

Against the Grain

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Creating and Marketing Textbook/OER Programs

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featured in national media and received external grant funding.

Controlling our resource commitment — We got more proposals than we could possibly accept and complete. Because we advertised this as a competitive process for limited resources, we were able to turn down some proposals with no hard feelings.

Challenges of Digital Partners

Building positive faculty relationships — The reward of a job done well is...more work. Faculty loved having an IT person devoted to their personal project for weeks or months at a time, and understandably wanted to take the fullest possible advantage of that. Nearly every researcher asked us to expand the scope of their Digital Partners project, or to work on additional, unrelated projects. It is, of course, nice to be in demand, but we already have plenty of projects and we need to give other faculty a chance to get their projects done, too.

Creating high impact products with lasting value — Every product we build adds to the

amount of time we need to spend maintaining our existing digital projects. More time on existing projects means less time for creating new projects.

Controlling our resource commitment — We advertised Digital Partners as providing one half of an FTE for a year, to be shared among all the accepted projects. Internally, we allocated three quarters of an FTE because we knew we'd end up going over our resource budget. But our faculty kept having just one more excellent idea that needed to be implemented before we called their project complete, and we ended up utilizing the equivalent of about one and a half FTE on the four projects that year.

Plans for the Future


Our Digital Partners program was always intended as an interim step towards a full service digital scholarship center within the library. If we could establish a full service center, we felt we could discontinue the annual competitive grant process, and instead route researchers to the new center as ideas and needs arise.

The **UNCG Libraries** are now in the process of implementing STARS (Scholarship, Technology, and Research Services), a suite of

digital services including GIS, data visualization, metadata, digitization, digital archiving, data mining, online publishing, copyright, large scale digital projects support, and more. We hope to have STARS in place sometime during the 2018/19 academic year. But we are finding ourselves reluctant to let go of Digital Partners. The bulk of the work that has come to us through that program has fallen to the Library's IT unit, which is currently quite busy working on several externally funded projects (one of which is a major, multi-year initiative). Lacking the capacity to expand our commitment to faculty-initiated digital projects for the next couple of years, we will likely maintain the Digital Partners grant and process for the foreseeable future. Ironically, our short-term, temporary fix has become a key element of our long-term digital scholarship center strategy.

References

Digital Partners Grants — <https://library.uncg.edu/research/support/index.aspx>

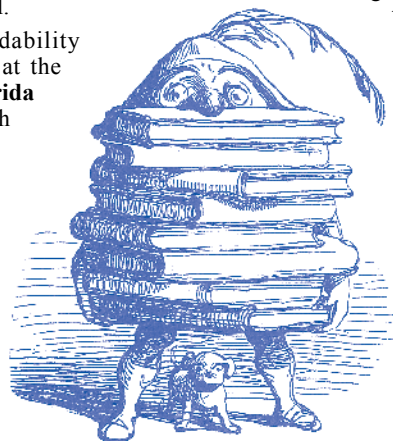
STARS — <http://libresearch.uncg.edu/index.html> 

Creating and Marketing Textbook/OER Programs

by **Laura Pascual** (Collections & Discovery, Assistant Librarian, University of South Florida) <lpascua@usf.edu>

High textbook costs should no longer be considered an unchangeable fact of academic life. Although learning outcomes and overall student success improves with access to course materials, use of expensive textbooks that hold students hostage to increased debt and delayed graduation can be reduced as low cost and no cost alternatives grow in number. Textbook affordability is a broad issue that ultimately requires intervention by many stakeholders, but libraries have important roles both as innovators driving the creation of new content and access models and as traditional liaisons between content selectors and available content options. In addition to national and state level campaigns, each local initiative contributes to challenging the traditional textbook model.

The Textbook Affordability Project (TAP), founded at the **University of South Florida (USF)** in 2009 through the **USF Libraries**, has grown incrementally and exponentially with each new program and approach over the past nine years. The effect of the rapid and disproportionate rise in textbook costs was keenly felt at **USF**, a large metropolitan research university with



a high population of **Pell** grant recipients, and the need for affordable course materials was realized early on. Beginning with a faculty survey to gauge awareness, a technology fee grant was sought and awarded and a website was created to inform students and faculty. The TAP website (tap.usf.edu) remains the foundation of all programs, hosting tools, data, communications, policies, and information concerning textbook affordability.

Open educational resources (OER) and textbook affordability programs continue to evolve as technology and business models for academic content change and alternative resources and purchase methods become available. One of **USF's** successful programs has been Ebooks for the Classroom. Beginning in 2011, using a TAP web page with an eBook request form, faculty gained the ability to request the purchase of their selected title as a library-licensed eBook for use in support of coursework. The form's fields included faculty contact information, course identification including the course and semester the eBook would be used, and book description elements

such as title, author, ISBN, and publication year to identify the exact item being requested. A database tracking this information plus course enrollment, student cost to purchase the print version, and library cost to purchase the eBook was created to track usage of the tool and savings. Librarians working with faculty promoted the request form or made requests for course materials on their behalf. Outreach efforts at faculty and student events included advertising the TAP website in general and demonstrations of the Ebooks for the Classroom program specifically. Other traditional means of requests for books through the library such as course reserves, interlibrary loan, and faculty emails or in-person visits were funneled to the system if the material was to be used by students for coursework and could be fulfilled as library-licensed eBooks. Mediated requests from the library's demand-driven acquisition (DDA) program and low-limit or turnaway notices from previously purchased eBooks with limited access models were upgraded or re-purchased and added to the tracking system if course use could be identified. Processing of requests and collection of applicable course usage titles for these individual eBooks is a manual process requiring the time and attention of an electronic resources librarian.

Coincidentally, the Ebooks for the Classroom program followed a change in the **USF Libraries** collection development methodology from a print approval process to electronic

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books. Collections from major academic publishers allowing DRM-free content had been purchased, and one of the top five largest demand driven acquisition programs established. Much of the funding for purchasing eBooks came from technology fee awards, thereby linking tech fees, eBooks, and textbook affordability efforts. More recently, evidence-based acquisition programs (EBAs) for currently published eBooks from university press consortia platforms and commercial academic publishers with their own eBook platforms provide broad access to multi-disciplinary content for course use.

In addition to requesting the acquisition of specific titles as eBooks for coursework through the Ebooks for the Classroom form, titles in electronic format can also be found in the library catalog. While discovery through the catalog allows faculty to find and select eBooks already held by the library, it also creates problems. The library did not know these eBooks were being used for coursework and faculty were not informed that titles chosen may have access limitations, as USF has a large collection of older consortially purchased eBooks that are shared single concurrent-user model or local single or three-user titles. The faculty were further challenged to determine a working link to the content to give to their students.

USF created the new Ebooks for the Classroom+ tool (<http://ebplus.lib.usf.edu>) as a solution to these issues based on the course adoption eBook database in use at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, who kindly shared the concept and basic code. USF modified and expanded the functionality to accommodate our needs. The first step was to determine which eBook platforms/publishers would be included in the database and which fields available from the majority of the vendor title lists would be used in the standardized dataset. It was decided that both completely DRM-free eBooks from publisher platforms and unlimited concurrent-user eBooks with print/download limitations from aggregator platforms would be loaded into the database. This included eBooks licensed by USF, titles available through evidence-based programs, and those that could be purchased as single titles. Due to the scale (well over half a million eBooks) and the changing nature of eBook availability, normalizing, loading, and updating this data on an ongoing basis has been a challenging process, one that is continually being refined and improved. While the eBooks are also in the library catalog, with the exception of the non-owned non-EBA titles, the database provides faculty a convenient view of unlimited access eBooks with a clear indication of the publisher, eBook platform, and DRM status for printing and downloading (<http://ebplus.lib.usf.edu/faculty>). This information had been consistently requested

by faculty searching the main catalog and the response to this feature was very favorable. The searching method and results display were modified several times to improve relevance and readability. Syndetics book cover images appear in the search results and summaries are provided if available when the link to detailed information is clicked. Faculty can click for direct access to the eBook for review if the title is accessible without cost, meaning owned or EBA titles. If the book is found suitable for a course, faculty can click to request a purchase for non-owned or DDA titles, or click to adopt already available eBooks. This feature assures the book selected for course use by faculty will not “disappear” by being removed from the DDA pool, another issue with eBooks in the main catalog. A form appears for faculty to enter their name and email address and select the semester and course section where the title will be used. An export from the University course system is periodically uploaded to Ebooks for the Classroom+ in order to populate the course section drop box with the standard course section identifier and course title, creating standardized course information and making it possible for related course data to populate a transaction table for statistical purposes. Once the adoption form is complete, faculty can choose to adopt the same title for another course or return to the search function. If an available eBook was chosen, faculty receive an email with the direct link to the title (Ezproxy prefix included) for use in their syllabus or course module. If a purchase was requested, faculty receive an email indicating that they will be notified when the purchase is complete. An administrative function was created to mark titles as owned once purchased. Once marked, faculty who adopted these titles are automatically notified that the title is available via an email with the direct link to the eBook. Statistical reports can be exported through the administrative function. The Ebooks for the Classroom+ course adoption database tool can also be used from the student’s perspective. The student view, also available from the TAP website (<http://ebplus.lib.usf.edu/students>), provides lookup functionality by instructor name, course title, or course number, similar to the course reserves search function in the library catalog. An alphabetic by title display of book covers indicates all texts adopted by faculty for the current semester with direct links to the eBook contents.

The faculty search page still contains the original request form for use if the title being searched was not found in the database. These titles are individually analyzed and manually responded to, although we have plans to integrate some of the automated functionality and data integration of the new system to the process. The new Ebooks for the Classroom+ tool took a team of collections, acquisitions, and metadata librarians, staff, and a library developer a significant amount of time to create, populate, customize and maintain. Development should be considered an iterative process. However, the time invested pays off.

Our goal is to make it easy for faculty to locate and adopt library-licensed eBooks that are available at no cost to the students rather than expensive textbooks. Once in place, the automated nature of the tool’s functionality saves librarian time investigating and responding to individual requests.

Building on our experience with marketing eBooks to the faculty as a no cost to the student alternative to commercial textbooks, the USF Textbook Affordability Project moved to expand the OER/Open Access Textbook program. While having long hosted several popular open access textbooks on our institutional repository, engaged in funding and supporting the creation of multiple USF authored open access and multimedia textbooks, and maintained a list of open access repositories on the TAP website, we needed to introduce and connect faculty to available open content in a more direct way. USF joined the Open Textbook Network (OTN) and sent a representative to their Summer Institute to learn how to analyze and promote open content. As a result, USF TAP created and hosted a two-day Textbook Affordability Days event featuring Open Textbook Network workshops for faculty, faculty adoption support staff, and campus leadership. Of the faculty attending the workshop, 58% reviewed an open access textbook. Of those who reviewed OA textbooks, 52% indicated they intended to adopt an open access textbook for their course, and more were considering adopting. Overall 68% of faculty who attended the workshop are now adopting or are considering adopting an open access textbook. In addition to the workshops, a USF author’s panel discussed their experience with creating open access textbooks and OER, and a liaison librarian explained the process of finding and substituting OER for costly textbooks, using a USF course that had done so as an example. USF has recently transitioned two major high enrollment courses from expensive commercial textbooks to open access textbooks.

The most important part of any textbook program is effectively communicating to the faculty their options and alternatives. They can’t use a program they don’t know about, or don’t have time to figure out. Changes don’t have to be all or nothing. Replacing some elements, or adding in some alternative content can help. USF maintains traditional course reserves and a textbooks on reserve program where print copies are made available for three-hour loans for high enrollment and other key courses where textbook replacement is not yet possible. Liaison librarians and the Textbook Affordability Project team at USF are working proactively to advise colleges, departments, and individual faculty members of all the possibilities for saving students money. Every program and every initiative at every university is important and every library can do something to help reduce costs, save students money and time, promote student success, and change the current textbook model. 🐼