

VitalSource®



How to Build and Grow a Digital Course Materials Program That Works

Digital course materials give colleges and universities a unique opportunity to remove barriers to education, support learners, and improve student outcomes. Access to digital course materials can play a critical role in the long-term success and retention of students – improving engagement as much as 200%.

By significantly lowering the cost of course materials as compared to new textbooks, digital options level the playing field for first-generation college students and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Without access to digital materials, these students are the most likely to purchase

secondhand textbooks, which can be out-of-date, or to forgo purchasing necessary materials altogether. Plus, the analytics tools that come with digital course materials enable faculty members to identify which students need extra help early in a course, when intervention has the greatest impact.

Programs like Inclusive Access, which offer day-one access to lower-cost digital materials for all students in a course, are being increasingly adopted in higher education – showing that innovative uses of digital materials are delivering a powerful benefit not only to students, but also to faculty and the institutions themselves.



Curious to see how relieving your students of the confusion and cost of securing course materials will benefit your institution? Read on to explore how this innovative approach to course content improves affordability and student outcomes and learn the steps you can take to build and grow an effective program.

“It’s all about partnerships on campus. You have to pull in the faculty to accept and promote the concept, the students to understand and utilize the program, and IT to implement the technology; you need admin to support and champion the goals, publishers to manage the content, and your bookstore to implement the process. It’s a lot of work, but the end result is a program that substantially benefits everyone in the chain.”

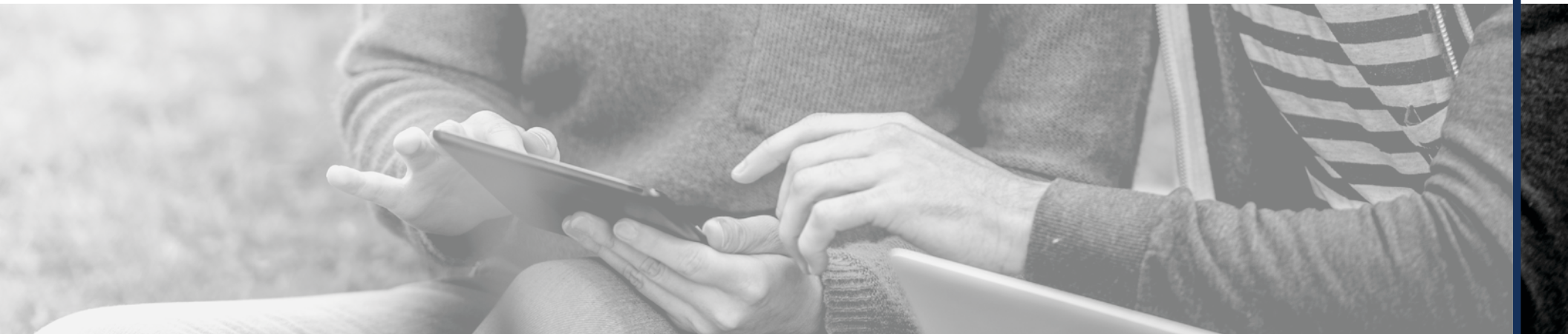
*— Shane Girton, Sr. Associate Director,
University of Utah Bookstore*



Why Digital Course Materials?

In an educational environment in which 85% of students say they have delayed or avoided purchasing required materials and some faculty have seen students wait up to five weeks to get their necessary materials, digital course materials deliver myriad advantages:

- Students don't bear the burden of figuring out what to buy or where to buy it – often shopping at an average of three different places – because they have immediate access to the course materials on or before the first day of class at the lowest possible price.
- The 87% of faculty that expect students to read required texts by the end of the first week of the course can skip what many dub “syllabus week” – the first week of class during which no one is prepared to start coursework – and dig right in to teaching from day one.
- Publishers can provide digital materials to students at up to 70% reduced cost because it's still more profitable than printing textbooks and competing with the secondhand market of rented or pirated content.



What does this relationship look like in practice? Fresno State implemented an Inclusive Access pilot program that saved students almost \$250,000 in one academic year. And Central Michigan University, just one year into its Inclusive Access program, estimates its students have saved nearly \$1 million in course materials between its 2018 summer and fall semesters. It's savings like this that compound to make education exponentially more affordable and convenient.

Read more about how [Fresno State implemented Inclusive Access](#).

Benefits to individual stakeholders aside, Inclusive Access also serves the big picture of more inclusive campuses: first-generation students and those of low socioeconomic status often don't have the experience and resources to know which materials to buy or how important they are to their success. Lower-cost digital course materials remove this barrier to success, making it easier for these students to afford to stay in school.

The path forward is clear: institutions that build and grow a digital course materials program will reach more students with tools to study more effectively throughout their college career.





“Here at BYU-Idaho, we have had great success with Inclusive Access. The instructors are happy because IA allows the students to have the materials needed for class on the first day. The students are happy because of the ease of using the digital materials and the convenience of just clicking a link inside their course. Also, the ease of no books to order, no lines and no shipping fees.”

— Linda Munns, Academic Materials Manager at BYU-Idaho

Building a Program

While higher education institutions have a reputation for being politically progressive, they often take a conservative approach to adopting new solutions or changing the traditional way of providing services. Transitioning from traditional textbooks to digital course materials is no exception, so it's important to plan as much of the process in advance as possible.

"Deciding to provide learning materials for students on day one is a very big decision, even when students are given the option to opt out," says Dr. Michael Hale, Vice President of Education at VitalSource. "But as higher education institutions start to track matriculation rates and monitor student success, it's natural to want to do whatever you can to make sure students who enroll are successful. For many institutions, that means implementing a plan to make course materials as affordable and convenient as possible."

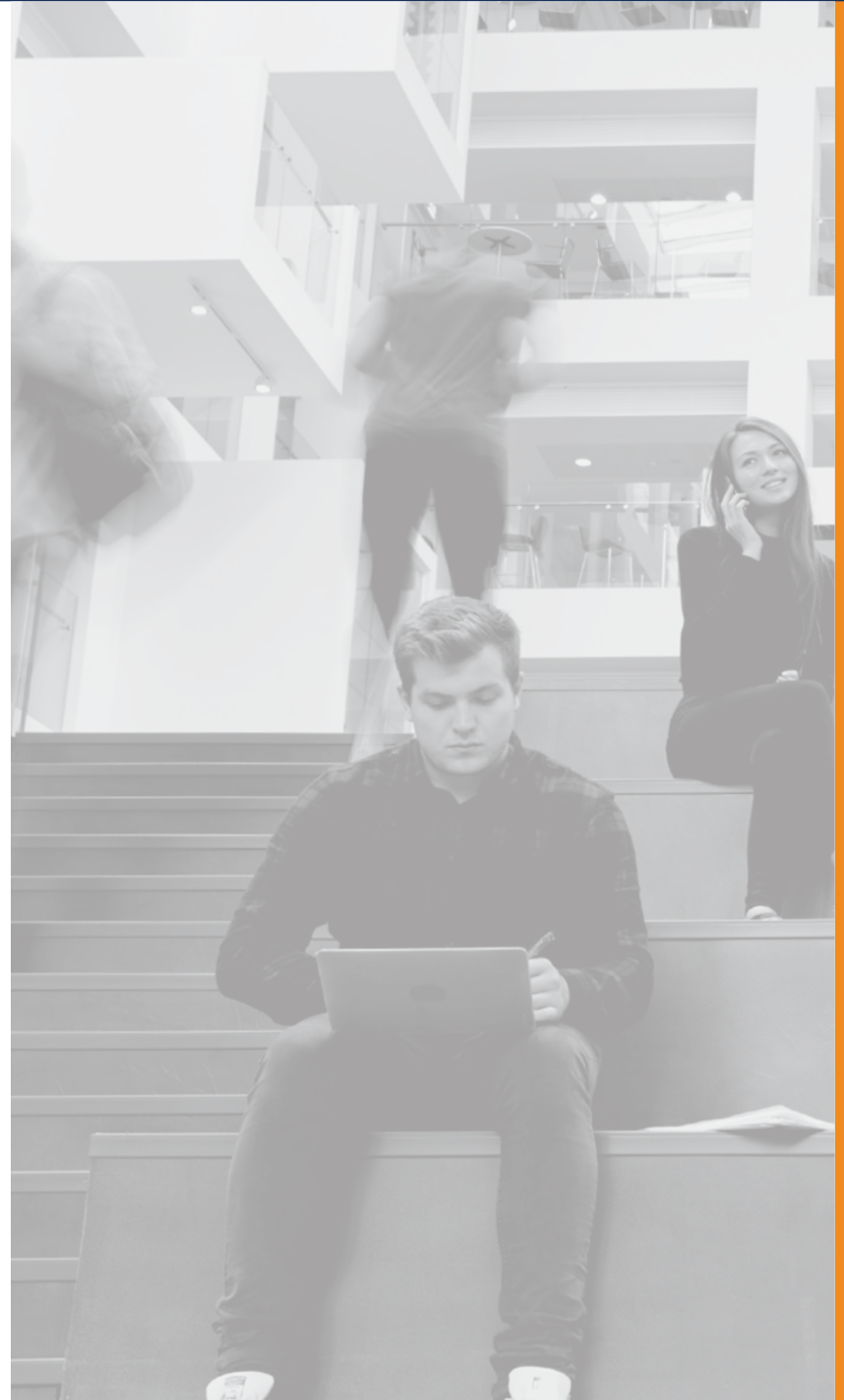


Here's a look at several steps you can take to make your institution's transition to digital course materials as seamless as possible:

- **Identify a program champion.** Identify a department or individual champion to take charge of the campus implementation so everyone involved will have one go-to contact. Ideally, you should choose someone associated with the college bookstore or Academic Affairs who can help educate students and faculty about the program.
- **Task your champion with building buy-in.** In an ideal situation, everyone at your institution is on board with a transition to digital course materials. In reality, your campus champion will need to lead the initiative and generate buy-in from less invested stakeholders. Task your champion with getting buy-in from essential departments like Academic Affairs, IT, the Bursar's office, and instructors. "Get all the parties involved in a conference call, like the bookstore, vendor, and faculty, so everyone can ask questions and know how the process is supposed to work," says Monte Burton, Textbook Buyer at University of Alaska – Anchorage.



- **Start with a pilot program.** Choose a few established courses to transition to digital course materials. This will give you the opportunity to address challenges and adjust your approach as you add courses. It will also allow you to feature the success of these programs to pique interest in other departments and courses. Consider targeting high enrollment courses with high-cost course materials for your pilot.
- **Directly address common fears.** As digital course materials prove successful and become more popular, your faculty and staff will have fewer hesitations. Until then, directly address any fears related to adding a bill to student accounts or adding more work for instructors by sharing examples of how other institutions are flourishing with digital course materials, such as [how Inclusive Access saved University of Missouri students \\$7 million over the course of three academic years.](#)





- **Don't feel limited by one source or another.** Institutions sometimes assume they have to choose between Inclusive Access and OER initiatives, but the reality is that your digital program can be as flexible as you want it to be. If it will best meet the needs of your instructors and student body, consider creating a mix of Inclusive Access materials and Open Educational Resource (OER) materials. The key is ensuring that digital materials offer more than just affordability – look for resources that offer interactive elements such as flashcards, note-taking, and highlighting, as well as student engagement analytics.
- **Tap into the resources of an established partner.** Working with an experienced digital course materials partner gives you access to benefits beyond top-of-the-line technology: you'll be able to tap into an expert consultant who can centralize your conversations with course materials partners and publishers, and who can also provide training materials and quick-start guides as a part of your partnership.

Growing a Program

One of the most important parts of building a digital materials program is the technology you use to manage it. Even if you plan to start with a small pilot program, make sure you choose a management and delivery platform that can scale to support your needs as you add courses and departments over time.

For example, it's possible to manually operate an Inclusive Access program for a handful of courses through simple

spreadsheet technology. But once you decide to scale to 5, 10, or 100 courses, it becomes prohibitive and you miss out on the powerful data analytics capabilities that come with a robust technology. You'll also want to consider the U.S. Department of Education compliance issues that exist for your institution and choose an Inclusive Access partner designed to be compliant with federal guidelines around Inclusive Access and accessibility for students with special needs.



Kurt Kaiser, textbook manager at the Colorado State University (CSU) Bookstore, began the university's Inclusive Access program with one online Occupational Therapy class in 2015. By spring of 2017, the university enrolled approximately 3,000 Inclusive Access students per semester, and Kaiser was downloading rosters for each section and manually inputting the data.

As the university approached 9,000 students enrolled per semester, Kaiser knew he'd need to bring software support on board. Working with a trusted platform partner to manage and deliver his program, Kaiser's workload dropped from hours to seconds: "It used to take me hours before classes started to email students access codes and other information," said Kaiser. "Now it can be done with one click and I can manage those 9,400 students (in Inclusive Access sections) in a quarter of the time it took me to do it manually for a few sections."

Read more about Inclusive Access at [Colorado State University](#).





“Inclusive Access is a must for an institutional bookstore. It keeps you in the conversation about affordability. We’ve rapidly grown the program and now offer materials from 5 publishers on 4 platforms, reaching 22 courses, 48 sections, and 30 faculty members and 6900 plus students. That’s the growth in 1 year (from 1 publisher, 1 platform, 1 course, 1 section, 1 professor, 80 enrollment). There is an appetite for this on your campus.”

— Christopher Walsh, Assistant Director,
Book Division, NC State University

Endless Insight From Course Materials Analytics

As institutions continue to monitor student success and matriculation rates, many see the need for programs to support students who aren't thriving or who are at risk of dropping out. This is another area in which digital course materials deliver a particular advantage over traditional textbooks, offering unprecedented and often untapped insight into student behavior and new opportunities for intervention.

In a recent study by Blackboard, VitalSource, and University of Maryland, Baltimore County, researchers found that early activity is a strong predictor of passing a class. When students have access to digital course materials, faculty members can access a simple analytics dashboard that shows which students are accessing the content and which are not.

Combined with other metrics such as grades and attendance, faculty members receive a more nuanced picture of which students will need extra support and attention to stay engaged and what they can do to ensure students succeed.

"Having data that tells you when you should reach out to a student to help them persist in a course is invaluable," says Dr. Michael Hale, Vice President of Education at VitalSource.

"In fact, one of the interesting things we've seen is that around week two of a course is when 'D' and 'F' students start to drop off from their peers in participation rates. When faculty members have access to that data in an easy-to-digest form, it makes it easier to intervene and have an impact."



The Future of Student Learning

Innovative solutions to rising textbook costs are taking hold across North America. Many colleges and universities are considering – and moving forward with – digital course materials to increase retention, support lower-income and first-generation students, and remove the barrier of buying costly textbooks that has kept many students from performing at their highest level.

With programs such as Inclusive Access, leaders and administrators are seeing how offering digital access to all students in course, from the first day, is a powerful solution to students' financial and educational challenges. Higher education institutions have seen results such as these:



- After using Inclusive Access for just one year, a community college in Tennessee saw a nearly 6% increase in overall average GPA.
- An Inclusive Access pilot program involving more than 4,000 students at Fresno State saved participants about \$250,000 over two semesters.
- The University of Missouri's "AutoAccess" Inclusive Access program – in which all students received access to digital content for their classes through their learning management

system – saved students about \$7 million institution-wide over three years.

The success of these programs, administrators say, comes from people who make them work. These include leaders from the bookstore, vendor, faculty, the Bursar's office, and IT, as well as a department or individual champion that takes the lead. Digital course materials are transforming student learning and higher education institutions in meaningful ways beyond mere cost savings. Stay tuned for more developments in the near future and for the long term.





[VitalSource Technologies, LLC](#), part of Ingram Content Group, is improving the learning experience by making it easier to create and deliver effective and affordable content. The preferred choice among educational institutions and companies for digital learning materials, VitalSource® helps over 1,000 educational content providers create and deliver seamless interactive learning experiences through its exclusive Bookshelf® platform to millions of learners at 7,000 institutions. Bookshelf users opened more than 20 million digital textbooks last year and read more than 3.3 billion pages. Follow VitalSource on Twitter at [@VitalSource](#) and LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/company/vitalsource-technologies/>.

[Learn More](#)

