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Jeff Gallant
USG/Affordable Learning Georgia, jeff.gallant@usg.edu

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Librarians Transforming Textbooks: The Past, Present, and Future of the Affordable Learning Georgia Initiative

By Jeff Gallant

In July 2014, Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG) began its first year as a funded initiative of the University System of Georgia (USG) as a part of its parent GALILEO program. The initiative has focused on providing USG faculty with the support to make textbooks more affordable for their students while encouraging analysis of the effects of affordable learning projects on student retention and progression. Through a new grant program and supporting a zero-cost option for all eCore (Georgia's online college core-curriculum) courses, ALG will save students over an estimated $9 million in course materials costs in fiscal years 2015 and 2016, and librarians play a crucial role in many of these ALG projects.

Background

For the 2014–2015 academic year, the College Board (2015) estimates that the average cost of books and supplies per year for a college student is over $1,200. The Government Accountability Office (2013) estimates that over four years, students will pay 26 percent of the average accrued student loan debt on textbooks, while textbooks have increased in price from 2002 to 2012 at a rate of over three times the increase of the Consumer Price Index.

In a Florida Virtual Campus study (2012), more than half of the students surveyed did not purchase the required textbook for a course due to the high cost. The cost of textbooks caused thirty-one percent of respondents to decline registering for a course, thirty-five percent of respondents to register for fewer classes, fourteen percent of respondents to drop a course, and ten percent of respondents to withdraw from a course. Going even further into students' higher education decisions, a study by the college bookstore supplier

Nebraska Book Company/Neebo (2014) found that nearly half of students surveyed would choose one university over another if they offered free textbooks for all four years of undergraduate college.

History of Affordable Learning Georgia

The USG has been exploring open educational resources (OER) for over ten years, including the creation of the USG SHARE learning objects repository and an early partnership with a digital learning object initiative, California State University's MERLOT. In support of open scholarship, the Regents' Advisory Committee on Libraries (RACL) created a plan for a system-wide approach to connected open-access institutional repositories, which led to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant-funded creation of the Georgia Knowledge Repository (GKR). Because libraries are at the core of GKR, the discoverability of open resources has been at the forefront of that service, produced through common metadata element definitions, cross-mapping of collections, and harvesting and norming metadata for inclusion in a discovery tool.

Because of these early open-learning efforts in the USG, many innovative instructors adopted or created OER for their courses, either alongside or in cooperation with these USG projects. When the USG joined Complete College America to create the Complete College Georgia initiative, which focuses on retention, progression, and graduation, the barriers that textbook costs present to students became clear. A USG whitepaper analysis of the textbook market and OER alternatives identified many factors and strategies for consideration (Lasseter 2011). The USG began a project to produce an open United States history textbook

in collaboration with the University Press of North Georgia. That effort not only produced an open textbook, *History in the Making: A History of the People of the United States of America to 1877*, now available to all USG students and the world, but it also created a development model that leverages the editorial and peer-review processes already in place with the university system presses to ensure a high-quality product.

In June 2013, the USG began to formalize its efforts to address issues surrounding textbook affordability. The libraries were asked to lead this effort through the GALILEO initiative, due not only to the licensed content GALILEO provides that could be leveraged to reduce the costs of learning materials, but also because of GALILEO's technical and administrative infrastructure for managing content and its history of effective stewardship and collaboration within the USG.

A pilot team of USG librarians set the strategy and goals of the initiative and identified the stakeholders who needed to be engaged. Team members then talked to many stakeholders and others across the country engaged in these efforts. To get started, ALG was fortunate to form a partnership with the California State University System's Affordable Learning Solutions (AL$) initiative, which provided a framework for both communications about and access to open educational resources.

An early outcome was the establishment of a network of advocates of affordable learning at each USG institution, including a Library Coordinator, who would provide support in finding, evaluating, and implementing affordable and open educational resources, and a Campus Champion, who would coordinate awareness efforts and advocate for OER implementation across the campus. These Champions and Coordinators are now central to OER awareness efforts; they often host campus workshops, raise awareness of Textbook Transformation Grants calls for proposals, and meet with organizations such as faculty senates to advocate for affordable learning and OER. Champions and Coordinators meet each month in an ALG web meeting, providing campus updates and collaborating with others involved in ALG.

Textbook Transformations

In fiscal year 2015, the State of Georgia provided funding to enhance GALILEO, including support for reducing the costs of textbooks through ALG. With this funding, ALG could build on the pilot project by following through with specific strategies focused on the adoption of affordable and open materials. As part of these new efforts, ALG created a Visiting Program Officer position from within the USG library community to help with community outreach, training, and support of open educational resources.

Winners of the Recognition Awards for Innovation and Early Success in Textbook Transformation at the Symposium on the Future of the Textbook. Full list of awardees: http://www.affordablelearninggeorgia.org/about/recognition_awards

ALG has created many partnerships in order to ensure large-scale impact and high-quality resources. ALG has continued to work with the University Press of North Georgia and the University of Georgia Press to leverage their expertise for quality outcomes in the development of original materials as well as license materials from their catalogues for open or USG access. ALG has partnered with college stores, supporting their affordability efforts by providing software solutions to broaden students' commercial textbook options. The initiative has also partnered with Rice University's OpenStax College, a creator and host of high-quality, peer-reviewed open textbooks for high-impact courses. Many USG instructional faculty have adopted or adapted OpenStax College textbooks, and OpenStax provides support to these faculty individually and also to ALG through participating in-person in OER training sessions.

In a unique and high-impact partnership, Affordable Learning Georgia is working with eCore, the University System of Georgia's online core curriculum program managed by the University of West Georgia, in order to transform the textbooks for all eCore courses. By 2016, all eCore courses will have a zero-cost textbook solution, effectively bringing down student costs to tuition alone. With over twelve thousand annual enrollments in eCore courses and expansion plans underway, the USG is leading the nation in the scale of its provision of two years of college without the need to purchase any textbooks.

Adopting a new open textbook or affordable resources in a course requires extra time and effort on the part of the faculty instructor, as is the case when adopting a new commercial textbook. Modifying or creating a new open textbook or other open resources takes even more time. ALG addresses this issue through its Textbook Transformation Grants, which provide support to faculty in adopting affordable resources by allowing for course releases or extra-workload compensation for faculty, librarians, and instructional designers.

Textbook Transformation Grants are divided into four categories:

1. No-Cost-to-Students Learning Materials, which encompass course implementations of OER and other no-cost resources. Librarians assist with this type of project by helping with finding and evaluating resources, providing support for open-access hosting, and sometimes providing open access to a course via LibGuides.

2. OpenStax Textbooks, which encompass course implementations of OpenStax College textbooks specifically and involve OpenStax as a partner in providing support on these projects. OpenStax Textbook grants may not involve too much finding and evaluating, but librarians can still help provide access to newly-created or adapted materials and help find supplementary materials.

3. Course Pack Pilots, which encompass course implementations of library resources primarily and other materials that require copyright clearance to be within a course pack. GALILEO and locally-subscribed electronic resources are crucial to these projects. Librarians are essential to Category Three teams, due to their knowledge not only of how to find, evaluate, and provide access to library resources, but also their understanding of copyright law and copyright clearance.

4. Transformations-at-scale, which encompass multiple-course, departmental, and multiple-institution collaborative large-scale implementation projects. Grant proposals are double-blind peer-reviewed through a partnership with the Georgia Institute of Technology's Center for 21st Century Universities (C21U). These projects often involve more people than the other grant

project teams, and librarians participate in these larger, collaborative efforts as searchers, evaluators, supporters for open access, and points of contact for copyright and open-licensing questions.

Each grant project requires qualitative and quantitative evaluations of the affordable resource implementation, including measures for the sustainability of the new implementation, open access to all instructional materials created as part of the project, student performance measures including retention and progression, and lessons learned from the project. Along with other benefits of the new affordable

Student Government Association Presidents Kari Butler (College of Coastal Georgia) and Elijah Maurice (Middle Georgia State College) with Nicole Finkbeiner (Rice University's OpenStax College) at the Symposium on the Future of the Textbook.

resources, many faculty have reported that these implementations also allow them to re-think their courses, considering different aspects of the course and looking at how to best engage their students.

Through the first two rounds of Textbook Transformation Grants, along with supporting OER implementation in eCore, ALG estimates over $9 million in savings for students in fiscal years 2015 and 2016.

Symposium on the Future of the Textbook

In December 2014, Affordable Learning Georgia hosted the invitational Symposium on the Future of the Textbook at the Georgia Center at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. The symposium brought together USG administrators, librarians, instructional faculty,

instructional designers, and centers for teaching and learning in an educational and inspirational forum for methods of affordable education. Speakers from Georgia and other states discussed textbook costs, affordability, and emerging textbook solutions for the future, and many speakers focused on student learning, success, and experiences as well. At the symposium, David Wiley from Lumen Learning summarized this focus in his keynote speech: "For all the money we ask students to spend on materials, maybe we should ask ourselves what they get out of it."

The Symposium's speakers included national leaders in both commercial and open educational resources. Nicole Allen, Director of Open Education at SPARC, outlined the future of library roles in OER alongside Toby Graham, University Librarian and Associate Provost at the University of Georgia. David Ernst, CIO in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota (UMN), shared a measured look at the future of open textbooks and the UMN Open Textbook Library, along with sharing UMN student perspectives. Along with keynote speakers, the Symposium featured presentations by USG Student Government Association presidents, faculty, scholarly presses, and campus bookstore administrators. An awards ceremony was also held for early innovators in textbook transformation. All presentation materials and videos of the keynote speeches are available on the Affordable Learning Georgia website.

Ongoing Efforts

Building on these early efforts, Affordable Learning Georgia continues to reach out to USG faculty, staff, and administrators through participation and dialogue at System conferences and the Regents' Academic Committee meetings. Events this year include a series of online and in-person professional development activities designed to acquaint faculty with affordable choices and key concepts such as open licensing, adaptation strategies, and more. A new webinar series started on March 12, 2015, with Celebrate Open USG, a celebration of open education efforts throughout the USG, featuring faculty, staff, and administrators involved in OER projects. ALG also hosted an Affordable Learning Institute for librarians on March 23 and a post-conference workshop at the 2015 USG Teaching and Learning Conference on April 9.

With over $9 million estimated in student savings through only one year of funding, Affordable Learning Georgia has grown to be a unique and large-scale effort in the adaptation of affordable resources and OER. USG libraries and librarians are a core part of ALG's mission, and they are encouraged to share their knowledge and participate in OER projects. Librarians are working with faculty to implement open and no-cost resources from both the open web and from GALILEO and local library collections in their courses. Librarians also assist by creating reading lists, often using Springshare's LibGuides tool to provide a usable and freely-accessible webpage for a course. In addition to reading lists, librarians at many USG institutions have created LibGuides pages that guide faculty in finding and evaluating OER and affordable resources. Librarians have also been included as part of Textbook Transformation Grants project teams, assisting faculty and instructional designers in ensuring a successful course implementation.

Cable Green (Creative Commons) delivering a keynote address at the Symposium on the Future of the Textbook.

For more information on Affordable Learning Georgia, contact your institution's ALG Library Coordinator, and visit the ALG website at http://affordablelearninggeorgia.org/ for more information about affordable and open educational resources.

Jeff Gallant is Affordable Learning Georgia Visiting Program Officer for Open Educational Resources at University System of Georgia Board of Regents, Library Services

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