McGraw Hill Affordable Access Case Study

University of California, Davis

Advancing Equity and Access Through a Campuswide Affordable Access Model

Challenge

Only 22% of Students Had Access to All Required Course Materials

Solution

Equitable Access: A Scalable, Flat-Rate Access Model

Results

Transformational Gains in Access, Efficiency, and Student Experience

> **Before we implemented our Equitable Access program, a majority of our students never gained access to their materials."**
>
> –Jason Lorgan



Jason Lorgan
Senior Executive Director, Business Development and Innovation

The Challenge

The University of California, Davis (UC Davis) identified a critical equity issue: a significant portion of students were unable to access required course materials, directly impacting their academic success and even their choice of major. The cost of textbooks, particularly in STEM disciplines, created structural barriers for lower-income students.

As Jason Lorgan explains: **"We identified a significant equity gap between students who had access to their required course materials and those who did not, prompting us to take action."**

This challenge extended beyond affordability into academic decision-making. Some students reported avoiding certain majors due to textbook costs, raising concerns about institutional equity, and opportunity.

> **"Lower income students were reporting that they felt they could not select the major of their choice because they were unable to afford the textbook costs in the STEM fields."**

Prior to implementing Equitable Access, UC Davis data showed that only 22% of students had access to all required course materials—highlighting a systemic access failure under traditional models.

The Solution

UC Davis first piloted Inclusive Access in 2014, demonstrating improved access outcomes. Building on that success, the university launched its Equitable Access program in 2020—a comprehensive, campus-wide solution designed to ensure all students receive course materials on or before the first day of class.

The program provides:

- Undergraduate students: All required materials for $169 per quarter
- Graduate School of Management students: All required materials for $199 per quarter

> **Many of these students have told us they would have to make difficult choices—food or rent vs. books—without this grant."**

The model is grounded in five key pillars:

- **Equity:** A flat rate ensures all students pay the same, regardless of major
- **Affordability:** Lower overall cost compared to traditional purchasing
- **Access:** Immediate, day-one availability of materials
- **Financial Predictability:** Alignment with financial aid structures
- **Convenience:** Seamless integration with Canvas LMS

Additionally, UC Davis reinvests surplus funds into student support. Through textbook grants, the program has delivered over $6.1 million in aid across five academic years, supporting 36,000 low-income students. These grants directly reduce financial pressure and allow students to focus more fully on their academic experience.

One student shared the impact: **"As a first-generation college student, I was grateful that Equitable Access took all the stress out of finding the right textbooks, and the Equitable Access grant made my academic year smoother and a lot more manageable."**
— Cell Biology '24 Equitable Access Grant Recipient

Understanding the Models: Inclusive Access vs. Equitable Access

Inclusive Access (IA): Faculty choose whether their course participates. Students receive day-one digital access through the LMS at a discounted, financial-aid-eligible rate. Students may opt out and purchase materials independently.

Equitable Access (EA): All courses within a program, college, or institution participate. Students receive day-one access to all required digital materials for the term through a single, discounted, financial-aid-eligible flat fee. Students may opt out and purchase materials independently.

Key Difference: Inclusive Access improves affordability and access at the course level, while Equitable Access scales those benefits across the entire institution, creating consistency, predictability, and broader equity.

Equitable Access Supports Academic Freedom and Student Choice

“Our Equitable Access program will support the academic freedom of our faculty, who are free to choose whatever content they feel is best for their course—commercial content, OER, or faculty-authored materials.”

A common misconception is that Equitable Access is designed around commercial course materials. At UC Davis, the program is content agnostic. Faculty retain complete academic freedom to select the resources that best support student learning, whether those materials are OER, publisher content, or faculty-authored resources. Regardless of the content selected, all materials are delivered through the same streamlined Equitable Access platform, creating a consistent experience for students while preserving faculty choice.

Jason Lorgan emphasizes that academic freedom was a guiding principle in the program's design. "Our Equitable Access program will support the academic freedom of our faculty, who will be free to choose whatever content they feel is best for their course." Because every type of course material is supported, faculty can continue evaluating and adopting the resources that best meet their instructional goals without changing the student experience.

The program also addresses concerns that a flat-rate model might discourage OER adoption. UC Davis built ongoing evaluation directly into the program. "Our program will be evaluated annually by an actuarial sciences firm to ensure appropriate pricing," Lorgan explains. As OER adoption increases and the overall cost of delivering course materials declines, the program's flat rate can be adjusted accordingly, ensuring pricing continues to reflect actual costs.

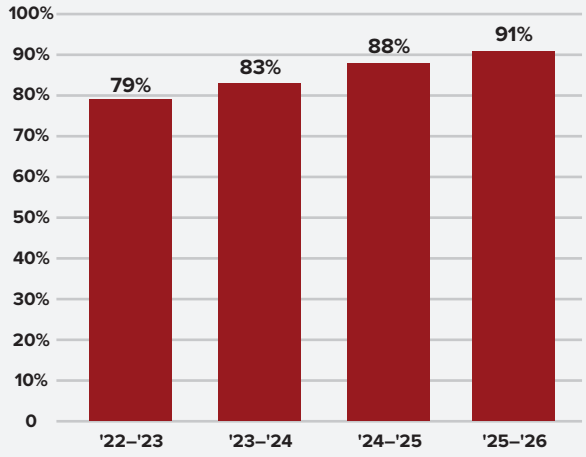
UC Davis also views access to learning materials as a campuswide student service rather than an individual purchase. Through its Equitable Access program, the institution applies a shared-cost model similar to tuition, health insurance, recreation, and other student services providing predictable pricing and day-one access for all participating students. Prior to implementation, textbook costs were one of the few educational expenses that varied dramatically by student and major. The flat-rate model removes that inconsistency while ensuring every student has access to the materials their instructors choose.

The Results

The Equitable Access program at UC Davis has delivered sustained, measurable improvements in student access to course materials. Participation has steadily increased year over year, reaching 91% in the 2025–26 academic year, up from 88% in 2024–25, 83% in 2023–24, and 79% in 2022–23 (Figure 1). This consistent growth reflects both strong student adoption and institutional alignment, signaling that the model is not only scalable but durable over time. The shift represents a dramatic improvement from pre-program benchmarks and demonstrates how a flat-rate model can normalize full access across an entire student population.

Operationally, the transition to a primarily digital, LMS-integrated delivery model has significantly improved the speed, accuracy, and reliability of course material distribution. Materials are now supplied as soon as faculty complete their adoptions, eliminating delays associated with shipping, inventory shortages, or incorrect editions. As Jason Lorgan notes, **“You cannot run out of digital content, it does not get lost in shipment, when late adoptions arrive, we can have the material on the LMS the same day versus rush shipping taking several days at best.”** Administrative processes have also been streamlined, with automated adjustments for course adds and drops and fewer errors overall, reducing friction for both students and staff.

Figure 1: Equitable Access Participation



Communication has become more consistent and transparent across the institution. Students now experience a standardized process in every course, with clear expectations around what is included and how to access materials. At the same time, faculty have developed a stronger understanding of cost implications within a flat-rate framework, contributing to more informed adoption decisions.

Student satisfaction has improved significantly, driven primarily by the program's convenience and predictable cost. Most students report that Equitable Access is easier than sourcing textbooks on their own and appreciate the ability to select courses without worrying about material expenses (Figures 2 and 3). Convenience is the leading reason students remain in the program, with cost savings serving as an important secondary benefit (Figure 4).

The program has also streamlined campus operations. In a typical academic year, approximately 60,000 students add or drop courses, generating an estimated 120,000 textbook purchases and returns under a traditional model. With Equitable Access, these transactions are handled automatically through the institution's course materials workflow, reducing administrative burden, eliminating unnecessary bookstore visits, and creating a more seamless experience for students, faculty, and staff.

> **Student satisfaction around the textbook process has improved dramatically."**



Student Survey

Figure 2: Was Equitable Access easier than shopping for textbooks on your own?

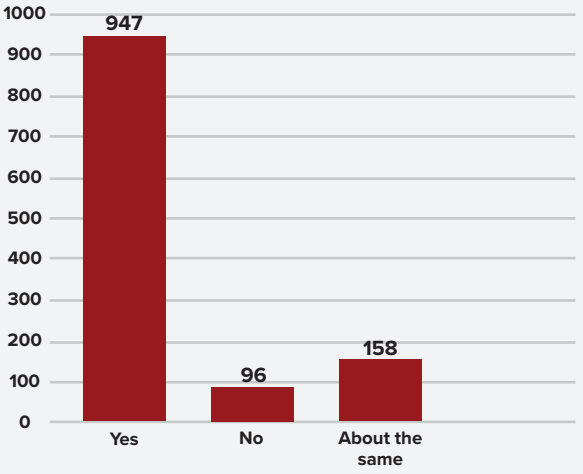


Figure 3: Did knowing your books were included for $199 reduce the stress of choosing classes?

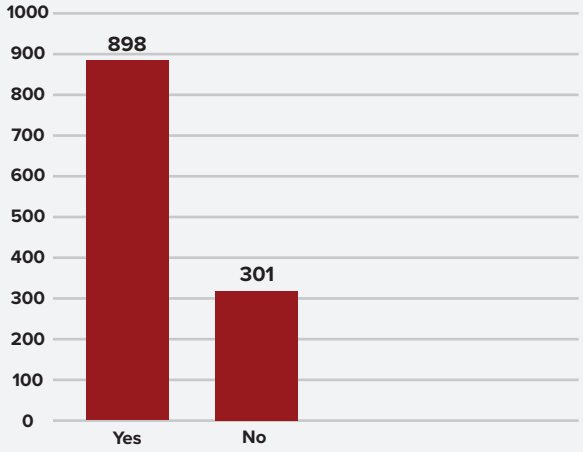
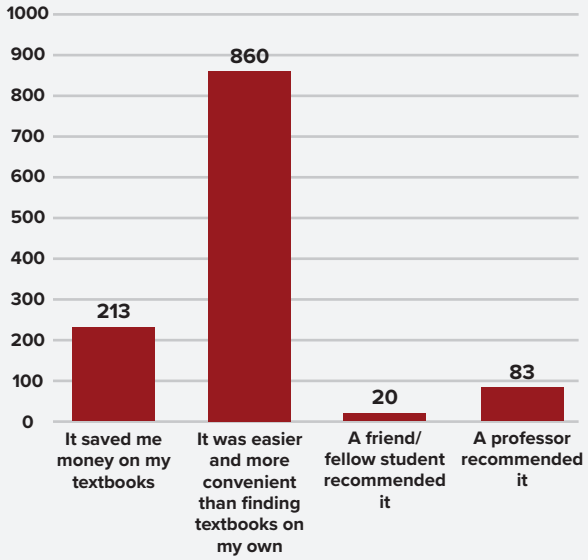


Figure 4: What was your primary reason for remaining in Equitable Access?



Conclusion

UC Davis's Equitable Access program has received national recognition for its innovation and impact, including a Catalyst Fund award from the National Association of Higher Education Systems (NASH) and a Gold Medal from the IMS Global Learning Consortium.

The program stands out for its universal approach—addressing affordability not just for some students, but for all.

Jason Lorgan emphasizes the broader institutional impact: **"The positive impacts have been huge for our campus, and we would highly encourage others to consider such a model."**

The transition required addressing faculty concerns—particularly ensuring digital delivery and academic freedom—but ultimately resulted in a more efficient, equitable system. Academic freedom is 100% protected in this program.

> **"The textbook process is much more pleasant for all involved."**

For institutions seeking to improve access, reduce costs, and enhance the student experience, UC Davis offers a compelling, scalable blueprint for Affordable Access success.

About UC Davis

The University of California, Davis is a leading public research university known for its commitment to access, innovation, and student success. With a diverse student population and a strong emphasis on equity, UC Davis has been at the forefront of developing scalable solutions that remove barriers to higher education—particularly the rising cost of course materials.

About Jason Lorgan

Jason Lorgan is the Senior Executive Director of Business Development and Innovation for the Division of Student Affairs at UC Davis. With more than 24 years of experience at the university, he has held leadership roles across multiple departments, including UC Davis Stores, Campus Recreation, and the Memorial Union. In his current role, Jason leads initiatives focused on revenue generation, cost-saving strategies, and operational innovation aligned with student success goals. He has also contributed to the development of the upcoming Student Opportunity Center and previously held roles at Golden Gate University, San Diego State University, and Rio Hondo Community College.

