2014

Getting Faculty into the Fight: The Battle Against High Textbook Costs

Ann Agee
San Jose State University, ann.agee@sjsu.edu

Christina Mune
San Jose State University, christina.mune@sjsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Getting Faculty into the Fight: The Battle Against High Textbook Costs

by **Ann Agee** (Academic Liaison Librarian, San Jose State University) <ann.agee@sjsu.edu>

and **Christina Mune** (Academic Liaison Librarian, San Jose State University) <Christina.mune@sjsu.edu>
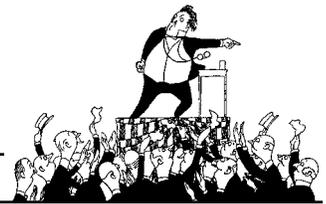
"For one semester to save money, I didn't buy the textbooks necessary for the class... I didn't have enough money to buy textbooks, so my GPA dropped drastically from a 3.4 to a 2.9."

This quote from a **San Jose State University** (**SJSU**) student in 2012 underlies the situation facing many students across the country as textbook costs continue to rise at three times the rate of overall consumer prices.[1] The quote also epitomizes the motivation behind the Affordable Learning Solutions (ALS) initiative. This **California State University** (**CSU**) system initiative promotes the adoption of low-cost and free classroom materials by faculty across the 23 **CSU** campuses. Its goal: to lower the cost of a college education for students.

For faculty, there are many challenges to replacing traditional, commercially-published textbooks with alternative learning materials. This change requires not just swapping out a book but redesigning syllabi, modifying lesson plans, recreating assessments, and rewriting lecture notes. Faculty can also lose access to the timesaving supplements that frequently come with a textbook, such as test banks, instructor's manuals, PowerPoint presentations, and prepared lecture notes.

There are additional barriers to making this change, especially when using open educational resources (OER), teaching and learning materials that are freely available online. The absence of an easy, centralized way to find OER and a lack of quality control for these learning objects can make locating an appropriate resource time-consuming and frustrating. Once an OER is found, technical problems can arise if it is not compatible with the devices students are using. Self-authored materials are an alternative to OER but demand even more of a faculty member's time to create. Library materials, another alternative, still require the time necessary to research and compile them for classroom use.

These were the obstacles we needed to overcome when ALS was rolled out at **SJSU** in 2012. At **SJSU**, and many other **CSU** campuses, the ALS initiative is coordinated by librarians, professionals committed to providing equal access to information. To kick off the campaign on the **SJSU** campus, an ALS Fair was held with speakers from the Education division of Apple, Flat World Knowledge, and Open.Michigan, the **University of Michigan** initiative that encourages faculty to use, create, and share OER. A student panel spoke about the effects of textbook prices on their education, and a panel of faculty already using textbook alternatives outlined their approaches. A raffle — with iTunes gift cards and two iPads donated by the campus bookstore as prizes — topped off the event.

After this opener, an ALS Website was created to provide faculty with information on finding open resources (*library.sjsu.edu/als*), a Webinar was provided for online instructors, and workshops were held where faculty could work one-on-one with librarians to find open resources and library eBooks for their classes. eBooks from the library appeal to faculty as both authoritative and easily accessible to their students, and ALS capitalized on this interest early by creating the Textbooks Available as eBooks in the Library list. *http://library. sjsu.edu/affordable-learning-solutions/text-books-available-ebooks-library*

Textbooks Available as eBooks in the Library (TABL) List

The list is created with the help of one of the library's campus partners, the **Spartan Bookstore**, a **Barnes & Noble** outlet. Before each semester begins, the bookstore shares its list of textbooks ordered by faculty with the library's Technical Services department. The library matches this list of textbooks to the library's collection of nearly 130,000 multiple-use eBooks. This is a painstaking process because the format of the bookstore's list and the library's catalog are not a precise match and the data needs to be reformatted by hand. However, in the Spring 2012 semester, a total of 126 textbook titles were found to be available in the library's eBook collection.

Once posted to the library's Website, the TABL list is promoted to students through social media and the campus newspaper. In the Spring 2012 semester, usage of the 126 eBooks increased by 794% compared to the previous term's usage. Classes that had a combined total enrollment of more than 1,700 students were using these eBooks as either required or supplementary textbooks. Using these enrollment figures and the books' usage statistics, it was projected that the TABL list saved students more than $50,000 in its first semester. Combined with usage figures from the Fall 2012 list, this estimate grew to over $200,000. The list is now in its fifth semester, and its success is reflected in new library collection practices that give preference to multi-user eBooks.

While this for-profit/library partnership may seem like an unusual relationship, bookstore management indicates that selling textbooks is no longer the main retail goal of a campus bookstore; rentals, digital books, and merchandise provide a much higher profit margin. For the bookstore, creating positive partnerships with other departments on campus balances the loss of a fraction of their book sales.

Textbook Alternatives Project (TAP)

While working with faculty to replace textbooks with library content and OER, we recognized the considerable amount of effort required in these adoptions. Material must be evaluated, courses redesigned, and new assessments created. Clearly, faculty deserve recognition and support for such efforts.

---

against the grain
people profile

David Gibbs

Head of Collection Development & Preservation
George Mason University, Fairfax, VA • <dgibbs@gmu.edu>

BORN & LIVED: Ohio, Alabama, North Carolina, Boston, Paris, New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, DC.

EARLY LIFE: Loner, nerd, bookworm.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Grad student, book editor, Web editor, librarian (**College of San Mateo**, **Georgetown**, **George Mason**).

IN MY SPARE TIME: Amateur musician (clarinet, piano), quality TV.

PET PEEVES: Tailgaters (drivers and pedestrians), loud talkers.

PHILOSOPHY: Carpe diem.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Hopefully publishers will be offering print and eBooks as a bundle.

While working on a solution, we heard about a program piloted in 2012-2013 at **Chico State**, another **CSU** campus, called TAP or the Textbook Alternatives Project. This project awarded grant funds to faculty working on more affordable course materials meant to replace expensive textbooks. In Spring 2013, we brought TAP to **SJSU**. As of Summer 2014, we've completed three rounds of TAP grants and have had 23 faculty members participate.

TAP is currently funded by grants from the **CSU** Chancellor's Office. These grants are offered to ALS programs for each university in the system, and campuses receive up to $20,000 each. Requirements — such as the contribution of finished projects to *MERLOT.org*, an OER depository, and the planning of faculty recognition events on campus — come with these funds. Here are some of the projects our TAP faculty produced:

Department	Course	Materials	Cost Savings (Appx Course Enrollment x Cost Savings per Student)
Religious Studies	Eastern Religions	Rather than requiring three textbooks at a total cost of $160 as he has previously done, the instructor will use a combination of free library resources and a custom AcademicPub course pack.	$6,960
Computer Science	Software Engineering	Software Engineering is a required course for Computer Science majors and has an enrollment of 200+ a year. The current textbook costs $128. The instructor is replacing it with an open online textbook.	$72,000
Geology	Hazards, Risks of Earthquakes and Volcanoes	More than 250 students take this class each year. The current text costs $66 (used) to $158 (new). The instructor will be replacing it with an open online textbook he has created with learning activity worksheets, peer-reviewed instructional materials, and articles available from federally funded sources.	$18,480
Accounting	Introduction to Financial Accounting & Survey of Accounting	These two accounting courses can enroll up to 400 students a year. The instructor has created an e-textbook titled Discovering Accounting which will be priced at $55, replacing a $255 traditional textbook for a savings of $200 per student.	$80,000

Initially, we offered TAP grants from $500-$2,000. Applicants were required to submit a proposal that included: number of students and sections per term, current cost of course materials, projected cost, and a description of new materials, including information about how these materials would be assessed. The grant proposals were reviewed by the ALS coordinators using a rubric. The most heavily weighted criterion was the savings to students, which was determined by multiplying the number of students affected by the cost reduction of course materials.

There were some clear winners, mostly large General Education courses with expensive textbooks, which represented the courses we had intended TAP to target. However, as reviewers, we felt many projects had merit

and had difficulty turning anyone away. So for the first round of TAP grants, we requested additional funds from the Chancellor's Office in order to fund 11 out of 17 submitted projects. This raised the total award amount available from $6,000 to $9,500.

We incorrectly assumed that applicants would select the amount of funds they needed for their course redesign and submit that with a budget breakdown. Unsurprisingly (in hindsight), all of the applicants requested the highest amount. We had to then decide how much we would offer each winner using their rubric score. Once awarded, some winners decided the amount was not enough (mostly those that received $500) and pulled out of the project. For the next iterations, we specified a set amount — $1,000 — and all of the winners received this amount.

We also found the original requirements of the Memorandum of Understanding each TAP recipient signed to be rather onerous—on both the recipient and the ALS coordinators. We removed required meetings with library faculty

and the mandate that they adopt a Creative Commons license for self-authored material. We do still ask that they submit a showcase profile for our Website, post completed open resources to *MERLOT.org*, and provide assessment and evaluation information.

Evaluation of the new affordable materials in existing TAP courses is an ongoing project. Faculty need to develop a convincing assessment that compares the effectiveness of original materials with the new materials they have chosen to use. TAP participants must also report these results to us in a way that can be shared with the Chancellor's Office and other stakeholders. Deciding on appropriate assessment indicators — such as GPA, retention, survey results, or individual qualitative feedback — continues to be a challenge.

We recognize the innovative achievements of TAP participants in a number of ways. Profiles are showcased via a revolving spotlight on our ALS Website. Participants' deans and colleagues are invited to an annual event, called "da Vinci Day," that recognizes the winners with a lunch and a keepsake poster that highlights their projects and outcomes. Additionally, letters of recommendation are sent to their department chairs and directly to the faculty. These letters are for inclusion in faculty dossiers and annual evaluations, to prove service to students and a commitment to teaching and learning at **SJSU**.

Next Steps

In addition to our TABL list and TAP grants, we plan to pursue other opportunities to engage faculty in switching to affordable, open materials for the classroom. Most promising is our Open Textbooks Project. This project targets large, General Education courses for the adoption of OER or library materials as replacements for current textbooks. This project reverses the process, however, by finding the material first, then matching it to an existing course.

High quality, open access textbooks and library eBook vendors have already been identified by librarians. We plan to fund adjunct librarians to match these books — from vendors like Open Stax (from **Rice University**) or library eBooks from **ebrary** and **EBL** — to textbooks currently used in high-enrollment General Education courses at **SJSU**. Librarians would also research and identify relevant textbook supplements, such as test banks, instructor manuals, PowerPoint presentations, and prepared lecture notes, that would make adoption of these affordable materials easier and more attractive. Open textbooks and library eBooks that show a strong alignment with textbooks currently in use would be promoted to the faculty teaching the courses and to the department chairs. We hope the Open Textbooks Project will reach even more students and keep a college education within their reach by making it more affordable. 🌳

Endnotes
1. U.S. Government Accountability Office. "College Textbooks: Students Have Greater Access to Textbook Information," Publication No. GAO-13-368. (June 2013). *http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/655066.pdf* (Accessed August 1, 2014).

several sessions at this year's **Conference** about self-publishing initiatives.

Was excited to read about **Usus – a community Website on usage** in this issue of *ATG* (p.105). **Usus** (Latin for usage) is a new, independent, community-run Website *(http://www.usus.org. uk/)* for all those interested in the usage of online content. It is designed to support a productive