LOS ANGELES PACIFIC
UNIVERSITY

READSPEAKER ENHANCES COURSE ACCESSIBILITY AND HELPS DRIVE STUDENT SUCCESS FOR LOS ANGELES PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

TEXT-TO-SPEECH TOOLS FROM READSPEAKER ENSURE THAT COURSES ARE FULLY ACCESSIBLE FOR THOSE NEEDING ACCOMMODATIONS WHILE ALSO HELPING ALL STUDENTS ENGAGE MORE DEEPLY WITH LEARNING CONTENT.

At the very core of higher education's mission is the desire for students to be successful in their college journey. Taken a step further, success means everyone must have an equal chance to access and engage with what an institution has to offer.

> ALL STUDENTS ENGAGE MORE DEEPLY WITH COURSE MATERIALS WHEN VOICE CAPABILITIES ARE ADDED; WE'VE SEEN THIS TIME AND TIME AGAIN. AND BETTER ENGAGEMENT LEADS TO GREATER STUDENT SUCCESS.
>
> **—DIRECTOR OF ELEARNING OPERATIONS, GEORGE HANSHAW**

Today with college ranking systems and the competition in attracting and retaining students, engagement is as central to an institution's survival as the balance sheet. Student completion rates factor heavily in those college ranking systems. Those, in turn, influence enrollment and faculty recruitment. And while enrollment numbers steadily decline, institutions cannot afford to have students drop out because they are not fully engaged.

Yet, dropping out is what frequently happens when students encounter barriers to course materials. In the pandemic, it was all too apparent that students with physical impairments or other learning disabilities were left behind, because they either had difficulty with or could not engage at all with course materials in the cobbled-together remote teaching that substituted for the traditional on-campus classes.

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It does not need to be that way. In a forward-thinking institution like Los Angeles Pacific University, the vision of full engagement and accessibility means that students encounter no barriers regardless of when, where, or how they engage with learning content. It also means that students who do not necessarily need text-to-speech (TTS) but who choose to use it can do so from top to bottom, and on any device.

With a campus commitment and recognition that courses have to be designed with TTS in mind, it is not that difficult to achieve with ReadSpeaker. That is why LAPU made the institutional commitment to embed ReadSpeaker's text-to-speech tools at the LMS level, ensuring that the lifelike voices and accessibility tools are available at every level of a student's engagement in learning.

Making Accessibility a Core Value

A TTS add-on is one thing, but making it central to all digital content requires a much broader view–which LAPU has had since the beginning. This broad view means accessibility is core to the institutional mission. LAPU's courses are all completely accessible for students who are visually or hearing impaired and for students who simply prefer to use speech while learning. Prospective students immediately recognize that there is something special about LAPU when they sample a LAPU course.

Dr. George Hanshaw, the Director of eLearning Operations at the university explains that is because every course is developed with TTS in mind. This, in turn, drives how employees choose technology and how designers build the courses. "For us, accessibility isn't just bolted onto instruction; it's part of the actual build process when we design new courses and programs."

Read George's [article on ensuring accessibility for all students](#)

Bridging Accessibility Gaps

The key, says Hanshaw, is not to ask instructors and course designers to spend additional time ensuring that all course materials are fully accessible. Instead, the tool is embedded directly into the learning management system – which for LAPU is both Moodle and Brightspace. The only thing instructors need to do in order to make their materials fully accessible is to upload them into the LMS in digital format following some simple best practices for tagging content, which every faculty member already has been taught.

What students see on the myLAPU app or a document accessed within the app, is a prompt within the margin saying: "Listen to this page using ReadSpeaker." When students click on the "listen" button, they can hear the text read aloud, regardless of its source.

The software reads the text in a very natural-sounding human voice, complete with the inflection and emotive qualities that make human-sounding voices human. Any part of the text can be read, either faster or slower, and even with page masking. Students can pick from several different voices or even download an audio file for listening on the go like they would with a podcast.

Text to Speech Increases Student Engagement—and Success

"Enabling voice capabilities for study tools and curriculum is just as important from an engagement standpoint as it is for accessibility," Hanshaw explains. "All students engage more deeply with course materials when voice capabilities are added. We've seen this time and time again. And better engagement leads to greater student success."

To learn more about ReadSpeaker and its potential for improving both accessibility and student engagement and success, <u>contact us</u> for more information.

About LAPU

LAPU, which has historical roots dating back to 1899, is a faith-based online institution serving 3,000 nontraditional adult learners. It offers associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees including an MBA program, a pre-nursing degree, and a teacher credentialing programs. The university takes pride in being affordable and fitting into the lives of busy adults and non-traditional students. Courses are natively built for online learning, maximizing the medium so that courses are more than simply remote teaching; they are conceived of and designed around mobile devices. Students access the myLAPU app to do their coursework and interact with instructors and each other. LAPU believes that students don't have to choose between having a life and earning a degree.
They can do both.