

Inclusive Access Partnership Boosts Student Retention and Course Success in North Carolina

Rowan-Cabarrus Community College
North Carolina



At Cengage Learning, we believe that engagement is the foundation of learning. Engagement is at our core and our focus is on engaging with learners, both in the classroom and beyond, to ensure the most effective product design, learning solutions and personalized services — all to help people learn. We understand that an engaged learner is a successful one and we are leading the transition to digital with a unique faculty AND student perspective to transform learning through engagement. Our name itself reinforces this core commitment — “engage” is at the “center” of all we do.

Like their peers around the country, educators at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC) in Salisbury, North Carolina are always seeking ways to improve the teaching and learning experience. One strategy that has generated good results is to make it as easy and appealing as possible for students to access and use course materials.

Partnering with Cengage Learning, Rowan-Cabarrus initiated an inclusive access program in 2014. Through the program, the college purchases digital textbooks directly from Cengage Learning at a discounted price and provides a copy to each student as part of his or her course registration. The program has garnered praise from students for lowering the cost of course materials and for making those materials easy to access. What’s more, course retention and success rates have improved in the two years since implementation, which pleases instructors and administrators.

The Challenge — “Digital Natives” Want Quick Access To Affordable Course Materials

The move to the inclusive access partnership, which accommodated more than 4,000 students in 11 liberal arts courses in its initial implementation, was sparked in part by the desire to meet today’s “digital” students on their terms. “Many students have electronic devices, and they want to use the Internet,” says Betty Stack, Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Dean of Early College for Rowan-Cabarrus. “This model is the wave of the future.” There were other challenges, too. A significant percentage of students simply didn’t purchase course materials, and were consequently a step behind from day one. Others purchased them but were put off by having to use access codes to get into online assignments and readings. Both factors affected student success.

“We were concerned that print textbooks were too expensive,” recalls Jenny Billings Beaver, Chair of Curriculum English (ENG), Developmental Reading and English (DRE), and Study Skills (ACA) at Rowan-Cabarrus and an early spearheader of the initiative. “The students weren’t complaining — they just weren’t buying books. We had to come up with a way to get students to buy the materials needed for their courses, and save them money, too.”

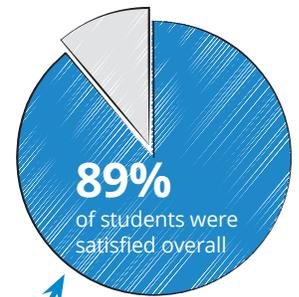
Partnership Supports Seamless Integration With College LMS

As part of the inclusive access partnership (called the eText initiative at RCCC), instructors and students access digital course materials through Rowan-Cabarrus’s Blackboard® learning management system (LMS). Departments that initially participated in the program worked hard to make sure users were on board. “We did a lot of groundwork to prepare students and faculty through emails, texts, FAQs, etc.,” says Jenny. “Because all course materials are in Blackboard, which students use daily, there have been no problems with accessing them.” Out of the 13,332 students whose courses were part of the initiative from Fall 2014 through Fall 2015, only 24 required help desk tickets, and all but one were resolved promptly.

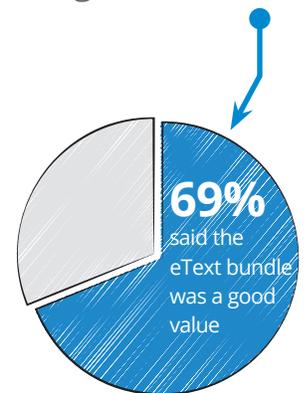
Lyndsay Marrone, Chair of Communications, Journalism, and Foreign Languages, has 26 sections using the model in public speaking and communications. “Providing students with an electronic textbook that is built into Blackboard, is there the first day of class, and saves them money is a no-brainer,” she says. To address concerns expressed in her departments — that some non-traditional students are not tech savvy — a printed loose-leaf version of the text is available. Students in English also have that option.

Quantitative Results — Retention Rates Grow

Students are asked to complete surveys about their Cengage Learning eText experience at the end of each semester. In Fall 2015, 550 of the 2,328 students taking a variety of liberal arts courses responded (24%). A large majority of the students (89%) indicated that they were satisfied overall with their eText (accessed via MindTap®), and 69% viewed the eText bundle as a good value. In addition, 83% said they experienced no difficulty with their eText when they used it for the first time. These and other similar results for 2014 and 2015 are summarized in Figure 1.



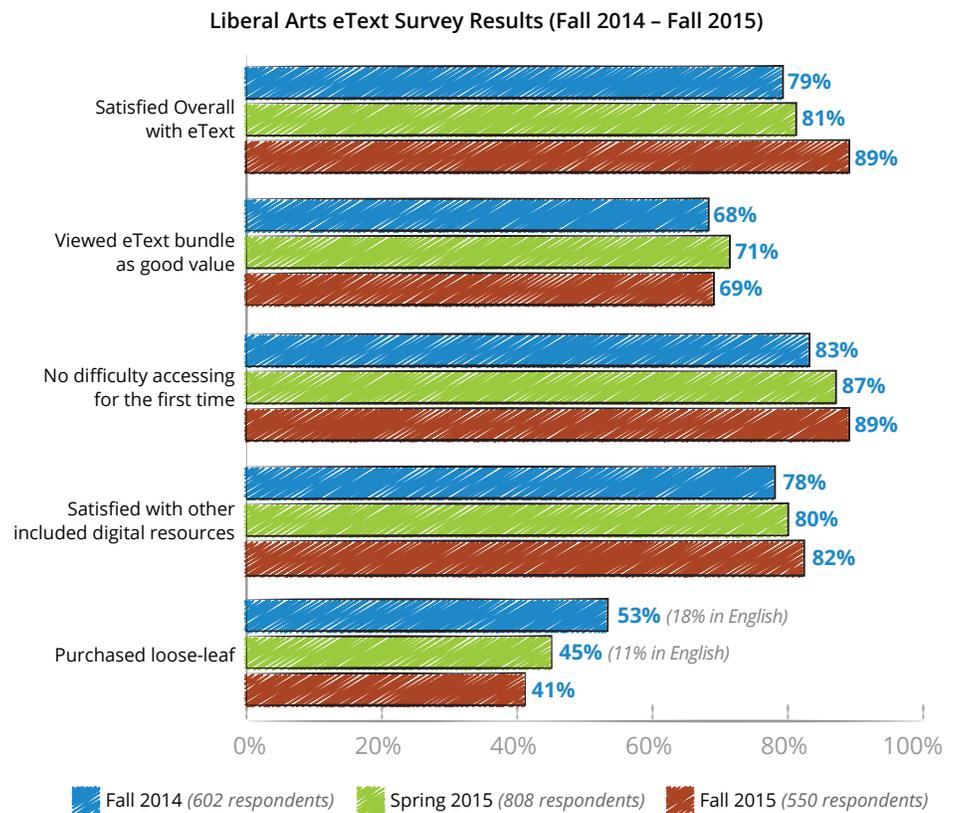
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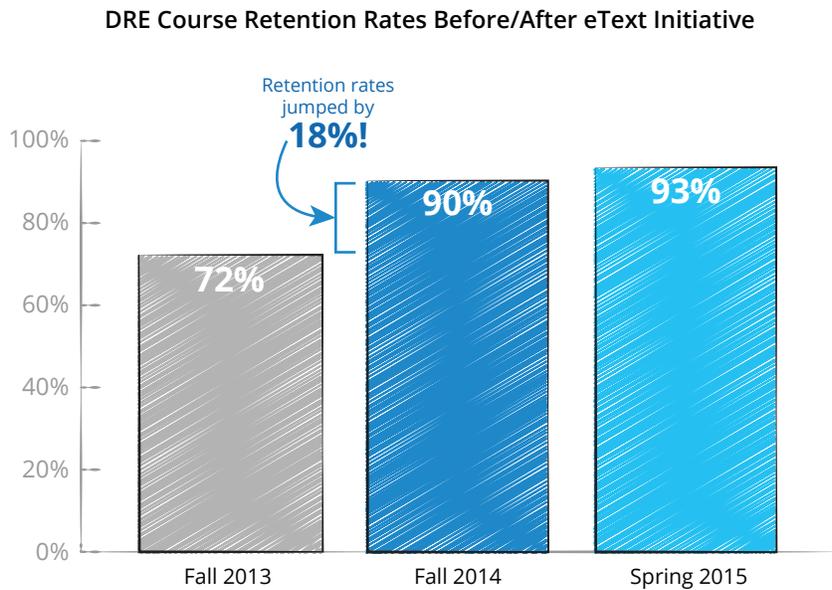
In the first semester of the eText initiative in Fall 2014, the retention rate among students in all Developmental Reading and English sections was 90%, an **18% jump** over Fall 2013.

Figure 1. Post-course survey responses of liberal arts students who used Cengage Learning digital course materials delivered through RCCC's eText initiative/inclusive access program in Fall 2014, Spring 2015, and Fall 2015



Increases in course retention and success rates accompanied the move to the inclusive model, validating the theory that students are more likely to use and benefit from their course materials when they have them readily available (Figure 2). In the first semester of the eText initiative in Fall 2014, the retention rate among students in all Developmental Reading and English sections was 90%, an 18% jump over Fall 2013. Overall results were even better in Spring 2015, when the retention rate for the course was 93%. Course success rates improved, too: 84% of the 88 students who completed the course in Spring 2015 achieved a final score of 80% or better. Spring 2015 was the first semester in which students used MindTap, along with Aplia™ and Write Experience, in the course; Fall 2014 students used a CourseMate eText with Aplia and Write Experience.

Figure 2. The average retention rate for all sections of Developmental Reading and English (DRE) jumped 18% between Fall 2013 (before implementation of the eText initiative) and Fall 2014 (after implementation). Fall 2014 students used a CourseMate eText, and Spring 2015 students used a MindTap eText



Students save anywhere from 20% to 50%, depending on the course and whether or not they purchase the loose-leaf version. They are excited when they go to the bookstore and learn they don't have to purchase anything else. . . . The majority of students are using only the eText, and not the printed version.

Users Give Program A “Thumbs Up”

The initiative has been well received on many fronts. “The faculty members are excited that all students have materials — and the right materials — on the first day of class,” says Lyndsay. In addition, because Rowan-Cabarrus is using the program for full-platform materials, instructors have access to the eText as well as to ancillary materials, assessment support, and analytics — and can tailor the content to their needs. Jenny says, “They can go through the materials and delete anything they don’t want to assign. They can track their students’ progress better, too. For the first time ever, English 111 has a pre- and post-assessment so we can see performance.” Betty adds, “Program chairs love it because materials are readily available in the LMS and there are so many extra resources.”

Students are pleased, too, including those on financial aid, who are covered by the program. “Students save anywhere from 20% to 50%, depending on the course and whether or not they purchase the loose-leaf version. They are excited when they go to the bookstore and learn they don’t have to purchase anything else,” says Jenny. “This has also empowered them. The majority of students are using only the eText, and not the printed version. Students like that they can access their course materials from anywhere on any device — phones, tablets, Kindles, computers, whatever.” Students also get additional learning resources (i.e., videos, flashcards, and quizzes) at no additional charge, which gives them greater value for their dollars and creates a richer learning experience.

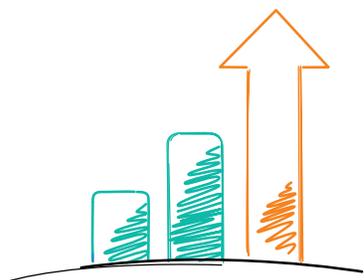
Jenny Beaver

Chair, Curriculum
English, Developmental
Reading and English, and
Study Skills
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Community College

The e-text was wonderful. It helped being able to access the text anywhere I was without having to carry a book with me. Much more convenient. Excellent content, very current.

Student

Rowan-Cabarrus
Community College



Course success rates improved: 84% of the 88 students who completed the course [Developmental Reading and English] in Spring 2015 achieved a final score of 80% or better (figure 3).

eText Initiative Supports Online Programs

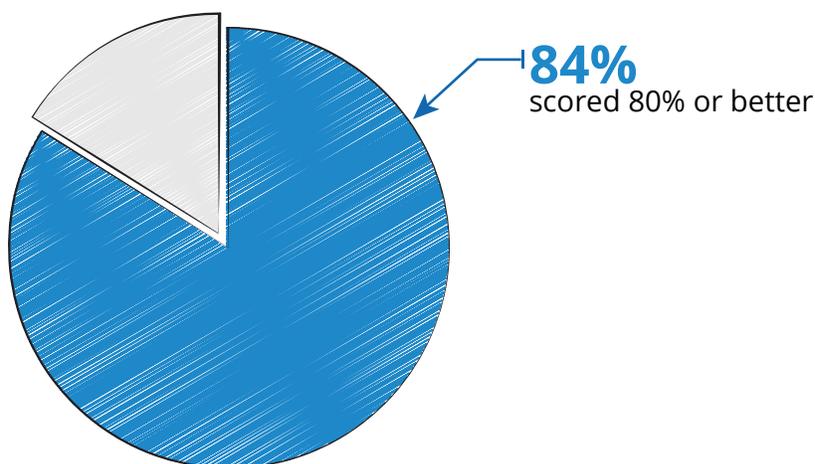
Rod Townley, RCCC Vice President of Academic Programs, explains additional good reasons for implementing the inclusive access program. “Rowan-Cabarrus has been aggressive about developing a comprehensive online educational program,” he says. “We offer many entire degrees online and all of our courses have at least some of the instructional content online. It seemed counterintuitive to have entire courses online and still require a hard copy text. In keeping with this strategic direction, we established some time ago that we wanted to pursue an eText solution for our students. This decision was, in part, based on the fact that our number one complaint coming from students was the cost of textbooks. Often their solution in the past was to not purchase a book and try to borrow or share with other students. This is obviously not a good strategy for success.”

The school’s bookstore benefits, too. Because digital course materials are included in the course registration fee, the store ultimately gets 100% sell through of the eTexts. “This is the bookstore’s first inclusive access partnership with a publisher. Selling fewer books has helped the staff logistically and with storage, although they still sell the loose-leaf version. They seem very pleased,” says Jenny.

Positive Experience Drives Program Expansion

Given the program’s initial success, other departments such as art and history have expressed interest. The college also plans to include a digital handbook in all English courses, applying the inclusive access partnership in 300 sections (up from 90). “The world is going digital, and this is the first model we have found that is device agnostic,” says Jenny. “It saves money and guarantees book purchases. It cuts down on back orders and lines at the bookstore. It also gives instructors free resources.”

Figure 3. Percentage of DRE students achieving a final score of 80% or better in Spring 2015



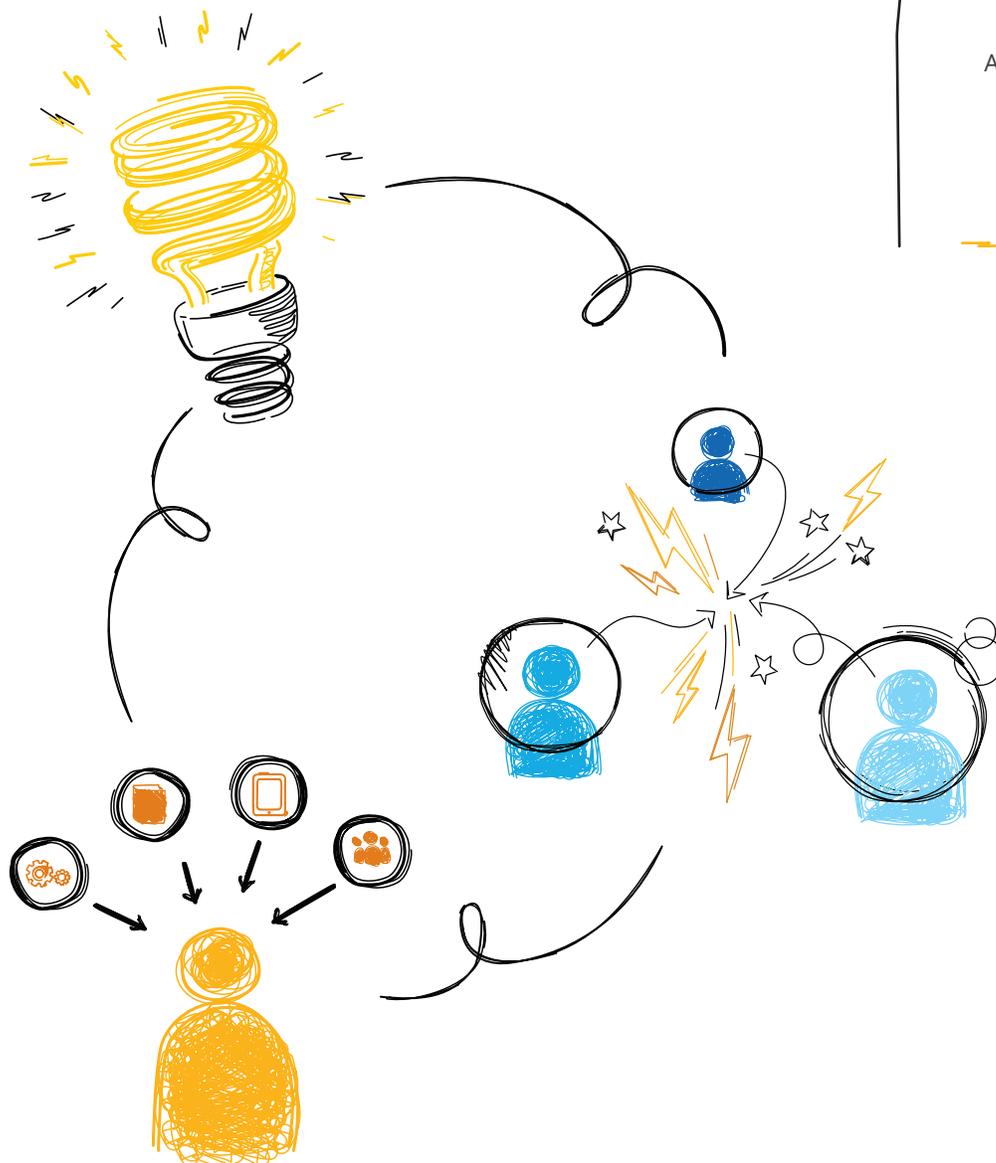
"In evaluating the eText options," says Rod, "we found that many of the Cengage Learning titles offered much more instructional content and support than would be possible in a hard copy text. In fact, they have created such a rich learning environment online that a student using a traditional hard copy text would be at a significant disadvantage. This is one of those rare initiatives that yields a 'win, win, win' outcome for all. It is a win for the environment (no trees needed for hard copy textbooks), for the school and instructors, and most importantly, for student success. We are thrilled with the collaboration with Cengage Learning and look forward to even more robust eText offerings in the future."



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Betty Stack

Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Dean of Early College
Rowan-Cabarrus Community College





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Source Code: M16019823

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