Introduction

Technology in the classroom has reached critical mass. Today it is rare to enter a university classroom and not see at least half of the students using Ipads, laptops and other mobile devices to take notes and review information. Professors are now delivering entire lectures through PowerPoint, providing grades via Blackboard and even using Twitter, an online social presence tool, to monitor student understanding of their subjects. (Snyder, 1)

This infiltration of technology in education is the catalyst for schools to review the access points of students and faculty to technology; then use this review to ensure that all members, regardless of abilities, can access needed technology to be successful in the classroom. For the purpose of this paper, we will concentrate specifically on the accessibility of technology in higher education, the effects of technology use on campus and its surrounding community, and what an institution may include in its purchasing policies to ensure that any hardware or software purchased is compliant in terms of community needs and accessibility.

Although technology in the classroom is a topic of debate on all academic levels including K-12 schools, we will focus our attention to the effects on higher education. Please note that much of the historical and legal information cited here will apply to both the K-12 and Higher Education settings.

The Policy Context

In 1973, a revision to the Rehabilitation Act passed, recognizing the civil rights of people with disabilities for the first time in history. The portion of the law focusing on the disabled,
Section 504 (29 U.S.C. § 701), applies to both K-12 & Higher Education. It specifically states that any organization receiving federal funding “may not deny access to programs, services, benefits or opportunities to participate based on physical barriers.”

Another section of the Rehabilitation Act to review is Section 508 (29 U.S.C. § 794d), which requires the federal government to ensure that the electronic and information technology that it develops, procures, maintains, or uses is accessible to persons with disabilities. When discussing the Penn State and (National Federation of the Blind (NFB) case, which we will address in more detail later in this paper, Russlynn Ali, the U.S. Department of Education’s assistant secretary for civil rights, stated the following: “Colleges and universities have specific legal obligations to provide students, faculty, and staff with disabilities the same benefits, programs and services.”

Policy Issues

The Education for All Handicapped Children Law was enacted by Congress in 1975 and ensures that children with disabilities have the opportunity to receive the same educational experience as other children. In 1990, this law was amended and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA Act affirmed that special education would be made available to all those that qualified as disabled under the categories of the law. IDEA also provides money to the states, which is then distributed to the school districts for special education programs. While IDEA is a key law for K-12 educators and is widely applied, especially in the creation of Individual Education Plans (IEP) for qualified students, this law does not apply to higher education. There are no IEPs to follow when a student is enrolled in college.
or university. Instead, the onus is on the student to alert the school of their disability and it is not deemed the responsibility of the institution to seek out students who may require additional accommodations. There are also no formal documentation guidelines or requirements to track and support their students with disabilities and schools are free to request/create whatever documentation they feel is necessary.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 provides further substantiation of the need to provide accessibility in the classroom. This Act protects against the discrimination of Americans with disabilities, legislating that businesses and public institutions must make reasonable accommodation, so that Americans with disabilities can participate in major life activities. The ADA also provides a clear definition for the term disability: a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a life activity. In 2008, the Act was broadened to include examples of major life activities including “… learning, reading, thinking, concentrating communicating and working, among other things.” That inclusion and breakdown of the examples to be included is important when considering how institutions of higher education should move forward to provide for and make accommodations for students, faculty, and staff with disabilities.

Compliance with the ADA has met major opposition from religious groups and business interests due to the costs associated with improving accessible within their facilities or having to pay in full for completely new infrastructure. In a famous article by Brian Doherty, he called the ADA an “expensive headache to millions,” and it is fair to say that these same types of costs will be experienced in higher education on a whole new level. Not only will schools and colleges
need to determine how to implement technology in the classrooms but also how to meet the needs of its entire population within the educational environment.

Recently, the US Department of Education’s Office of Educational Technology submitted a Report titled “Promoting Grit, Tenacity, and Perseverance: Critical Factors for Success in the 21st Century.” This document discusses the important and requisite role that technology is playing and will continue to play for students in school today. The report states that “New technologies are providing opportunities with the potential to advance education far beyond what has been possible before.” (DOE, 7) The report continues on to shape the framework of past, present, and future priorities for technology in education. Presently, technology in the classroom is used in many different ways, and is becoming more and more flexible and adaptable to its environment. With that said, institutions of higher education will need to ensure that they are agile enough to respond quickly and provide effective methods to accommodate their communities in areas of learning, thinking, and communicating.

Technology and the ADA have gained prominence in discussions in recent years in various areas of case law that have included both educational and non-educational facets. Looking at the baseline for these cases you can see the common thread that runs through them is that providers must shoulder the responsibility for compliance. It is up to those that distribute the technology to ensure that users of all types and skillsets can make use of their websites, electronic books, and technical resources. To get a better understanding of the case law, we will review some of the cases and their highlights below:
• **National Federation of the Blind v. Target Corporation.** The NFB sued Target Corporation in a class action suit because their site was not properly formatted for those with low or no vision to utilize it. In 2006, this case challenged whether the ADA limitations imposed on brick and mortar shopping should also be enforced with the click and mortar or click only shopping websites. The outcome was a settlement between the two parties whereby Target was required to provide access to users with disabilities by updating their website. The court called this groundbreaking law in an arena that was growing in importance.

• **National Federation of the Blind v. The Pennsylvania State University.** The NFB sued Penn State University because their technology was inaccessible to individuals with impairments to their vision, thus blocking them from access to the same opportunities as those without such impairments. Penn State entered into an early resolutions process in an attempt to mitigate the lawsuit at the early stages. In their agreements, Penn State agreed to complete an accessibility audit and to provide students, faculty and staff with disabilities the same benefits, programs and services, but when technically unfeasible to do so would provide an alternate, acceptable benefit.

Within Penn State’s agreement with the National Federation for the Blind are several definitions that will be important to keep in mind throughout the rest of this paper:

**Accessible** – fully and equally accessible to and independently usable by blind individuals...so that they may acquire the same information, engage in the same
interactions, and enjoy the same services as sighted students and faculty, with substantially equivalent ease of use

**Electronic and information technology (EIT)** - includes information technology and any equipment or interconnected system or subsystem of equipment that is used in the creation, conversion, or duplication of data or information. The term electronic and information technology includes, but is not limited to, telecommunications products (such as telephones), information kiosks, Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) and transaction machines, internet and intranet websites, electronic books and electronic book reading systems, search engines and databases, course management systems, classroom technology and multimedia, personal response systems ("clickers"), and office equipment such as classroom presentation equipment, copiers and fax machines.

**Information technology** means any equipment or interconnected system or subsystem of equipment that is used in the automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, or reception of data or information. The term information technology includes computers, ancillary equipment, software, firmware and similar procedures, services (including support services), and related resources.

In a recent survey by the Disability Compliance for Higher Education Group, it was found that as today’s college students enter the classroom accustomed to using technology in their daily lives, requests for disability accommodations involving technology are on the rise (Schaffhauser, 1). One question that rises up throughout this research is: who in the institution
is responsible for providing accommodations? Is it the disability services office, which traditionally fielded these requests from students and provided the necessary items? Or, is it incumbent upon the information technology office to address and provide guidance, since that staff typically has the most familiarity with software and hardware selection and parameters? This is a decision that needs to be solidified, especially at the college level to ensure that each office does not assume that the other is taking care of the necessary accommodations.

The Target and Penn State cases show that this is just the beginning of the road for accessible technologies. Retail stores cannot stop at providing handicap accessible entryways, bathrooms, and dressing rooms, now they must keep in mind that when a person wants to buy a shirt online, the consumer should be able to easily determine the price and color of the shirt and then put it in their virtual shopping cart and finalize the transaction. Just as the world of electronic commerce needs to adjust, so does the world of higher education. Students are now completing assignments in an online environment without ever touching a hard copy textbook, or even a piece of paper. Faculty members are beginning to expect students to submit their work digitally and also disseminate information via PowerPoint presentations, Twitter, and other digital media. Both faculty and students are now using YouTube videos, TED Talks, and Wikipedia to share information, provide global awareness on topics, and highlight the viewpoints of other experts in their areas. It is imperative that this kind of information be available to those with disabilities, but the question remains: who on each campus is responsible for accessibility?
Internal and External Actors

At this time, there are many educational and non-educational parties that are relevant to and interested in how this situation. On campus, that includes just about everyone – the students, faculty and administration. Off campus, the state legislators, the Department of Education and the Department of Justice are all interested in how educational institutions will make technology accessible to all of their users. Let’s break down the policy actors involved at each level and review what their goals and objectives are for technology accessibility:

Government Actors: President and Congress

Policy actors exist on the full political spectrum in ADA related cases. Government officials at the top assist in developing, maintaining, and molding policy over time. In the case of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, it was the Senate that initially introduced the Act, which then with a unanimous voice vote in the House of Representatives, after which it was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on July 26, 1990 (IDEA). Many view the Act as an extension of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

National Religious Groups

Even though the House vote was unanimous, there was some opposition with stakeholders that were affected by this legislation. National groups like the Association of Christian Schools International and the National Association of Evangelicals opposed some of the earlier iterations of the law, saying that it would be too costly for religious organizations to make these public accommodations.
National Business Groups

Many businesses protested the ADA act, stating insurmountable costs for compliance. A business like Greyhound Bus Lines focused on the unintended consequence of cost. This increase in cost would result in no longer be able to offer affordable transportation to the intercity and rural populations because they would need to pass the cost of improvements to be compliant along to the customers in the form of higher fares. Even the US Chamber of Commerce, one of the largest commerce groups in the country said it could be disastrous to many of the small businesses trying to survive in a struggling economy.

Judicial Branch

Often it is up to the judicial branch of our government to interpret a new law’s full implications. Cases involving accessible online commerce versus accessible brick and mortar stores (‘bricks vs. clicks’) sought to expand the ADA’s influence over the exponentially growing cyberspace. As mentioned earlier, other big cases involving Target Corporation focused on the accessibility of websites published by large corporations to run their e-commerce sites.

Department of Justice

Many times cases are brought to the attention of the Department of Justice through the Office of Civil Rights which makes a claim that some group or individual is being marginalized or discriminated against. Advocacy groups aggregate power in order to speak for individual citizens, taking on cases and causes in order to give weight and fire power to the claims. In
many cases, if it were not for local or national advocacy groups, individuals would not have the financial or personal resources to bring suit against corporations.

**Congress and the President (again)**

Although lawmakers work to create a framework of laws in which the intent will stand up to possible interpretations in case law, there are often loopholes and gaps in the policy, leading to unforeseen consequence. In this case, George W. Bush signed into law the *ADA Amendments Act of 2008* in order to give broader protections to workers when Congress felt the courts were too narrow or restrictive in their interpretation of the law.

**National Lobbyist Groups**

Moving closer to the direction of our policy proposal, the connection of all this background in our policy case is that fact that it was the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) that challenged Target Corporation. NFB focused on the fact that Target.com did not enable persons of low or no vision use their website. There were no accommodations built into the site when it was developed. It was also the National Federation for the Blind who approached Penn State University and raised questions about the accessibility of its resources to disabled individuals on its campus. Based on these two heavy weight cases alone, we can see that the NFB has a lot of clout and has built a great track record of effecting change.

**Large Educational Institutions**

In the Penn State case, I would argue that this target, no pun intended, was deliberate. Penn State University itself is a powerful actor in the local, state and national scene. It has a
high profile, a national brand and reputation for being an educational and research institution with deep pockets. Penn State University could take the stance to simply defend itself against the claims or it could reach a voluntary resolution agreement where the two entities work together to change the behavior and standards at which the University operates.

The Office of Civil Rights does offer an Early Complaint Resolution (ECR) process to help resolve cases where the parties want to come to a compromise or agreement on how they can accommodate each other. In this case, Penn State did adopt changes suggested by the National Federation of the Blind and accept responsibility for its failed attempt at ad-hoc accommodations. In a case like Penn State, with so many federal dollars funding so many areas of higher education, from research dollars to student loans, if Penn State is not in compliance with the ADA and supporting case law, those valuable federal dollars could be withheld. That threat alone could close down many institutions that rely heavily on those federal dollars.

As Penn State implemented that change at its administrative level, the effects started filtering down to the faculty, staff, and students who are the primary users and beneficiers of these accommodations. The point was, to state as an institution, that ad-hoc accommodations were no longer acceptable, that Penn State recognized this and will develop policy and implement change across the campus to remediate this issue.

When a large organization like Penn State is targeted, peer institutions are always tracking such game changing elements. Other large institutions do not want to be the next example institution and be embarrassed or sued into changing its ways. In this case, we would state that other local and state related institutions like Penn State, need to seriously examine
potential and implement policy changes in order to offer broad accommodations, rather than relying on ad hoc accommodations for person with disabilities, as a standard operating procedure.

Keeping in mind that the current environment intertwines technology and education, the commitment of our institution to provide the best education possible and the requirement of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, we are proposing a reform to the accessibility of technology in the institution. This policy will include a breakdown of responsibilities and requirements for parties within the Institution, as well as provide information on which departments and positions are responsible for the management and implementation of the policy. There are many facets of technology accessibility to look at and create policy around: the creation of instructional materials, website accessibility, purchasing new equipment and software that can be utilized by those with impairments, and the maintenance and upkeep of said equipment and software.

The University is an institution of higher education that does receive federal funding and federal aid, therefore must take a proactive role assuring that it is compliant with federal civil rights laws related to persons with disabilities. In a higher sense, colleges and universities must act as the leaders in change that become societal norms. Development of policies, procedure and protocols to address deficiencies in compliance must be thought out and adjusted over time. Most of the programs and services that are offered in higher education are developed by third parties and are procured through contracts and request for proposals. It is at this point of
entry into the University environment that the first level of defense of accessibility standards must take place. Therefore a procurement policy must be developed to define the process.

Proposed Procurement Policy

All of the programs and services provided to all people with and without disabilities will be accessible. Ad hoc accommodations are no longer an option in purchasing decisions. This basic civil rights law requires that publicly supported education entities and/or institutions receiving federal aid must provide programs and services in accessible formats for all persons engaging in the program. The purchasing of information technology that is not accessible is a clear violation of U.S. law. As a direct result, to remain compliant, all services and products, including but not limited to software and hardware for all equipment and computers, must be purchased with priority given to goods and services that are accessible to persons with disabilities. Please refer to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Section 508 Information Technology and Accessibility Standards for guidance.

Requests For Proposals (RFP) must include accessibility features to be included with the product, while also acknowledging which accessibility features are not included in said product or service. A compliance rubric must be included with each RFP. Once the RFPs are received and reviewed, an accessibility compliance team will evaluate and verify required documentation. The process is not complete until the product is delivered and the accessibility compliance rubric is evaluated in comparison to the product’s actual accessibility performance versus the claims of accessibility. Any exclusion must be fully documented with an explanation and must pass through the accessibility compliance review board.
In order to create a policy to influence and guide all purchases in the University, the policy must come from the top. Approval of a procurement policy in regards to accessibility must come from the board of directors. There are legal reasons that must be considered in order to mitigate the risk of being sued for non-compliance with ADA requirements. But more importantly the policy must not lose sight of accommodating the needs of the University community and stakeholders in order to have a positive effect on its ability to educate.

The target of the policy is all of the purchasers in the University who have the power and ability to procure goods and services on behalf of the University. There are many different areas to consider in purchasing goods and services including software, information systems, ERP systems, class content management, hardware, electronics, computers, and peripherals. All the person who make procurement decisions, secretaries, office assistants, professors, facilities, computer services tech staff, library staff and students can and will be affected by such a policy.

The strategy to enact this policy is to pull together a purchasing team that represents a broad sample of the many different purchasing groups in the University. The goal is to integrate this updated procurement policy as a more robust and well-rounded process. The goal of the policy is to implement a basic framework that will work seamlessly within our current procurement process. We do not want to dictate every purchase but provide guidelines to follow and consider when creating an RFP. Similar processes have been implemented at the University with the more recent being an Energy Policy that requires Energy Star rated devices be purchased if available. If there are no accessible options available, the goal is to have a
paper trail to prove the course of action and have it reviewed by a special advisory board to ensure that product accessibility was considered. This policy would need to be announced from the top. It starts with a board approval and an open announcement from the President stating that moving forward; the University will be accessible for all of the community including those with disabilities. The President will go on to announce that the first move to back this direction is a university wide Accessibility Procurement Policy.

Cost will definitely be a factor anytime that the procurement of goods and services must be enhanced with additional features. There will be a premium, some factor that has not been fully vetted yet. This must be balanced with the cost of not taking a proactive and justified action on a basic civil right. In addition, there is an unintended consequence of added features, upgrades, options, pilots, and testing that will bring a wider range of learning opportunities to all students. This wider range of pedagogy will offer a breadth of options for a diverse group of learners, each with their own ways of learning.

Without a doubt, there will be tension and bumps that must be worked through. This progressive stand to move from ad hoc accommodations to full accommodations for all persons is a bold one. In many cases, the goal and vision of different stakeholders are oceans apart. For instance, there are some professors who just want to do research and teaching is seen as just a chore that comes with research. So a faculty member may feel it is not their core competency and they should not have to absorb the cost or be responsible for ensuring his or her class content and material is accessible. Just as a professor of history who is using a computer to teach a class may feel that it is not his or her responsibility for making sure that computer is up-
to-date and protected by a virus scan. The responsibility would fall on the information
technology support services group. A professor may show videos that the professor created
the video using her personal computer. But the professor may say they did their part, they
created the video, but they are not responsible for voice over, closed captioning, language
translation etc. Claims of not having the time or expertise may be widespread.

The key thing to focus on is that when it comes to civil rights, we all have responsibility
to act. No doubt, as with any new regulation or rule, there will be a learning curve. The
exceptions and or waivers to this policy should be difficult to come by and only be available
when there are no other options. There may be some resistance initially until people get used
to the changes but it will not take long for the changes and policies to be business as usual.

The biggest and most important factor in the ultimate success of this policy is how the
policy is framed and announced from the beginning. A thorough explanation for the change is
needed to ground the fears of misinformation. Although the university will be an early adopter
of such a policy, there are several national and peer institution examples that could be case
studies for such a procurement policy change. Also, the cost and risks of not taking action and
not complying need to be explained in depth. Civil rights violations are not good and are not
taken lightly.

The shorter term effects will include some initial start-up costs to create the policy,
training people on the policy and providing the proper channels for dealing with the grey areas.
It may be a little confusing at first as some incidents may be trial by fire but soon enough there
will be enough example and case evidence to see the way through the growing pains.
This policy will have a profound effect on the University community, both intended and unintended. The students may have the broadest and possibility the greatest impact, which may some look at as an unintended consequence, of this far reaching policy. As a result of accommodating a focus group, such as visually impaired students, the university will have to procure products and services that offer a multitude of communication offerings. If our example is a lecture that a student must attend and critique for a required assignment, the university would require that the lecture be videotaped and include voiceovers, sign language, closed captioning, a brailed text transcript and video with an audio amplifier in order to accommodate students in the class. The result is a much broader range of learning options both in and out of the classroom. There may be students who do not have or may not self-identify as disabled but may learn better by reading text along with the video rather than just listening to the speaker lecture. The policy offers more opportunities for differential learning for each student, disabled or not.

In the workplace, staff members may also see a broader range of options to complete their work and be productive. But as the staff, they must also know and understand the purchasing policies and procedures to ensure that the University is in compliance and is meeting the needs of the students. The staff must understand the interpretation and spirit of the policy since, in most cases, the staff supports the will and goals of administration and faculty at the University. Faculty now must consider accessibility in their research, teaching, and course content making sure all materials provide options for accessibility for those who are disabled.
Proposed Resource Accessibility Policy

The other policy that we are proposing will primarily focus on the faculty experience with technology accessibility, centering on classroom instructional technology and materials, and addressing which staff members are responsible for the acquisition and creation of the materials and which department will support the efforts of the faculty members in this undertaking.

Faculty use more and more electronic resources for their own research, as well as for the production and dissemination of information for their students. According to Jennifer Howard, “About 40 percent, though, agreed strongly with the idea that, "assuming that electronic collections of journals are proven to work well," e-collections could comfortably replace print journal collections in academic libraries.” (Howard, 1) What does this mean for publications and for the sharing of information? Not only do users need to be technically savvy, but they will also need to ensure that these documents can be accessible by users who may not have the ability to utilize the electronic channels. Who is responsible for ensuring that these materials are available – is it the library? Is it the faculty member completing the research and compilation or is it the publisher?

In June, 2010, the Office of Civil Rights put forth a Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) informing institutions as to what their roles are in regard to the accessibility of technology for their students. (Schaffhauser 1) This letter’s aim was to clarify that, according to the Office of Civil Rights and the laws cited above, institutions are responsible for making any technology in use in the classroom available to all students, or to make accommodations so that students with
disabilities would be able to access the same information and communications as their fellow students. As this continues to be a hot topic, a follow-up document was released, containing frequently asked questions (FAQ) about how schools should adhere to the policy. The FAQ encourages schools to evaluate the accessibility of the technology before placing it into service and also indicates that someone must be designated as the caretaker for the accessibility and usage of the technology by the community.

The target audience for this portion of the accessibility policy is the faculty. Since we are proposing that faculty be responsible for the maintenance on their electronic sources and also ensuring that they will be the ones that are held accountable for providing electronic tools that all students, regardless of ability, can utilize, they will be the ones that must ensure adherence. We understand that this will require additional time and work for faculty members. We also realize that there may be some initial opposition to the implementation, but feel that it is a necessary course of action and that the faculty, since they are the ones creating the content, should be the ones to address the accessibility of each item that they utilize.

In order to enact this policy, we will create a team or committee of University peers, including both administration and faculty, to determine the best way to roll out these changes. At this time, our Institution has not yet been contacted about any violations or remanded on charges, however we feel it best to look ahead and make the accommodations now. Our policy will require members of the faculty community to provide “reasonable accommodation” or a change to the technology that will enable any individual the ability to enjoy equal educational opportunity, except for cases where this would cause the fundamental nature of the program
to be changed by the accommodation. This means that in certain cases, it may be that any accommodation to be made could potentially alter the lesson that faculty member is attempting to provide. If this is the case, the committee will review the request and the objection by the faculty and make a final decision as to how to proceed.

As this policy will be funded by the University and more likely the department from which the faculty/student is making the accommodation, the policy should also not place a great financial hardship on said party. This means that if the accommodation would be either financially constraining or would fundamentally change the operation of the coursework, it may be that the accommodation may not be possible. In this case, again, the committee would make the final decision as to whether or not to proceed.

To support this endeavor will also require the coordinated effort of several administrative offices. Though the final adaptation of the digital technology will rely on the input and determination of the faculty member who has been requested to provide the accommodation, he/she will have the support of both the Office of Disability Resources and the Office of Computer Services. These two groups must work in conjunction with each other and the faculty member to provide a consistent approach to adapting the technology to meet the needs of the handicapped students. The Office of Disability Resources will be called upon to share their expertise in working with students with disabilities, and interpreting the guidelines that must be met. This office will also provide guidance on the consistency of the adaptations.

As the experts in the field of technology, Computer Services will provide guidance on how to adapt the technology in use, whether it is an e-reader, a YouTube video, or a library
book, to make it available so that the disabled student will have the same opportunity to use it as all the other students in the classroom. Computer Services will also agree to provide training sessions and support for faculty members to utilize the technology required to adapt to meet this challenge.

When reviewing the costs of implementing this initiative, there are both tangible and intangible costs to consider. The tangible cost of providing this service at the beginning of the cycle is much less prohibitive than in a lawsuit later on in the process. In some research it has been found that it is better to make a small investment upfront in retrofitting your current information or paying the price to have it accommodating from the start then to litigate a complaint later on in the process. In one case, the settlement was $850,000 paid out of another institution’s pocket, rather than spending the funds to make the accommodation upfront. It should be noted that in addition to the $850,000, the school was then also required to make the accommodations so they were affected financially in both directions. At our institution, we have decided to be proactive in our approach to accessibility and want to make sure that we are at the front of the pack, rather than waiting to take action when we are legally required.

The intangible costs associated with excluding the disabled population from consideration when providing any variety of electronic resources is also high. While one may not be able to initially put a dollar amount on the value of this, a lawsuit and negative publicity against a school that is not compliant could cost a fortune in both real dollars and goodwill within the community. Our institution is often seen as one that is for the people, for the
community, not the elite, and if we exclude a portion of that population from our consideration, we may lose students and support to other schools that are in compliance and that have taken a course of action to provide accommodation. If we are at the forefront of this movement, and ensure early on that we have taken every step possible to accommodate those with a disability, we may be able to gain a better reputation within the community at large and the disabled population as well. Students may look to attend our institution over others, simply because we provide the best atmosphere and resources to meet their needs.

Since this is a new policy, we must ensure that when we mobilize for implementation we are clear, decisive and inclusive. We believe that we have laid out an excellent case for the adoption of this policy – in reviewing both the cases presented at the beginning of this paper and also the rate that technology is expanding in higher education, it is imperative that we step up to the challenge and provide accommodations and adaptations to the technology for the disabled community. Since our institution is considered to be a leader in technology across the United States, it is definitely a sound move to be a leader in this area – to show other schools how to provide access and also to mitigate any potential damages in the future. There is support for this initiative from the various administrative offices as outlined above and also from the faculty. While not all of the faculty may be on board yet, hopefully if we provide the right tools and training we will make this a smooth implementation for them.

During the early phase of implementation, we will surely run into some opposition from faculty members that have not fully embraced the need to accommodate students via the adaptation of their methods and materials. These members may feel that their academic
freedom is in jeopardy, that they have neither the time, nor the resources to accomplish this task or that they simply don’t know how to do it. In any event, it will be the charge of the committee to provide education, early and often, on how the faculty can find assistance with updating their resources. It will also be up to the committee to provide an open forum for feedback, and be receptive to advice on how they can improve this process in the early stages. The committee will also need to monitor the current course websites and offerings to ensure that the adaptive technology and rules are being followed. When it is discovered that they are not, it will be up to the committee to provide guidance to the individual that is not punitive, but rather educational and helpful.

Summary

Both the procurement and resource accessibility policies will have long reaching positive effects for the university community. From some of the research provided, it is clear that ad hoc adaptations are not the way to proceed, but rather, ensuring that technology is accessible to all users regardless of ability should become commonplace and the norm, rather than the exception.

As stated above, in higher education, the responsibility rests with the student to provide documentation and information about their disability. But being accessible for people with disabilities is a basic civil right that is coming of age. The laws are on the books, amendments have been made, case law is building and as a result the societal norms and practices are being molded. Higher Education should undoubtedly be one of those key change agents. There will be a cost in resources to make these accommodations but the costs pale in comparison to the
legal, financial and public relations costs of not complying. Most importantly the cost of marginalizing citizens who need the accommodations has an exponential cost on his or her life that may never be overcome. The intended and unintended positive consequences of such policy changes proposals developed in this paper speaks volumes about the universities willingness to be that change agent for a level playing field for all civil rights.

Works Cited


