
Book Reviews

Elyssa M. Gould

Affordable Course Materials: Electronic Textbooks and Open Educational Resources. Ed. Chris Diaz. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2017. 144 p. \$65 softcover (ISBN: 978-0-8389-1580-6).

The nine case studies collected in *Affordable Course Materials* cite research that points to the same truth students across the country face with each new academic term: the price of textbooks far outpaces the rate of inflation. According to an oft-cited report released by the Government Accountability Office in 2013, the price of the average new textbook rose 82 percent in the preceding decade—three times the rate of inflation.¹ These case studies assert the claim that libraries, already both a central part of the campus community and committed to equal access to information resources, are perfectly poised to mitigate the cost of core texts. By facilitating access to course materials in innovative ways, libraries can alleviate the financial burden on the students they serve. This volume showcases approaches taken by academic libraries to benefit their campus communities, the challenges the authors faced, and the lessons learned. It serves as a valuable source of information and inspiration for those wishing to implement their own initiatives.

Because the projects undertaken by the authors of these case studies were generally library-wide (or even campus-wide) efforts not limited to a single library department, this text can serve as a guide for academic librarians regardless of specialty. Librarians involved in the cited projects ranged from acquisitions librarians to instructional designers. The book's format allows the reader to choose which case studies to read, and each has a unique perspective to offer. There is repetition among the case studies, but this only underscores both the need for action and the fact that these methods have found success in academic librarianship.

The subtitle of this collection suggests two means by which libraries might provide access to course materials: electronic textbooks and open educational resources (OERs). Although libraries have not traditionally collected textbooks for general circulation, many of the projects outlined in this volume evolved from the practice of placing print textbooks on course reserve. The introduction of these types of resources into library collections as required course materials can manifest in different ways but provide the same outcome: a cost benefit to students.

Libraries seeking to provide electronic versions of traditional textbooks assigned by faculty may face the challenge

some of the authors faced: obtaining a list of the texts required by faculty. Such a list is typically compiled by and accessed via the campus bookstore; for some institutions, such as the University of Central Florida in chapter 8, this posed a bigger challenge due to the language of the bookstore provider's contract with the university. In contrast, the University of Arizona in chapter 2 describes their relationship with UA's campus bookstore as a "partnership" (17).

Although some libraries focused on providing access to textbooks already assigned, others questioned the definition of a textbook and sought to affect change at the source: faculty selection of required texts for their courses. As the commercial textbook market has profited from the status quo, scholars and educators have responded by amplifying awareness of OERs, and academic libraries in particular have been on the cutting edge of this trend. Many of the cases in this collection have involved partnerships with faculty to encourage adoption, or even creation, of OERs to replace traditional textbooks. While there are other books or resources able to offer a more introductory guide to OERs themselves, those seeking practical ideas for engaging with faculty will find this book helpful. Some case studies detail the setup of institutional grants for faculty who adopt OERs in lieu of commercial texts, plus tangible examples of their own documents and communications with outside stakeholders. These resources can aid readers who wish to reach out and develop those relationships within their own campus communities.

These case studies cover a wide variety of topics related to affordable course materials, although one concept that would have benefitted from further expansion is the notion that initiatives that mitigate students' financial burden could have a profound effect on retention. As this is a topic of great interest to most university administrators, being able to assess student retention as a key aspect of projects like these provides a potential avenue for cooperation and partnership with stakeholders outside the library.

Smaller libraries or libraries with fewer resources may find the projects within these case studies to be daunting; the workflows were typically described as time-consuming, and implementation generally involved a high level of interdepartmental cooperation. However, the ideas represented are both practical and broad in their appeal. Especially of

benefit are cases that offer opportunities for scalability and adaptability. There are similarities among all the initiatives presented, but one powerful theme is that libraries are positioned to lead the charge to uniting diverse campus communities around a common goal.

Hopefully this exploration of library-led initiatives facilitating access to course materials will foster a new wave of similar projects dedicated to providing cost savings to students and to expanding the creation and utilization of

open access educational resources.—*Julie Gaida (juliegaida@pacificu.edu), Pacific University*

Reference

1. "College Textbooks: Students Have Access to Textbook Information," Government Accountability Office, June 6, 2013; accessed January 17, 2018. www.gao.gov/products/GAO-13-368.

Textbooks in Academic Libraries: Selection, Circulation, and Assessment. Ed. Chris Diaz. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2017. 148 p. \$65.00 softcover (ISBN 978-0-8389-1587-5).

Do textbooks have a place in academic libraries? Nearly all of the nine chapters in this text begins by addressing this question. Long-standing concerns about the acquisition and inclusion of print textbooks in the library's collection, including cost, frequency of replacement, etc., are cited in many of the case studies presented here. What is interesting is that this diverse group of institutions, representing both small and large private and public universities, all reached the same conclusion: the textbook reserve program aids in student recruitment, retention, and success.

The introduction, written by Diaz, explains that questions regarding the following aspects of a textbook reserve program are both asked and answered in the text: contribution to campus recruitment and retention efforts; assisting with library outreach to students and faculty; effects on library staffing and workflows; working with the campus bookstore; budgeting for a long-term program; and analyzing textbook circulation data (viii–ix).

How well does this book address each of these areas? Impact on retention is explored in more detail than recruitment. It is still a challenge for libraries to make the case that programs such as these directly contribute to retention, but at the very least these studies demonstrate highly effective ways of considering institutional priorities and provide examples of how they have successfully connected programs such as these to student recruitment and retention.

Outreach to students and faculty is a key part of introducing textbook programs. Managing student expectations is noted in more than one study. The first chapter, "Basically Everything I Need, I Know the Library Has It: A Case Study of SUNY Canton's Textbook Program," alludes to the fact that students very easily misconstrue the library's textbook reserve program as one that will have their texts for all their courses. The discussion of marketing and communication as a critical piece of the implementation process is a strength of this text. None of the libraries claim that their programs supplant the need for students purchasing their own texts for their courses. The case studies illustrate that the program acts as a stop-gap for students who would

otherwise be unable to purchase textbooks due to high costs and gives these students a chance at academic success.

It is clear from the studies in this book that a textbook reserve program is not one that should be introduced lightly. The impact on staffing and workflows detailed in these studies can be significant. Selection, acquisition, cataloging, processing, communication, and marketing require time and personnel. Some institutions target specific audiences while others provide general access to large-enrollment undergrad classes. The scope of the service plays a significant role in the library's commitment. Creative solutions are described to mitigate supply and demand problems, including self-service reserve rooms and pager systems.

Most of the chapters detail their library's experience with a textbook reserve program from its inception, including examples of how the program was funded, how the library identified the resources needed, how materials were designated in catalogs and discovery layers, how the program itself was delivered, and how success was assessed. Ease of discovery and timeliness of acquisition and cataloging of materials were identified as a critical means to success. More than one case study noted that if students checked the library catalog once for their materials and they were not there, they would not check again (84). The campus bookstore becomes an essential partner in this initiative as they are key to identifying the texts themselves. Some case studies reported success in utilizing the campus bookstore for purchasing textbook copies, while others moved away from the bookstores as a supplier due to issues pertaining to timeliness of delivery.

Of particular interest to library administrators will be the variety of ways that textbook reserve programs were funded. The most frequently mentioned collaborations were with student unions and governments. Most libraries did not develop a budget derived strictly from library funds; rather, these programs were made possible from funding supplied or supplemented by these partners. It was encouraging to read that even for the programs that started off with modest budgets, success was still achievable.