

A photograph of a Hofstra University building with a concrete overpass. The overpass has 'HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY' written on it in blue letters. The building has a modern design with orange and grey panels. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

HOFSTRA  
UNIVERSITY

## CASE STUDY

The Best Thing Since  
Sliced Bread: Hofstra  
University Fulfills  
Accommodation  
Requests Easily and  
Affordably

## Overview

Like many U.S. colleges and universities, Hofstra University—a private institution based in Hempstead, NY—has seen an unprecedented increase in student requests for accommodations. “Requests have gone up by 200 in the last year”, explains Victoria Simon, an Accommodations Specialist and Student Success Coordinator at the school.



*We'll have almost 1,000 students registered with our office by the end of the year*



**Victoria Simon**

Accommodations Specialist and Student Success Coordinator

Hofstra’s Office of Student Access Services is responsible for collecting these requests, processing them, and coordinating approved accommodations with students. And although the Office has offered students a number of different services and technologies in the past, Simon and her team are increasingly turning to Otter to fulfill accommodations for students with hearing impairments, auditory processing disorders, and fine and gross motor impairments.

## Fulfilling an Accommodations Gap

Simon was initially introduced to Otter after a colleague heard about it at an early 2021 training event. She quickly saw its potential to solve an unmet need for Hofstra’s students—utilizing live transcriptions in real-time during lectures, rather than waiting to receive recordings or transcripts afterwards. “We used to use [a different note-taking software], but the problem was that every student asked, ‘Where’s the button where we turn the audio into text?’ But it didn’t work that way. When we heard about what Otter does, we thought,



*This is what the students want.*

Simon cites that the process of implementing Otter at Hofstra went relatively smoothly, as Otter supported Simon and her team every step of the way. "I look for certain things when I'm about to buy a product and, to me, the back-end customer service part of the business is more important than the product itself," she states. "If I can't get to somebody immediately with my problem and have an adequate turnaround time, I don't want it. I don't care how pretty it is. I don't care how fast it is. I don't care if it works with a Mac. I don't want it."

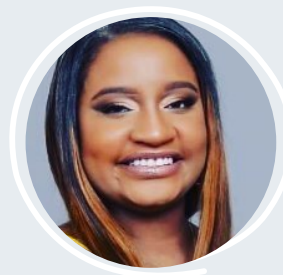
Throughout the implementation process, one hurdle Simon's team faced was pushback from some faculty members due to fears around the protection of intellectual property. In response, Simon and the Office developed a legally-approved policy defining how information will be safeguarded when students use Otter, which is shared with professors as a part of the Office's accommodations notification letters. Hofstra University also trains students on these expectations. "They understand how Otter works, what it does, how to use it, and how to ethically use it with respect to professors and other classmates," says Simon.

## A Positive Reception

To date, Otter's reception among students has been very positive. Ahjané Forbes, a contributor to Hofstra's student newspaper, The Hofstra Chronicle, wrote in a recent column that,



*Otter.ai is one of the most recent technological advances put into action by Student Access Services.*



**Ahjané Forbes**

Contributor to Hofstra's student Newspaper

It's an app which allows students to pull electronic PowerPoint slides into a note-taking app while also transcribing what the professor is saying. This provides more accommodations to students who may struggle with following a professor's lecture."

Hannah Cohen, a sophomore psychology major and a member of Hofstra's Disability Rights, Education, Activism and Mentoring (DREAM) group, also contributed to Forbes' piece. She stated, "From my perspective, it seems like a great accessibility tool for people who may be hard of hearing or even people with auditory processing disorders."

Simon echoes this sentiment. "The fact that Otter provides a transcript from the audio recording helps students that have hearing impairments. If it wasn't for how robust Otter is, they wouldn't otherwise be able to integrate with the class as well," she explains. It's also helpful for students using Zoom to attend classes, she notes, as many schools continue to navigate remote learning.

Beyond Otter's note-taking benefits, Simon also sees an impact on student confidence. "You can record yourself with Otter and use it for paper," she says. "If you don't know how to get started on a paper because of your learning disability, you can use Otter and say, 'In 1776, the constitutional Congress...' There's the beginning of your outline or your intro paragraph. Because you're using Otter to do it, you don't have to be afraid of starting the writing process anymore."

## Saving Time and Money

Since adopting Otter, Hofstra University has been able to reduce its reliance on CART services and student note-takers. Not only does Simon describe Otter as "the next best thing" compared to CART services, but she also appreciates the cost savings Otter offers.



*Otter is so cost-effective. Especially with what our budgets were going through after COVID, it was a blessing.*

For Simon, the reduction in administrative responsibilities has been an equal benefit. Before Otter, her office had to manage student note-takers. "We had to remind them every week [to turn in their notes]. And then we realized, they're 19 years old. That's too much responsibility for somebody who was doing us a favor."

Now, she continues, "We don't have to track every student down and ask, 'Did you give them your notes?' Not only that, they had to come into our office and make photocopies of the notes if they weren't typing them on the computer. That whole thing isn't in the office anymore; it's amazing."



*Otter is the next best thing since sliced bread. I absolutely love it.*

## A Robust Solution for School Accommodations

Compared to other solutions her team tested, Simon recommends Otter for its full suite of features, broad device compatibility—including the ability to use Otter on laptops, tablets, smartphones, and other mobile devices—and ease of adoption. Although Simon actively disseminates Otter's help and training resources to new users, she explains that, "It doesn't take a long time for our students or staff to figure out how to get it working and why it's such a good tool to have."

"I can't say enough good things about this tool, and not just the tool itself but also the management system," she continues. "As the person administering the accounts, the data that I can see with the management system is amazing. I like how easy it is to send the license. I like how easy it is for the students to upload it onto their laptops. I like the tech support."

To learn more about how Otter helps students and faculty succeed as an academic accommodation solution, [visit our website](#), [reach out to our team](#), or [get started with a free trial](#).