Against the Grain

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TextSelect Revisited: The Evolution and Success of the Textbook Reserves Program at George Mason University

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TextSelect Revisited: The Evolution and Success of the Textbook Reserves Program at George Mason University

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The textbook reserve program at **George Mason University Libraries** — introduced in a 2014 article in **Against the Grain** — began in 2009 as a pilot focusing on textbooks for the School of Engineering. Following a 2012 campus-wide initiative to investigate textbook affordability for students, the program was expanded to include additional classes in fall 2013 and spring 2014. TextSelect was born.

Under the current TextSelect program, **Mason Libraries** provide (via physical reserves) one copy of every required textbook over $50 for general education courses and courses required for undergraduate majors in business, conflict resolution, economics, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and health sciences. The program also includes textbooks under $50 for these courses if the University Libraries already own a copy, as well as graduate-level textbooks (funded separately) at the discretion of the subject librarian. This has amounted to as many as 850 titles added to our physical reserves per semester and has resulted in thousands of circulations (see Figure 1).

Fig. 1: Titles Purchased and Usage

	Titles Purchased*	Titles Already in Collection	Average Cost/Title*	Total Uses**
Fall 2013	222	No data	$76	1,047
Spring 2014	213	No data	$92	1,664
Fall 2014	211	543	$110	4,466
Spring 2015	186	672	$64	6,351
Fall 2015	132	419	$132	8,002
Spring 2016	67	573	$117	6,677

* Excludes titles already owned by the library.
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On-Campus Partnership

Since fall 2013, the campus bookstore (operated by **Barnes & Noble College**) has been a strong partner in our program, which has been central to TextSelect's success. For starters, bookstore staff generate and provide the lists of books required for classes that qualify for the program each semester. When possible, they provide us with the best-condition used copy, which costs less than list price and allows our collection budgets to stretch further. Perhaps most crucially, they provided the Libraries with funding for the program's early years, allowing TextSelect to weather state and local budget reductions without a loss of service to Mason's students.

Acquisitions Workflow

Our workflow for processing titles in the program has remained essentially the same since Spring 2014 (see Fig. 2). Internal processes have improved, including a refinement of program criteria; implementation of a relational database to help shepherd title lists through the selection process; and the establishment of an outreach campaign directed at the faculty with courses included in the program. As the program has matured, record-keeping has improved, but one of the major remaining workflow challenges is accurately tracking title counts and expenditures, since the Libraries often place orders that are never filled (or are filled a semester or two late) or make last-minute orders for titles that have gone missing.

Fig. 2: Workflow
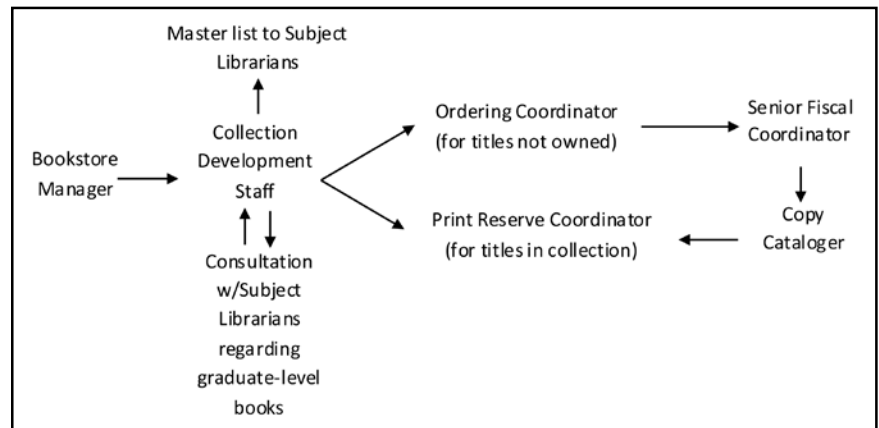
Ongoing Challenges

Though TextSelect has been largely successful, it has not been without its challenges. For instance, since 2009, we have discovered that titles taken off reserve between semesters often go missing and must be reordered. To combat this, we now keep items on reserve for two years after they are last required for a course. Since we are keeping more titles on reserve for longer, space quickly became another concern. Fortunately, reorganizing the shelving and other space behind the library desk has allowed us to create enough room to house these items (at least for now) without costing the library money for new shelving or renovations.

Since TextSelect's inception, we have also had difficulty collecting accurate usage data, an issue that caused us to change how we place these items on reserve. In the beginning, we used the reserve module of **Ex Libris'** Voyager ILS, and we attached each title to a faculty name and course number. This process gave students more options for searching and identifying these titles. However, it also limited our ability to generate accurate statistics and to run historical reports, as course deletion at term end also deleted the data we would need for reporting. We ultimately decided that collecting accurate usage statistics was more important to us than the enhanced search options allowed by attaching faculty and course information, and now we instead assign temporary locations to these books which enables us to run reports whenever we need to. Students now need to know the exact title they are looking for, but since usage has continued to rise, we believe this change has not negatively impacted access to the titles.

Over the past three years, we have also identified a small percentage of students who view TextSelect as a "rental" service. For the cost of the maximum overdue fine ($25), they check out the items at the beginning of the semester, keep them for the entire period, and then return the book and pay their fine. To combat this issue — which includes a very small number of users — we implemented a number of circulation policy changes, including increasing the replacement cost of these items

from the standard $67 replacement cost to $300 and billing users for replacements costs once the item is 24 hours overdue. After emailing and calling the student for seven days overdue, we now work with the Assistant Dean of Students and the Director of the Office of Student Conduct to help resolve the issue. Having this extra level of University involvement has helped us resolve all but one of these rare situations.

Finally, awareness continues to be a challenge. As mentioned previously, we have instituted a more proactive outreach program, issuing title lists to the subject librarians well in advance of the semester so that they can reach out directly to affected faculty. Reaching out to faculty directly remains our top marketing strategy, since faculty can then notify students in their syllabus or during the first week of class. That said, we also refer students to the program when they ask at a library service desk if the library has their textbooks.

Evaluating Success

Thus far, the Libraries have assessed our success in terms of overall usage numbers, which have steadily increased over time. We are also pleased to hear anecdotal reports of TextSelect being used and valued, for example in "Top 3 Reasons I Can't Live without My Library" video submissions from a 2016 University Libraries contest.[1] Beyond this kind of assessment, in the past year our Assessment & Planning Officer has begun analyzing the data more completely, looking more comprehensively at usage and expenditure trends, and the value offered by this program. As part of her initial assessment, she identified the highest usage by STEM and School of Business courses, and mostly during the first four weeks of the semester. She plans to continue examining data from additional terms and may even survey TextSelect users directly. This in-depth analysis, combined with our ongoing efforts to streamline workflows and maintain the highest levels of service, will help the Libraries develop strategies to continue and improve the TextSelect program. 🌿

Endnotes
1. *http://library.gmu.edu/top3/videos*

Textbook Affordability: An Update

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Over the past six years, the **University of South Florida (USF) Libraries** have been working to address the issue of textbook affordability for **USF** students and faculty. As textbook and course material costs continue to rise exponentially, students struggle to afford these materials. Students are making tough choices between textbooks and essentials such as food and prescription medicine. The rising cost of textbooks is also contributing to student debt in the U.S., debt that has now reached record levels. **USF** also has the distinction of having a high percentage of students (42%) with need-based Pell Grants. With heightened attention placed on the issue by the Florida legislature, **USF** administration is also taking notice of this issue. At **USF**, our work with textbook affordability is more highly valued now than ever. Back in November of 2014, **USF** reported in *The Charleston Advisor* on the year-long Internet2/EDUCAUSE E-Textbook Pilots. These three semester-long pilots laid out a road map for **USF** based on surveys of students and faculty that analyzed whether etextbooks could equal or surpass the value of print textbooks within the context of teaching and learning. That answer was yes, but price point was key to that acceptance. Participation in the pilots also resulted in direct savings of over $553,000 for students. But what is **USF** doing now to help support students and faculty with the affordability of course materials, and where is this work headed?

The Textbook Affordability Project (TAP) at **USF** is the umbrella for any initiative that supports textbook affordability on behalf of our students. As our primary means of communication, we have a website (*http://tap.usf.edu*) that provides information on services, news, tools, and collections. Social media, in-person outreach at campus events, multi-media presentations, bookmarks, and brochures all serve to spread the word on how we are trying to help our students. Direct access to affordable materials comes by way of four initiatives. These initiatives are: Online Course Reserve, Print Textbooks on Reserve program, Ebooks in the Classroom, and our Open Textbook Initiative.

Based on a survey of our faculty that resulted in a response of 424 out of 2,090 faculty, we learned that faculty place a high value on a robust online course reserve system that integrates with the course management system. To that end, we acquired ARES to ensure a user-friendly online course reserve environment, and we have continued to fund it over the past four years. The result? More **USF** faculty are using Online Course Reserve, and more content is being added than ever before. The **USF Libraries** also funded three years of the **Copyright Clearance Center** Academic License to help to ensure copyright compliance. The aim of this work is to provide scaffolding for faculty that would allow them to shed textbook requirements in favor of course readings on Online Course Reserve.

The aim of the Print Textbooks on Reserve program is to acquire at least two textbooks for courses with a combined enrollment of over 100 students. These textbooks can be loaned for three hours. With funding from the University to acquire textbooks, we are now supporting a combined enrollment of 59,000 students in over 2,300 course sections with access to more than 1,100 textbooks. These textbooks were used more than 35,000 times in the past year. Supplemented by donations from publishers and faculty, the current value of this collection is over $140,000 with an investment of $30,000.

Ebooks in the Classroom is another cost-savings program for our students. Faculty submit requests to the **USF Libraries** to acquire ebooks adopted either as recommended or required reading for courses. Eligible courses can be at the undergraduate or graduate level. A great deal of attention is paid to acquiring ebooks with the least restrictive digital rights. To date, the **USF Libraries** have saved students over $1.4 million in textbook costs by making the ebooks that serve as textbooks accessible online at no cost to the students.

Within the past year, the **USF Libraries** and **USF** Innovative Education have partnered to fully fund and publish our first open access textbook. Working with a faculty member, **Jenifer Schneider** from the College of Education, *The Inside, Outside, and Upside Downs of Children's Literature: From Poets and Pop-ups to Princesses and Porridge* was published in the spring of 2016. While **Jenifer** was certainly mindful of saving students' money, she also wanted to create something innovative and interactive. Making an imaginative use of multi-media to help the reader understand this content, there are twelve videos that accompany each chapter. As **Jenifer** teaches large sections of a popular Children's Literature course, the potential savings over the span of three semesters will be $180,000 for **USF** students. Published under a **Creative Commons** license, this textbook is now open to the world. The **USF Libraries** also host on our institutional repository, Scholar Commons, twelve open textbooks authored by **USF** faculty. The textbook *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices* by **Anol Bhattacherjee** it the most downloaded publication on Scholar