



# CASE STUDY

How UC Davis  
Fulfills Note-Taking  
Accommodations  
with Otter

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# Overview



Note-taking accommodations—including peer note-taking and assistive technologies—make it possible for students to fully engage with course materials and progress towards their educational goals, especially those who are unable to take notes on their own.

Yet despite how important these accommodations are for students with disabilities, the Student Disability Center at the University of California, Davis (UC Davis) initially struggled to fulfill the volume of requests it received for these services, according to Joshua Hori, who worked as an Assistive Technology Analyst at the school before transitioning into a similar faculty-focused role



**Joshua Hori**  
Assistive Technology Analyst

Beginning in 2008, UC Davis adopted a number of technologies to support this challenge. Otter was eventually added to the mix in 2019, as Hori was an early adopter of the technology himself. “We realized that not all technologies would fit each one of the students, so we had options for them to consider,” he explains. “Using these services, we went from a volunteer-based fulfillment, which may have a lack of volunteers, to being able to accommodate all our students.”



*We have a lot of notetaking requests, and we were proactively looking for ways to improve it since it was a volunteer based program.*

## Navigating UC Davis's Vendor Risk Assessment (VRA) Process



Like many colleges and universities, UC Davis uses a vendor risk assessment process to understand how external programs use student data and to limit the selling of student data to third parties. While Otter meets UC Davis's cloud intrusion insurance requirements and has nearly completed all of the organization's SOC 2, Type II compliance requirements, Hori was able to get special permission within the school's VRA process to deploy Otter based on its unique ability to meet a specific need.

"With the Student Disability Center, we were able to say that Otter provides a very unique service that we cannot get anywhere else," he explains. "[With] a limited number of students who need the accommodation, we were able to start integrating it into our campus."

The quality of Otter's transcriptions also made a strong case for its adoption throughout the VRA process. As Hori notes, "I've compared Otter, Dragon Naturally Speaking, Apple Dictate, Windows Speech Recognition, and Google Translate side-by-side with a Russian accent, and Otter was the best."



*Out of all of them, Otter got the best recognition.*

## A "Breakthrough Technology" for UC Davis Students



Since its adoption, Otter has been particularly well-liked by UC Davis students, with Hori calling the program "one of the more preferred note-taking services that we have available."

In particular, UC Davis students seem to appreciate Otter's specific note-taking functionality over other related technologies. "One of the great things about Otter is that it gives you a live transcription of what was being said, in real-time," says Hori. "For our students who might be distracted, they could refer to the captions or highlight them in order to refer to them later on. They didn't have to write so much, because the app was doing all the writing for them."

"A majority of our students really preferred that it kept their attention on the lecture, where they were able to read it and listen to it at the same time," he continues.

"A lot of our lawyers like it, a lot of our learning disabled students like it. Otter is probably one of our most used accommodations to date."



*Otter is a breakthrough technology that a lot of students gravitated towards.*



## Expanding Otter's Use at UC Davis



Following the success of Otter's initial adoption at UC Davis, the school has expanded the deployment of Otter.

Use cases for Otter continue to expand as well. As an example, when UC Davis had to quickly pivot to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Otter played a key role in helping maintain continuity in students' accommodations. While attending classes from home eliminated the distractions present in classrooms and lecture halls, Hori explains, "sometimes, students' home life is noisier than their Zoom lecture." The integration of Otter and Otter Assistant improved the classroom experience for remote students - minimizing the many disruptive potentials that come with virtual learning.

In the coming year, Hori hopes to make Otter available to even more students, faculty, and staff members at UC Davis. "There are a lot of instructors who want to use Otter because they see its potential," he states. In particular, faculty and staff with whom Hori has worked see the value of

Otter not just as a note-taking tool, but as a resource that could support their own content production as well.

While Hori is quick to note that Otter is better suited to some situations over others, he stresses the difference the program has made for students requiring note-taking accommodations at UC Davis.



*It's a blessing.  
It really is.*