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Library Publishing of Open Textbooks: The Open SUNY Textbooks Program



by **Kate Pitcher** (Interim Director, Milne Library, SUNY Geneseo and Principle Investigator, Open SUNY Textbooks)

Introduction & Background

SUNY Geneseo is one of sixty-four campuses in the **State University of New York (SUNY)** system, and one of twelve comprehensive, four-year undergraduate colleges. It is a liberal arts-focused, highly competitive, and extremely selective undergraduate institution. System-wide, there are over 460,000 students enrolled in **SUNY** programs, and in 2012, **Geneseo's** own full-time equivalent enrollment was 5,418. Like most publicly funded institutions, **Geneseo** faces intermittent budget cuts and flat funding, while enrollment remains steady or increases. Leaders on campus and across the system are encouraged to innovate and look for high-impact solutions.

In 2012, **SUNY** created the Innovative Instructional Technology Grant (IITG) program to incentivize faculty and staff to pursue new initiatives that positively impact teaching and learning. **SUNY Geneseo's Milne Library** applied for and was awarded a \$20,000 grant to design and build an open textbook publishing program. The Open **SUNY** Textbooks (OST) program is a collaboration of nine **SUNY** libraries, made up of community colleges, undergraduate comprehensives, and one research university. The program's goal is to create an open textbook publishing system spearheaded and managed by librarians, one that capitalizes on our libraries' existing infrastructure and relationships with faculty. Since 2012, additional **SUNY** libraries, the **SUNY** Press, and other individuals have worked with the original project team to develop and build a sustainable academic-friendly publishing model for open textbooks.

Why Textbooks?

Nationally, students bear a high cost to attend college, but how much do textbook costs factor into these budgets? The GAO reported in 2013 that:

More recent data show that textbook prices continued to rise from 2002 to 2012 at an average of 6% per year, while tuition and fees increased at an average of 7% and overall prices increased at an average of 2% per year...new textbook prices increased by a total of 82% over this time period, while tuition and fees increased by 89% and overall consumer prices grew by 28%.¹

In 2012, the **Florida Virtual Campus** (a network of public colleges in Florida) interviewed hundreds of students from all eleven of Florida's state universities and administered an anonymous online survey in which students from twenty-two of its twenty-eight colleges, community colleges, and state colleges participated.² Not surprisingly, they found that textbook costs continue to take a toll on students financially and academically. Among their many findings, these stand out:

- Students use a wide variety of methods to reduce costs of textbooks, including purchasing books from a

source other than the campus bookstore, renting textbooks, purchasing used books, selling their used books, and using copies on reserve at the campus library.

- Institutions' libraries that provide textbooks for checkout are extending an important lifeline to students who cannot afford to purchase a textbook.
- 64% of students reported not buying a textbook for a course, 49% took fewer courses, 45% didn't register for a course, and 27% had dropped a course — all because of textbook costs.²

On our own campus, we've conducted polls and informal surveys and found similar information — students are going to great lengths to avoid purchasing expensive textbooks, including dropping and adding courses based on the cost of textbooks. Students are spending more money on textbooks and tuition without the prospect of a greater return on investment. According to the College Board, students and their parents spend approximately \$1,200 per year on textbooks.³ In addition, the 2005 GAO report raised concerns that publishers are increasing the frequency with which they revise their textbooks, not because they feel compelled to update the content, but in order to limit the used "discount" market for textbooks, preventing the resale of older editions.⁴ Students want solutions, and they are prepared to make serious decisions about their future based on the problems they see in higher education.

How Open SUNY Textbooks Works

The OST program has two major goals: to engage faculty and students in the creation and publication of open textbooks; and to develop a framework for library publishing services and an infrastructure to support such creation. The original \$20,000 grant in 2012 provided funding for author and peer reviewer incentives and for the establishment of an editorial and review system for authors, reviewers, and librarians. A call for authors was released in November of 2012 and sent to **SUNY** faculty through the **SUNY** Provosts' listserv. Interested faculty members were invited to submit proposals for the creation of an open textbook, encouraged to involve their students in the creation of the book, and given the deadline for submission of their manuscript. Incentives were included: authors would receive a \$3,000 award upon completion of their manuscript and an additional \$1,000 award for the successful integration of students into the creation of the textbook (after completing an assessment of student learning from the experience). Peer reviewers received a \$1,000 award.

The OST project team was very encouraged that we received 38 proposals in only three weeks — this demonstrated to us that **SUNY**

faculty were interested in publishing open textbooks. We determined that our grant funding could support the publication of four textbooks. Using a rubric created by the OST project team, librarians carefully reviewed, ranked, and selected the top textbook proposals in each of seven subject categories (Anthropology, Art & Music; Business & Economics; Computer Science; Education; English & Foreign Languages; Math; and Sciences). The four proposals that received the highest evaluation scores were selected for publication. An additional 11 textbooks were identified as strong candidates for publication and four **SUNY** libraries agreed to contribute \$40,000 to fund the publication of these textbooks, bringing the total number of accepted proposals in round one to 15.

In 2013, the OST team applied for and was awarded a second IITG grant, this time for \$60,000. Review of manuscript proposals was handled differently during this second round: instead of project team members reviewing and ranking proposals, librarian liaisons from the partner libraries were asked to identify and work with willing faculty on their campuses to review a one-page, blind abstract and use a rubric to rank the feasibility of the textbook proposal in question. This new approach also allowed for the team to identify a pool of future peer reviewers. Reviewers came from all sectors of the **SUNY** system and all disciplines. The team also modified the incentive structure for the second round — a \$1,000 award for authors and \$300 for peer reviewers. This has enabled us to fund the publication of 15 textbook proposals in round two with publication expected by the end of 2015.

One outcome from both rounds of the grants is the creation of documentation that can be used to implement initiatives similar to Open **SUNY** Textbooks at other institutions. Part of the work being done by partners includes developing the roles of editor, copyeditor, proofreader, and instructional designer at the member libraries. In this regard, the project also relies on a partnership with the university press, **SUNY** Press, to assist with workflow design, role clarification, and professional development.

Why the Library as Publisher?

As more universities and colleges take on publishing initiatives within their organizations, roles will need to be clarified. There are several reasons why the library is a good fit as a publisher on a university or college campus, especially if the focus is on open access textbook publishing. First, libraries are advocates for sharing and reusing information. Open access is a means to the dissemination of research and information across the scholarly landscape and libraries are well-positioned to work with authors and researchers to create, produce, and disseminate their research through open

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access methods. Second, an important consideration in planning a publishing program is infrastructure development. Libraries, in most cases, have already developed a robust infrastructure for collecting, organizing, and maintaining digital collections. The necessary platforms already exist for producing scholarships. Third, the library as publisher assists our higher education institutions in curating and shaping the new learning environment needed to make transformations for the future. Instead of reacting to change, libraries can be proactive on their campuses and lead transformation.

Conclusion & Future

By the end of our second round of funding, the OST project will have published thirty textbooks and will have created a scalable model for library editorial and production services for open access textbook publishing. A sustainability plan, including sources for future funding, is in development to identify ways libraries can support these sorts of resource-intensive and high-impact publishing services. OST's future is dependent on developing such a sustainability plan. To that end, project team members are working on next steps for the project:

- **Print-on-demand:** currently, OST contracts allow authors the right to sell print-on-demand versions of their books through **CreateSpace** or other vendors. While OST team members can provide assistance, all royalties are assigned to the author. A cost recovery model is under development in which print-on-demand options are written into the contract and royalties are shared between OST and the author, 50/50. Currently, **SUNY** Counsel is reviewing contract options for including royalty sharing clauses.
- **Distribution:** currently, Open **SUNY** Textbooks are distributed freely online through our Open Monograph Press (OMP) publishing platform (<http://opensuny.org>). Our scalability and sustainability plan will include an enhanced distribution model. We are negotiating with several vendors to test EPUB distribution of our open textbooks. This would allow for sales of enhanced versions of the textbooks while keeping the free open access versions of the textbooks available at the Open **SUNY** Textbook Website.
- **Hybrid funding:** other funding models are also in development. One idea is to propose a student fee to the **SUNY** student assembly for the creation and development of Open **SUNY** Textbooks. Another idea is to work with an outside corporation with start-up money to support libraries publishing open textbooks. The development of such an outside entity could offer libraries the infrastructure for publishing textbooks, including the platform, incentives for Open

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Kate Pitcher

BORN & LIVED: Born and raised in Western New York.

EARLY LIFE: Reading was my constant companion through childhood — it always surprises me that I never thought about being a librarian until a few years out of college — I spent most of my childhood at my local public library, so in hindsight it seems like it should have been a given.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Worked at the **New York Public Library** for two years, then **Rochester Public Library**. I have been at **SUNY Geneseo** in many capacities since 2002; mostly involved with collection development and publishing activities in the past three years. As of July 2014, I am the interim library director. The culture at **Milne Library** is simply one-of-a-kind and innovative — I absolutely love my job.

FAMILY: Husband **Jeff** and three children; **Griffin, Silas, and Cordelia**.

IN MY SPARE TIME: Read, exercise, and garden with my kids.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Anything by **Kate Atkinson, Margaret Atwood, Carol Shields, or Jill McCorkle**. Love the *Outlander* series by **Diana Gabaldon**.

PET PEEVES: Complaining about problems, but taking no action to solve or create something better — do something.

PHILOSOPHY: The academic library is a place where knowledge is created, produced, and disseminated — we are the curators of the scholarship lifecycle and the sharers of this scholarship. All of our other activities are tied to this and are the reason for why we exist.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Working with the GIST team on a patron-driven acquisitions system and the work I have been doing with library publishing, working with my colleagues on Library Publishing Toolkit and Open **SUNY** Textbooks.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: I would love to see Open **SUNY** Textbooks expand and collaborate with other institutions. Five years from now it would be spectacular if we had a sustainable academic publishing model, collaborative relationships with many other libraries, and open textbook programs and hundreds of titles and **SUNY** authors involved in the program.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Library publishing developed a lot of forward momentum in the past two years (especially with the formation of groups like the Library Publishing Coalition and publication of best practices documents like the Library Publishing Toolkit) and I think it has potential for transforming our relationships with students and faculty on campus. Publishing the scholarship and pedagogical material of our faculty and students is a natural part of the academic lifecycle and one that should be integrated into the other services we provide such as information literacy instruction and scholarship support services. It's just a matter of time. 🐼

Access at campuses, and the creation of opportunities for professional development.

The future of Open **SUNY** Textbooks is about the future of library publishing and the development of new roles for libraries and librarians. Filling those roles often requires guidance and training for librarians to develop new skills. With this in mind, the OST team is working with libraries across the state to create best practices and professional development opportunities for librarians. One of our partnerships in development is with New York State's NY3Rs Council, a network of local library resource councils, and they are already offering workshops and online learning opportunities for those in the library community who are interested in publishing.

For more information, check out the Open **SUNY** Textbooks Website: <http://opensuny.org/omp/index.php/SUNYOpenTextbooks>. 🐼

Endnotes

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