

An Informational Report on “Inclusive Access” Textbook Models

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I. Introduction

Publishers have developed what are now commonly known as “inclusive access” models, which can be coordinated directly with institutions or indirectly via college bookstores. Other terms used to describe these models reflect the economics associated with each:

- automatic textbook billing
- textbook auto-enrollment
- immediate access

The role of economics should not be understated. While the “inclusive access” models can be successful for lowering the price of textbooks because all enrolled students will theoretically pay for first-day-of-class access (thus lowering the cost for each participant), the opt-in and purchase requirements may be strict and impactful to students who might choose to access or acquire texts in other ways. These models can be loosely framed as textbook affordability initiatives. However, the onus placed on all enrolled students to automatically pay for the course materials is a key consideration.

II. Issues to Review

- **Format Considerations:** Publishers favor digital formats and access codes, but there is still a need for print copies. This is related to student preference and accessibility requirements.
- **Opt-in vs. Opt-out:** “Inclusive access” models are often established with an “opt-out” for students, which means students must follow a pre-defined process to avoid automatic billing charges. This can be an obstacle for many students.
- **Online Instruction and Remote Access:** The COVID-19 pandemic may alter the thinking on student access to textbooks and instructional materials. “Inclusive access” models may be viable for online classes and classes that are moved to the remote access environment due to limits on face-to-face instruction. At the same time, alternative modes of access to learning materials such as copies of texts placed at library course reserves desks may become less viable with limited access to libraries and digital copies rarely available without fees.

- **Scaling:** “Inclusive access” models are often implemented as a campus-wide initiative. However, there are arguments that can be made for implementation at the department level instead. It is worth noting that publishers appear to prefer campus-wide implementations, and this should not be overlooked.
- **Billing:** Policies and processes would need to be established with local bursars. Depending on the institution, billing and refunding policies would then be developed accordingly.
- **Accessibility:** Format review is critical to ensure accessibility for those who require print materials.
- **Competing Textbook Affordability initiatives:** One such initiative, Open Educational Resources, is at odds with the spirit of “inclusive access” models, but there is discussion in the available literature of how these programs can co-exist.
- **Independent Providers:** VitalSource and RedShelf are two providers with large footprints in the delivery of digital access to textbook, and they offered direct access (without fees) for students to many textbooks and resources in response to COVID-19. These offers are valid through the end of Spring Semester 2020 with no clear indication of additional “open” access periods. Although students can subscribe to content from the providers, there do not appear to be viable options for institutional wide subscriptions as of the writing of this report.
- **Faculty Impact:** If “inclusive access” models are considered at Santa Rosa Junior College, there would likely be conversations related to workload, curriculum, and student equity at the department and institutional levels.

III. Current Status of “Inclusive Access” Textbook Models at Santa Rosa Junior College

Currently the campus bookstore, operated by Follett, does not negotiate with publishers and deliver “inclusive access” models at Santa Rosa Junior College. However, over the last few years inquiries have been made with Follett regarding these kinds of models at SRJC. The Textbook and Instructional Materials Committee (TIMC) has undertaken preliminary review of “inclusive access” models because they are becoming commonplace. The TIMC suggests the following starting point topics for determining viability of “inclusive access” models at SRJC.

- Seek guidance from departments and the faculty.
- Review impact on faculty and curriculum development.
- Review board policy and ensure integrity of the “inclusive access” models.
- Determine the overall impact on students with regards to costs, equity, format, etc.
- Develop policies, particularly opt-out policies for students, if the models are implemented.
- Discuss a mechanism for billing and scenarios for refunds if the models are implemented.

IV. Relevant Santa Rosa Junior College Board Policies

There are several areas of District Policy that apply to the discussion about “inclusive access” models, and there may be ancillary policies that are also relevant. Specific language needs to be reviewed in at least three areas of Board Policy: 5.4 (P) Course Fees, 8.1.4 Course Fee Reimbursement and 3.19 (P) Textbooks.

1) Course Fees 5.4 (P) – Optional Fees

Specifically, 5.4P 3 A 1

“Instructional Materials Fees refers to funds collected to purchase certain required course material from the District which becomes tangible personal property that is owned or primarily controlled by the student and has continuing value to the student outside the classroom.”

Comment: The term tangible personal property may or may not apply to access codes.

2) Course Fee Reimbursement 8.1.4

Comment: The language might be unclear about reimbursement and the process for students who cancel a class but have paid for access to materials. This would need to be reviewed and clarified.

3) Textbooks 3.19(P)

Comment: This section covers key areas such as selection, adoption, accessibility, affordability, availability and also ordering related to textbooks and instructional materials. Open Educational Resources are outlined as well as are practices related to price comparisons for materials. The policy also establishes the Textbook and Instructional Materials Committee. A deeper review of this section of board policy may be helpful if “inclusive access” models are considered.

V. Follett

Santa Rosa Junior College has contracted with Follett to provide bookstore services to the SRJC community. The publishing industry is moving more to digital access, and Follett has kept pace with the transitions. SRJC Bookstore manager, Will Crawford, has proposed that Follett is prepared to support the adoption of “inclusive access” at SRJC. He has presented background information and has requested that SRJC consider adopting “inclusive access” models. He offers the following documentation:

Follett Access: <https://follettaccess.follett.com/>

Outcomes Made Accessible: Improving Outcomes and Retention While Lowering the Cost of College Learning Materials:

https://www.follett.com/assets/www-doc/L19678-Follett_ACCESS_and_Student_Outcomes_White_Paper.pdf

Follett ACCESS + Alamo Colleges District and Virginia Community College System Course materials access program adapts easily to complex college system set-ups, and empowers students to succeed

<https://follettaccess.follett.com/follettaccess/assets/File/resources/Follett-ACCESS-Community-College-System-Case-Study.pdf>

VI. Additional Reading

The literature as of April 2020 reflects both positive impacts and also concerns with “inclusive access” models. For example, there are lawsuits emerging with the economics and rights of consumers possibly at stake. In addition, accessibility and quality of materials are important considerations.

It will be important to monitor developments in this area of instructional materials access and delivery. The TIMC offers a brief list of sources to consult in an area that is still emerging.

Cuillier, Cheryl. "Chapter 16 – Inclusive Access: Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why?" *The Evolution of Affordable Content Efforts in the Higher Education Environment: Programs, Case Studies, and Examples*, edited by Kristi Jensen and Shane Nackerud, 2018. *University of Minnesota Libraries*, open.lib.umn.edu/affordablecontent/chapter/inclusive-access-who-what-when-where-how-and-why/.

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Shaak, Erin. "Student Claims Inclusive Access 'Conspiracy' Raises Prices for Textbooks, Course Materials." *ClassAction.org*, 23 Apr. 2020, www.classaction.org/news/student-claims-inclusive-access-conspiracy-raises-prices-for-textbooks-course-materials. Accessed 1 May 2020.

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Williamson, Daniel. "Giving Inclusive Access a Second Look." *Openstax.org*, 25 July 2019, openstax.org/blog/giving-inclusive-access-second-look.