

Inclusive Access Talking Points

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As inclusive access (IA) programs expand across campuses, we need to be prepared to discuss them with faculty, administrators, campus stores, librarians, instructional designers, and IT staff. Here we provide some background information and talking points to get you started.

Q: What is inclusive access?

A: It's a content-delivery program (often managed by campus stores; sometimes by academic affairs, information technology, or libraries) that provides students with day-one access to digital course materials from publishers and vendors at a reduced cost. It goes by a variety of different names: inclusive access (McGraw-Hill, Wiley, Pearson, VitalSource, RedShelf), Macmillan Learning, Follett ACCESS, First Day (Barnes & Noble College), Equitable Access (University of California Davis), and Immediate Access (San Diego State), just to name a few.

Q: How do IA programs work?

A: Exact details may vary, but they generally work like this: Students get access to digital course materials on or before the first day of class. Content is usually linked in the campus learning management system (LMS). Access for enrolled students is free during a brief opt-out period at the beginning of the course. If students opt out of buying the IA content by the deadline, their access disappears. If they don't opt out, access continues and they're automatically charged for the content. Because opt-out rates tend to be low, publishers say they can afford to offer volume discounts. Some publishers advertise discounts up to 80%, but there is little pricing transparency.

Q: How does IA differ from OER?

A: OER are customizable; free for users to read online or download; offer perpetual access; and allow unlimited printing, copying, and sharing. While some OER content is available through IA programs (OpenStax is a prime example), most IA content is copyrighted with all rights reserved and can't be revised by students or instructors. IA content also isn't free, it's only accessible for a limited time, and it often has copy/paste and printing restrictions. Students aren't allowed to share or resell IA content (access codes and digital rights management [DRM] may be used to ensure this).

Considerations

- Understand the pricing involved. Regulations only require publishers to offer IA materials "below competitive market rates" (often compared to new print textbooks) so savings can be minimal, especially compared to rentals and used textbooks (the latter of which students may be able to resell). Pricing associated with IA isn't always transparent. Many faculty don't know that they even have an option to negotiate for better pricing. IA discounts may depend on the negotiating ability of the campus entities involved in the



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process. Pricing models should also be viewed with some skepticism. Even if discounts are available now, there is certainly potential to see price increases as more institutions become reliant on IA programs. Publishers should be continually discouraged from reverting to their former methods of pricing print textbooks.

- Beware of IA packages with online testing or homework system requirements. Using the online system may be the only way for students to submit their homework or take tests. In those cases, opting out of inclusive access isn't truly an option for students. They can't pass the class without the full package.
- Take proprietary systems and technical logistics into account. IA vendors and publishers often use their own separate platforms for content. Each platform may require a unique log-in. Dealing with a variety of platform interfaces, linking capabilities, setup steps, opt-out procedures, and other issues can cause confusion for students and instructors.
- Students and instructors need to be clear about the length of student access to IA content and how students can access that content after the course ends. Access terms may vary by title. If access beyond the course term is negotiated, students will likely have to find the IA content on the publishers' and vendors' proprietary platforms rather than in the LMS.
- Institutions need to be aware of the impact on academic freedom for faculty in course material selection involved in IA programs. Narrow or restrictive agreements can limit the number of choices available to support curricular content.
- The digital platforms associated with IA are a veritable treasure trove of data. Publishers say the analytics enable instructors to monitor class progress and follow up with students who aren't doing the readings or engaging with the materials. In reality, instructors may not have easy access to the analytics or use them. Institutions need to assure what information is being collected, the reason it's being collected, and who owns and retains that information. The privacy of our stakeholders is dependent on the sensible collection, protection, and security of any data collected through IA.
- Inclusive access is definitely a good deal for publishers. Opt-out rates tend to be low (3.9%-7.6% at the University of Arizona) so they sell more books. With the use of digital course materials, publishers earn revenue on every inclusive access sale. Rental and used print textbooks may be more affordable options for students, but inclusive access reduces the availability of those in the marketplace. Publishers and vendors also gain valuable market research and usage statistics from the student data collected by their analytics systems. Administrators should know how student data is being collected, used, and possibly sold (for example, [view details of Cengage's practices surrounding the use of personal information here](#)).
- Inclusive access *may* benefit students, however there is also no guarantee that subscription prices will remain at current cost. OER and library-licensed materials offer greater advantages and cost savings, but if those are unavailable and inclusive access content is offered at a significantly reduced price, that's preferable to paying full price for a new hardcover textbook (or trying to pass the class without the course materials).



Talking Points with Various Stakeholders

- **With instructors:** Thank you for looking for ways to reduce the cost of course materials and improve student success. Day-one access to content will definitely benefit you and your students. Before you choose inclusive access, though, let's explore some no-cost options for students that also provide day-one access. You're the subject matter expert and have the academic freedom to choose the best content for your class. Between open educational resources and library-licensed materials such as books, journal articles, and streaming video, we may be able to find freely accessible content that's just what you need.
- **With administrators:** Inclusive access is one option on the spectrum of affordable course materials, but there may be better alternatives at zero cost to students. Open educational resources have the advantages of customizability, perpetual use, and unlimited free access. Library-licensed materials have the advantage of free access as long as the student is enrolled. IA can be complicated and time-consuming to set up and manage. It requires close collaboration among the campus store, IT, bursar's office, instructors, and instructional designers. You'll want to ensure that IA programs don't infringe on faculty's academic freedom, due to limited options or exclusive arrangements. You'll also want to pay close attention to the actual cost savings that IA delivers.
- **With campus stores:** I'd love to work with you on textbook affordability initiatives. Together, we could promote a range of no-cost or low-cost options, including open educational resources, library-licensed materials, and inclusive access. If we report student savings from all three options to administrators, our collaborative efforts will show a bigger impact and a greater contribution to student success and retention.

Resources

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