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The Odd Couple: Teaming Up to Reduce Textbook Costs for Students

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Abstract

Since 2012, The University of Arizona (UA) Libraries have partnered with the UA BookStores to identify and make available e-book versions of required course materials accessible through the campus course management system and the BookStores' website. These e-books have multi- or unlimited use licenses and are available at no cost to students. In advance of each semester, these two stakeholder groups work in partnership to acquire, make discoverable, and promote this service to faculty and students in a variety of ways.

With the maturity of our partnership and of this service to faculty and students, the UA Libraries are investigating our current environment and working with the UA BookStores to develop a new model that will improve our workflows, processes, and service to our end users, most notably by inserting the libraries at an earlier stage in the textbook adoption process.

This paper focuses on both our current process and how we got to this point as well as on our future strategic plans for developing and implementing a new model in collaboration with campus stakeholders.

Both external considerations and internal library acquisition processes are considered to give a full picture of workflows and collaborations.

The Odd Couple

Academic libraries have a long history of building collections in support of research and preservation of scholarly knowledge, rather than focusing on curricular content. Textbooks, historically, have been excluded from acquisitions and interlibrary loan policies. However, an increase in electronically available titles and the expansion of open educational resource (OER) offerings, coinciding with a steep rise in print textbooks costs, have opened a window of opportunity for academic libraries to align collection policies with course content to the benefit of students (see for example the November 2014 and November 2016 issues of *Against the Grain*). Surveys show that many times students will not purchase course reading materials because of cost barriers (Redden, 2011). By working with campus partners, such as the bookstore, academic libraries can demonstrate a real impact on mitigating the cost of enrollment for students. Ultimately, these efforts show that campus units are aligned toward the same goal: Supporting student learning and retention by expanding access to low or no-cost alternatives to expensive textbooks.

The UA's BookStore is university-owned and operated, reporting to Student Affairs. The UA Libraries reports through the Dean of Libraries up to the Provost. When piloting this project, the stakeholders from the BookStore who worked through an initial process were the director and the assistant director of the BookStore. Stakeholders from the libraries included representation from liaison librarians and acquisitions staff. Both the BookStore and the libraries involved their IT departments to collaboratively work together. That representation continues to be the group that does this work presently, with two liaison librarians assigned as co-leads from the Research and Learning Department (R & L). These two librarians act as the main contact points between the libraries and the BookStore. Delivery, Description, and Acquisitions (DDA) handles all acquisitions work, while Technology Strategy and Services (TeSS) is our IT support.
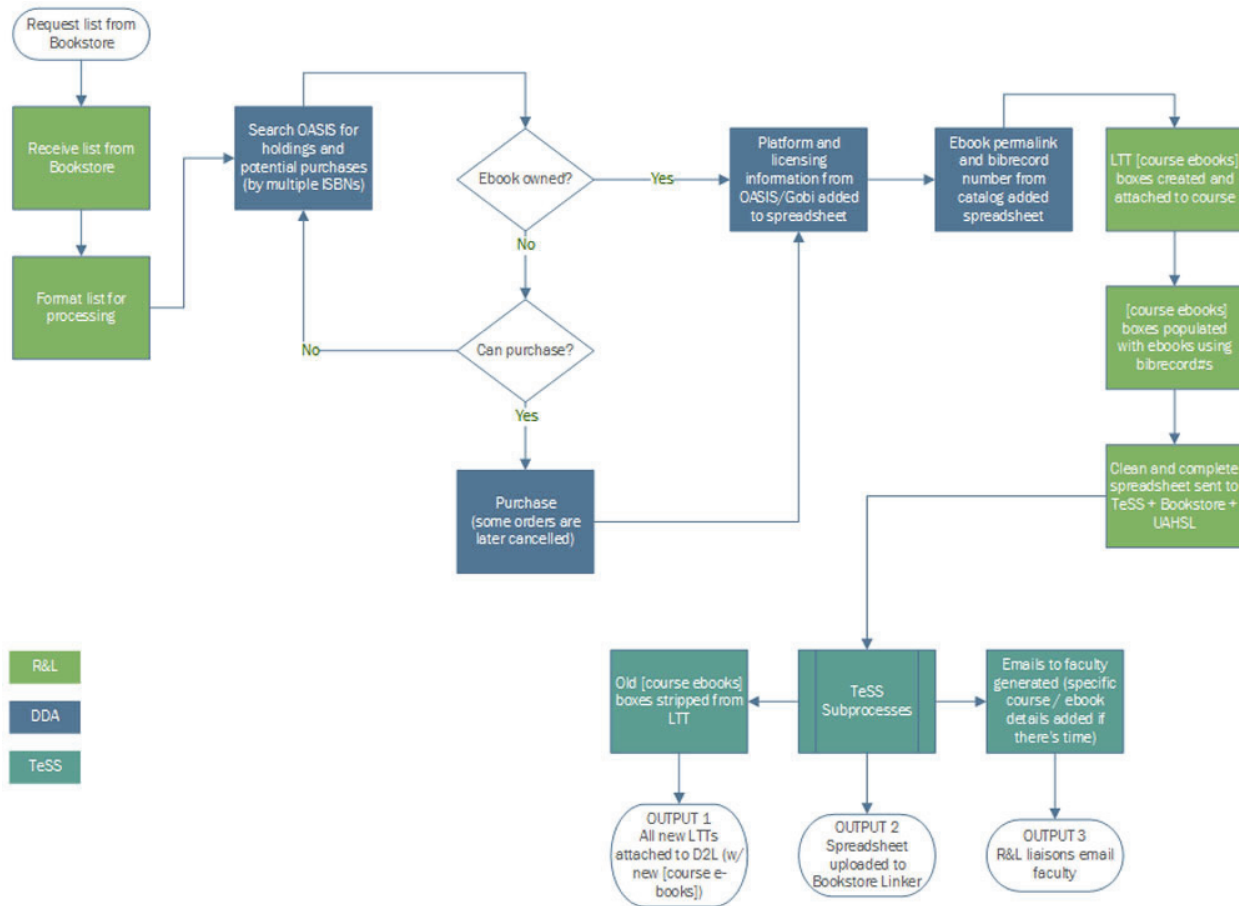
Figure 1. Required course materials workflow.

Required Course Materials Workflow

Textbook adoption deadlines are the dates in which campus departments must submit their lists of required course materials to the BookStore. These deadlines occur sometime during the prior semester. For example, at UA, the textbook adoption deadline for the fall semester is March 17. In a perfect world, faculty would meet those deadlines. The reality is that many faculty at UA do not meet those deadlines, and, in fact, the University is not in compliance with federal regulations mandating that students be informed of costs associated with course enrollment before registration. This has been a serious topic of concern for campus leadership. Nevertheless, those textbook adoption submissions are what started the process of the required course materials service.

The BookStore receives textbook adoption information from campus departments and produces a spreadsheet it then shares with the UA Libraries (see Figure 2). The spreadsheet received by the liaison librarians from the Bookstore is not de-duplicated and contains extraneous columns that need cleaning before it is ready to be passed on to the libraries' acquisitions team.

After the spreadsheet is formatted and cleaned up, it is sent to the librarian overseeing acquisitions who coordinates the work in DDA (see Figure 2). As can be seen, the column headers include course number and section, instructor name, author name, title, and ISBN. The "Act Enr" column, referring to active enrollment, is not accurate since it is a static snapshot of the enrollment at the time of adoption and is not indicative of any subsequent enrollment changes. The instructor e-mail column is blank, as this information is not provided by the BookStore and will need to be filled in later in the process.

Term	Dept/Course	Section	Act Enr	Instructor	InstructorEmail	Author	Title	ISBN
F16	MATH 205	1	3	ANHALT		NCTM	PRINCIPLES TO ACTION	978-0-87353-774-2
F16	AIS 405	1	9	GONZALES		NEIHARDT	BLACK ELK SPEAKS,COMPLETE ED.-NEW INTRO	978-0-8032-8391-6
F16	MED 896A	431				NELSON	ESSENTIAL CLINICAL GLOBAL HEALTH	978-1-1186384-4-6
F16	NURS 753	101	4	DOWNS		NELSON	INFECTIOUS DISEASE EPIDEMIOLOGY	978-1-4496837-9-5
F16	BIOC 462A	1,002	148	STAFF		NELSON	LEHNINGER PRIN.OF BIOCHEM.(LOOSELEAF)	978-1-4292931-2-9
F16	BIOC 565	1	6	SCHWARTZ		NELSON	LEHNINGER PRIN.OF BIOCHEMISTRY	978-1-4292341-4-6
F16	GPSV 311	001-004	2			NELSON	PRESIDENCY+POLITICAL SYSTEM	978-0-87289-964-3
F16	MUS 334	1	67	POST		NETTL	EXCURSIONS IN WORLD MUSIC	978-1-1386664-4-3
F16	ARH 316B	1	25	PLAX		NEUMAN	BAROQUE+ROCOCO ART+ARCHITECTURE	978-0-205-83226-2
F16	SOC 374	1	16	LEAHEY		NEUMAN	BASICS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH	978-0-205-76261-3
F16	MAS 580A	1	5	WILKINSON-LEE		NEUMAN	SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS	978-0-205-61596-4
F16	ANTH 440A	1	6	FERGUSON		NEUMANN	CULTURAL RESOURCES ARCHAEOLOGY	978-0-7591-1846-1
F16	LAW 402A	1,002	71	WILLIAMS		NEUMANN	LEGAL REASONING+LEGAL WRITING	978-1-4548269-7-2

Figure 2. Spreadsheet containing textbook adoption information from campus departments.

Acquisitions staff each take a section of the cleaned-up spreadsheet and batch search by ISBN for e-book matches only. The UA Libraries have agreements with Coutts and Yankee Book Peddler (YBP) for acquiring content. We search Coutts's OASIS interface first and, if time allows, YBP's Gobi interface. Though we upload holdings data monthly to both vendors, we still go through the extra step of searching our library catalog to make sure we don't already own it or subscribe to it as part of a larger e-book package.

A time-consuming piece of the process is to look at licensing terms and make decisions about them. UA Libraries, in the interest of balancing access versus availability, has chosen to work with three types of licenses:

- Three users: We will purchase an e-book with a three-concurrent user license. The primary reason is because many titles have this type of license, which allows us to purchase far more titles than we could have otherwise. As expected, it does come with accessibility limitations, which can cause frustration in users. We also must take into consideration class sizes and, at times, confer with liaison librarians.

- Unlimited: No limitations on number of concurrent users or loan instances.

- Nonlinear: Provides multiple simultaneous access. Each copy allows up to a certain number of loan instances per year. At the end of the lending year, these loan instances renew automatically at no additional cost, or if the library goes over its yearly allotment, there is the option to buy more access slots.

UA Libraries does not limit to digital rights management (DRM)-free titles, although these are certainly the most preferred type of e-books.

If we find that we do already own or subscribe to the e-book, but it was purchased under a different license, such as a single use, we will attempt to purchase it with one of the three approved types of licenses. Occasionally, we will purchase multiple three-user licenses if that is the only option and the class size is substantial.

After many hours of searching, the list is completed with all the new titles that could be found and that fit our license criteria ordered and received. Additional information added to the original spreadsheet includes information about ownership (did we already own it?), e-book platform, license information, permanent URL to catalog record, and any pertinent notes (see Figure 3). At this point, the list is returned to the liaison librarians in the R & L department.

The final two steps in working with the spreadsheet are to locate the liaison librarian assigned to the campus department in which the course is offered and to search for instructor e-mail addresses. Both tasks are performed by student employees with the R & L department. Instructor e-mails are obtained by searching the UA phonebook and matching the instructor's name while ascertaining liaison librarians is done by looking at existing liaison assignments and conferring with librarians within the R & L department.

Once we've identified and purchased available e-books, we generate three outputs: (1) e-books are linked on the BookStore's website at the point of purchase, (2) e-books are embedded in the campus course management system (D2L) for relevant courses, and (3) e-mails are generated that notify faculty about the availability of the e-books. These automated outputs are the work of TeSS, our technology team.

Term	Dept/Course	Section	Act Enr	Instructor	InstructorEmail	Author	Title	ISBN	Owned	Bought	Platform	License	URL	bibrecord
F16	MATH 205	1	3	ANHALT		NCTM	PRINCIPLES TO ACTION	978-0-87353-774-2	N	N				
F16	AIS 405	1	9	GONZALES		NEIHARDT	BLACK ELK SPEAKS,COMPLETE ED.-NEW INTRO	978-0-8032-8391-6	Y	Y	EBL	unlimited	http://sabi	b75724959
F16	MED 896A	431				NELSON	ESSENTIAL CLINICAL GLOBAL HEALTH	978-1-1186384-4-6	Y	Y	EBL	non-linear	http://sabi	b75725022
F16	NURS 753	101	4	DOWNS		NELSON	INFECTIOUS DISEASE EPIDEMIOLOGY	978-1-4496837-9-5	Y	N	Books@Ovid		http://sabi	b72350027
F16	BIOC 462A	1,002	148	STAFF		NELSON	LEHNINGER PRIN.OF BIOCHEM.(LOOSELEAF)	978-1-4292931-2-9	N	N				
F16	BIOC 565	1	6	SCHWARTZ		NELSON	LEHNINGER PRIN.OF BIOCHEMISTRY	978-1-4292341-4-6	N	N				
F16	GPSV 311	001-004	2			NELSON	PRESIDENCY+POLITICAL SYSTEM	978-0-87289-964-3	N	N				
F16	MUS 334	1	67	POST		NETTL	EXCURSIONS IN WORLD MUSIC	978-1-1386664-4-3	N	Y	EBSCO	concurrent	http://sabi	b75725034
F16	ARH 316B	1	25	PLAX		NEUMAN	BAROQUE+ROCOCO ART+ARCHITECTURE	978-0-205-83226-2	N	N				
F16	SOC 374	1	16	LEAHEY		NEUMAN	BASICS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH	978-0-205-76261-3	N	N				
F16	MAS 580A	1	5	WILKINSON-LEE		NEUMAN	SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS	978-0-205-61596-4	N	N				
F16	ANTH 440A	1	6	FERGUSON		NEUMANN	CULTURAL RESOURCES ARCHAEOLOGY	978-0-7591-1846-1	Y	N	myilibrary	3-user	http://sabi	b6504583x

Figure 3. Spreadsheet including information about ownership, e-book platform, license information, permanent URL to catalog record, and any pertinent notes.

Thanks again to our partnership with the BookStore, technology staff on both units could work together to place access to library-available e-books on the student view portal of the BookStore website's textbook listing for each required text. This link is listed alongside other options for obtaining the text, including purchasing new or used print or renting. The BookStore Linker, as we call it, is one way we can make students aware of the availability of a library e-book that can be used in lieu of the required print text.

Our second output is the embedding of course e-books in D2L. Several years ago, the UA Libraries developed a point of integration in D2L, called the Library Tools Tab, that populates each course page in D2L with discipline-specific library resources and services. Placing the links to the e-books in the Library Tools Tab in relevant D2L course pages allows students to access the e-book alongside other course content.

Finally, if time allows, our technology team, TeSS, generates auto-populated e-mails to individual faculty for whom we can make a library e-book available that include specific information about the course, title, and licensing information for each e-book. Data for the e-mail template is pulled from the spreadsheet listing textbook adoption requests. These e-mails are then sent by liaison librarians to departmental faculty alerting them to the e-book option. If there is not enough time to generate the e-mails before the beginning of the semester, liaison librarians send out generic e-mails to faculty letting them know that a course-specific e-book is linked in their D2L page and is freely available to students.

Bottlenecks/Problems

Since 2012, when this project began, we've learned many things and have continued to make refinements to our process along the way. Nonetheless, the challenges associated with our current workflow reduce the potential impact of this service while also placing substantial pressures on staff time and resources. Timing is the greatest obstacle. Manually searching the lists of 2,000 titles can take up to 4 weeks, bottlenecking the project, and once it is handed off to TeSS, there is often (at most) only 2 weeks left before the beginning of the semester. Moreover, because faculty continue to submit requests long after the deadline, there are many titles that do not appear on the lists we search. Balancing the desire to be as comprehensive as possible with a cutoff date that allows us to complete the work in time has been difficult. Workload leveling is also very challenging, since acquisitions staff is already burdened with other work commitments ahead of a new semester, and this adds a tremendous amount of work to be completed in a short amount of time. Due to the "all hands on deck" call, other work can suffer. Other issues to address or improve include:

- Licensing issues: Because we don't limit to DRM-free, there are inevitable frustrations with some titles that do not allow for chapter or full-book downloading capabilities. Also, the three-user license, though it allows us to get many more titles, can lead to frustration with turnaways.

- As mentioned, though we upload new holdings information monthly, it is an inexact process, relying on an ISBN match, so we still find ourselves needing to check our library catalog for holdings information.

- Though we get many more titles, we are not choosy about e-book platforms and will utilize ebrary, EBSCO, EBL, and MyiLibrary. Also, we have e-books purchased or subscribed to in packages such as Wiley, Springer, or ScienceDirect. This creates complexity for not only our users but also for staff that support troubleshooting of information resources access.

Data

As a current example, Fall 2016 numbers are provided to give context to the scope of work:

- Total number of titles contained in the spreadsheet from the BookStore: 3,266

- Total number of unduplicated titles: 2,081

- Date the libraries received the list from the BookStore: June 27, 2016

- Number of titles searched and found in the Libraries' catalog: 293

- Number of new titles purchased: 183

- Percentage of found and purchased titles:

  o Found: 14%

  o Purchased: 9%

- Approximate cost for Fall 2016: $15,000

- Cost for calendar year 2016: $32,348 (The libraries uses student fee funds for these purchases and reports out to undergraduate and graduate student governance groups on the spend.)

References

Against the Grain, November 2014, *26*(5).

Against the Grain, November 2016, *28*(5).

Redden, M. (2011, August 23). 7 in 10 students have skipped buying a textbook because of its cost, survey finds. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://www.chronicle.com/article/7-in-10-Students-Have-Skipped/128785/

Future Plans

As went enter our fifth year working on this project, we are progressing with several goals in mind. First, we're working with the BookStore to explore the feasibility of a more coordinated approach to fulfilling textbook adoption requests. One possibility would be to integrate our systems so that library staff would be able to see textbook requests from faculty as they come in, thereby avoiding the bottleneck that occurs when having to process the lengthy list in a short period of time. Spreading out the workflow in this way would also allow for more communication with faculty as they're planning for their course.

Assessment is also a goal. Currently, assessing the value of this program is based on calculating the estimated savings and potential impact—we do not yet have clear data on how many students use a library e-book in lieu of purchasing a print textbook.

Finally, we'd like to work more closely in conjunction with our expanding OER efforts at the UA, toward the shared strategic goal of providing students with access to low or no-cost alternatives to traditional textbooks.