



Inclusive Access educator study

A look at student access and cost savings
at Auburn University

Key findings:

- Pearson Inclusive Access at Auburn University (known as the All Access program) has cumulatively saved students close to a million dollars since Fall 2014.
- Based on survey data, a projected 2,185 students who opted in to the Inclusive Access program during Spring 2017 would otherwise not have purchased course materials. It has enabled these students (over one-third of participating students) who would not have otherwise purchased the text to gain access to required texts from the start of the semester.



School name: Auburn University, Auburn, AL



Program name: All Access



Timeframe: Fall 2014–Fall 2017



Educator: Russell Weldon, Assistant Director, Auburn University Bookstore and Daren Ray, Professor of History



Results reported by: Dina Yankelewitz, Pearson Program Outcomes Analytics Manager

Setting

Auburn University is a public research university in Auburn, Alabama. It is a land, sea, and space grant institution and one of the largest universities in the region. Offering a choice of over 140 majors in 15 colleges and schools, it enrolls over 28,000 students, with more than 22,000 undergraduates. Seventy-seven (77%) percent of students are White, nearly 7% are Black, 3% are Hispanic, and 2% are Asian. The university boasts a freshman retention rate of over 90%, and a five-year graduation rate of nearly 73%. Auburn prides itself on its international footprint, with over 800 international students benefiting from its Accelerator Program, 500 Auburn students studying abroad, and a global faculty.

Challenges and Goals

In the Inclusive Access model, all students enrolled in a course receive first-day access to digital course materials, and the cost of the materials is included in the course fee. Auburn University became a pioneer of Inclusive Access for several reasons. With its history of customer service and helping faculty solve problems to improve the educational experience, the bookstore sought to provide a digital solution that would empower faculty members in a new age. The bookstore management at Auburn embraces change and transparency as critical to moving the university bookstore industry forward. In its quest to serve as a value provider and seek innovation, Assistant Director Russell Weldon explained that, “Inclusive Access became the next logical step.” Finally, the model helped further the university’s strategic mission of engaging students and increasing success and retention rates.

Implementation

Auburn University’s bookstore began implementing its All Access program in Fall 2014. Its primary focus was on ensuring a smooth but easily scalable implementation. The first course adoptions had no need for a student opt out, since the digital materials

were only available via the All Access program. Auburn also worked to develop their own in-house management system, rather than relying on a third-party partner, to ensure that they can more easily control all aspects of the implementation. Auburn’s system menu allows for use of an access code, an eText, or a Canvas (Learning Management System) integration of a digital product. The system emails students upon course registration to inform them that they have enrolled in an All Access class and are provided an individual access code. They are also redirected to the bookstore’s website to help them understand what this term means and how they will receive their course materials.

In March, the bookstore hosted an event with multiple publishers and digital providers for forty instructors. All of the participating instructors chose to implement All Access in the Fall semester.

“There is an explosive amount of interest and growth. We can tell that there is something happening.”

—Russell Weldon, Assistant Director,
Auburn University Bookstore

As a result of the careful planning and infrastructure created to manage the program, students experienced a smooth transition to All Access, as reported by history professor Dr. Daren Ray, who implemented it in Spring 2017. Students received instructions from the bookstore that explained how they would be charged for the course materials and how they could opt out of the program. According to Dr. Ray, for nearly all students, this explained the process sufficiently. The only exceptions were a few international students who experienced difficulty understanding the instructions and required assistance from the instructor to explain the opt-out

process. Professor Ray uses Revel™ in his course, and transitioning to All Access was a natural next step that simplified the registration and onboarding process for his students. In addition, the cost savings of twenty dollars per unit on the program reduced student frustration regarding the cost of the multiple course materials in his course.

Cost Savings

The All Access initiative at Auburn University Bookstore has translated to significant cost savings for students:

- Students have saved an average of fifty dollars for each unit in the program compared to the new price of the unit.
- On average, students saved just over 50% off of the lowest print option (new or used).
- In the Spring 2017 semester alone, 6,500 students enrolled in 20 courses saved a total of \$178,000. In Fall 2017, the program grew to 16,000 students enrolled in an All Access course with cost savings of \$441,850.
- Over the lifetime of the All Access program (three years), students have realized a cumulative savings of almost one million dollars (\$991,227).
- In courses that required students to purchase course materials, student opt-out rates over the past three years has been less than 1.2%, significantly lower than the national average of close to 6%¹.
- Despite the significant student cost savings, the bookstore has consistently reported a revenue from All Access sales, enabling it to continue to provide faculty with solutions that facilitate their instruction.

The Student Experience

The Auburn University bookstore surveyed students enrolled in courses that participated in the All Access program at the end of Spring 2017. Out of 6,707 students, 112 students (1.7% of students surveyed) responded to the survey, of which 92 (82%) opted in to All Access for at least one course during the Spring semester.

Affordability

92% of student respondents who opted into All Access believed that the cost of digital materials in the program were a similar or better value compared to print textbooks they had purchased in the past. Student perception here is in line with the actual student cost savings reported above.

Access

Over one-third of students surveyed reported that they were unlikely to purchase course materials at all if they were not offered digitally via the All Access program. This translates to 2,185 students (of the 6,284 students enrolled in the program during the Spring semester) who opted in and were able to access the course materials due to All Access. These 2,185 students would likely not have had any access to course materials during the semester without the All Access program.

78% of students who opted in to All Access agreed or strongly agreed that the digital course materials were easy to access.

The Instructor Experience

Dr. Ray explained how Inclusive Access has streamlined student access to course materials. In the past, many students would sign up for the two-week trial period to access Revel. When the trial ended, some students would often decide to leave the class. Conversely, students who remained in the course but failed to purchase the access code before the trial period expired would often try to create a new, separate login when they did make the purchase, requiring the instructor to manage two accounts for one student. In the All Access program, all students receive the same access code for the course. That way, students had instant and consistent access to the course materials throughout the semester. As Ray concluded, “It’s a straightforward and easy way to implement a digital textbook.”

Conclusion

Auburn University’s All Access program is accelerating due to its carefully planned implementation and the clear and transparent communication between the bookstore and participating instructors and students. It has realized significant cost savings for students when compared to the lowest print alternative. The digital delivery of course materials on the first day of class streamlines student onboarding and minimizes faculty involvement in registration. Additionally, the All Access program enables students, who otherwise would not have purchased the course text, to gain instant access to course materials that can have an impact on their retention, course grades, and overall success in college.

1 As reported by RedShelf, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/01/31/textbook-publishers-contemplate-inclusive-accessbusiness-model-future>

2 Some of the survey questions were adapted with permission from the Indiana University eText survey protocol.