

ACHIEVE for READERS and WRITERS

A Holistic Product that Increases Equity and Access

PRODUCT USED	Achieve for Readers and Writers	
STUDY DESIGN	Evaluation Study with Descriptive Analyses	
COURSE	Composition	
INSTRUCTOR	Dr. Steven Schessler	

How Achieve for Readers and Writers contributes to equity and access in an online classroom at a large community college

The Challenge

Engagement, Equity, and Access

Cabrillo College is a designated Hispanic-Serving Institution with the majority of students planning to transfer to an in-state four-year college after two years. The college serves a wide range of students and strives to provide equitable and accessible learning experiences to ensure high quality post-secondary education, especially for traditionally minoritized students. Instructor Steven Schessler explains there is a traditional support structure for his students, with access to the college's tutoring center and librarian services and notes, *"My students need high touch."* He notes further that participation and engagement in class has been a challenge and with a recent new law from the California state legislature, there was *"a shift to anyone being able to take the course without having to place into it (and the removal of two lower level courses), and with that came the challenge of reaching a variety of student needs and providing much more support."* Additionally, Schessler notes the community college model means *"we set deadlines but we do not expect our students to make them. The goal is not to be punitive around why they couldn't. Some of our students have kids or are taking care of younger siblings or have jobs. This is different from a residential environment at a four-year institution. For us, the hardest thing is participation and a lot of invasive outreach when they miss deadlines, but always with the ability for them to catch up. All of this is exaggerated with COVID."*

Achieve Implementation

Achieve for Readers and Writers: A Holistic Resource

Instructor Schessler uses all the features of Achieve for Readers and Writers including the diagnostics, readings, writing tools, and peer review. Schessler appreciates all of the materials in Achieve as a holistic resource, stating, *"Achieve came along at a fortuitous time because I didn't have this material and students want a package, where everything is there. Not just a bunch of hyperlinks the instructor is grabbing and students feel like you are cobbling something together."*

Especially now with lack of structure [due to COVID], the more structure the better." As an instructor, Schessler relies on Achieve's resources to support his instruction. *"Knowing that Achieve is there to work with students, teach them, guide them and give them all that information is great. I will reinforce what Achieve is doing but I am not the content provider. It lets me focus on collaboration with faculty from other disciplines and guide students through different resources, topics, discussions, and scientific languages."* Schessler specifically appreciates the peer review feature where he notes *"it is so easy to give targeted feedback as an instructor. Much more efficient [than paper]. And, it lets students focus on the top three things they need [to improve their essay]."* Achieve's flexibility also enhances instruction, especially during the changes with COVID-19, *"that flexibility helped me keep more students. I didn't have to do a work-around when students were late."*

Online Class: Equity and Access

Instructor Schessler has been teaching his course as fully online for years and is an active administrator and advocate on committees for equity and access across California community colleges. Schessler states that some community college students are *"treading water in the LMS (Canvas) and my students tend to procrastinate becoming involved in one more thing (Achieve). It is not a structural barrier. It is putting it off. Best thing is to assign readings. Once they do it they are fine. That starts to get them engaged."* Beyond assigning reading to get students to jump into the platform, Schessler explained ways he helped students with access in Spring 2020. In the past, he has made the diagnostics optional and with the changes due to COVID-19, *"I am making them mandatory, especially because students won't have the support services that they are used to and I want them to identify their strengths and areas where they need improvement."* Still Schessler noticed a change in his students in Spring 2020 with the switch due to COVID-19. *"They lost all of their in-person contacts and wanted live meetings to help with that."* Schessler offered virtual in-person meetings once a week to students to maintain connection during this transition.

The Results

Achieve engages students and increases equity and access.

Higher Engagement in Achieve, Higher Success Rates

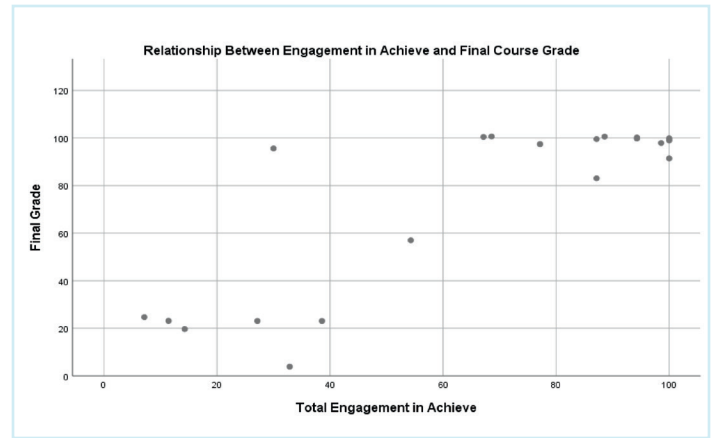
Achieve provided the results Instructor Schessler wanted to see. *“There is a correlation. Obviously, the higher engagement in Achieve, the higher the success rate for students. I’m excited to keep reinforcing that to students: last semester when students were engaged, they had great results.”* The fall 2019 Achieve study with Dr. Schessler showed increased engagement in Achieve was positively related to student academic achievement. There was a large, statistically significant positive relationship (.842) between the mean percentage of assigned Achieve activities a student engaged in throughout the semester and their course grade. (see diagram) That is, the more a student engaged in the activities in Achieve the better they performed academically. Dr. Schessler encourages other instructors to use Achieve stating that Achieve offers the resources and support to enhance instruction.

“There has been an awakening to the value of online education whether primary or supplementary. Now online education won’t be as alien to instructors. Instructors have now figured out that they need more help with larger classes and research and higher expectations. It is nice for them to take on more assistance through Achieve that they may not have previously entertained.”

Fostering Engagement and Equity

Schessler has experienced students at various educational levels engaged and learning in Achieve and advocates for its use to increase equity and to help instructors with instruction. The bottom line for him is: *“This increases equity and access for students. It lets them come in at whatever level they are entering the classroom and provides all the tools (in addition to the instructors work and the work of others on campus) to help them succeed. It allows them to operate at different levels and still access the learning material or work through diagnostics and learn how to improve and in ways that instructors don’t have time for. I wouldn’t sit down and give them a diagnostic every other week and read through the results and come up with a plan for them. I don’t have time for that. I can’t do that in a three-unit class. The benefit is really giving them, on the one hand, supplementary material to improve their education, and on the other hand, improving the way that we do basic functions like draft feedback which is at the center of most of our classes or how you do reflection before your paper. So much to be said for a system that makes them do that as part of their assignment, instead of inviting them to do it. If they know they have a box to fill they are going to fill it as opposed to a bullet list of things to do they are going to do 3 out of 5.*

I could not juggle all those balls if I was also doing diagnostic testing and evaluating it and recommending resources. Achieve provides all the tools.”



Fall 2019 Achieve Beta Study Results for Schessler’s class

School Background

Cabrillo College is a public two-year community college offering associate’s degrees. The institution serves over 11,000 students and has one main campus in Aptos, California. The college has a 100% admission rate and the student to faculty ratio is 22 to 1. Student demographics are 47% Hispanic/Latino, 41% white, 5% two or more races, and 1% Black. Most (63%) of the students are under 24 years old and 95% are in-state students. (citation: NCES)

About the Professor

Dr. Steven Schessler (Ph.D, Emory University, M.A. in Education with focus on Instructional Technology, San Francisco State University) is an experienced English Composition instructor with more than eleven years teaching English, nine of those at Cabrillo College. He uses Achieve for Readers and Writers to teach a college composition class which spans majors across the community college. Dr. Schessler divides his time between duties as an administrator and faculty support on the Guided Pathways initiative, which works across community colleges in California and is focused on equity and access. He is also English Department Chair. Dr. Schessler has been using Achieve for Readers and Writers since fall 2019.

Study Limitations

Although the data are rich, the findings of this case study are specific to the instructor who participated. They cannot be generalized to all institutions who use Achieve for Readers and Writers. The results are also descriptive and should not be used to infer causation.

“There are experts at Macmillan who know how to put this material together chapter to chapter and piece to piece. We can use that to support our work. We don’t need to invent everything ourselves.”