The Computerworld Honors Program

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Final Copy of Case Study

Status:
Laureate

Year:
2013

Organization Name:
Indiana University

Organization URL:
www.indiana.edu

Project Name:
eTexts Initiative

Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:
Mobile Access

Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)

With the primary goal of reducing the cost of course materials for students, Indiana University (IU) made a bold move to transition to an opt-in digital textbook model for all eight of its campuses. The high cost of textbooks, a per-student average of $600-$1,000 per semester, has driven nearly 30% of students to opt out of buying required materials, and attempt to succeed in the classroom without these resources. Because course materials are key to an instructor's ability to teach and a student's ability to learn, IU changed the business model and developed new and improved technologies to support its move to eTexts. IU's eTexts initiative focused on a long-term strategy for success. First, IU negotiated with popular textbook publishers to ensure that the materials in demand could be delivered in eText formats. Second, IU worked with the publishers on a 100% sell-through model, which greatly reduced the cost to students (eTexts were delivered for around 35% of list price). IU also focused on getting faculty excited about the initiative and the possibilities of digital learning materials. Finally, to ensure delivery was smooth, IU upgraded the wireless local area network (WLAN) infrastructure to

support student and faculty access to eTexts from a range of mobile devices anywhere on campus. IU needed a robust, reliable network that not only provided access to eTexts, but also let faculty and students seamlessly use eTexts for collaboration beyond the classroom. Additionally, the network needed to be future-proofed for the growing number and types of mobile and wireless devices that would access digital materials, especially as the initiative builds momentum among the university's 110,000 students and 19,000 faculty. IU's IT staff had to move quickly to ensure rock-solid wireless reliability.

When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)

When the university first implemented the project in September 2012, around 130 sections encompassing 5,000 students opted for eTexts. Today the number of students using eTexts through the initiative is at 10,000 (around 250 sections or about 10% of the overall student population). IU is working to grow that number exponentially, providing students with even greater cost savings and faculty with cutting-edge technologies for teaching and learning. The necessary wireless network upgrade to support IU's move to digital including the recent and continuing rapid growth in the number of wireless and mobile devices used by students, faculty and staff was completed in 2012 on IU's two main campuses (Bloomington and Indianapolis). The remaining six campuses will be updated over the next eight months. When this process is complete, the network will have nearly 6,500 access points installed. This will provide reliable wireless for hundreds of thousands of devices accessing the network at any given time, from any location, on all IU campuses. Additionally, the upgraded WLAN provides an AirWave management tool for identifying and solving network and connection issues in a matter of minutes, rather than hours or days, resulting in reduced IT costs.

Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)

IU's eTexts initiative is in its third semester, and continues to gain momentum. The wireless network upgrade to support this initiative and to move to a more digital environment overall is in its first phase. The Wireless LAN upgrade was completed on the two main campuses (Bloomington and Indianapolis) at the end of 2012, and it will be fully deployed on the six remaining campuses by August 1, 2013. As with all technology projects, these initiatives will never be fully complete due to the rapidly changing nature of hardware and software. At IU, university leaders are continuing to work with publishers to improve and expand eText offerings. In turn, they are focused on enhancing and improving the eText software platform for unprecedented collaboration. Ultimately, these measures are aimed at supporting additional digital initiatives to reduce costs for students and take learning to a new level. Also, as the demand for eTexts grows among IU's faculty and staff, the upgraded wireless infrastructure will provide the reliable user experience that is necessary for the success of the university's digital programs.

Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)

IU's eTexts initiative has benefitted thousands of IU students by reducing their textbook costs. The University's faculty are also able to easily engage with cutting-edge technology in the classroom. Additionally, the reduced need for printed materials is substantial, and provides another benefit from both a cost and environmental standpoint. As Justin Kingsolver, president of the IU Student Association in Bloomington, stated: "IUSA is proud to lend our support to this initiative because of its commitment to cutting textbook costs to IU students and maintaining a proactive approach to sustainability issues." IU faculty have also benefitted significantly. As Professor and Associate Dean Stephen Watt notes, "The e-text initiative is exceptionally important in ameliorating a major problem for almost all students: the high cost of textbooks. In response, many students choose precarious options: share a book, photocopy parts of a book, or in the worst cases try to get by without one. The results often include failure, withdrawal from courses, and inadequate progress toward completion of a degree. The e-text movement can generate benefits for students, faculty, and publishers alike." Additionally, with IU's eTexts program, the overall learning experience can be elevated as students and teachers use eText features such as note taking and sharing, sample quizzes, and tutorials. "With eTexts, the highlighting and annotation tools give me a better sense of the level of engagement students are having with the book content," said Professor Robert Potter, who directs the Institute for Communication Research. "Plus, as an instructor the eText allows me to project pages during lecture and use the annotation tools to link concepts to other Web-based sources." IU's wireless network is the backbone for the program. Without it, the University's eText program would not be possible.

Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)

IU's eTexts approach is definitely a best practice for other universities across the globe to consider. With the goal of making education more affordable, IU has set the stage for institutions to move forward with their own eTexts programs. Incorporating input from education leaders and partners such as Internet2 and EDUCAUSE, IU has developed an excellent case study of how to successfully deploy a program that faculty and students will embrace. There are many benefits to an eTexts program: it saves students money, it is eco-friendly, and it enhances learning. Learn more from the resources in the news section of the IU eTexts site: http://etexts.iu.edu/news/index.php

If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)

IU does not benefit financially from the eText program; in other words, IU does not take a cut from student fees for eTexts. IU students have unlimited access to their eTexts while they are enrolled are the university. IU's faculty can view data analytics through the reading platform to see how many students are actually using their eTexts. Using that information, they can promote more interaction and involvement among students. The

wireless network upgrade supports not only IU's eTexts program, but also a more interactive learning environment inside and outside of the classroom, even in outdoor spaces. Students and faculty are no longer bound by classrooms and buildings (which has added benefits for distance learners and students with special needs). Supporting article: http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/01/why-are-college-textbooks-so-absurdly-expensive/266801/)