Genio

Volunteer State
Community College

Institution wide case study

Executive summary

Leslie Smith is the Manager of the Access Center at **Volunteer State Community College** (Vol State), an institution where 93% of the student body would be considered non-traditional (e.g. first generation, working, aged 22+).

With 36 years of experience in disability services, she has been a passionate champion for student success since joining Volunteer State Community College (Vol State) and a strategic advocate for her diverse student cohort, which consists of **38% first generation and 73% working students.**

Leslie has spearheaded the evolution of note taking skills development on campus, transforming it from an accommodation for a few into an indispensable, institution wide tool that has **improved retention by 11%.**

Many of her non-traditional students are considered to be at a greater risk for dropout or failure. Leslie has demonstrated the significant value that learning technologies such as Genio can have in boosting her student's knowledge, increasing their skills and improving their confidence.

Collectively, this has led to more effective learning and greater student engagement across Vol State.

"*I saw that of students who persisted from Fall semester to Spring semester, who had used Genio, the persistence rate was 88% compared to 77% for those who did not. **That 11% difference was significant.***"**

Leslie Smith
Access Center Manager

![VOL STATE logo]

▶ **Improved retention by 11%** - students utilizing Genio achieved an 88% retention rate from Fall to Spring, compared to 77% for students who didn't use Genio.

▶ Genio **saved 28 students** from dropping out.

▶ **88% experienced less stress** because of Genio.

▶ **88%** believed Genio has **improved their study skills.**

▶ Volunteer State Community College successfully demonstrated Genio's impact, **securing long term funding** via the Student Tech Fee.

"*After more than 30 years in higher education, working at a community college serving an 11-county area around Nashville, **I can confidently say Genio is one of the best tools we've come across.***

*As a student services professional, I love seeing how it helps our students stay organized, learn more effectively, and ultimately do better in their classes. **It's simple, intuitive, and really makes a difference.***"**

Anne-Marie McKee
Assistant Vice President for the Division of Student Services

The challenge for Vol State

In 2019, the Vice President of Academic Affairs approached Leslie with a challenge: faculty were **frustrated and overburdened by the process of finding peer notetakers** for students with disabilities.

The system was fundamentally flawed. As a college with an open admissions policy, many student notetakers were not strong students themselves, making the accommodation unreliable and ineffective.

Leslie's initial analysis showed that paying a $50 stipend to peer notetakers for the 90 students who qualified would be far more expensive than purchasing a technology-based solution.

This led to the college moving to Genio, first with 25 licenses before increasing that figure to 250. Genio had an intuitive UI, a mobile app, and kept students more engaged by asking them to **take, organize, and refine their own notes,** rather than doing the work for them or relying on peer notetakers, increasing student uptake.

However, adoption was still not where Vol State wanted it to be, until they learned the reason why.

"We more than doubled our usage of the students who used it, but it was far less, only about 20% of the number of licenses we had... the feedback we got from students was that they felt very self-conscious and insecure using it.

They felt it outed them as a student with a disability. If they had students who asked about it, they'd have to say, "you have to be a student in the access center to use it."

This feedback became the driving force behind a new vision. The goal shifted from simply providing better accommodations to implementing a universal tool that could support every student on campus.

Leslie aimed to boost the overall student experience, increase engagement in class, and enhance learning effectiveness to directly address the institutional strategic goal of improving student retention.

The solution was to pursue an institution wide license, making Genio an equitable resource available to all. This way, any student could benefit from Genio and students with accommodations wouldn't have a spotlight on them.

Building a **business case**

To secure funding for their institution wide trial, Leslie targeted the college's Technology Access Fees (TAF), a student-funded resource managed by the Computing and Technology Committee.

The process began by submitting a request through a dynamic form on the IT website. This form was then routed through a hierarchy of signatures before landing with the committee for a vote.

Securing approval was a persistent effort. Leslie and her AT Coordinator, Marye, presented to the committee on three separate occasions, iterating their case every time. They faced challenges, including pushback from a committee member who favored a different program that would benefit only a single academic division.

Leslie had to directly advocate for her proposal:

"*During the meeting, I said that I believe that **this technology is going to benefit every student** and TAF funds are based on student fees. Every student pays into the TAF funds so every student should benefit.***"**

Crucially, Leslie was able to connect her proposal to the broader goals of Vol State. By demonstrating how Genio allows Vol State to explore, develop, and use new technologies to enhance teaching, research, service and student achievement, with a goal of increasing fall to fall retention rates, **she could tie her proposal to wider initiatives.**

Key stakeholders were vital to this process, including Leslie's immensely supportive Assistant Vice President of Student Services, Anne-Marie McKee, and the chair of the committee itself, who as the college's web developer, immediately saw the tool's potential.

Securing **buy-in**

Engaging faculty was a critical part of the process.

Leslie began by forming an alliance with the Faculty Senate Chair, who became a "super big supporter". At her suggestion, they held an introductory session during convocation week, but the meeting was tense.

"It was a pretty contentious discussion. There were a lot of faculty who didn't understand it. They thought that it was going to be something that was going to do all the work for students."

During the debate, faculty allies spoke up, reminding their peers that students were already recording lectures on their phones. Likewise, they reminded them that Genio doesn't do all the work for the student, ensuring academic integrity and the right level of productive friction.

Following this, the funding committee required Leslie's team to conduct a faculty survey to ensure their voices were heard before they would approve permanent funding.

While students weren't consulted on the initial decision, their feedback was the catalyst for the institution wide model.

Once the trial was approved, the team launched a robust campaign to drive adoption. **This included:**

▶ A strategic email campaign

Using Slate, they sent a mass email in July to all students already registered for the fall. The system then automatically sent the same email to every new student the moment they registered for classes, continuing through the first week of the semester.

▶ Engaging parents and students

At campus orientation events, the team presented Genio not just as an accessibility tool, but as **a resource for every student.** Parents became "a big influencer," encouraging their children to sign up.

▶ Creative resource fairs

At campus resource fairs, the Manager of Student Engagement and Support organized a scavenger hunt that required students to visit every table for a signature. **This created a captive audience.** When students approached their Access Center table saying, "I don't need to know about your services," the team would reply, "we have something that's available to you too" and introduce them to Genio.

Implementing Genio

The implementation journey occurred in distinct phases, beginning in 2019 and culminating in the institution wide trial for the 2024 academic year.

The move to an institution wide model **dramatically simplified the administrative workload.**

"It has made things much easier for us because before Marye had to send out individual invitations to each student and then the student had to accept the invitation; now we don't have to do any of that"

With Single Sign-On, promoted via text, email and announcements, students could now access Genio directly through their student portal. Training was hands-on and targeted. Marye, the AT Coordinator, met with 21 students for one-on-one sessions and held orientations where new students would bring their laptops, upload the software, and learn the features on the spot.

The IT help desk was also briefed, but the comprehensive video tutorials and resources within the Genio dashboard proved so effective that user questions were minimal.

The first-year results were staggering, where Vol State hoped for 10% activation they achieved **24%**, serving over 1,200 students signing up.

*"Genio is by far the best note taking app I've used. It greatly improves the accuracy and speed of my note taking. **I feel less stressed** because I'm more confident in my studying because of my improved notes and I don't miss information in class."*

James Parker, student at Vol State
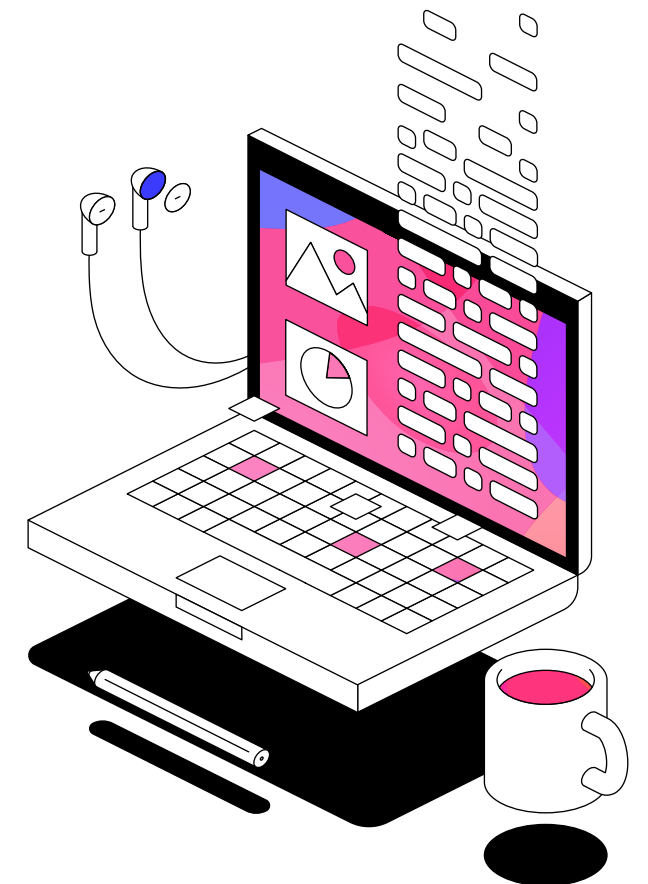
Quantifiable retention gains and **soaring student confidence**

The single most powerful result came from the Office of Institutional Research. The data provided the **undeniable proof of impact** that Leslie needed to secure permanent funding.

"It just really knocked the socks off of us… when I took a look at it and I saw that of students who persisted from Fall semester to Spring semester, who had used Genio, the persistence rate was 88% compared to 77% for those who did not.. That 11% difference was significant."

Beyond the numbers, students experienced a transformation in the classroom. One student who created a testimonial video explained that Genio was essential for helping her sort through information due to her disability.

"It's been overwhelmingly positive from the students who have used it.

We had students saying, 'Oh, yeah, it really helped me. I just couldn't have gotten through my classes without that. I love it. I hope you guys keep offering this.'

And so it's been overwhelmingly positive by the students who have used it."

Leslie explains this is a common theme:

"They don't have to focus on taking notes and then missing some of it… they can actually focus on the lecture. **The fact of the matter is that it cuts down on anxiety and stress.** *And so I think a lot of the students just in the way they present themselves, not even necessarily what they say, but the way they present themselves is with greater confidence."*

Because of Genio, students across Vol State felt more effective at learning and better able to engage with the material they were being presented with, no matter their learning background or environment.

Armed with this compelling data, Leslie successfully applied to have Genio funded permanently by the **Student Tech Fee**. Her advice for other institutions looking to do the same is to be strategic and persistent.

"Without Genio I would be struggling. It's really helpful with easing my worries of missing something important during class that the professor stresses would be on the test."

Ana Maria, student at Vol State

Leslie's advice:

▶ **Build alliances**

"You need to get allies that you start small and you build your ally base and then you start getting ideas".

▶ **Brainstorm all possibilities**

Leslie had a backup plan to ask each academic division to contribute a percentage towards the total cost based on their students' usage.

▶ **Use the available data**

By aligning her metrics with the strategic goals of the institution, Leslie was able to harness the data to reinforce and validate her case.

▶ **Leverage all campus resources**

From the PR department to student government, every connection can help build momentum.

The future for **Genio and Vol State**

The work at Volunteer State is not done. The next phase is focused on deepening faculty engagement and adoption.

The team is planning lunch and learn sessions and a train the trainer program to build a network of Genio champions within each academic division. They are also working with a faculty committee to integrate Genio Notes and the Confident Notetaker's Masterclass **directly into the curriculum** for the redesigned first year experience classes.

> When asked about Genio...
>
> **"***there were some students who would say [to another student], 'oh yeah! I use that. You need to use it. I'll show you how to get it.'***"**

Likewise, Leslie explained how Genio has become an invaluable recruitment tool. So much so, the Outreach and Accommodations Coordinator makes sure to include information about Genio and how to use it at transition fairs, ensuring students coming in knew all about it already and were excited to use it in college. It was a level of additional support they could offer in building note taking skills that their competitors weren't offering.

For Leslie, the success of an institution wide initiative still comes down to its effect on the individual.

"It's like the story of the single starfish on the beach... that one starfish that you pick up and you help and you throw back into the ocean, that has been significant for that one starfish.

It's the same way with our students... if we're helping one student get through a class or get through a semester or get through their degree program, then that's significant for that one student".

With Genio Notes, Leslie was able to save not just one starfish this semester, but 28. Given secure funding, additional awareness and support across campus, **Vol State is sure to make an even greater impact on students' lives this year and the year after that.**

Let's talk about improving your student outcomes. Book a call to discuss Genio's institution wide learning tools:

▶ **Book a call**