Equitable Access

Why institutions are embracing EA to empower learning for all

There is an initiative across the country to close the gap between socioeconomic status and students’ ability to purchase course materials. As part of this initiative, there is the industry coined term, ‘equitable access’ program. Equitable access (EA) programs allow students to be prepared with their course materials on the first day of class for one low fee. This cost is embedded into tuition or fees regardless of the student’s major or the format of materials.* It is designed to provide every student with the same opportunities. While students can choose not to participate, a couple considerations are worth noting – the student would be opting out of all courses (not per course) causing them to purchase their course materials individually. Digital course materials are at the heart of equitable access, though channel partners and campus bookstores may offer the print option. Implementation of equitable access is determined by administration, faculty senate, and the campus store. Once EA is implemented, the campus store drives this program. Students receive all their materials through the campus store which means the benefit to the institution is a predictable revenue stream.

Improved Learner Outcomes

On top of the reduced costs and increased access, the equitable access model has also been shown to positively impact course completion rates (achieved a letter grade between A-D). In 2022, Michael R. Moore from the University of New Hampshire published his findings regarding students from community colleges’ participation in equitable access and resulting success.
While the overall national completion rate of community college students is 42.2%, when students participate in equitable access programs, the overall completion rate jumps to 72.27%, an increase of 30 points. Equitable access also has a positive impact on underrepresented minorities, with an average increase in completion rate of 15.83%. Black students appear to benefit the most with an increase of 21.06%.

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EA in Practice

There have been many institutions across the country that have successfully implemented this model including UC Davis, Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), and Colorado University-Boulder (CU). UC Davis offers Equitable Access to all their undergraduate students, regardless of their field of study. They also award needs-based, full textbook grants to the lowest-income undergraduate students as chosen by Financial Aid. Since the 2021-22 school year, UC Davis has continued to award more grants now totaling $1,267,500. “With the help of the Equitable Access grant, I no longer had to worry about whether or not I had enough to cover the cost of my textbooks for the course, and Equitable Access made accessing my materials extremely easy and fast.” – Equitable Access grant recipient. In addition, with Equitable Access, the quarterly rate has lowered from $199 to $169. They ensure the same cost for all students by taking the surplus funds from those students that have course materials lower than $169 to supply those with materials over $169.

For the 2023-24 school year, the cost of CU Boulder’s Book Access program is $279 per term, offering students peace of mind knowing they will start their terms with their required materials at a predictable cost. Not only does the Book Access program benefit students through immediate access, low cost, and retention, but it also benefits the faculty. The overall benefit to faculty and students in this program is choosing content that provides the highest educational value to the course being offered without having to worry about the overall cost to students.

Students today enter their collegiate classrooms having come from all walks of life. Yet they all deserve the same opportunity. Programs like Equitable Access help alleviate the unpredictable costs of course materials so financial barriers do not keep students from pursuing their collegiate goals.

Source: https://www.slingshotedu.com/blog/what-is-equitable-access