

## **FICTION** or **FACT**: The Real Truth about Inclusive & Equitable Access Programs

*Access programs are student-approved and in high demand at colleges nationwide*

**FICTION**: Access programs don't lower the cost of course materials for students.

**FACT**: The costs of course materials in access programs are often much lower than the retail market prices for the same item. ***A study of over 25,000 courses across institution types found that students in affordable access programs saved nearly \$24 per material, a 30 percent savings compared to prevailing market pricing for the same material.***

**FICTION**: Access programs limit choice and prevent students from comparison shopping for cheaper textbooks.

**FACT**: Students have weeks to comparison shop during a free trial period. In "opt-out" access programs students can start using course materials on or usually before the first day of class. Every student has until the close of the drop-add period to opt out of the access program. This period is usually two to three weeks and can be longer. Students enjoy free access to course materials. This ensures that ***students have enough time to evaluate their course materials options, receive materials from their preferred source, and opt out of the program without penalty – all without falling behind in their classes. With opt-in programs, students will not get access to any course materials until they decide to opt-in.***

**FICTION**: It is difficult to opt-out of an access program.

**FACT**: Opt-out is easy and takes seconds online. The opt-out process is intentionally designed to be ***as simple as possible. Students can easily opt-out online with one-click, through the learning management system they already use. Students receive several reminders about the opt-out process and deadline.*** Students can choose to opt-out of the access program until the close of the drop-add period – typically, two to three weeks after the start of classes.

**FICTION**: Students don't like access programs.

**FACT**: A [survey](#) of more than 100 college campuses with access programs confirmed ***an overwhelming majority of students (91%) found it convenient to have their course materials bundled by the institution and 86% said affordable access programs made them feel better prepared for class.*** Because of this, access programs are incredibly popular with students at colleges throughout the country.

As of 2022, [39% of college students](#) acquired materials through inclusive access models, up from just 15% in 2019. ***Today, more than 1,500 colleges offer an inclusive or equitable access program,*** and the programs have been endorsed by student associations at schools such as California State University, Long Beach and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

**FICTION:** Access programs do not improve student outcomes.

**FACT:** *Access programs don't just help bring down costs for students, they also help improve outcomes, particularly for low-income students.* In fact, a [survey](#) of college campuses with access programs found that 75% of students stated that access programs helped them achieve better grades in the current term. Another [independent study](#) found that **access programs also increased course completion rates for at-risk groups, including Black students (21%) and students above 25 years old (6%).** In particular, providing day-one access to all required course materials has contributed to improved academic outcomes for students in these “opt-out” access programs.

**FICTION:** Students have no idea if the price of their access materials is truly lower than what is available through other sources.

**FACT:** Federal law requires the prices of materials to be stated in or linked from the course schedule. **Additionally, campus stores maintain a list of textbook ISBN pricing for new, used, rental, and digital so students can compare the retail prices to the discounted pricing offered through the access program.** Hundreds of colleges also offer online marketplaces showing prices on Amazon and other online booksellers to make it as easy as possible for students to comparison shop and confirm they are getting the best prices.

**FICTION:** Access programs prevent students from using open educational resources (OER).

**FACT:** *Affordable access and OER programs can and do thrive side by side. Both contributed to declines in student spending.* California State University, Alamo Community College, Iowa State University, and El Paso Community College are among the many schools that found great success in further reducing costs for students by combining access programs with OER initiatives. **It is not an either-or proposition.**

**FICTION:** Access programs are only operated by a handful of publishers that determine pricing for all course materials.

**FACT:** In 2023, at least 550 publishers contributed content to access programs – far more than the top five largest publishers that contributed 96% of the content to these programs back in 2016. **Competition from smaller publishers and new market entrants complements pressure from other low- and no-cost material initiatives, driving large publishers to continue providing maximum value** and lower pricing to students in affordable access programs.