



CASE STUDY

Supporting
Student Success
& Retention with
Otter Note-Taking
at Irvine Valley
College

Overview



The California Community Colleges—a system of 116 colleges serving more than 1.8 million students—has a powerful vision: to provide opportunities to all who seek them and to break down the systemic inequities that block too many students from attaining the career and life they want.

At Irvine Valley College—a public college within the system with a total enrollment of more than 14,500 students—fulfilling this vision involves connecting underserved populations with the technology and other supports needed to help them reach their educational goals.

“We’ve got a big mix of people here, including people who have disabilities and people who utilize different technologies for different reasons,” describes Tim Van Norman, an Instructional Technologist at the College.

To support the diverse needs of these students, Van Norman regularly explores new technology—a process which, in late 2019, led him to Otter.



We have a whole mix of ages and abilities, technologically.



Tim Van Norman
Instructional Technologist

Early Successes Prompt a Deeper Exploration



After signing up for an account to explore Otter on his own, Van Norman uploaded roughly 200 videos and was able to access his completed transcripts within a few hours. However, it wasn't Otter's speed that surprised him most—it was the technology's responsiveness to his changes.

"There's one term that I use quite a bit; it's a package that we use called Proctorio," he describes. Otter didn't initially recognize 'Proctorio' as a word, but was able to learn it from changes made by Van Norman. "I edited the captions, and then a month later, I was demonstrating Otter to somebody else, and I said the word Proctorio. Otter actually came back and had it correct.



That alone convinced me that there was something to this.

A contact at UCLA connected Van Norman with Otter directly, leading him to dive more deeply into how its features could benefit students at Irvine Valley College. In particular, Van Norman wanted to understand how Otter could support the College's student success initiatives aimed at English - as - a - second -language (ESL) and hard-of-hearing students. '

"We have a strong ESL group of students that are being taught in English, but don't necessarily know English very well," he explains. "So anything that can be written for them—so that they can hear it and see it—is a positive." In addition, he continues, "We also have a number of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and we also have faculty who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Basically, anytime we can put captions on something, that's a good thing."

Setting Irvine Valley College Up for Successful Remote Instruction



Initially, one of Otter's features that most interested Van Norman was its ability to integrate with Zoom. This interest proved particularly prescient, as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 forced the College to identify new solutions to help rapidly expand its remote education offerings.

According to Van Norman, "When we first started with Otter, it was shortly after the pandemic started, and we were looking at how to provide live captions in our online classrooms. We knew we had a need before. But when everybody had to go online all of a sudden, now it's a stark reality that we have to deal with."

Since the pandemic's early days, Irvine Valley College has been able to expand its use of Otter to more faculty, staff, and students. "We have two types of users right now," explains Van Norman. "One is faculty or staff who have Otter in their Zoom account. It automatically turns on, streams, and then participants can click and view the transcript. It's a really nice package."

Students also benefit from Otter's collaboration features, which allow them to highlight areas of the transcript and add their own comments. According to Van Norman. "We have a lot of students who have accommodations with regard to note-taking or live captioning."



Many of our students have come back semester after semester asking for Otter again...

Closing In on 1 Million Minutes of Transcribed Courses



Irvine Valley College continues to see strong results from its implementation of Otter across multiple use cases. As an example, Van Norman describes a recent session he conducted, which used Otter to provide captioning instead of a live person. "I was complimented - that was the best we'd done in the last two and a half years."

Otter's analytics capabilities further prove the success of the partnership. "I believe we've done close to a million minutes total since October 2020, and that, frankly, I find amazing," Van Norman notes.

"One of the big things we're all about at California Community Colleges is retention and student success," he concludes. "Any tool we can give that's useful to students, that allows them to take notes, that helps with their success, that works well, that there isn't a lot of training we have to do—and, even better, that's not very expensive per student—is a really big positive for us."



I've been very happy with the product that Otter has developed and how it's worked.