

CASE STUDY

Increasing Persistence by 13% with InScribe



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of North Texas (UNT), one of the nation's largest public research universities, is celebrated for its commitment to innovation, inclusivity, and student success. Known by many as The Mean Green, the institution offers online and in-person programs to over 47,000 students, fostering a dynamic educational community. In 2020, UNT launched a five-year strategic plan (January 2020 - January 2025) aimed at supporting student success, advancing UNT's Tier 1 goals, and nurturing a caring community. Central to this strategic plan are the objectives of student empowerment and transformation, focusing on creating educational and social environments that equip students for lifelong success.

With an emphasis on the expansion and development of student support services, the Division of Digital Strategy & Innovation (DSI), the Division of Planning, and the Division of Student Affairs dedicated their work to improving the online learning experience and enriching students' growth mindset, well-being, and mental health. In service of this goal, Samantha Nikolai, Director of DSI Enterprise, collaborated with other divisions to design and launch an InScribe virtual community for online students. This initiative aimed to cultivate a sense of belonging and community and was introduced in August 2023 to 1,000 online students in the Online Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences (BAAS) and Online Bachelor of Science in General Business (BSGB) programs. The community had an immediate positive impact, leading to significant improvements in student engagement and a remarkable 13% increase in student persistence rates.

This successful adoption of the InScribe platform aligns with UNT's mission to empower students for lifelong success, establishing a new standard for virtual learning environments. Plans are underway to extend the platform to 23,000 students, positioning UNT to further revolutionize online education and affirm its leadership in innovative and inclusive education.



"This initiative not only bridges the physical gap between our online students and the campus but also strengthens our commitment to every student's success and well-being, irrespective of their mode of learning."

Sam Nikolai | Director of DSI Enterprise

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

Ranked a Tier One research university by the Carnegie Classification and designated a Hispanic- and Minority-Serving Institution, UNT is the flagship of the UNT System located in Denton, TX. Boasting 250 degree programs and a thriving community of nearly 47,000 students, UNT serves the North Texas region and helps drive the state's economy through innovative research, educational excellence focused on career readiness, and a spirit of entrepreneurship. Together, with its branch campus in Frisco, UNT students earned more than 12,000 degrees last year.



The UNT community is guided by five shared values – Courageous Integrity, Be Curious, We Care, Better Together, and Show Your Fire. [Learn more about UNT's values.](#)



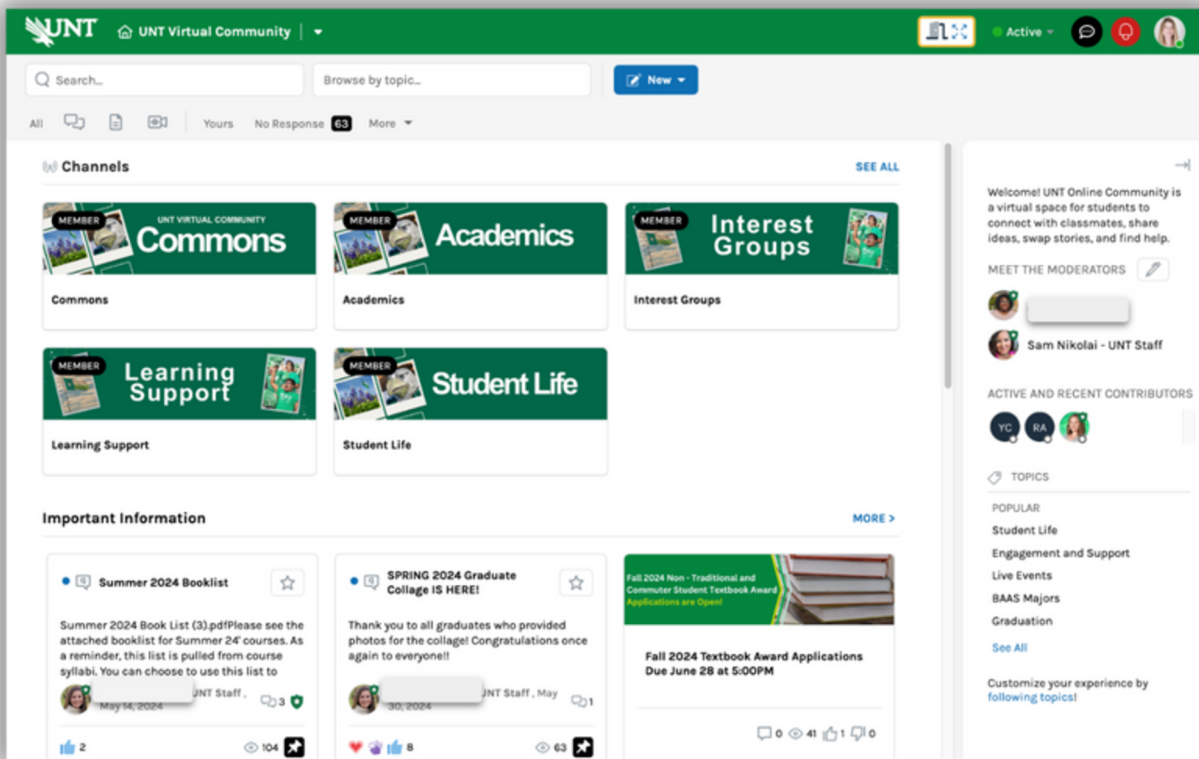
THE CHALLENGE

With the rise of online education, institutions have wrestled with replicating the engaging, community-focused experiences of traditional campus life in a virtual setting. Online students often face unique challenges, including feelings of isolation and a lack of integration into the broader university community. These challenges can negatively impact their academic performance, retention, and overall satisfaction. UNT recognized this challenge and identified the need for a platform that could better connect their online students and foster opportunities for peer engagement and support.

THE SOLUTION

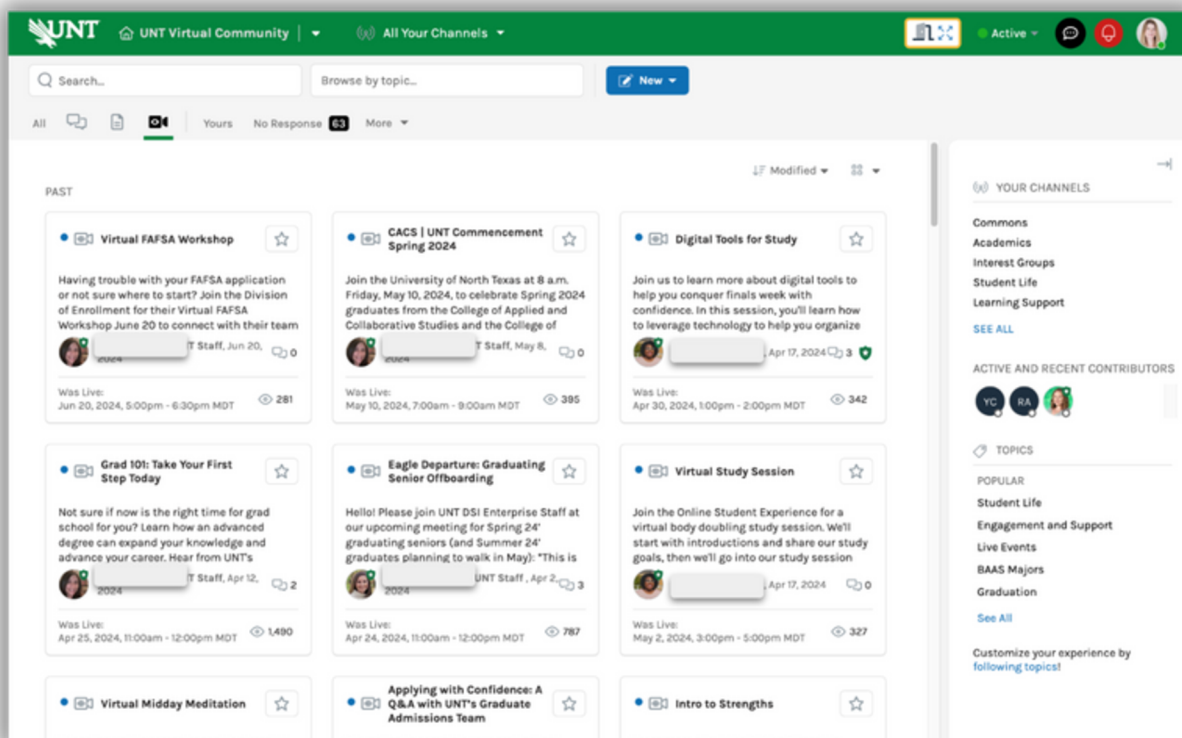
To find their answer, UNT looked at best practices from peer institutions and collaborated closely with the Divisions of Planning and Student Affairs. Ultimately, they decided that the best way to achieve their goals was to create an online community that would bring together students in a virtual space for conversation and collaboration. This space would not only allow online students to connect with each other, it would also give UNT a centralized location for students to access critical university services, resources, and support.

To design and launch this initiative, UNT adopted InScribe, a virtual community platform that helps institutions create dynamic spaces for academic dialogue, peer support, and resource sharing. To maximize opportunities for access, UNT integrated InScribe into the existing Canvas Learning Management System (LMS), institutional emails, websites, and text messages. This strategic integration transformed the platform into a comprehensive hub for support and engagement. Tailored to the needs of non-traditional, online learners, it included spaces for academic assistance, social interaction, and information sharing, making it a versatile solution for various student needs.



UNT's virtual community initiative had ambitious goals including significantly improving the online educational experience, bolstering a sense of belonging, and increasing student persistence rates among their online learners.

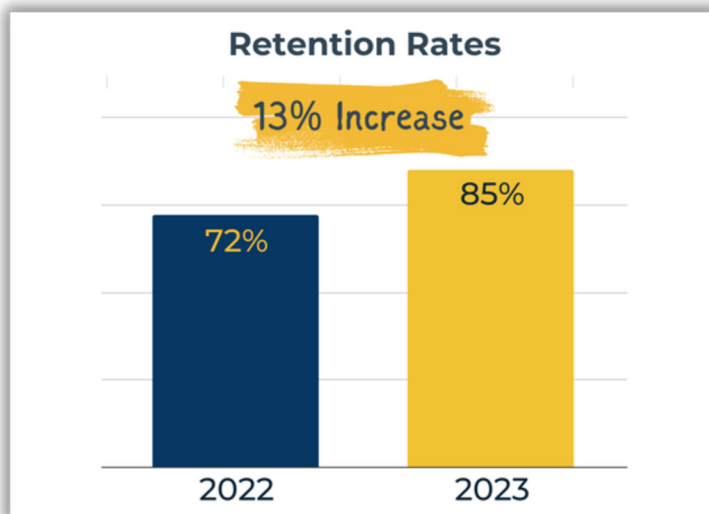
During its pilot phase, the community was made available to 1,000 students in specific online programs. In the first semester, it attracted an active membership of 869 learners. Students used the space to ask questions, provide advice to each other, and share stories about their education journeys. UNT found the space particularly useful for disseminating information about key services such as financial aid, bill payment, and academic advising, simplifying complex bureaucratic procedures for online learners. Live events such as student meet-ups were also promoted and accessed via the community, giving students an alternative, synchronous opportunity to engage with each other.



"Seeing our online community thrive and witness tangible increases in retention and engagement has been truly inspiring. This is a testament to the strength and resilience of our Mean Green family, even in a virtual space." – Samanta Nikolai, Director of DSI Enterprise

OUTCOME

The pilot phase of UNT's virtual community was successful across each of UNT's goals. High adoption rates indicate that students appreciate the space and are excited about new opportunities to engage with their peers. Engagement metrics also demonstrated the platform's efficacy in cultivating an active and supportive online community. In the first six months, 183 questions were asked, resulting in 450 responses and more than 29k views. Most importantly, the community also drove dramatic increases in student persistence, jumping from 72% in Fall '22/Spring '23 to 85% in Fall '23/Spring '24 after the community was launched. This impressive 13% boost in student retention indicates the power of community to support student success.



The favorable outcomes of the pilot program affirmed the importance of developing integrated virtual spaces for online learners. The marked improvement in retention rates and heightened levels of engagement suggest that the platform successfully met the challenges of isolation and disconnection from the university community.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As UNT looks ahead, there are plans to expand the program to include all 23,000 online students and graduate students. Additionally, the introduction of leadership roles within the community aims to empower online students as community ambassadors. The initiative's success has generated widespread interest across the university, leading to plans for a broader implementation in the upcoming academic year.

The collaborative effort between UNT and the InScribe virtual community platform has showcased the transformative power of peer connection for online students. The pilot program's success at UNT paves the way for further expansion, highlighting the university's dedication to an inclusive, community-driven approach to online education.



Ready to increase persistence rates?

Get started today! Your community can be set up in as little as 10 business days. Plus, your dedicated customer success team will ensure a successful launch and assist with the long-term health of your community. **Request a proposal at hello@inscribeapp.com.**