

Northern Marianas College Reduces Delays and Expands Access

Campus Snapshot

Institution Type:

Public land-grant college

Location:

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (US territory)

Campuses:

3 across Saipan (main), Tinian, and Rota

Enrollment:

1,075 students
(Spring 2025)

The Vision: Northern Marianas College (NMC), a remote institution serving students across three Pacific islands, faced logistical challenges with physical course materials, which were compounded by hazardous weather conditions.

To serve the campuses on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, the campus store team relied on books shipped by sea, often waiting weeks for shipments to arrive. In many cases, once materials arrived on the main island, moving them between islands took as much time and expense as bringing them from the mainland. Without a way to deliver digital course materials, students struggled to access the resources they needed.

The institution recognized it needed a more sustainable approach to course materials.



"We have three campuses, and they're separated by ocean. Supporting all our students through this new format is a game changer for us. Before, we used hard copy books, and it cost thousands of dollars to ship them here, and students weren't able to get their books before classes started. Now we can provide access to ebooks online for most students almost anytime."

— David Attao, Chief Financial Officer, NMC

The Journey: Students faced several barriers to getting course materials. Shipping delayed delivery, and funding and ledger processes added steps before students could complete their purchases.

At NMC, **more than 80% of students rely on Pell Grants**, which makes affordability critical. However, a manual and time-consuming financial aid process often delayed students' ability to use their funds. At the same time, operational challenges added complexity. Shipping increased costs, inventory carried risk, and unsold books often sat in storage with no way to recover the institution's investment. Without an eCommerce platform, students completed purchases by email or in person, creating additional hurdles.

NMC partnered with an experienced industry consultant who assisted in assembling the right mix of vendors to design a solution tailored to its needs.

The team used this as an opportunity to evolve NMC's approach by expanding into digital materials and enhancing campus store systems to **improve access and operational efficiency**.



"If classes start in February and an instructor needs books, we won't get those books until March or April. Students lose out on those first months of learning because of shipping."

— David Attao, Chief Financial Officer, NMC

The Outcome: With the new course materials program, students can access materials online immediately. In a region prone to typhoons, this ensures they can download course materials in advance and continue learning during weather disruptions.

The change also transformed bookstore operations. Digital materials **reduced inventory risk, minimized delays, and streamlined workflows**, which has enabled the team to focus on supporting students.

Program enhancements simplified how students use financial aid by reducing manual steps and improving access. Students now obtain materials independently, which frees the bookstore team to focus on support.

The Impact: The shift to digital materials expanded availability across the islands and positioned the college as a reliable source for learning in the broader community.

Students no longer fall behind waiting for course materials and can engage from the start of their courses, while the bookstore team has reduced inventory and operational costs.

With greater visibility into inventory and purchasing, the team can manage costs and make informed decisions that keep materials affordable. Together, these changes have created a connected and supportive learning experience across the islands.



"It's been over 20 years that the college has been trying to implement a better system. Now that we have this, it's much more convenient for students and much more accessible for them as well."

— David Attao, Chief Financial Officer, NMC

What's Next: NMC is expanding its role within the community by increasing access to learning materials beyond campus. It is transforming what began as a logistical challenge into a sustainable, community-centered approach.



VitalSource + Northern Marianas College
Making learning more accessible, no matter where students are.

VitalSource®

get.vitalsource.com/dayoneaccess