



Launching an Affordable
Access Program

A Practical Guide for Institutions

Insights, steps, and lessons learned from
successful higher education implementations

What is an Affordable Access Program?

Affordable Access programs are digital-first course material delivery models designed by institutions and their bookstores to provide students with access to required materials on or before the first day of class at significantly reduced costs.



Why Affordable Access Matters

Access to course materials is an institutional strategy, not just a student expense.

One often overlooked factor: whether students begin the term with required course materials.

When students delay or avoid purchasing materials:

- Academic readiness gaps widen in the first weeks of the term
- Faculty adjust course pacing and expectations
- Completion and retention outcomes are affected
- Equity goals are harder to achieve

For institutions focused on persistence, DFW reduction, and completion metrics, this is not a minor operational issue, it's a barrier. Affordable Access programs allow institutions to operationalize affordability as part of their broader student success strategy.

28%

of students at four-year institutions

18%

at two-year institutions

did not obtain at least one required course material.

—Tyton Partners, *Course Materials in Higher Education (2025)*. Data reflects student purchasing behavior within traditional procurement models.





“Nearly **one in five students** skipped or deferred taking a class due to cost, and more than one-third chose to go without required materials.”

—McGraw Hill, *Dallas College: Transforming Access, Equity, and Student Success Through Affordable Access (2026)*. Data reflects time period before Affordable Access was implemented.



Students participating in Affordable Access programs **saved**

36% on average per course.



With Affordable Access programs, **students are paying**

\$58 on average per course for their course materials.

Savings reported throughout this section are derived from a database of 1,088 U.S.-based institutions that have contracted with Barnes & Noble College, Follett, RedShelf, or VitalSource. Further detail on this database is provided in Appendix C of Tyton Partners' recent report, *Course Materials in Higher Education*. Tyton Partners completed the analysis of this data to ensure data integrity, statistical significance of results, and institution and publisher anonymity.



Program Models

Inclusive Access

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/Complete Access

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.

Cascading Access

Combines Inclusive and Complete Access models. Students receive day-one access to all materials for a flat discounted fee. Students may opt out of specific courses and purchase them individually at a reduced rate.

“Since the program launched, we have seen a **4% increase** in student retention and a **4% increase** in fall-to-spring persistence. Reducing logistical and financial burdens has made an enormous difference in keeping students enrolled and engaged.”

—Dr. Greg Morris, *Senior Vice Provost, Academic Services, Dallas College*



	Inclusive Access	Equitable/Complete	Cascading
Course Participation	Faculty decide if they want their course/section to participate.	All courses in a particular academic program, college, or institution participate.	All courses in a particular academic program, college, or institution participate.
Student Access Timing	Day-one access via LMS	Day-one access via LMS	Day-one access via LMS
Materials Covered	All required digital course materials for participating courses only.	All required digital course materials for the term.	All required materials for the term, unless a student opts in to only certain courses.
Pricing Model	Students pay a discounted rate for the materials on their student account alongside tuition and fees.	A flat fee per credit hour or term is added on a student's account alongside tuition and fees.	Students are charged a flat fee per term for all course materials, unless they choose to only opt in to certain courses. Course materials charge is posted on the student's account.
Financial Aid	Yes	Yes	Yes
Opt-Out Option	Students can opt out of the fee for each participating course.	Students can opt out of the fee at the program level.	Students can opt out but then opt back in for specific courses at their discretion.
Key Benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students receive required course materials at the lowest possible price. • Flexibility for students and faculty to participate. • Students can access their materials up to 2-weeks before the term begins and retain access for 2 weeks even if they choose to opt out, ensuring continuity during decision period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students receive required course materials at the lowest possible price • Flexibility for students to participate. • Faculty maintain autonomy in course material selection. • Students can access their materials up to 2-weeks before the term begins and retain access for 2 weeks even if they choose to opt out, ensuring continuity during decision period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students receive required course materials at the lowest possible price • Flexibility for students to participate. • Faculty maintain autonomy in course material selection. • Students can access their materials up to 2-weeks before the term begins and retain access for 2 weeks even if they choose to opt out, ensuring continuity during decision period.

Affordable Access programs ensure students have materials on or before the first day of class, improving preparation, participation, and outcomes.

27% of students are more likely to earn a passing letter grade.

60% of students are less likely to withdraw from a course.

—Tyton Partners, *Course Materials in Higher Education* (2025).



Expected Outcomes

Lower Costs



Students pay the lowest possible price for materials, guaranteed.

\$24.94
per credit hour

The average cost reported by Florida State College at Jacksonville.

—McGraw Hill, *Florida State College at Jacksonville Case Study (2026)*.

\$835
Saved

Dallas College reports this as the average annual student savings.

—McGraw Hill, *Dallas College: Transforming Access, Equity, and Student Success Through Affordable Access (2026)*.

Higher Faculty Satisfaction

85%

of faculty reported improved student readiness following implementation.

—McGraw Hill, *Florida State College at Jacksonville Case Study (2026)*.

“Our program continues to rely on faculty and department chair adoption of materials. We strive for 80% digital adoption and recently standardized adoptions for adjunct faculty, which is improving fulfillment. As a result, 95% of course material adoptions are now fulfilled within the first week of classes.”

—Dr. Greg Morris, *Senior Vice Provost, Academic Services, Dallas College*

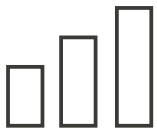


Improved Access, Equity, and Persistence



Black and multiracial students experienced 50–54% increases in course completion rates.

—Tyton Partners, *Course Materials in Higher Education* (2025).



Term-to-term persistence increased from 66% to 70% (2021–2024), and year-to-year retention rose from 74% to 78% (2020–2023).

—McGraw Hill, *Dallas College: Transforming Access, Equity, and Student Success Through Affordable Access* (2026).

84%

of students said cost savings helped them stay enrolled.

—McGraw Hill, *Florida State College at Jacksonville Case Study* (2026).

Higher On-Time Material Access

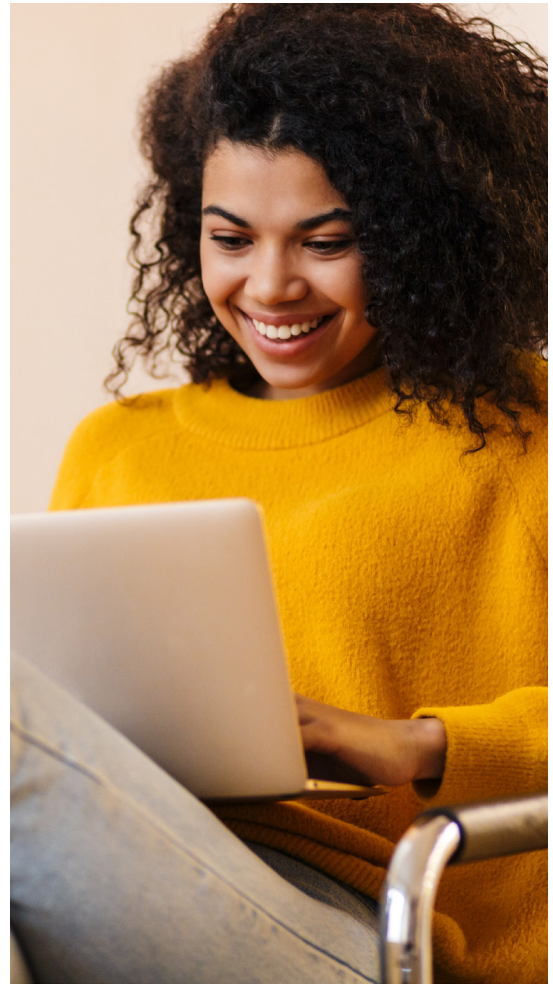


Students receive access to course materials up to two weeks before the term begins.

87%


of instructors report all or nearly all students have materials on day one under Inclusive Access, compared to 61% under traditional models.

—Tyton Partners, *Course Materials in Higher Education* (2025).



“It was great. This is my first year in college, and I was happy it was easy and not stressful.”

—FSCJ Student



Step-by-Step Blueprint for Implementation

STEP 1

Identify the Need

Evaluate challenges such as delayed material purchases, faculty readiness gaps, and academic performance metrics including DFW rates (grades of D, F, or Withdrawal).

“I have missed deadlines to use financial aid for books before and had to buy out of pocket. Having the book included in tuition meant I didn’t have to worry—and I knew I had the right edition.”

—FSCJ Student

STEP 2

Build Your Internal Committee

Form a cross-functional team including:

- Academic leadership
- Faculty champions
- Bookstore or procurement staff
- Student Affairs representatives
- IT/LMS specialists
- Publisher partners

(Pro Tip: A dedicated committee that oversees FSCJ ACCESS meets biweekly to address any issues that might affect students. And before each term begins, the college brings faculty and key partners together for training sessions.)

STEP 3

Choose Pilot Courses

Start with courses that meet these criteria:

- High enrollment
- High DFW rates
- Gateway courses
- Faculty interested in innovation

Institutions expand on average from 33 to nearly 300 courses within three years.

—Tyton Partners, *Course Materials in Higher Education* (2025).

STEP 4

Develop a Communication Plan

Create a robust outreach strategy:

- Automated LMS or email reminders before the term starts
- Faculty-led outreach templates
- Pre-term training sessions for faculty

A sample 3-touch plan:

- Pre-registration messaging
- Pre-term “What to Expect” student email
- First-week reminders and opt-out instructions

STEP 5

Train Faculty & Stakeholders

Conduct training sessions before each term, focusing on:

- LMS access and navigation
- Opt-out processes for students
- Courseware setup

STEP 6

Evaluate Program Health

Use a checklist to monitor program success:

- Day-One access rates
- Opt-out rates
- Cost savings delivered
- Faculty satisfaction
- Course pass rates and DFW trends

“Our number one strategic priority is student success leading to completion or transfer. Learning material cost is now a non-issue for students—and that has been transformative.”

—Dr. Greg Morris, *Senior Vice Provost, Academic Services, Dallas College*

How McGraw Hill Can Support You

McGraw Hill offers consultation services to help institutions:

- Select appropriate courses for pilots
- Integrate course materials into LMS platforms
- Train faculty and stakeholders
- Support communication plans with resources for faculty and students



We invite you to learn more.
mcgrawhill.info/ReadyDay1»