

Customer Spotlight: Alamo Colleges District



In a Nutshell

Alamo Colleges District is playing a significant role in ensuring their students' learning and accessibility needs are met with captioning and transcription. Leadership, including Interpreting Services Manager Jo Hilton, are helping to push accessibility measures forward on a district level. Accessibility needs were highlighted by the shift to online courses due to the novel coronavirus. Alamo's usage of Verbit's services has grown substantially since January 2020, accounting for lecture-heavy classes by supplementing them with captions and interactive transcripts. These tools combat issues such as 'frozen' speakers which disrupt the student experience. As a result, the district is seeing strong student retention rates amidst the shift to online.

“Alamo is committed to access. The students have really relied on [Verbit’s] transcription and the captions if they miss the interpreter. They can then catch what’s happening. Hard of hearing students without ASL can follow along and participate. Transcripts are great for saving for later for notes and study materials.”

Jo Hilton, Interpreting Services Manager



ALAMO
COLLEGES
DISTRICT

The Challenges

In March 2020, Alamo leadership moved all courses online via Zoom to replace the need for face-to-face interactions. The district organized a “Remote Ready Bootcamp” to train 5,000+ faculty members on how to hold classes via Zoom and ensure accessibility for students. The district had been utilizing Verbit’s captioning and transcription tools prior to the pandemic, but needed to ensure not only students with reported needs, but all students could participate remotely.

“Colleges and universities have to think about those silent disabilities or invisible disabilities,” Hilton said. “We had some students operating fine in the



classroom and didn't need accommodations because it's so much more holistic when you're in a room and you're getting contextual clues.” However, in the Zoom setting, additional students reported to DSS and were referred to Hilton. They were struggling to understand teachers and follow along with courses. Professors and interpreters were freezing on Zoom as well due to inconsistent Wi-Fi, which affected all students.

Alamo Colleges District Profile:



The Alamo Colleges District is a network of five community colleges in San Antonio and Universal City, Texas, which serves the Greater San Antonio metropolitan area. These credits transfer to four-year universities for those pursuing bachelor's or higher degrees. Alamo Colleges' workforce development programs help individuals build new careers and meet the needs of business. The Alamo Colleges District empowers Texas' diverse communities for success. More than 98K students are enrolled in Alamo Colleges' 300+ degree certificate programs.

The Solution

Hilton worked with the Alamo Colleges District to connect each school with Verbit and provide captioning of necessary classes. Benefits included:

- **Equal opportunities for all students:** All students were given a fair chance to succeed in the online environment with accessible videos and materials.
- **Ease of use:** Teachers were quick to learn Verbit's platform, which provided integration with their preferred LMS, CANVAS.
- **Competitive pricing:** Interpreting services and CART services can be expensive accommodations, which made them district-level functions. Verbit offered competitive pricing to ensure all students were granted accessible materials at the budget.
- **Live services:** Verbit provided its real-time CART services to allow online students to effectively follow along with courses through live captions and interactive transcripts.

The Results

✓ Accommodation of growing needs

Alamo has seen a growth in the number of students reporting disabilities over the past few semesters. "We don't have the option of saying 'we can't accommodate you.' A lot of colleges try to go with an internal system, but it's cumbersome in terms of equipment, personnel, scheduling and driving. They don't have the manpower," which is where Verbit comes in.

✓ Accessibility to benefit all learners

"I use captions all the time, and I don't have a disability that makes it necessary. It's just convenient. So when we have a student who has any kind of hearing loss, it's the most reliable way to present them with the information. Captioning can make it easier to digest."

✓ Faculty buy-in of accessibility benefits

"We started adding live captions and emailed teachers to include them with their online classes... Not one teacher wasn't on board. They were asking 'Am I doing it right? What more can I do?' We are in a better position for when [the crisis] is over. It really makes me very proud."

"Verbit worked really hard to set Alamo up with a contract that would work for our needs. It's just been really easy. The invoicing is super easy to see what we've spent. I can go in and see that students are appropriately scheduled. It's just a very easy system to work with."

Jo Hilton, Interpreting Services Manager, Alamo Colleges District

