

Scaling an Equitable Access Program: VitalSource and University of California, Davis

CHALLENGE

All students deserve to have access to the resources they need throughout their collegiate career, no matter their major. Current course materials models often put students in a position of having to choose whether or not they can afford to purchase their required materials, creating inequity. UC Davis wanted to provide a solution to the unpredictable costs of course materials as financial barriers should not keep students from pursuing their collegiate goals.

SOLUTION

Equitable Access is a digital-first, flat-rate subscription program that delivers digital course materials through the learning management system (LMS). The program's mission is to reduce inequity among students by eliminating textbook access issues, while ensuring that costs are predictable and equal for all undergraduate students. All students are automatically enrolled in Equitable Access for \$199 per term. Should students prefer a different method to obtain their course materials, they can choose to opt out of the program. The program is publisher agnostic and supports the academic freedom of faculty to choose the content they deem best for their course. The solution is powered by VitalSource Campus Store tools, which manage the program dynamics utilizing the IMS Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) standard.

LEARNING IMPACT OUTCOMES

During the first term of Equitable Access at UC Davis, students who opted into the program were 17% less likely to drop a course than students who opted out, suggesting that having these materials helped them persist in the course. Participating students were asked in a survey about their primary reason for choosing to remain part of Equitable Access, and 60% answered that "Equitable Access was easier and more convenient than finding textbooks on my own." When participating students were asked if they felt free to choose classes without worrying about textbook prices because they knew that all their books were included for \$199, 69% of students agreed.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

In the year prior to the start of Equitable Access, the number of UC Davis students with access to all of their required textbooks was 6,819 students, and almost 78% of students reported they didn't have access to at least one required textbook in the previous 12 months. During the first term of Equitable Access, in fall 2020, the number of students with access to all of their required textbooks increased to 22,661 students, a dramatic 70% increase realized in a single term. The vast increase in student access leveraged the existing technology ecosystem at UC Davis and IMS integration standards to incorporate VitalSource tools that manage content fulfillment and student access directly in the LMS. Increasing usage of existing technology has provided a return on the original investment in the technology while, most importantly, streamlining the content procurement process for students and promoting equity and affordability.