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Why Should Librarians Be Involved in Facilitating Access to Content Needed for Courses?

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In a survey of academic library directors in fall 2013, Ithaka S+R found that nearly every respondent believes it is important that the library support undergraduate learning. By contrast, a smaller share of respondents — about two-thirds — hail from institutions where they believe it is important that their library support faculty research. These responses indicate that fewer library leaders nationally are focusing on research support, and more would like to focus on contributing to student success. They are driven by increasing institutional commitments to student retention, progression, and lifelong learning outcomes.

Libraries have long contributed to student success by building appropriate collections, ensuring students have sufficient information literacy skills, offering reference services, providing spaces for quiet contemplation and collaboration, as well as a variety of other ways. In recent years, there have been substantial discussions in the profession about information literacy, along with other important initiatives to correlate library usage with student success. In fact, libraries provide a broad array of services that can contribute to undergraduate success, and it is reasonable to think of them as a more integrated service portfolio for the student. However, libraries rarely organize their work systematically around teaching and learning or student success. More often, the work of a library is organized functionally.

With a limited materials budget, course content is often not the top priority. In some cases, libraries have intentionally excluded textbooks in particular from their collection development activities. Librarians have sometimes sought to avoid acquiring textbooks on the argument that they could not possibly afford to provide them for all students, for financial as well as for space reasons (Anderson, 2016). At most a small number of copies is made available through the reserves system, obtained from copies owned by the library, loaned by faculty members, or sometimes even borrowed from other libraries. These practices seem to run counter to the notion that actively acquiring highly utilized items to support the curriculum directly in these targeted collections can form the foundation to supporting student success. As many libraries work to strengthen their support of teaching and learning, ideally with a more integrated portfolio of services, facilitating content for courses is emerging as a greater priority than ever before.

For libraries with constrained materials budgets, there are sound reasons to think about course content as a guiding principle. A large portion of library collections are purchased with a reasoning that items "might" be important to library users. Content related directly to courses, especially items that are listed on the syllabus, are surely going to be checked out particularly by the savvy juniors and seniors. If we assess monograph usage in a similar fashion as database usage, such as cost per download or in the case of monographs cost per checkout, then taking a more course-oriented focus may be sound. It is, in a sense, a form of demand-driven acquisition. If a textbook or monograph is heavily used for a full year or two, that is similar to a library ordering a bestseller; it is popular now for our users. Compare that with a book selected because the library "ought" to have it, but that ultimately is little used. If libraries truly want to provide these services to our patrons, then we can readily make the case, as far as services go, for student savings, and possibly even for student recruitment and retention. Assessing the impact of these collections is sure to be important, albeit tangled, in the future (Okerson & Conway, 2001).

One significant contribution that librarians make in facilitating access to course content is through the reserves/e-reserves system. We serve in a trusted advisory role to help faculty, who specifically request these items be made available, lawfully distribute course materials for students. In a sense, this service is not dissimilar from institutional repository services. As we have seen in the **GSU Library** Copyright Lawsuit, libraries are striking an appropriate balance in this arena (Association of Research Libraries, 2016).

Even in situations where libraries forego formal e-reserves collections made available through the learning management system (LMS), they will share with faculty how to incorporate link resolvers, permanent links, and fair use guidelines for course content. Without librarians' involvement, there is a risk that faculty will scan entire works and (rightly or wrongly) feel safe behind a password-protected LMS. Alternately, there are risks in ignoring the readily available black market for textbooks and journal articles. Students already see the insanity that has become too commonplace in academic textbook pricing models and have instead opted for illegal downloading for convenience and cost effectiveness (Strauss, 2014). Facilitating access to content for courses through the LMS and using models that link together licensed e-resources with the interfaces and service models needed for the LMS will be a huge consideration moving forward. What type of resource is most compatible for newer blended and online classes? Unfortunately print and electronic are not mutually exclusive, as more students claim to want access to both.

It is important to note that coordinated collection development may become more complex if the focus shifts significantly towards content related to courses. As libraries work together in systems or consortia, they may find that their respective curricula do not align all that well. In addition, there will certainly be strains on collective purchasing, challenges during periods of high demand, and also for tangible materials the cost of storing these items in the long term. Collection development and liaison librarians should play a key role in making these decisions to determine how what is best for "right now" can be balanced with what has long-term usage potential.

What would the model look like for moving more of our budget dollars to direct support of teaching, learning, and course offerings? If publishers were willing to provide libraries with reasonable purchase or subscription models for course materials, especially the kinds of content that experiences a high revision rate, there would be compelling reasons to partner. If affordable print-on-demand materials become the norm, then libraries wouldn't have to be as concerned with processing and providing space for these items. There could be opportunities as well to work in partnership to transition from print models to digital models, and potentially from today's ownership or rental models towards subscription models that, particularly as publishers move from static texts towards interactive learning modules, work well for all parties.

The librarian's role in assisting faculty with identifying high-quality course content should certainly not be underestimated. As we take more active roles partnering with faculty members on their current course content, over time this may open up additional opportunities to move the needle in more community and open directions. Library-as-Publisher initiatives and an increasing role of Open Educational Resources (OERs) in higher education allow librarians to move beyond the purchase and delivery services into that of a publishing partner and intellectual property proponent. These close working relationships might allow for the substitution of OERs for traditional textbooks over time. Emerging research is being performed on the use of OERs and how they contribute positively to student success (Robinson et.al, 2014). As more research is completed on OERs

and linking cost-effective course content with student success, including initiatives from **Lumen Learning** (*http://lumenlearning.com/*) and **Robinson** et al., librarians may be able to create assessment programs for our collections that directly impact curricular goals. Building library assessment around courses, such as explicitly serving the needs of specific courses, can be a measure of how we serve the community. E-textbooks could be the gateway to more direct support of library collections as part of the curriculum. Perhaps we would not need to be as concerned with storing multiple editions of the same text, which can take up feet of space on our shelves, and could thus be more involved in ensuring easy access to affordable print-on-demand and electronic resources.

In a similar vein, what if librarians should facilitate access to course content that results from the course itself, i.e., student outputs from their course experience? How would students learn from and experience content generated by their peers over the evolution of the course? Utilizing institutional repositories as content hubs,

as they already are, for these types of collections, is complementary in nature to open educational resources and demonstrates how the library plays a role in all areas of student learning.

Of course, there are tradeoffs. Finding that sweet spot of balancing the information needs of current courses with long term library collection goals to continue to serve our community is likely to be very complex. Libraries should not aim to create a comprehensive textbook collection of every textbook used for every course but should instead discern where the budget allocation will have the most significant impact on student learning outcomes and other aspects of student success. Textbooks are certainly having their moment in the spotlight with regards to the cost burden on students, and libraries can definitely play a greater role to alleviate that burden. Increasing discoverability of course content, promoting faculty adoption of affordable resources of high quality, and best serving the teaching and learning needs of our campuses are all key areas where librarians can take a greater role.

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Momentum Building: Progress Towards a National OER Movement
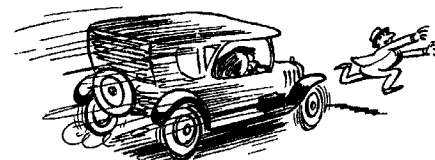
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Two years ago we were privileged to share our individual and collective experience with Open Education Resources (OER) with *ATG* readers. We also shared a vision inspired by our observation of a movement in which a growing number of academic and K-12 librarians were choosing to advocate for the adoption of affordable learning materials at their institutions.

Similar to the advances made towards the growing acceptance of open access publishing options and data sharing, educators are slowly gaining awareness of OER as learning materials. OER include open textbooks, open courseware, and other educational materials that carry an open license permitting their free use and repurposing by others. Although a recent Babson Survey showed only about a quarter of U.S. faculty are familiar with OER,[1] we believe this will change as the power of academic librarians to support and increase faculty adoption of OER continues to grow into a national movement.

Our thinking that progress is achieved in greater numbers and with the power of collaboration is being put into practice with growing numbers of textbook affordability projects. For example, we recently joined dozens of colleagues from across the nation at the **Open Textbook Network Summit** to discuss, plan, and strategize for better ways to promote open textbook adoptions at our institutions, how to help faculty publish or modify open textbooks, and most importantly, what we can do to share and customize our own content for communicating the value of OER.

In this update to our original article we share those most recent developments, which to our way of thinking generate high enthusiasm for even greater progress towards higher education's transition to a culture of openness.

Five Signs of Progress

1) OER Librarians: Over the past two years, it has become increasingly clear that OER have a place within the modern academic library. It is now common for libraries to have at least one member of staff who is considered the OER point person, whether that person is officially designated or simply someone who has taken an interest in the topic. Campuses are frequently adding OER to job titles and descriptions and seeking candidates with OER experience. In many cases, OER is housed within scholarly communications, taking advantage of the natural connections with Open Access. However, OER initiatives are also housed within access services, technical services, collections development, digital initiatives, or departmental liaisons — all of which intersect with OER in one way or another. As this space matures, it will be interesting to see whether a role for an "OER librarian" becomes fixed, the way it did for scholarly communications, or if OER simply becomes part of what the entire library does.

2) Open Textbook Publishing: Among the most positive indicators is the continuing growth of open textbooks and the number of organizations supporting their publication. While the exact number of open textbooks is un-