Personal Testimony

State: North Carolina

Institution: Wake Forest University

Name: Kathryn Webster

Dear Senator Tillis and Senator Burr:

Each day, print-disabled students battle for equal access to their course materials. These impediments are obstacles that can be easily fixed if higher education institutions were given direction in regard to accessibility. As a blind student at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, I write today to urge Congress to support the creation of voluntary guidelines by a purpose-based commission. Wake Forest University has been most diligent in providing me alternative formats, but I am still left with delays in receiving textbooks, inability to utilize certain websites and databases, and inconsistency when using various software programs.

I am a junior pursuing a Bachelor’s of Science in Computer Science and Business & Enterprise Management with a concentration in Management Consulting. Moreover, I am attaining a minor in Statistics. The majority of my courses involve programming, quantitative skills, and analytic software. Unfortunately, many blind students are discouraged by enrolling in any Mathematics course. This is not on account of lack of knowledge or drive; it is simply the frustration that comes with attempting to succeed in such a technology-based field of study. Regardless, I am not one of those students. I have fought and will continue to fight for equal access to education because print-disabled students deserve fair treatment, equal opportunity, and liberty to prosper in their chosen field. During my schooling, I have faced barriers that have both discouraged and frustrated me.

Perhaps the most detrimental obstacle I experienced occurred in the fall of my sophomore year. While enrolled in Principles of Financial Accounting, a prerequisite for the School of Business, I was unable to receive the textbook in accessible format. The absence of course material for this mandatory course led to delayed submission of assignments, unsuccessful examination grades, and a lack of comprehension. If the course book was electronically accessible, these barriers would not have negatively impacted my success in the class.

This scenario is not unique to me. Blind students face similar circumstances each day; and it is time to push for equal access to education. Thank you for considering my request; and I am eager to work for accessibility in the classroom for all students.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Cornell Webster