

Against the Grain

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Textbooks on Reserve – Seven Years and Going Strong

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Textbooks on Reserve — Seven Years and Going Strong

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It is no secret that textbooks have been and still are prohibitively expensive for most students (Martin, Belikov, Hilton, Wiley, & Fischer, 2017; Senack, 2014). In the past we at the **Joseph F. Smith Library of Brigham Young University-Hawaii** held a pretty hard line, as did many libraries, about not acquiring textbooks that were currently in use. Per the collection development policy at the time, we would accept donations of other textbooks in good condition for the circulating collections, but that was as far as we would go. News reports about the high inflation rate of textbooks were prevalent. We had read articles discussing the link between textbook availability and grades and retention. Anecdotally, we heard from students and professors about the practice of textbook sharing, or worse, going without a textbook. Students frequently requested more textbooks in the library. That there was a problem nationally and on our campus was evident, and in our library we began to brainstorm ways that we could contribute to a solution.

Before we launched our textbook initiative in the fall of 2011, there were a few other programs to help students on campus. There was a minimal textbook reserve collection, hosted in the library. These textbooks were brought over by individual faculty members and often were personal copies. The mathematics department offered a rental program for upper division textbooks. The computer science department had also begun a limited rental program.

We heard from one instructor that at his former institution faculty members were required to deposit copies of textbooks in the library for students to use, and we were intrigued by this

idea as a possible solution. There was little in the literature about this concept and we knew that we would not be able to get faculty or departmental buy-in to require the purchase of textbooks to place on course reserve. If we wanted to move forward with the idea that textbooks for all courses will be placed on reserve, it would be up to the library to make it happen.

As we looked for ways to make this solution real, we considered many factors, including funding, staffing, campus relationships and the trend of declining circulation rates for physical books (a trend experienced by all academic libraries) (Anderson, 2017). As a small, highly residential, undergraduate liberal arts university, we wanted to make sure we were putting money into the resources that were most needed and that would get used. We decided to cancel low or no-use monographic serials to free up money to support the reserves textbook initiative. We also chose to cancel a few direct print and online periodical subscriptions, if the titles were included in an aggregator database and had little or no embargo period.

Canceling resources is not an attractive option for any institution. While a research library might want to build a “just in case” collection, as a small undergraduate library with limited space we choose to focus on “just in time.” We do subsidize interlibrary loan (ILL) for students and faculty alike for “just in time” access. Thanks to ILL agreements, we can generally have articles delivered within two or three business days after request submission. Thus far, no one has been denied access to an article they needed for their research due to our cancellations. For us, canceling low-use continuing resources and re-allocating the funds better served our students.

As we continued creating the parameters for this program, we decided that it would require some shifting in staff assignments to make it work. The start-up took two months to acquire, catalog and physically process the initial collection. Currently, staff and librarians devote an average of ten to fifteen hours per week in the months leading up to the new semester and continue to spend more time on course reserves tasks for the first few weeks afterward, as not all materials are in place at the start of the semester. Most of the time is spent on checking edition changes, course number changes and trying to figure out what will no longer be used. The amount of time spent has not noticeably declined, as every title must be checked by hand each semester and new texts

are introduced each semester. Although, we have found the level of spending for new texts has declined.

We recognized that we would need a robust relationship with the **BYUH Bookstore** to make this program work. We began and continue to work with them well before each semester starts to acquire textbook lists, which we then compare against our holdings. We cooperate with each other for resolving bibliographic questions and in identifying textbooks that faculty members may list in a syllabus but not send to the Bookstore. We try to place orders through the Bookstore whenever possible, and they have been grateful for the continued support of the library purchases. The Bookstore had mentioned that they noticed a decline in textbook purchases from students in general even before our initiative.

We also developed relationships with many of the department administrative assistants, as well as individual faculty members, as we have worked together to get everything on the shelf in a timely manner. All but one or two faculty members have been most supportive of the program. A few requested that their required texts be excluded from course reserve, and instead they promised to make available for free the materials needed to those students who have a hard time purchasing the text for whatever reason.

We have worked out a formula to decide how many textbooks to buy for each section. Since most of our classes have an enrollment cap of 25 students or fewer, we decided to set the purchase of textbooks at one per increment of 25 students per section. In other words, if a course had one section with 25 or fewer students, we would purchase one copy of the textbook. The texts are available for checkout, in two hour increments, to be used in the library only. There is a possibility to renew the item if no one else is waiting for it, which often is the case. There is a \$1 an hour charge for returning books late. One frequent request is to let books out of the building; we declined to implement this after feedback from Circulation staff who felt that this would result in more overdue items. Circulation Desk employees are careful to let students know exactly what time the book is due back when they are checking the item out. In addition, Circulation Desk employees track requested titles and alert us when we are missing a text or when more copies may be needed.

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we are reintroducing librarian and staff selected titles into the mix. The great thing is that our budget has the flexibility to accommodate both approaches. 🌸

Endnotes

1. **Price, Jason S. and McDonald, John D.**, “Beguiled by Bananas: A Retrospective Study of the Usage and Breadth of Patron vs. Librarian Acquired eBook Collections” (2009). *Library Staff Publications and Research*. 9. http://scholarship.claremont.edu/library_staff/9.

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It didn't take long for the word-of-mouth advertising to take effect. Textbook reserve usage averaged 6,500 transactions per year prior to the launch of the all-inclusive library textbook initiative. Immediately after students found out about the program, usage soared. We peaked at 37,871 transactions in a year that coincided with a temporary bump in enrollment, and we appear to have stabilized at just over 30,000 reserves transactions per year.

In addition to the numbers, the feedback from students, faculty, and administration has been largely positive. Students appreciate course reserves and several faculty members regularly contact us to ask us to investigate the possibility of eBook availability or ask us to buy a variety of supplementary texts rather than requiring their students to purchase the books. Faculty members are especially mindful of those \$250+ textbooks, and they ask us to lower our student-to-textbook ratio in some cases. We don't mind acquiring more copies of the really expensive texts for student use.

Positive Comments Continue to be Voiced by Students

Comments include:

"Yes, books on reserve has saved me hundreds of dollars this semester!"

"Yes, I love being able to leave my books at home."

"I don't buy books because it's too expensive."

"It really helps out poor college students. I use it when **Amazon** decides to [delay shipping] my books an extra month."

"They are fantastic, super helpful and useful!"

While wildly popular from the students' point of view, there are challenges on the library side. Keeping abreast of edition changes and dropped textbooks and course number changes is an ongoing, labor-intensive, tedious process every semester. In spite of this, we view the program as a success and one that has worked well for our campus.

Recently, we have gone back to the literature to see what other libraries have been doing about textbooks and have discovered that some libraries took a similar track, such as the library at **University of California Los Angeles** (Celik & Peck, 2016). Other librarians took a slightly different approach. For example, librarians at **San Jose State University** gave a presentation at the **Charleston Conference** in 2012 regarding the beginnings of their initiative. At that time, their Provost provided stipends for faculty members to revise their courses using library resources. The librarians subsequently developed a portal making their eBooks easily discoverable (King, 2018). Librarians at **East Carolina University** and the **University of North Carolina at Greensboro** jointly received funding to help with textbook costs. One strategy they developed was to offer faculty members mini-grants to explore no-cost solutions for students. Another strategy was that the librarians identified eBooks currently in use as textbooks and which were already owned or that could be purchased as an unlimited user-access copy (Thomas & Bernhardt, 2018).

Looking ahead, we believe we will continue our current model for the next several years. While some faculty members have switched to using library-licensed materials and some regularly inquire if eBooks are available, the majority of our faculty still use traditional textbooks. There is currently no OER initiative under serious consideration on our campus. Course Reserves continues

to be the most heavily used collection in the library and we are happy to help contribute to student success.

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educates and stimulates their students, but also by giving them these kinds of financial opportunities to help librarians go to meetings that support their work," said **Sung Tinnie**, COO. "This essay contest was just one way we could say, Thank You to them, as well as offering financial support to an **international librarian to travel to the Charleston Conference in the Fast Pitch Contest**," **Tinnie** added. "This will be my second time attending the **Charleston Conference** (the first time I attended was in 2016)," stated **Price**. "I prioritized attending this academic year because it has proved to be the best place to connect with other academic business librarians and learn about emerging areas in our field," **Elizabeth** added. **Elizabeth Price** has been an academic librarian since 2010, she moved into her current position as **Business Librarian at James Madison Uni-**

versity in 2016. Librarianship is her second career, following nine years as a newspaper copy editor and page designer for the *Lexington (KY) Herald-Leader*.

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www.momentumpress.net

Noticed that **George Machovec** and **Buzzy Basch** both like **stamp collecting**!! Have you seen the movie **Charade** with **Cary Grant**, **Audrey Hepburn** and **Walter Matthau**? A stamp plays a big part in it!

I ran into this article the other day — "**Don't Close the Book on Books**" by **Danny Heitman** (August 29 WSJ). It's about a student who didn't like to read and thought that books are a bore. "A 2015 survey by **Scholastic** and **YouGov** showed a sharp decline in the share of young people who read for plea-



Mackinnon (Yu-hei) Inglis

sure." **Heitman** points to the need for universities to make books more visible on campus, and I am reminded of **Jim O'Donnell's** valiant efforts to do just that. Kudos to **Jim O'Donnell!**

Those of you who know me know that I am an optimist. I don't think that this generation of students is much different from my generation of students. It's just that there are a lot more distractions now

than there were back then. Back when I was in college I went to the library but it was not to check out books. I wanted a quiet place to meet my boyfriend that was private and was not a "date." What concerns me more than anything is the fact that libraries and bookstores "have pretty much gotten out of the book busi-

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