TEACH Act – Supporting Story

State: Connecticut

Institution: The University of Connecticut

There currently are no guidelines in place for what accessibility is, so institutions are implementing inaccessible technology.  This creates a barrier to blind students’ success in higher education.  The TEACH Act will catalyze the creation of the guidelines we need.

This is a problem right here in our home state at the University of Connecticut.  I have known the Director of UConn’s Center for Students with Disabilities, Donna Korbel, since the third grade because I attended school with her daughter.  She had fed me multiple times before I was even looking at colleges. I know that Ms. Korbel and her Center did everything it could to help me.  When I was a student at UConn, there were many technologies that I was expected to use for class that were fundamentally inaccessible to me as a blind user, and the Center for Students with Disabilities was aware of the problems before I was.  The infrastructure being implemented by university administrators was not assessed upon accessibility guidelines because they did not exist.  I frequently spent extra hours and money trying to work around inaccessible technology before I could even start doing my academic work.  There was an online course management software that I needed to use on a daily basis that was inaccessible to me. I would literally have to find a sighted person and ask them to perform certain steps in my procedures because the software wouldn’t let me. I would have to spend extra hours with my instructors working around the system that didn’t work for blind students. This destroyed productive time for both of us and prevented us both from reaching our full potential

One day, in the Center for Students with Disabilities, I mentioned my curiosity about coming home to Connecticut for graduate school at UConn. The staff’s first response was to warn me that the university had chosen to adopt Google Apps for Education, a fundamentally inaccessible system for the blind, and that my accessibility problems would only be worse in the future at UConn.

**I chose not to apply to graduate school at UConn.**

The problem is not the fact that I am blind. The problem is the fact that inaccessible technology is woven into the fabric of the collegiate academic experience at many institutions. Nobody wants the technology to be inaccessible, but nobody has guidelines for how to ensure that I can be welcome in higher education. Well-meaning institutions can and do go awry without these guidelines.