to possible "keyboard traps." Inconsistent focus behavior after searches or filtering likewise disrupts workflow.
   b. WCAG Success Criteria: 2.4.3 (Focus Order), 4.1.2 (Name, Role, Value).

Disabilities Impacted

Blind and Low-Vision Users

- **Issues:** Ambiguous button labels, non-descriptive alt text, and missing landmarks.
- **Impact:** It makes it difficult for screen reader users to understand content structure and perform tasks efficiently.

Users with Motor Disabilities

- **Issues:** Inconsistent focus behavior and potential keyboard traps.
- **Impact:** This can hinder the ability to navigate exclusively using a keyboard or alternative input devices.

Users with Cognitive Disabilities

- **Issues:** Complex or unclear interface elements (e.g., mislabeled menus, inconsistent heading levels)
- **Impact:** This can increase cognitive load and reduce ease of use.

Page-Specific Findings and Impact Analysis

Below are summaries of the tested pages, each with a findings table illustrating the key accessibility issues. All issues below were discovered through JAWS screen reader testing, keyboard-only navigation, and manual inspection.

The following section lists the accessibility findings by **URL** and **WCAG violations** and describes their impact on users.

Main Landing Page

(https://read-dukeupress-edu.proxy.lib.umich.edu/journals)

Issue	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
No Main Landmark Region	1.3.1 Info and Relationships (A)	The page lacks a designated Main region, complicating screen reader navigation.	Users cannot jump directly to the primary content area.
Search Button Not Identified Properly	1.3.1 (Info and Relationships)	The search button is read ambiguously and does not convey role or state changes.	JAWS announces a button but does not provide clarity on whether it is expanded or collapsed.
Inconsistent Heading Levels	1.3.1 (Info and Relationships) 2.4.6 Headings and Labels (AA)	Headings appear out of logical sequence, causing confusion for screen reader users.	"FACEBOOK: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS" is read as an H3 in an unexpected context.
Menu Items Announced as Simple Links	4.1.2 (Name, Role, Value)	Links like "BOOKS" and "JOURNALS" are collapsed submenus but are read only as links, not submenus.	Link "BOOKS" is announced as "Link collapsed BOOKS" with no submenu context.
Images Without Meaningful Alt Text	1.1.1 (Non-text Content)	Some images contain text or are crucial to context but lack descriptive alt text.	Project/book cover images read only as "Graphic" or file names.

Impact Summary:

Users relying on screen readers or keyboard navigation may experience difficulty locating and operating the search feature, identifying key images, and efficiently jumping between major sections of the page.
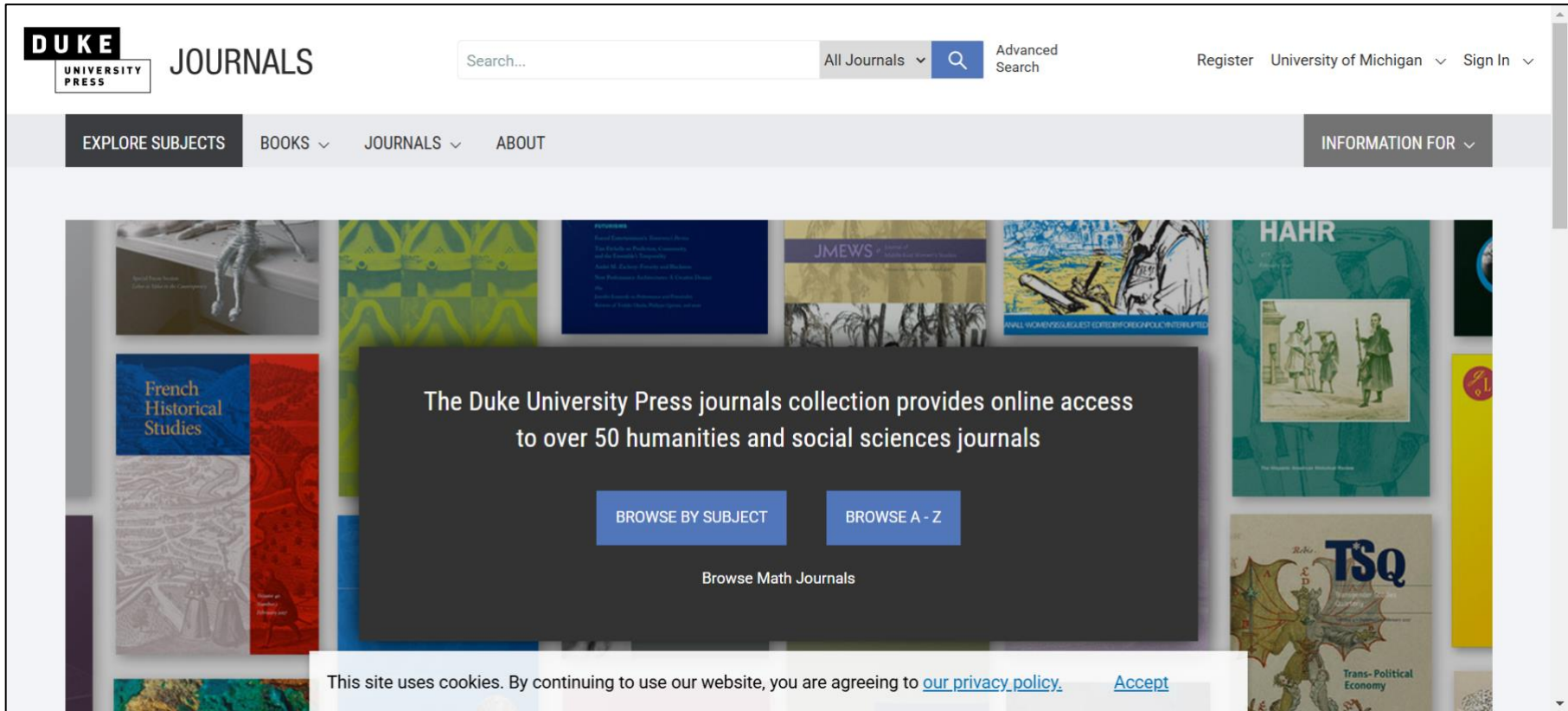
Main Landing Page Screenshot

Figure 1. Duke University Press journals collection main landing page.

Search Results Page

(https://read-dukeupress-edu.proxy.lib.umich.edu/journals/search-results)

Issue	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
Heading Levels Not in Order	1.3.1 (Info and Relationships)	The heading hierarchy is not intuitive, making it harder to skim search results. Headings for results appear out of sequence.	Headings for results appear out of sequence (e.g., jumping from H2 to H4).
Filter Not in Tab Order	1.3.1 (Info and Relationships)	Users tabbing through fields cannot reach the "Apply" link, rendering the date filter inaccessible.	If keyboard users tab from the date entry field, "Apply" is skipped.
Images Lacking Alt Text	1.1.1 (Non-text Content)	Cover images and icons that provide contextual clues have no descriptive alt text.	Book covers read as "Graphic" with no additional context.
Buttons Without Labels	4.1.2 (Name, Role, Value)	Buttons labeled only as "2" or "3" do not convey purpose.	JAWS reads them as "Button 2," "Button 3," with no functional context.
Links Without Descriptive Names	2.4.4 (Link Purpose)	Certain links lack meaningful text describing their target or function.	Links read as "Link Graphic Image" or repeated "Link."

Impact Summary:

After entering a search, screen reader users are not directed to the results, and confusing heading levels hamper scanning. Inaccessible filters also limit refining or applying new search parameters, forcing more steps to locate relevant information.
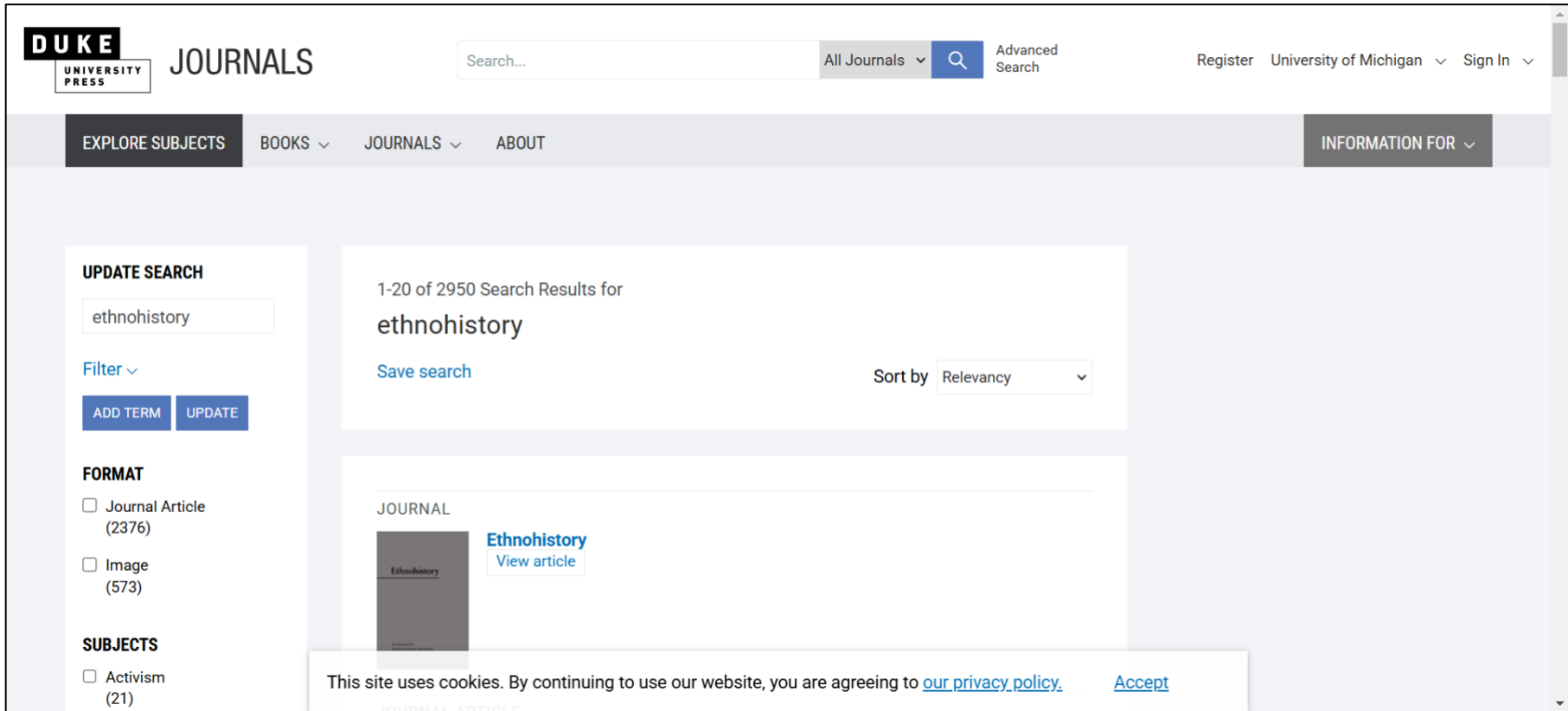
Search Results Page Screenshot

Figure 2. Screenshot of the Duke University Press search results page featuring the result for "Ethnohistory."

Ethnohistory Research Article Page

Figure 3. Ethnohistory journal page.

Advanced Search Page

(https://read-dukeupress-edu.proxy.lib.umich.edu/advanced-search)

Issue	WCAG Success Criteria	Description	Example
Multiple Links Without Descriptive Names	**2.4.4 (Link Purpose)**	Filter links and other controls are ambiguous or repetitively labeled.	Screen reader announces "Filter link" without clarifying context.
No Main Landmark Region	**1.3.1 (Info and Relationships)**	As with the landing page, there is no designated main region.	Screen reader users cannot jump to the main content.

Impact Summary:

Users must spend additional time traversing heading levels or tabbing through elements to find the core search tools. Missing landmarks and non-descriptive links compromise efficiency and clarity.
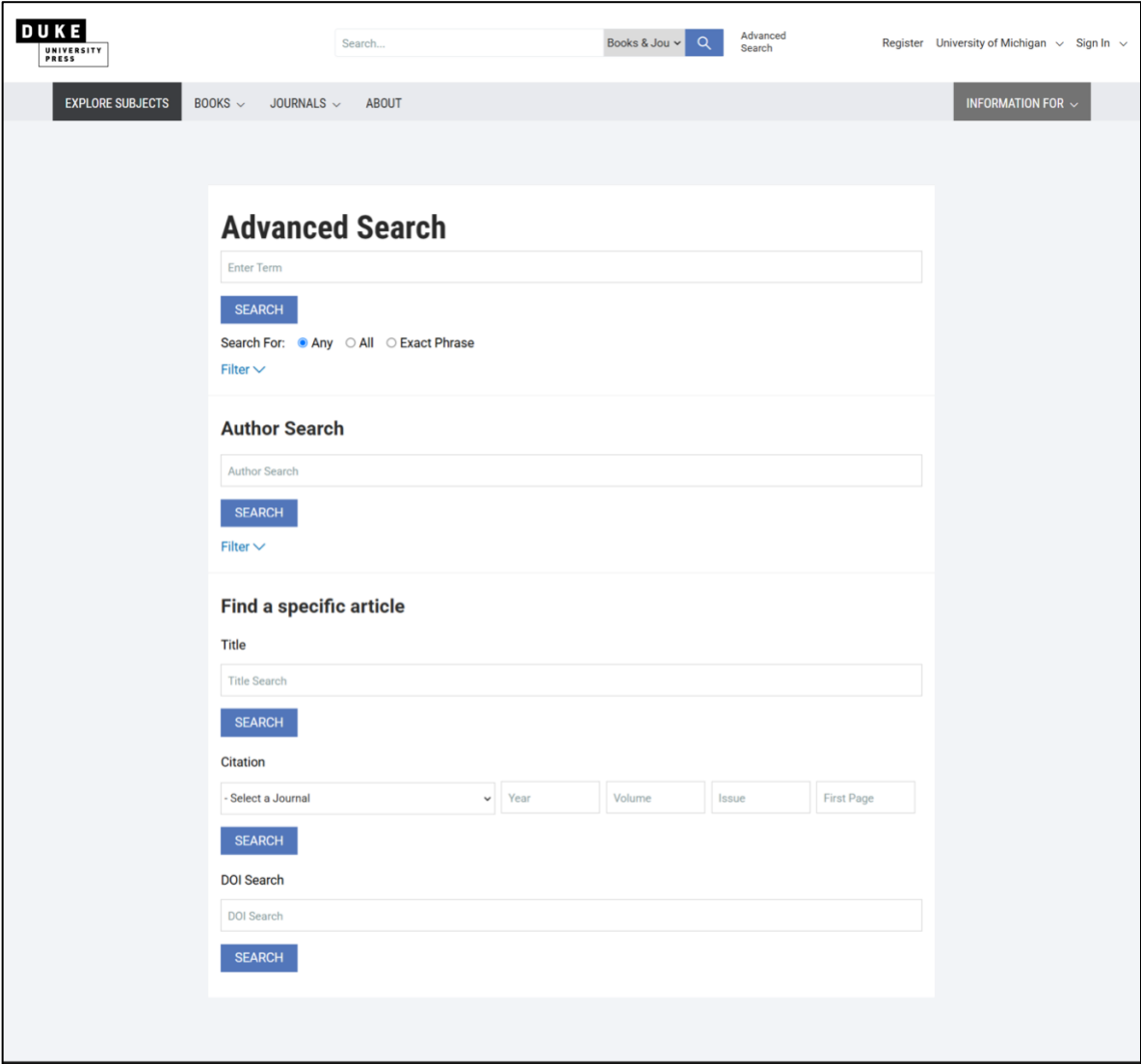
Advanced Search Page

Figure 4. The advanced search page

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

Overall, the Duke University Press digital platform is functional but presents notable usability and efficiency barriers to screen reader and keyboard-only users. To enhance inclusivity, we recommend:

Recommended Fixes

- Improving Navigation Structure:
- Correct heading levels and sequences.
- Add missing landmark regions (e.g., main) to streamline navigation.
- Minimize redundant elements.
- Enhancing Search and Filter Experience:
- Implement proper focus management after submitting a search.
- Ensure that the keyboard can navigate filters without skipping crucial controls.
- Ensuring Clear Labeling of Interactive Elements:
- Provide descriptive text or ARIA labels for images, links, and buttons.
- Convey state changes (e.g., "expanded" vs. "collapsed") consistently.
- Further Testing:
- Conduct additional user testing with individuals who rely on assistive technologies.
- Perform a deeper technical audit to align fully with WCAG 2.2 AA guidelines.

Disclaimer

Accessiblü prepared this report as a high-level accessibility evaluation of the Duke University Press platform. The evaluation utilized industry-standard testing methodologies, including screen reader testing (JAWS 2025), keyboard-only navigation, and manual inspection for select WCAG 2.2 AA success criteria.

This report does not represent a comprehensive WCAG compliance audit and should not be seen as a certification of accessibility compliance. While we have identified significant accessibility concerns and usability barriers, this evaluation was limited in scope and may not encompass all accessibility issues on the platform.

Liability:

Accessiblü offers this report for informational purposes only. It assumes no legal responsibility for accessibility violations or compliance failures resulting from its use. Organizations seeking formal certification should conduct a comprehensive audit and user testing disabilities.

Limitations of Testing:

This evaluation was conducted at a specific time, and platform updates may have occurred after testing was completed. Additionally, while automated tools and expert reviews were utilized, real-world users with disabilities determine the true measure of accessibility.