

SUCCESS STORY

Betty Stack, Jenny Billings Beaver, Lyndsay Marrone

(clockwise from top left)

Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, Salisbury, North Carolina

Community College Partners with Cengage Learning to Offer Easy Access to More Affordable Course Materials

As is the case at many institutions, educators at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College in Salisbury, North Carolina are always seeking ways to improve the teaching and learning experience. One strategy 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 a new 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. “This model is the wave of the future,” says Betty Stack, Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Dean of Early College for Rowan-Cabarrus. “Many students have electronic devices, and they want to use the Internet.”

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 also sparked by factors other than the desire to meet “digital” students on their terms. Some students simply didn’t purchase course materials. 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.”

INCLUSIVE ACCESS PARTNERSHIP SUPPORTS SEAMLESS INTEGRATION WITH COLLEGE LMS

As part of the inclusive access partnership, 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. Betty says the efforts paid off. Jenny adds, “We did a lot of groundwork to prepare students and faculty through emails, texts, FAQs, etc. Because all course materials are in Blackboard, which students use daily, there have been no problems with accessing them.” Out of the 4,212 initial student users, only 21 required help desk tickets, and all were resolved promptly.



CHALLENGES

- Today’s tech-savvy students demand digital connectivity for instant access to information. If a transaction or process — such as finding, buying, or accessing course materials — is deemed too time-consuming, some students won’t bother.
- The cost of textbooks discourages some students from purchasing the required materials, which can negatively affect their performance and persistence in the course.
- To help promote student preparedness, educators want to encourage students to buy and use course materials by making it as easy and affordable as possible.

SOLUTIONS

- Inclusive Access Partnership with Cengage Learning

RESULTS

- Inclusive access partnership delivers course materials to students as part of their registration, giving instructors peace of mind in knowing that students have the right materials on the first day of class.
- Students save 25% to 50% on course materials as compared to the cost of traditional printed textbooks. They have embraced the model, as evidenced by the fact that only 17% to 20% purchased print versions of the text in use.
- Bookstore achieves 100% sell through of eBooks plus incremental sales on loose-leaf versions of the text in use, while saving space otherwise needed for printed textbooks.

“Program chairs love [the partnership] because materials are readily available in the LMS and there are so many extra resources.”

Betty Stack

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

“[Having access to the e-book] was good and it really helped me understand [the course material] better.”

Student

Rowan-Cabarrus Community College

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 were not tech savvy — a printed loose-leaf version of the text was available. Students in English also had that option.

USERS AND ADMINISTRATORS GIVE A “THUMBS UP”

The initiative has benefited the college’s faculty, students, and bookstore. “The faculty members are excited that all students have the 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 eBook 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. 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: They don’t have to be afraid of technology. Only 17% to 20% of students are buying the printed version of the text.” Betty adds, “Students like that they can access their course materials from anywhere on any device — phones, tablets, Kindles, computers, whatever.”

Rod Townley, Vice President of Academic Programs, says, “Rowan-Cabarrus has been very aggressive about developing a comprehensive online educational program. We currently 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 eBook 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.”

Because digital course materials are included in the course registration fee, the bookstore ultimately gets 100% sell through of the eBooks. “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.”

Lyndsay says, “It’s a way to ensure that students are prepared and ready to go on the first day of the class. It eliminates the early semester stress that we, as faculty, sometimes feel when trying to get books and everything in order. It also eliminates the need to purchase an outside access code; it’s very streamlined in Blackboard.”

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Jenny Billings Beaver

Chair, Curriculum English,
Developmental Reading
and English, and Study Skills
Rowan-Cabarrus Community College

“A very good experience. It was my first time ever taking a class like this. I can say my first class with the e-Text initiative was swell.”

Student

Rowan-Cabarrus Community College

“Finally, in evaluating the eBook 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. First, 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 eBook offerings in the future.”



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