

Pearson eBooks solution

Durham University, UK

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CASE SUMMARY

By incorporating eBooks on the undergraduate Engineering course, Durham University is able to provide a course specific resource that is **accessible and affordable** for students. In doing so more students are **engaging on a heightened level** with their independent reading.

Course

BSc Engineering and Computing Sciences

eBook Platform

Vital Source

Type of Data Collected

Anecdotal

Data Collection Period

2011 - 2013

Course Context

Durham University runs a general Engineering programme which covers the whole spectrum of Engineering, and students do not come into the university to do specialist engineering degrees as they would at other universities. For the first two years students study the same programmes, and then specialise within a focused area of engineering in their third year. Both Engineering and Computer Science run a 3 year Bachelors course and a 4 year Masters course for students to select from. The Engineering programme is also assessed by a large examination component with a smaller percentage dedicated to coursework and formative assignments.

eBook Solution

We have worked with Pearson to create a product specifically targeted at our first year students. The product is called the eBook but it is actually five separate parts that represent the five taught engineering modules within the school. For each of the modules there is a text which is either a whole textbook or a chapter covering content for it as an eBook. All the sections are accessed through Vital Source, where the eBook can be viewed as separate texts. This product is sold to our students for £150, and they receive a code which provides them with access to the texts once purchased.

Implementation

To manage student expectations, students are informed about the eBook being available during induction, and

prior to this we mention the eBook within letters of introduction before students arrive. Additionally, within the induction booklet, information about the eBook is also included and during induction the account manager at Pearson comes along to give a 10 minute introduction to the eBook, with information about where it can be found and how it can be downloaded onto a tablet, a phone, and a laptop. As the eBook has been embraced by the lecturers on the course, a number of our staff embed the eBook into teaching, and refer to the texts for their students to consult before or after lectures.

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Motivations

VALUE: CORE TEXTS ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE TO STUDENTS

What we realised before incorporating the eBook on the course, was that students needed to buy 8-10 different books to cover their course content. Therefore, we were aware that students were either spending a lot of money on books or they were simply not buying them because they could not afford to. We are now able to offer students their core texts for £150, something that would probably cost them £500-£600 if they were to buy the same material they needed individually.

CUSTOMISATION: KEY CHAPTERS AND RELEVANT TEXTS ARE PULLED TOGETHER TO PRODUCE A BESPOKE EBOOK

We knew that Pearson had worked with the Physics department at Durham University to develop a print book specific to their needs, so we were aware of the possibility of customisation with Pearson, and this was a certainly an advantage for us.

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Desired Learning Outcome

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO ENGAGE MORE INDEPENDENTLY

Interestingly there has not always been a great tradition of engineering students buying their books, and this is because they tend to be given a lot of hand out material during lectures. It has almost become the accepted practice that lecturers provide the materials and students develop the expectation that they do not need to read books or go to the library.

By having an affordable eBook on the course, we were trying to break this cycle a little to make sure that the students understand that reading for themselves is a good thing. We also had the aim of cutting down on the amount of material which was being produced and the cost of photocopying. Now I give out very few hand outs and during lectures I will highlight the parts of the eBook that are relevant to what I am discussing. It gets the students into the habit of looking up things for themselves rather than having it available for them on a sheet of paper.

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Challenges and Responses

EBOOK SELECTION PROCESS AND OBTAINING INITIAL AGREEMENT FROM TEACHING STAFF

In terms of getting the core texts that we needed there were clearly some compromises along the way. What we also had to bear in mind was that because of the breadth of engineering on this course it would be difficult to find a single text that covers the whole syllabus. At first we needed to get the initial agreement from all members of staff

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which was not the most straightforward of tasks. We had to get all the Level 1 lecturers together and agree on core texts needed for various areas on the course. We managed to find relevant texts from Pearson's list; however they were not necessarily the texts we were using at the time. In some cases we were planning on changing textbooks so this was a good opportunity to switch to Pearson's eBooks. We had a lot of help from

the account manager at Pearson to identify appropriate texts.

FIRST EBOOK VERSION WAS NOT WELL RECEIVED BY STUDENTS

The final decision to implement the first version of the eBook was made later than we would have liked. We made the final agreement for it in July which meant that getting the eBook ready by October was certainly a challenge on Pearson's side, but despite the limited time they delivered it. The first version of the eBook which we launched in October 2011 had all the texts and chapter extracts combined into one text and that made navigation and searching very difficult. As a result there was negativity from students in that initial version.

We carried out a survey to further ascertain what the students thought of the eBook and we were able to identify some clear areas for improvement. We also shared the responses from this survey with Pearson who responded by creating a revised eBook which separated the one text into digestible sections. This made the eBook much more usable and easier to navigate.

Results

POSSIBILITY OF PROVIDING THE EBOOK FOR SECOND YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

What was quite interesting was that some of the students, who had the eBook in the first year, wondered why they did not have them for their second year. This proved that once the students had become familiar with

the revised version, they were almost expecting it in their second year. We will therefore consider developing eBooks for the students in their second year of the course. In terms of the students who engage with the eBooks, we have 160 students typically coming into the general engineering course, and we typically sell 60-100 of the eBooks to them, therefore about half of the students use it.

CONVENIENT ACCESS TO CORE MATERIALS

The eBook also takes significant pressure off the library, as students can access their core texts whenever they want to and this is certainly a benefit. For instance, with some of the core texts there would be only 10 available copies in the library, with some of them on reserve lending systems. So with the eBook the core material is available cheaply, minimizing the high demand for books with limited availability at the library.

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Student Perspectives

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James McWhinney

3rd Year Electronic Engineering Student

HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE EBOOK?

The eBook was announced at the front of a lecture and I mainly used it on my laptop at home because at the time there was only an app for iOS devices.

HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HEARD THAT THE EBOOK WOULD BE PART OF YOUR COURSE?

I was really interested in the eBook because I thought it seemed like a very good idea that you wouldn't have a massive pile of big textbooks. It was also reassuring that you would have access to everything that you should need for the course, and it would be easy to access. So I thought it was a brilliant idea when I heard about it.

WHEN DID YOU BUY THE EBOOK, AND HOW OFTEN DID YOU USE IT TO STUDY?

Maybe a week after I heard about it, I went ahead and bought it.

I used the eBook about once every two weeks, and I used it most in the run up to exams, when I was doing most preparation and the library was busy so it was difficult to get hold of the print books. It was good to have my own eBook at home which I knew I could get access to.

Paul Chambers

3rd Year Civil Engineering Student

WHEN DID YOU BUY THE EBOOK?

The majority of the people who heard about the eBook got it in the first couple weeks of term, and the way it was presented at that point made sense to go in early and get it to make sure it worked.

HOW EASY WAS IT FOR YOU TO HAVE INITIAL ACCESS TO THE EBOOK?

In terms of downloading the eBook and getting it up and running, it was fairly easy. We were told from the very first steps that it was going to be comprehensive, and that we wouldn't need anything else.

HOW DID YOU USE THE EBOOK?

Each week we were set up with problem sheets and a series of questions on an online information system, so as we were going through them we would dip into the eBook and have it open as a tab on the computer. In that way it was useful for consolidation and revision.

HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT EBOOKS BEING INTRODUCED INTO YOUR COURSE?

It made a lot of sense that it was going to be a more financially viable set up than buying the hard copy book. It was just a more convenient way of getting the books for the course. I think the main advantage of it was cost, if you looked at buying each individual book compared to buying the eBook it was a massive difference.