

California State University, Fresno

DISCOVERe

The bold vision of California State University, Fresno President Joseph I. Castro to transform the classroom learning experience by replacing textbooks with computer tablets has proven to be a successful new teaching and learning practice with documented higher levels of faculty and student engagement.

Called DISCOVERe, the tablet program was launched in the spring of 2014 with 33 faculty teaching 29 courses in 49 sections with 900 students, 30 percent of whom were Hispanic and more than 50 percent first-generation college-goers.

DISCOVERe has grown in two years to 7,000 students and 130 faculty members who use tablets in the classroom for enhanced teaching and learning. Stipends to students drastically reduce the cost to purchase a tablet and the program allows for classroom cost savings since traditional textbooks are not needed. Overall there has been a 73 percent cost savings over a traditional course in regard to course materials and books. In fact, 60 percent of DISCOVERe courses have absolutely no textbook or materials costs because faculty use open source materials, which are free to students.

There is emerging evidence that students are performing better in DISCOVERe courses versus the same course taught without tablets. The data show that our at-risk students are performing on a par with the general student body, with students expressing more engagement and more willingness to work collaboratively. The satisfaction rates with the program are 82 percent among students and 91 percent among faculty.

While an academic program at heart, the DISCOVERe is a true campus collaboration. It begins with faculty professional development: training sessions plus a week-long “boot camp” in the summer to help prepare faculty to teach a robust tablet course. Technology support is ubiquitous. Faculty and students have assistance both in the classroom and at an on-campus hub that provides online help and resources. In addition, 25 student “guides” – each of whom completed 100 hours of customer service, tech, and app training – serve as a resource for faculty and students.

Looking ahead, the campus plans to expand DISCOVERe to 10,000 students and to more than 230 faculty in fall 2016.

Central Valley Promise

With generous support from the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) through its initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMFG), Fresno State has made unprecedented progress in building partnerships across educational sectors to plan an improved the K-16 college pipeline, now called the *Central Valley Promise*. The *Promise* is an intentioned response to the low college-going rate in the Central Valley of California. Fresno State, together with partners in K-12 and community college, has capitalized on shared initiatives in instructional technology to design a multifaceted plan to enhance the college-going culture of the region.

Designed by the Executive Leadership Team, consisting of partner college Presidents and school district Superintendents, the *Central Valley Promise* is a community-wide effort to promote college as a viable option for youth in the region. The *Promise* will ensure that if children and their parents pledge to do what it takes in middle and high school to prepare, college will be there for them in the future, guaranteed.

Launching in fall, 2-16 with three initial pathways – two rural and one urban – focused on STEM, Agriculture, and teaching careers, the *Promise* has potential to impact as many as 25,000 children in the Central Valley:

1. Sanger and Kings Canyon Unified School Districts to Reedley College to Fresno State
2. Firebaugh and Mendota Unified School Districts to West Hills Community College to Fresno State
3. Fresno Unified School District to Fresno City College to Fresno State

Significantly enhancing the college-going culture and improving the college-going rate in the Central Valley will fundamentally change the notion of educational equity in our traditionally underserved region. We pride ourselves on providing “opportunity” and “access,” but that is not sufficient. The *Central Valley Promise* has the potential to move us beyond opportunity and access and into participation and benefit. We are not just opening doors to diverse groups of students, many of whom are low income and first generation college goers, we are providing the resources and support for their full “participation,” and ultimately for the economic and social/cultural “benefits” of a college USU degree.
