

EQUITABLE access

Digital-First, Flat-Rate Textbook Subscription Program at UC Davis

Larry L. Sautter Award Proposal 2021

Submitted by:

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Summary:

Equitable Access is a digital-first, flat-rate textbook subscription program for all undergraduate students at UC Davis, with required textbooks and learning materials delivered through the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS).



Before Equitable Access **78%** of UC Davis students indicated they **did not have access** to all their required materials

The Problem

Textbooks have become increasingly expensive and prices vary widely by major. This has contributed to inequity on campus because not all students can afford their required course materials and acquiring them can be a complex process. During the winter quarter of 2020 before Equitable Access began, students were asked if within the previous 12 months, they did not rent, purchase or acquire at least one required textbook. 78% of UC Davis students indicated they did not have access to all their required materials. In addition, traditional textbooks are no longer the only learning materials faculty require in their courses. Traditional textbooks, Open Educational Resources (OER), homework platforms, library resources, and adaptive courseware are among the learning materials assigned by faculty on campus today. This wide variety of content and where to acquire it has caused confusion and delays in obtaining course materials. The goal of this program was to reduce inequity among students by eliminating course material access issues, while ensuring that costs are predictable and equal for all undergraduate students.

The Solution

Under Equitable Access, all undergraduate students are enrolled by default and pay the same flat rate of \$199 per quarter regardless of their major and courses. For students who remain in Equitable Access, all required content is delivered through the LMS by the first day of class. When students add or drop courses, their digital textbooks move with



them automatically so they can stay focused on their studies. If students prefer to obtain textbooks on their own, they are free to opt out of the program each term.

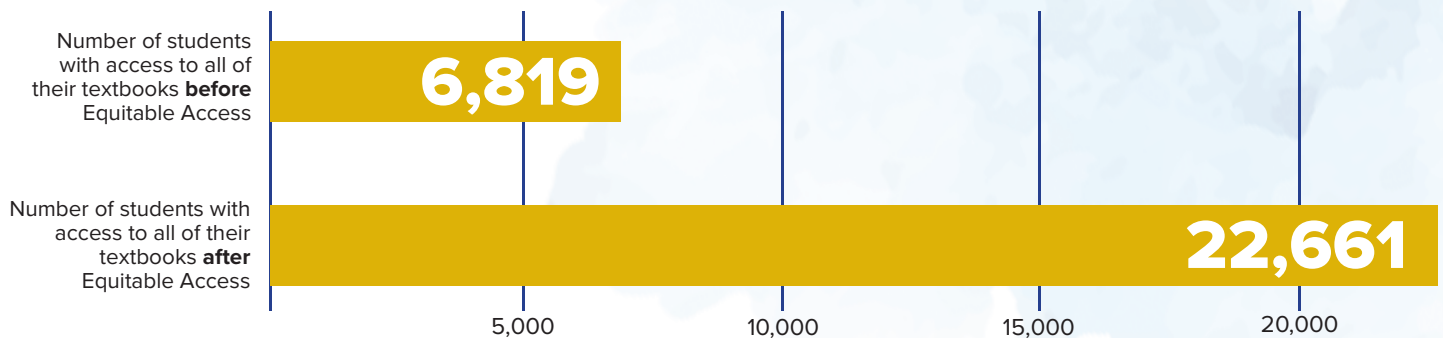
The Innovation

By pooling all undergraduate students together, innovative cost savings were achieved during price negotiations with publishers. The operational efficiency of the program creates opportunity for savings far beyond the traditional print model that most college campuses have employed for decades. Based on the performance of the program this academic year, there will be a reduction in the price of Equitable Access in fall 2021. At the end of each academic year, an actuarial science firm will analyze the performance of the fund and recommend the next year's rate. This annual actuarial analysis was inspired by the UC Student Health Insurance Program (UC SHIP).

Lower income students no longer have to worry about textbook costs varying based on their courses or major

The Impact

After launching Equitable Access, the number of students with access to their required textbooks has significantly increased. Students now have a single convenient location for day one access to all of their textbooks; they no longer have to worry about returning textbooks as they add or drop classes because their textbooks move with them automatically in the LMS. For the 15% of textbooks that are not available digitally, students can either pick up their textbooks at the campus store or can request to have them shipped at no additional cost. One low flat rate means costs are predictable for students. Additionally, those who receive financial aid for their textbook purchases can easily apply those funds as the program operates within the campus billing system. Perhaps most importantly, lower income students no longer have to worry about textbook costs varying based on their courses or major.



The Numbers

The success of Equitable Access was primarily measured by the increase in the number of undergraduate students with access to all their required textbooks before and after the program launched. In the winter quarter of 2020, UC Davis undergraduate survey data indicated that 78% of students claimed they did not have access to all their required textbooks. After Equitable Access, the number of students who claimed they did not have access to all their required textbooks plummeted to 27%. Stated differently, before the program began, 6,819 students claimed to have access to all of their required textbooks. This number grew to 22,661 after Equitable Access launched. Another important measure of the program's success was student satisfaction. For students who participated in Equitable Access, 79% said that they would recommend the program to other students, 71% said that the program was easier to use than shopping for textbooks on their own, and 60% said that convenience was the primary reason for remaining in the program.

The Collaboration

Launching Equitable Access required successful collaboration with many departments on campus. **Academic Technology Services**, which manages the campus Learning Management System is a critical partner in this program, as textbooks and other course content are accessed through the LMS. Course rosters from the **University Registrar** are regularly updated in the LMS to manage student access to textbooks as courses are added and dropped. Collaboration with **Student Accounting** integrates program billing into the tuition and fee payment process, which allows easy application of available financial aid dollars to pay for the program. Significant collaboration with the **University Library** is also a key feature of this program. Over 400 Library-owned digital resources that faculty have assigned for their courses are currently included within the LMS. Each quarter, the bookstore reviews licensed library content availability and links textbooks that match faculty-assigned content to the LMS. This collaboration provides significant savings to the institution (over \$400,000 in the first year); as program costs decline, this will contribute to reducing the price of Equitable Access in future terms.

The Timeline

Equitable Access was developed between 2018 and 2020. Initial meetings with education technology and campus partners were followed by publisher price negotiations, actuarial analysis to determine pricing, and the development of the technology to run the program. Our work also included receiving feedback from a steering committee of UC Davis undergraduate students; as the program was being developed, student feedback was regularly sought and incorporated. Meetings with numerous campus departments to facilitate the launch of the program occurred during this two-year period. After extensive student and campus outreach campaigns, the program launched to all UC Davis undergraduate students in fall quarter of 2020. We are currently nearing the end of our third academic term with the program in effect.



The Technology

Students are provided immediate digital access to their required course materials through the use of VitalSource's single Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) tool. The LTI tool securely connects students to digital content delivered in both VitalSource Bookshelf and provider-hosted courseware inside of the Canvas LMS. The technology combines adoption data from the student information system, the retail management systems and course rosters from Canvas to present a personalized experience for each student across all courses in the current term. This integration and partnership supports multiple content fulfillment sources, ranging from proprietary platforms to the campus library to present a unified, comprehensive use of resources resulting in a superior student experience.

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Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI)

