

Case Study:
California State University Accessible Technology Initiative
<http://www.calstate.edu/accessibility/>

There are 23 campuses in the California State University system, comprising the largest four-year university system in the United States. The Accessible Technology Initiative (ATI) is comparatively long-standing within higher education, having begun with an Executive Order from the CSU Chancellor in 2005. While library subscriptions and databases are only a recent focus of the ATI (since 2012), there are many lessons to be learned from the leadership of the California State University in their widespread attempt to change the culture throughout the system to embed accessibility awareness and policy in everyday business practices of the university. The only hope for a sustainable initiative is to integrate accessibility into business processes and everyday decision-making, explained ATI Director Cheryl Pruitt in a recent interview.

“Let’s start by talking about the enormity of the problem,” said Pruitt. “Back in 2006, the CSU did not realize the enormity of the problem.” They did, however, recognize the importance of campuses making plans for achieving accessible technology, and encouraged each campus to articulate annual goals. Over time, those goals were enhanced, and collectively articulated as success indicators. “When those success indicators are met,” Pruitt explained, “you are close to meeting a goal.” The success indicators were developed in close consultation with campus stakeholder groups, and the ATI staff developed documents and self-assessment tools for CSU campuses that also function as annual reporting documents. These self-assessment forms include Instructional Materials, Procurement, and Web. See: <http://ati.calstate.edu/>.

Self-assessments are only part of the process. Each CSU campus is also required under the ATI to have an accessibility plan, and it is generally understood that student-facing technologies are the highest-impact and therefore more critical areas to address in those plans: purchasing, libraries, and instructional materials. Library resources have become a recent focus of the ATI, and the CSU has leveraged its long-standing practices of system-wide licensing of e-resources into a highly successful process of collaboration with vendors that includes extensive accessibility testing, gap analysis, remediation and temporary workarounds, and forward looking commitments from vendors. While in its pilot phase, the testing was contracted out to an accessibility consulting firm, the ATI plans to use its own community of practice going forward.

Mark Turner, Director of the CSU’s Center for Accessible Media, explained the need to open lines of communication early with vendors and to augment the VPAT, a necessary but by no means sufficient form of vendor accessibility documentation. The CSU has developed a Accessibility Roadmap Template to accompany the VPAT, along with a statement of CSU’s Accessibility requirements, all available on the ATI website: http://www.calstate.edu/Accessibility/EIT_Procurement/. The Roadmap Template elicits information that the VPAT does not, namely the status of accessibility gaps in the product, how and when the vendor will address them, and any workarounds patrons can use until the gaps are resolved. “We share some common interests with vendors, of course,” said Turner. “They want their products to be usable by everyone, and so do we.”

Other rich resources on the ATI website include “From Where I Sit,” a video series featuring 8 CSU students with disabilities talking about their experiences with classroom electronic resources and technology (<http://teachingcommons.cdl.edu/access/materials/fwis.shtml>), along with faculty responses to those videos, and a website for Accessible Technology Resources for Teaching and Learning. <http://teachingcommons.cdl.edu/access/>