



# **eText Initiative**

Digital Integration Solution

Affordability.

Accessibility.

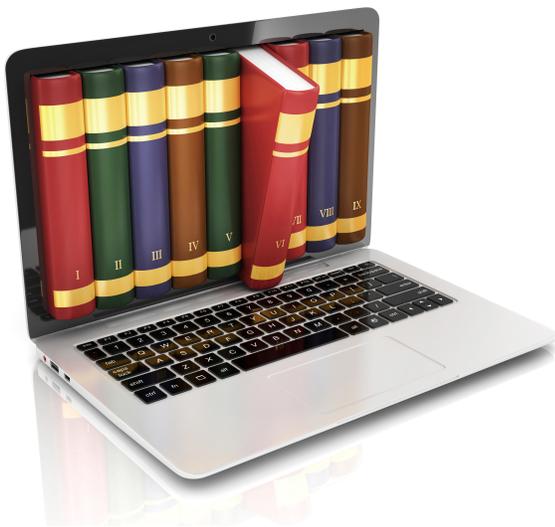
Student Success.

# eTextbooks at Algonquin College to Reach 10,000 Students and 120 Programs Next School Year

*Algonquin College Press Release, 24 March 2014*

Students save money and receive greater access to their textbooks through electronic resources in the largest eTextbook implementation at the postsecondary level in Canada.

What if you had access to all of your school textbooks anywhere, anytime? What if your textbooks were always with you, but never weighing you down? What if your textbooks could play audio and video, were searchable, and were linked to your school program's Learning Management System and other web resources? And what if your textbooks could do all of that and more at a fraction of the price of a paper textbook?



For 10,000 Algonquin College students this fall, getting all these features from their textbooks will be the norm. These students are enrolled in one of Algonquin College's eTextbook enabled programs, part of a growing initiative spearheaded by the College's Learning and Teaching Services department which began in 2013.

"At Algonquin we firmly believe in the importance of applied and digitally connected learning," explains Dr. Kent MacDonald, President, Algonquin College. "We have worked for many years to become a Digital College through the creation of mobile learning programs and spaces, by offering robust mobile support and wireless internet everywhere on campus, and in our expansion of our online and hybrid offerings. eTextbooks are the next phase. Through eTextbooks, we are able to provide a better quality education experience while reducing the cost of postsecondary education for our students and widening access to courses and course content."

There are many benefits to being one of the lucky students enrolled in an eTextbook program. Those students skip the bookstore line at the start of the term, and will not have to worry about 'getting it before the store runs out'. At the start of the

term, the books will already be bought and paid for at a fraction of the price of paper textbooks – all the students have to do is download it for use on up to four mobile devices and desktops. Students also never have to worry about marking the books up or damaging them – the eTextbook is theirs to keep, and they can insert notes in it wherever they like. And if a student would like to print out parts of their textbook or buy the regular textbook, they can still do that for a fee.

"It's all about choice," says Glenn MacDougall, Director of Learning and Teaching Services. "Our goal is to ensure that every student has access to the required course resources. eTextbooks represent a major step forward in support of our students and we are pleased to have the support of so many publishers and partners as well as the Government of Ontario."

The launch of eTextbooks at Algonquin College was preceded by a pilot during the Winter 2013 Term. Six programs were tested, with over 750 students trying the electronic books first. The results were very positive and shed some light on what the College can focus on going forward. For example, over 87% of respondents said they intended to primarily use their laptop to access their eTextbooks. Also, the vast majority indicated they had not and did not intend to print or order a printed copy of their eTextbook.

Some challenges were identified – most notably, some students found it difficult to refer to their textbook on their computer while also completing their homework on their computer. That is why the College will be giving out eReaders to students in select programs as part of a pilot to determine whether the device helps with their studies.

"The students were quick to embrace expanded use of technology in the classroom," says Professor Linda Crane, Coordinator, Computer Engineering Technology – Computing Science program. "While I expected it to be a challenge, I was pleasantly surprised with how effective eTextbooks were as a teaching tool, and how eager our students were to use them."

*“Through eTextbooks, we are able to provide a better quality education experience while reducing the cost of postsecondary education for our students and widening access to courses and course content.”*

# eTextbooks at Algonquin College

*100% of the students with 100% of their resources 100% of the time*

Contact North | Contact Nord article, 21 February 2014

The initial steps Algonquin College in Ottawa took to become a Digital College are outlined in *Digital College – Organizational change for enhanced student learning and engagement* in Contact North | Contact Nord's *Pockets of Innovation* series. Among the initiatives is the Mobile Learning Project, requiring all incoming students to have a mobile device that matches the requirements of their program. Recent research shows that students have an average of 2.5 mobile devices.

Consistent with its goal to embrace digital education and mobile learning, Algonquin has also launched an e-textbook initiative that is targeted to provide 100% of the students with 100% of their resources 100% of the time. The goals of the initiative are:

- To provide savings for students, with a goal of 50% savings on textbooks costs
- To make the e-resources available from day one of their classes
- To make the resources available on multiple devices, both on-line and off-line.



## INNOVATION

**Pilot Phase:** The integration of e-textbooks into College programs began with a pilot in January 2013, with about 700 first-level students in 6 programs being provided with all of their texts for free in digital format. This amounted to almost 2,300 e-textbooks in 27 courses.

As part of the pilot study, the 4 major textbook publishers who supply 80-85% of college texts, Pearson, Wiley, McGraw-Hill, and Nelson, donated the e-texts for free. In return, the students provided feedback on their use of the e-texts. The response from both faculty and students was positive.

Two different platforms were used during the pilot. One was designed to provide access to the e-texts only online and through a web browser, while the other required the installation of a software package that allowed students to download and access their e-texts while off-line. The pilot showed that the optimum platform for delivery of e-texts was through integration with the learning management system (LMS), with both online and off-line access. In addition, it was clear that students would want access to their e-texts from any of the multiple mobile devices they owned.

Students could print the entire e-texts, but very few availed themselves of this capacity. Chapters and pages could also be printed. For courses in areas such as accounting, printing was more necessary for worksheets.

**Phase One Integration:** In September 2013, the e-textbook initiative was expanded to 34 programs with 363 courses, about 4,000 first-entry students and 16,800 e-resources from the original 4 publishers plus a number of other, smaller publishers. The students were charged for the resources through a course ancillary fee. The College directly pays the publishers for the e-texts for 100% of students still registered after the first 10 days of class.

In this phase, the students paid 63% of what they would pay for a print book. The students get three-year access to the online versions of the e-texts; the e-texts downloaded to personal devices have no time limits on access.

Algonquin negotiated individual partner agreements with the four publishers in order to develop a business model that can be used for further negotiations. The e-texts are provisioned to the students through the College's LMS (Blackboard).

VitalSource is the platform that allows students to read their e-textbooks on their mobile devices, including laptops. Students install the VitalSource bookshelf onto their mobile devices, and then each new e-text is made available based on the courses in which they are registered. The platform allows students to manipulate the text online by highlighting sections, making notes, transferring the annotated text between devices; they can also transfer passages of text to Word and the system supplies a footnote. Colour-coding can be used as well to indicate, for example, passages particularly important for tests or sections with which the student is struggling.

To comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, the font size can be increased and the text can be converted to audio. The development of the accessibility was guided by a fully blind student who advised Algonquin on how he would use the e-texts. In addition, the e-text publishers are now delivering their resources in all formats to Alternative Educational Resources of Ontario (AERO) weeks prior to the start of classes so that timely modifications for accessibility can be made. Previously, it would take up to 3 weeks for a resource to be converted after a student request. By September 2014, about 1,200 resources will have been supplied to AERO, which is a digital repository operated by the government of Ontario to provide alternate format text to students with perceptual disabilities who attend publicly-funded educational institutions in Ontario.



## OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

Students benefit through:

- They receive substantial savings on the price of the textbooks – the goal is to provide the required e-textbooks at 50% of the price of the print version as the initiative expands to include greater numbers of students.
- In September 2013, with 34 programs participating, the College estimates that students saved about \$250 – \$300 each per semester, or about \$1 million overall.
- The online texts are often enhanced with visuals, animations, interactive exercises and quizzes, and other features that can make learning more engaging.
- e-Texts are portable and can be used anywhere.

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- 100% of students have access to all of their e-texts (100% of resources) from the first day of classes and can access them through multiple devices (100% of the time).
- In the past, students receiving Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) grants could defer their fees, but not their textbook purchases when they started class. As they now pay for their e-texts through an incidental fee, payment can be deferred until the OSAP funding has been received.
- Professors benefit as they can plan and teach knowing that all students have the e-texts and can do the readings and exercises, in addition to having access to the supplementary material supplied by the publishers. The use of e-texts encourages the greater integration of open educational resources, another College initiative.

As only required e-textbooks are provided through this initiative, faculty re-assessed their chosen texts, leading to a reduction of 15%-20% in the number of required texts.

Publishers benefit in that the College buys the books for 100% of the students. The usual practice for print sales is that about 80% of a class buys a new textbook when it is first available. In the second year, perhaps 40% buy the book new and the others buy it second-hand, and, by the third year of textbook life, it may be only 20% of the class who buy the book new from the publishers. With the Algonquin model, the College buys the book for 100% of the students every year, albeit at a reduced price, and the publisher saves the costs of printing, shipping, and returns.

Using a simple example, in a course with 100 students and a \$100 text offered at a 50% price point as an e-text, the publisher

It was recognized that some books would not be effective as e-texts, such as workbooks and manuals. These are supplied in print but are also covered by the course-level ancillary fee for the e-texts and are available through the campus bookstore. In this way, the commitment to students having 100% of the resources is upheld.

An e-text advisory group representing students and 16 departments on campus has been set up, as well as a smaller working group, to focus on issues of communication, integration, support, and engagement.

**Phase Two:** The use of e-texts in the 34 programs which started in September 2013 will be continued in the winter semester beginning in January 2014, with a few enhancements. Three student kiosks will be added for e-text connectivity and informational support, staffed by first-year students. An improved print management strategy will map the high-speed printers on campus, with information on how to print from various devices and the customization services available from the College print shop. Informational short messages regarding e-text services will also be sent to student phones in a test of push notification.

**Phase Three:** In September 2014, e-texts will be introduced in all full-time programs, including 9,000 first-level students and about 2,800 students continuing from the 34 original programs. This will involve about 40,000 e-resources. By 2015, the initiative will include all students.

would receive 100 students X 3 years X \$50 reduced price equalling \$15,000 with no additional costs for printing, etc. With a print text, the sales would be 80 students in the first year, then 40, then 20 or 140 overall so 140 X \$100 or \$14,000 plus the cost of printing, etc. When this formula is extended over multiple programs, with a commitment from the College to buy for 100% of the students every year, the financial benefits to the publishers can become substantial.

Publishers are also developing a new business model that can be extended to other institutions. One particularly distinctive aspect of the Algonquin approach is the use of one platform (VitalSource) for all e-texts. This, as explained by Larry Weatherdon, the eTextbook Manager, is contrary to the intent of publishers to each create their own platform. Having a single platform benefits students, institutions, and, as illustrated above, the publishers themselves.

Benefiting students, professors, and publishers is the ease of revision, corrections, and additions to e-texts, so e-textbooks can be kept current at minimal cost.

In 2015, the initiative will be fully integrated in the College and management will move to the College bookstore. Staff will be trained for the tasks involved in sustaining the e-text initiative, thereby developing a continuing role for the bookstore in the infrastructure.

## CHALLENGES AND ENHANCEMENTS

Students in e-text programs have said that reading the texts on laptops is awkward as they are too heavy to carry around, and switching between programs (such as Excel and Word in accounting courses) can be awkward. In response, the College is assessing a variety of tablets and their adaptability in supplying access to the LMS, e-mail, and the e-texts.

In January 2014, the College will purchase 200 tablets to test whether the combination of laptop and tablet improves the portability of e-texts. This also requires the development of a model in which the students without a tablet could lease one from the College for a set fee per semester. They could then take the tablet with them when they graduate. The College-wide integration of the Mobile Learning Initiative in which every incoming student has at least one mobile device as required by their program is essential to the success of the e-text initiative. In turn, having e-texts also extends the effectiveness of the Mobile Learning initiative.

Introducing the e-text initiative has been complex because of the number of people and divisions involved – all academic areas, the registrar, the bookstore, shipping, printing, administration, and, of course, students. The progress was carefully staged and required full support from senior management.

Although the College has been integrating mobile devices for 10 years, the unprecedented demand for wireless in September

2013 caused many difficulties, creating considerable frustration. This was not an issue with VitalSource, the e-text platform, as its online activity is remote, but with access to the LMS required to download the e-texts. This spilled over into higher demand to print the e-texts, which was difficult to fulfill. The wireless issue was resolved in a couple of weeks but created a difficult start – and a significant indicator of needs for enhanced wireless capacity.

Large-scale outreach to faculty and students is essential. An e-textbook site provides support for students and faculty, as well as information on the initiative and its implementation.

## POTENTIAL

The goal is a 50% saving for students on the print price of the textbooks. This should be possible once critical mass is achieved in September 2014, with all full-time programs (about 150) using e-textbooks.

Algonquin has about 7% of the Ontario college population and annual text books sales of about \$10 million. Extrapolating to the broader college population in Ontario indicates about \$120 million spent annually on textbooks. Based on the potential of this model with 50% savings, using e-texts could result in Ontario students saving about \$60 million on texts annually. As illustrated above, the model can also work for publishers, resulting in a win-win-win situation as the colleges then have a student population fully equipped with the required texts.

Two models for payment have been developed to serve Algonquin's various campuses. The one described above is the Institutional Pay Model. The alternative is the Student Pay Model, which will give students access to the same e-texts at the same prices, but will be used for students without access to the LMS, such as those in Continuing Education courses or at Algonquin campuses in Montenegro, India, Saudi Arabia, and China. These students would pay for the e-texts themselves, but would receive the same flexibility concerning multiple devices and fetime access. This model is expected to be implemented in Spring 2014.

As Glenn MacDougall expresses it: "You are only limited by imagination as to what you could do next." For example, soon professors will be able to highlight and comment on e-texts, and students can have access to these notes. Another is the negotiations with publishers, as Algonquin was "looking for partnerships, not vendor relationships. And they are all very, very supportive."

Other Ontario colleges have approached Algonquin in order to negotiate with the publishers as a group, allowing for even greater critical mass and potential savings.

Glenn MacDougall and Larry Weatherdon are very willing to share their model and experiences with their college and university colleagues, as they believe it holds great promise for students across Ontario.



# TEXTS @ Algonquin College

Written by | Mao Keo, eText Support Specialist,  
Algonquin College for IDEAS Magazine



*It is imperative for Algonquin to remain focused on delivering content that will ultimately enhance the student learning experience and implement solutions that offer more than can be achieved with paper-based textbooks.*

## What if every textbook you ever purchased could fit in your back pocket?

The cost of print-based textbooks continues to increase on a yearly basis. As a result of this, Algonquin College developed an approach to offer students significant savings on required resources.

The strategy was to distribute the required resources to the students in digital format (eTexts) and incorporate the cost into their college fees. The objective was to ensure that 100% of students had access to 100% of their resources, 100% of the time.

In the Winter semester of 2013 a pilot initiative commenced; it consisted of six College programs that agreed to adopt eTexts in substitution to traditionally used paper-based textbooks. For the purposes of the pilot, the resources were provided free to all participating students. In the Fall semester of 2013, drawing from conclusions of the pilot initiative, 28 additional College programs were integrated into the eText project at the Woodroffe campus. An institutional pay model was implemented, which ensured that all students were charged a set fee for each resource and Algonquin paid the publishers directly based on the total student enrollment in each course.

For this coming Fall semester, the number of programs implementing

eTexts has grown to over 80 and will involve approximately 120 program levels, including several programs from the Pembroke campus.

There are many advantages to eTexts including, but not limited to: easy accessibility for students, implied affordability as a result of the institutional pay model and increased usability to promote different approaches to student learning.

## ACCESSIBILITY

In this rapidly evolving era of digital learning and e-education, the integration of eTexts into the learning landscape is inevitable. The Algonquin model ensures that eTexts are available to the students through a student portal by the first day of class. This eliminates faculty concern of students entering the classroom without their required resources and also gives students the ability to begin readings in a timely manner. Additionally, it ensures that every student has access to the same format and edition of the adopted resource, which assists with classroom management. The new student portal will provide students with eText redemption codes, required software downloads and additional resources

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# Clearing the Digital Air

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based on course registration. This portal will also provide students with instructions, video tutorials and quick links to information pertaining to their specific program.

Once downloaded, the eTexts are permanent and do not expire. This is different from the current industry model where students lease access to a textbook for a specific amount of time. The Algonquin model ensures students own the material. Students

borrowing books, sharing books, making photocopies and in some cases, opting not to purchase entirely. This is often due to the high cost of physical textbooks. As a result of Algonquin's eText Initiative, digital resources are ordered in large volumes and delivered to the student at a savings of up to 50% of the suggested retail price. Algonquin is able to negotiate directly with the publishers and achieve better overall price points which are passed on directly to our students.

option available to conventional rented eTexts.

In addition, users have the option to adjust text size or page layout for enhanced readability.

## MOVING FORWARD

It is imperative for Algonquin to remain focused on delivering content that will ultimately enhance the student learning experience and implement solutions that offer more than can be achieved with paper-based textbooks.

Moving forward, Algonquin will continue to work collaboratively with publishers to further reduce the costs. In addition, publishers will strive towards providing more enhanced digital content, such as interactive videos, digital activities, collaboration tools and more.

The shift from physical textbooks to more enriched and enhanced eTexts is inevitable. As such, Algonquin strives to ensure that these learning resources are not only available but accessible, affordable and have boundless usability.

“ For this coming Fall semester, the number of programs implementing eTexts has grown to over 80 and will involve approximately 120 program levels.

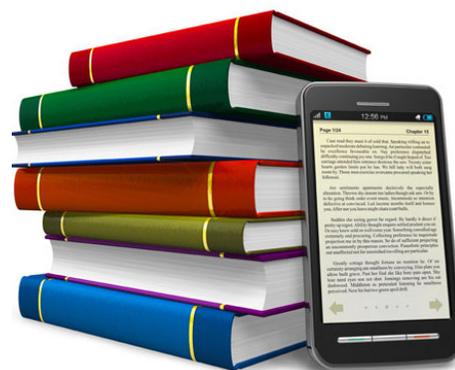
can download their eTexts on up to four devices and access is available on or offline, eliminating dependency on a network connection. In addition, eTexts are fully accessible to students with disabilities and may easily be converted into accessible formats such as large text, audio and Braille.

## AFFORDABILITY

In the traditional model, professors adopted required resources with the expectation or hope that students purchase them by the first day of class. As there is no management of this requirement, the purchase of required resources, in reality, is optional. Over the years, students have found a variety of methods to obtain access to required resources. These methods include

## USABILITY

eTexts are downloadable to computers and mobile devices through the use of eText platforms, such as the VitalSource Bookshelf. In the eText library, users can search words or phrases in specific books or their entire library. When connected to the internet, the eText search function can also reference other resources such as Google. eTexts allow for digital annotations, highlights and notes, which can be copied and exported into a word processing document with specific citations for future reference. Highlights and notes can also be shared amongst students and faculty enhancing classroom collaboration. eTexts offer various print options – students can print pages, chapters or even the entire eText. This is not an



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