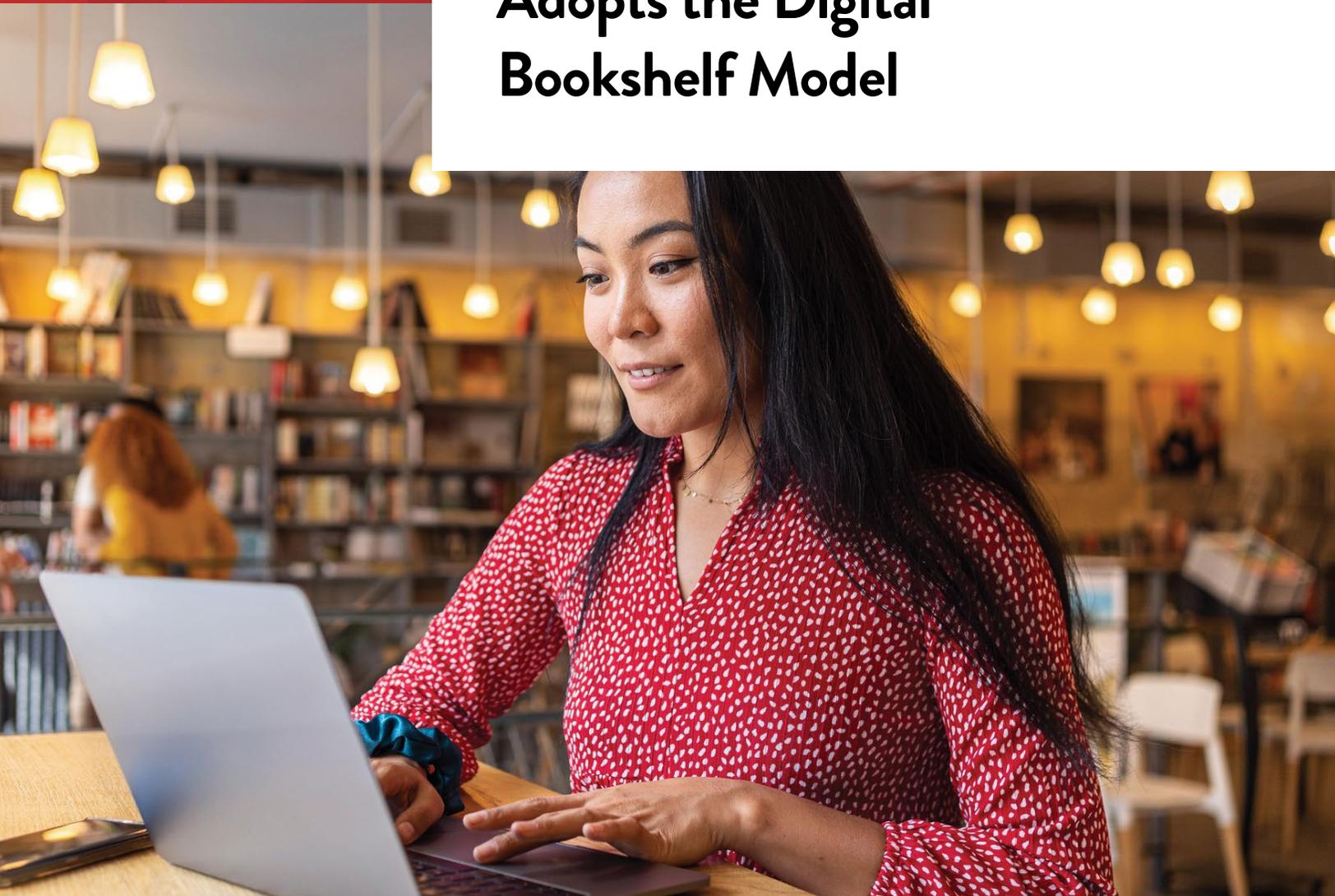




A Fully Online Law School Adopts the **Digital Bookshelf Model**



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SUMMARY

The *Digital Bookshelf* model, in which all students are given online access to their course materials on or before the first day of class, is a perfect fit for this fully online law program. All students are starting school equipped with exactly what they need to succeed—and more—through added resources and learning tools.

Background

John F. Kennedy School of Law at Northcentral University is an accredited, 100% online Juris Doctor program whose mission is to provide an accessible, challenging, and comprehensive legal education to a diverse community of learners. Students may enroll for an August or January start date. As of Fall 2021, over 100 students are enrolled, with approximately 30 students starting each semester.

Midway through 2020, the on-ground campus in California closed, and the school transitioned to becoming a fully online institution as part of Northcentral University. Northcentral University was founded in 1996 with the goal of offering higher education to working professionals around the world, and is a proud affiliate of the private, nonprofit National University System based in La Jolla, California.

The Digital Bookshelf Solution

As a new online law school, administrators did not want to take any chances that their students, located across the country, would not have the correct course materials on time for the start of classes. and so they chose to adopt a *Digital Bookshelf* model where all academic resources are embedded into the cost of the program. Students pay a standard per-course materials fee and are given all-digital access to their textbooks and supplemental materials.

As both an administrator and an educator, Associate Dean and Law Professor Nicole Mills recalls the constant challenge semester after semester of there always being “someone who couldn’t get the book on time, didn’t have the right book, or didn’t buy the book at all.” Shares Mills, “The *Digital Bookshelf* ensures that every person in every class has access to the exact same resources. It’s a more equitable solution.” Overnight, the law school transformed from having no digital usage to becoming a modern educational establishment, bringing their students, says Mills, “into the 21st century.”

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*– Associate Dean Nicole Mills,
JFK School of Law at Northcentral University*



Implementation

The *Digital Bookshelf* partnership at JFK School of Law includes the institutional purchase of educational materials from Aspen Publishing, as well as additional publishers. Before the semester begins, law librarian Jamie Diermier works with faculty to create a book list for all courses and collaborates with the school's instructional design team to ensure links to the course materials are loaded and ready to go.

Diermier recalls the days of competition for physical textbooks when students would check them out on reserve from the library. She estimates at least 10% of students would not buy the required books. "Now they can access their course materials 24/7. We advertise that all materials are included – it's a big selling point for students."

Included with the course materials fee, students receive digital access to two legal databases, two study aid platforms, bar study prep, and assigned eBooks which may include additional learning tools such as quizzes, flashcards, etc. Students may opt to buy a looseleaf print version of their eBooks at a discounted rate.

The challenge for Diermier is helping students understand where everything is located. She sends a welcome email before the first day of class to introduce herself as a point of contact and to share videos and informational materials on all resources. She also offers one-on-one assistance as needed.

Impact

The benefits of an all-inclusive digital model for course materials impact students, faculty, and the institution.

COST SAVINGS

Through the bulk purchase of course materials, the institution has been able to pass along cost savings to students by rolling up and distributing overall costs as course materials fees. When asked about the benefits of this model, one student shared, “Savings! The cost of law books is high. Having my school purchase my required course materials was a big benefit and a reason why I chose my school.”

TRANSPARENCY

Importantly, with this model, students know their total costs upfront. There are no hidden fees.

ACCESS

Regarding the benefits of eBooks, one student shares, “I have access to all my books in one spot, anytime, all the time. Having access to the books since day one of our classes has made a positive impact on my capacity to approach and finish on time the multiple readings and assignments we are responsible for.”

CURRENCY

In the past, Associate Dean Mills recalls purposely choosing to use an old edition of a text, in order to save her students money. “With the *Digital Bookshelf*, she shares, “we can now have the most up-to-date version without having to worry about cost.”

MORE TIME, LESS STRESS

The *Digital Bookshelf* saves students time from shopping around for course materials. Noted one student, “As a person who also has a full-time job, having the school purchase required course materials has been very helpful.” Emphasizes Mills, “Students know they’re in the right book, they don’t have to go looking for it, and they have it in front of them on day one.” Professors additionally benefit because they no longer have to worry about their students having the wrong text or no text at all.

VALUE ADD MATERIALS

Mills refers to the abundance of study aids included with the *Digital Bookshelf* as “an amazing benefit.” She encourages students in her classes to take advantage of the resources and shares how, in comparison, as a law student herself, she spent thousands of dollars on additional study aids.

PERSONALIZED LEARNING

While cost savings is of primary importance, the *Digital Bookshelf* model provides students with options. Students can access their materials in whatever electronic form they wish. They can increase the size of the font, listen to audio study guides, and choose from myriad learning tools. From color-coding their notes to creating digital outlines, ultimately, students can choose to use the learning aids in the way that suits them best.

Looking Ahead

JFK School of Law at Northcentral University has already made strides in improving their process for getting students access on the first day of class. While initially access codes were used, students now click on links that bring them to their course materials, and the goal is to make the process even more seamless. Because the law school is using multiple publishers and platforms, there have been some challenges along the way, but says Librarian Jamie Diermier, “I am optimistic that overall it is a benefit to students as far as cost savings and easier access.”

Additionally, as use of supplemental learning tools varies by professor, Diermier plans to better promote all available learning resources to faculty to increase awareness and implementation. She shares, “I really like the *Digital Bookshelf* for the tools it has, such as the quizzing. I hope it helps students learn better by having more than just the physical book.”

*“When everybody has access to the same things,
it levels the playing field.”*

– Associate Dean Nicole Mills, JFK School of Law at Northcentral University

Conclusion

How does the *Digital Bookshelf* contribute to the overall success of students at Northcentral University JFK School of Law? Summarizes Associate Dean Mills, “When everybody has access to the same things, it levels the playing field. No one is disadvantaged because the book they ordered is delayed. The experience is personalized because students can use the materials in ways that work best for them.”

Shares Mills about their online law school, “We’ve put together a strong program with fantastic course design, plentiful feedback for students, and insight for teachers to see where every single student is at. Although our plan was always to go 100% online, when in-person learning was shut down in Spring 2020 due to the pandemic, digital course materials allowed us to pivot much faster than we could have otherwise. We look forward to seeing our program grow and thrive with this model.”



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