



Green Mountain College
Runs on Rafter360®

Green Mountain College Turns to Rafter360 for a Sound and Sustainable Textbook Solution

Nestled on 155 acres in Poultney, Vermont, Green Mountain College (GMC) is a small liberal arts institution with a big mission: to create just and sustainable societies by training the next generation of leaders in social and environmental sustainability through an environmental liberal arts curriculum. This mission has already produced many accolades, including a gold rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education in 2014 and a perfect "green rating" in the last three editions of The Princeton Review's Green Honor Roll.

For years, GMC relied on an established model to serve its student body's textbook needs: a leased campus bookstore, managed by a well-liked GMC graduate in tune with the school's unique culture and inner-workings. Adoptions were determined through collaboration between the bookstore manager and the faculty using a cumbersome spreadsheet system. Still, the campus bookstore served the college community as a general supply hub and a place to stock up on GMC-branded apparel and other merchandise, and the manager's love for their alma mater shined, creating a seamless integration into campus life.

Then, a national restructuring of the leasing company led to closings of selected brick-and-mortar campus bookstores, and the company chose Green Mountain College as one of the locations to be shuttered. Forced to change their model and faced with a decision on how to move forward, the college turned to the same company's virtual bookstore program, which was, in Registrar &



A SOLUTION THAT SERVES STUDENTS

**Green Mountain College affordably
prepares 100% of students with
textbooks on day one**

The Challenge

Optimize the energy of the campus at semester's start to maximize student success and minimize enrollment drop-off, making sure all students are equally empowered to learn on the first day of classes.

The Solution

Green Mountain College implemented Rafter360 to unify students, faculty, and parents towards a campus-wide textbook solution.

- Brought the textbook experience back to campus for a personalized distribution method more characteristic of GMC's high-touch pedagogical philosophy
- Students with Pell Grant disbursements were able to use them to pay for textbooks
- Switched intuitively to Rafter360 from their existing, highly complex virtual bookstore system



Campus Snapshot

- > Founded in 1834
- > Began comprehensive environmental liberal arts curriculum in 1995
- > Undergraduate student body of 611, with a 14:1 student-faculty ratio and an average class size under 20
- > On Sierra magazine's "Top 15 Cool Schools" list for the six straight years (and #1 in 2010)
- > Became the nation's second climate-neutral campus in 2011

Director of Institutional Research Sharon L. Hoffman's words, "something that we viewed as an experiment and a 'patch through' until we figured out what we really wanted to do."

A Virtual Bookstore Model Fails to Serve Student Needs

As Hoffman "entered into textbook land" to oversee the transition from campus bookstore to virtual bookstore, she quickly discovered that she was fighting a losing battle. Even as she was expending time and resources setting up the new adoption portal and combating technical difficulties exacerbated by inconsistent client support, she found the model provided little benefit to a student body familiar with constant comparison shopping. Textbook prices under this new model, with shipping added to the bottom line, were prohibitively large in comparison to other available options.

The low costs of book buying on Amazon and other internet marketplaces had a hidden price, however: students armed with ISBN numbers and on a quest to find rock-bottom deals would create a confusing patchwork of purchases, product quality, and shipping details. Add

in the inevitable shakeup of class schedule changes, and the result was a disordered mess. Because many students weren't even placing orders until arriving on campus, it became commonplace for books to arrive 3-5 weeks after classes were underway. Faculty began to pad that now-inevitable processing and shipping time into their teaching plans as a precaution, and the students took notice and were frustrated by the slow pace of classes at the beginning of the semester and the number of their peers who were unprepared. Even worse, an increasing number of students weren't buying books at all due to expense and the difficulty of getting them.

The college needed a paradigm shift to optimize the system of getting students their required books in a timely, affordable, and practical fashion. They wanted to collaborate with students and families to remove a huge uncertainty from those crucial first weeks on campus, often full of financial stress, added and dropped classes, roommate crises, and other tumult. Increasing stability during those critical early phases of the semester would provide a huge benefit to all parties involved, and that realization led to GMC's selection of the Rafter360 textbooks-in-tuition program.

Green Mountain College Makes the Seamless Switch to Rafter360

Rafter's flagship product, Rafter360, is an innovative and industry-leading course materials management solution. At Green Mountain College, all students now receive 100 percent of their required course materials, both print and digital, before the start of classes and at a significant cost savings. This solution saves time and energy on the part of both the students and the college, transforming textbook buying from an uncertain jumble of online orders into a predictable, routine process with a clear, flat predictable price that can be folded into financial aid packages. Rafter360 maximizes the semester's productivity by providing books to be read, taught, and assigned immediately.

When Registrar Hoffman made the switch, she picked up the Rafter360 interface with ease, calling the whole

experience “extremely intuitive and easy to use.” She rapidly and effectively trained several student workers to aid in the crucial pre-packaging and distribution phase of the rollout. The software connected with GMC’s existing student information system (SIS), using registration data and add/drop information to manage inventory. Hoffman was excited about bringing the textbook experience back to campus: “It’s easier to solve problems when the entire operation is centered in your office to begin with, rather than being notified later, by a leasing company, and having to go back and troubleshoot.”

A conference room in the Student Union Building, conveniently located across from the dining hall, transformed into a “pop-up” textbook fulfillment center as students arrived on campus. Regardless of when students got to campus during the semester’s start, their textbooks were packaged up and waiting when they came to collect them. As the distribution of the textbooks was underway, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Thomas Mauhs-Pugh took the opportunity to check in on students about the new system: “I didn’t run into a single student who wasn’t responding positively. They were thoroughly impressed.”

GMC’s textbooks-in-tuition initiative was implemented with the support of the faculty, though some remained skeptical. One such skeptic approached Mauhs-Pugh on the first day of class, acknowledging with astonishment that every single student in all three of their classes had been fully prepared for assigned readings. From now on, they would no longer suspend their syllabus in anticipation of textbook issues but would work from the assumption that they could start teaching on the first day of class.

Rafter360 Helps Green Mountain College Promote Student Success

The shift that has proven to be the most immediate benefit of Rafter360 at GMC is the laying of a positive, productive baseline for student achievement, effectively creating a level playing field for all students at the outset of every semester, regardless of individual circumstance. “We think

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Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs

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that’s a significant service to students,” said Mauhs-Pugh, “increasing the likelihood that they can persist without running into financial or academic reasons to question whether it’s worth the investment.”

That benefit extends beyond the bounds of the campus, as well. Just under half of GMC’s student body is qualified to receive Pell Grants, and the ability to include the cost of textbooks in financial aid packages has been a significant factor in alleviating the financial stress on families who often struggle year to year with unpredictable costs outside of tuition and fees. According to Mauhs-Pugh, “Many students arrive at campus without a realistic plan for how they’re going to cover the textbook expense.” Simply making expenses more predictable and visible by knowing an exact cost per semester (rather than suggesting a nebulous range of \$900-\$1100, as was necessitated by past models) has greatly improved the

“It is hard for me conceive that having 100% of the students start each semester with all the required textbooks they need for every class would not have a positive impact on student academic success.”

Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs

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ability of families to adequately prepare and budget for education like never before, and greatly reducing the cost of textbooks has made education more affordable.

Through centralizing the textbook experience back on the campus, Mauhs-Pugh and Hoffman both independently realized that the Rafter360 program can also pre-indicate academic performance, helping faculty and staff identify students who may be struggling from the very start. "I would see correlations between who delayed picking up their course materials and who is receiving academic warnings in classes," Hoffman recounts. This early-alert system that creates opportunities to reach out and check in is a natural fit with the college's high-engagement teaching model. The model was even recognized in the 2013 National Survey of Student Engagement that placed GMC in the top 10% for student-faculty interaction.

Green Mountain College is using the Rafter360 textbooks-in-tuition initiative to cement their reputation as an institution that is addressing affordability and accessibility in higher education. It also reinforces the commitment to holistic sustainability that has been the hallmark of GMC's environmental liberal arts curriculum, both in terms of

creating an affordable model for students and their families and in terms of the curriculum's overall environmental impact. According to Mauhs-Pugh, "We understood that Rafter360 harnessed the embedded energy of keeping books in circulation and using them over and over. It's just one more way to increase our contribution to sustainability."

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