

Case Study

Manchester University

The University of Manchester serves one of the largest student populations in the UK, with a wide and diverse range of courses and modes of delivery, meaning the library faced a major challenge meeting the core text needs of all students.

The library's research with students, conducted via surveys and consultations, told them that students wanted to access all core texts and course readings electronically and in one place. Students complained that there were not enough textbooks in the library, and regarded textbooks as a 'hidden cost' they are increasingly unwilling to meet themselves.

The research also showed clearly the core needs of each group of stakeholders:

Students:

'I want to be provided with all the essential items on my reading list so that I do not have to pay for them myself.'

'I want the reading lists provided by my tutors to use clear and consistent terminology so that I know exactly what I am required to read for my course (and where and how I can get access to these items).'

Academics:

'I want all my students to have access to an electronic version of their core (essential) texts so that they can do the reading required of them.'

'I want the library to negotiate and manage book deals with publishers so that I can focus on teaching my students and doing my research.'

The institution:

'We want to provide our students with free access to their core texts in order to improve the student experience at the University of Manchester.'

'We want the library to oversee and negotiate our e-book deals so that we get better deals and do not duplicate content.'



Based on this feedback, in 2014 the library began a pilot etextbook program, *Books Right Here Right Now*.

So far, the program has:

- Provided individual textbooks to over 25,000 students
- Developed new models of textbook acquisition and supply
- Analysed reading list requirements and future needs through a comprehensive consultation of academic staff, and developed a reading list strategy for the university
- Disseminated their findings through a range of articles and conference presentations and advised a range of higher education libraries and national bodies

'All our research shows it is effective for both students, academic faculty and University, plus for us in the library a key part of our remit is to provide our students with what they want, so absolutely I see this activity as a key library activity.'

– Dominic Broadhurst,
University of Manchester Library

Case Study

University of Western Sydney

Western Sydney University (WSU) and The College provided all students enrolled in first-year and diploma subjects with free etextbooks for 2017, making this one of the largest such initiatives in the world. This initiative is in direct response to student feedback indicating that buying textbooks, which cost \$100 on average, was one of their biggest financial hurdles when starting university. The initiative helps with this, providing students with up to \$800 worth of value, and ensuring that they have everything they need to make the most of their studies.

The textbooks are delivered electronically, via the university's learning management system (vUWS), providing access on campus or at home. They can be read and used on any device, are fully searchable, and students can highlight text and make notes on-screen.

The etextbooks were sourced from 100 participating publishers via digital partner Proquest. Some 358 titles are provided electronically, and 30 titles for which electronic versions are not available are provided in print. For students with a disability, the books can be accessed via screen readers and other support tools.

Western Sydney University academic and author James Arvanitakis, whose textbook is included in the program, writes:

'Textbooks are a powerful pedagogical tool that can improve engagement. In my own teaching experience, a well-written and relevant textbook allows students to better understand the broader subject narrative. That is, it is not about learning individual topics such as gender, class, race and technology. Rather, it allows the student to see the story arc of the complex and intersectional factors that shape our societies.'

'This understanding of the broader subject area means students can contextualise their own experiences and learn to apply the knowledge critically.'

'It is a tool I have used successfully. For example, when introducing a textbook – which students paid for at the time—I saw retention rates improve. We went from a drop-out rate of 22% to less than 2%, and in the feedback forms students repeatedly quoted the textbook that I introduced (and I should note, authored).'

'While there is little evidence of a direct link between access to a textbook and improving retention rates, higher education consultants Academica did report that free textbooks improved retention by up to 10%.'



'We went from a drop-out rate of 22% to less than 2%'

– James Arvanitakis, academic and author, WSU

Case Study

Indiana University

Indiana University's eText initiative, which began as a pilot in 2009, has a simple goal: ensure all students have access to textbooks. To achieve this, the university has developed a model that it says balances benefits and compromises for all partners involved—faculty members, publishers, students and the university.

Bradley C. Wheeler, Vice President for Information Technology at Indiana University, said in an interview:

'We don't ask students to bring their own desk and chair to the classroom. Why do we ask them to waste their own time running around, playing games trying to find the book they need, when we can simplify the process electronically and have the university buy it wholesale?'

Essentially, the eTexts initiative treats textbook acquisition as software licensing. In course sections where faculty members opt in to the program, the university is able to negotiate discounted prices. The course materials are then delivered through an ereading platform controlled by the university, giving it control over the data collected about how students interact

with their textbooks. Students are notified if a course section in which they wish to enrol uses an eText, and are told up front how much they will be charged.

The program has over the last 12 months seen a surge in popularity. Last academic year, more than 40,000 students—about one-third of the university's total enrolment—got at least one textbook through the program. Last autumn alone, more than 27,000 students did the same, suggesting another record-setting year ahead.

Wheeler theorises that a combination of factors is behind the growth, including the maturation of the smartphone and tablet markets, as well as a growing sense that faculty members and students are more comfortable with digital course materials today than they were a few years ago.

A 2015 case study at Indiana University that looked at student participation levels and motivation suggested students prefer eTexts to print textbooks—so long as their instructors actively used the course materials in the class. In those classes, a slight majority of students said they read and learned more.

