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Incorporating Student Voices: Assessing Library Collections to Support Student Success



MILNER LIBRARY
Illinois State University



Mallory Jallas, Julie Murphy, Rachel Park, Rachel Scott, & Anne Shelley

Milner Library, Illinois State University

Introduction

Several studies have noted that students who engage with library collections also demonstrate high indicators of success, but these studies do not frequently highlight student voices in their assessment. Can librarians impact student success through strategic collection development, and if so, how can they measure it? This poster outlines a project that leveraged quantitative and qualitative methods to study the effect of library-provided course texts on students and their success. In spring 2020, librarians across multiple library units piloted a program to license assigned e-books; 2,029 students were enrolled in participating sections and had the opportunity to save up to \$143,880. The primary goal was to reduce textbook costs and support student success, however, the project team built in additional assessments to better understand the full impact.

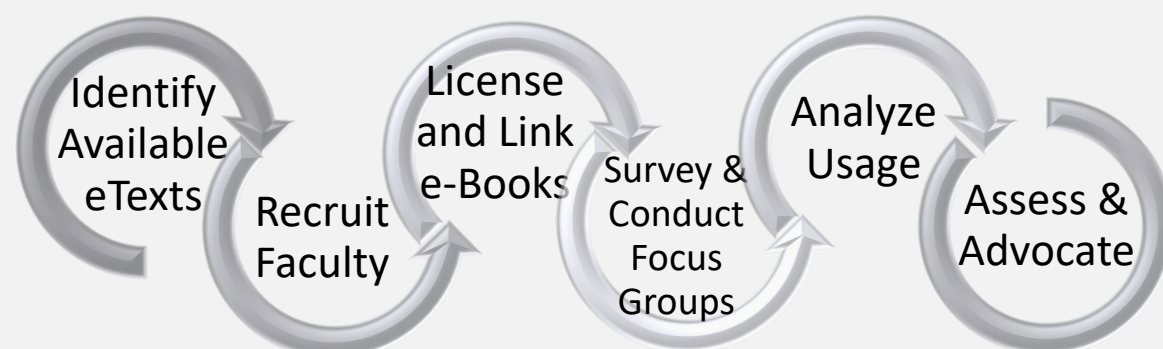
Student and faculty participants were separately invited to share their feedback through both surveys and focus groups, which featured questions about their perceived benefits, challenges, and preferences for using the library-provided e-books in place of a traditional textbook. Usage statistics provided insight into how students used the e-books compared to other library-licensed e-books purchased in the same period. Both the qualitative and quantitative data provide evidence to support the expansion of this project moving forward.

Methods / Limitations

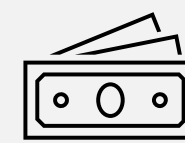
Students in participating classes were invited to submit a survey and to take part in one of two focus groups. The survey was open for the final nine weeks of the semester and was completed by 450 students for a participation rate of around 22%. Fifteen students participated in focus groups conducted via Zoom. Questions in both the survey and focus groups inquired after textbook acquisition, the impact of textbooks on their learning, their experience navigating library e-books, and their financial investment in textbooks.


- Walk us through your textbook acquisition process
- How has delaying a textbook purchase impacted your learning?
- How would you rank the benefits of having the library provide access to your assigned text
- What frustrations did you have in using the e-book(s)?
- What do you want faculty to know/consider when they're choosing a textbook for their course?

The [full survey](#) and [focus group](#) instruments are available as linked.




Results / Discussion


 **1831% Return on investment**
Milner Library's investment of \$7,858.37 on e-textbooks gave students the opportunity to save up to \$143,880.50 total.

 **Impactful savings for ISU students**
"It allows me to have more money allocated to what most college students actually struggle with like eating, housing, and mental health. I can gain peace of mind knowing that finances isn't one of the factors hindering my academic experience here at the university."

"This was an especially tough semester financially for many students, and the option of free access was extraordinarily welcome."


 **It's an equity issue**
"Having this text free to use has been an enriching and fulfilling experience. Eliminating payment walls is a massive stride toward an anti-racist movement and bridging the academic gap."

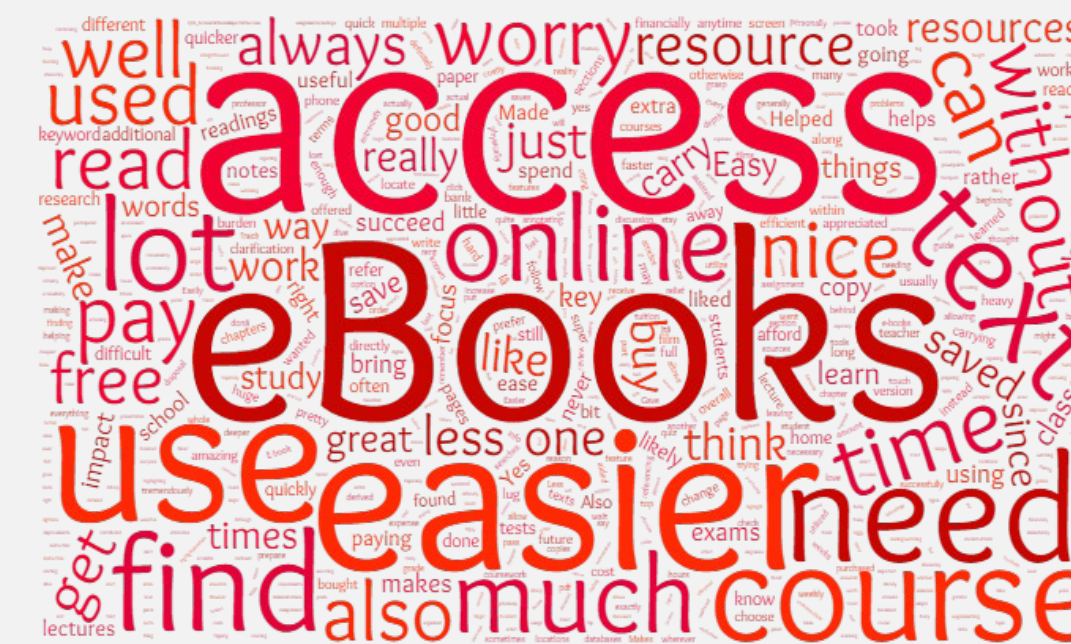
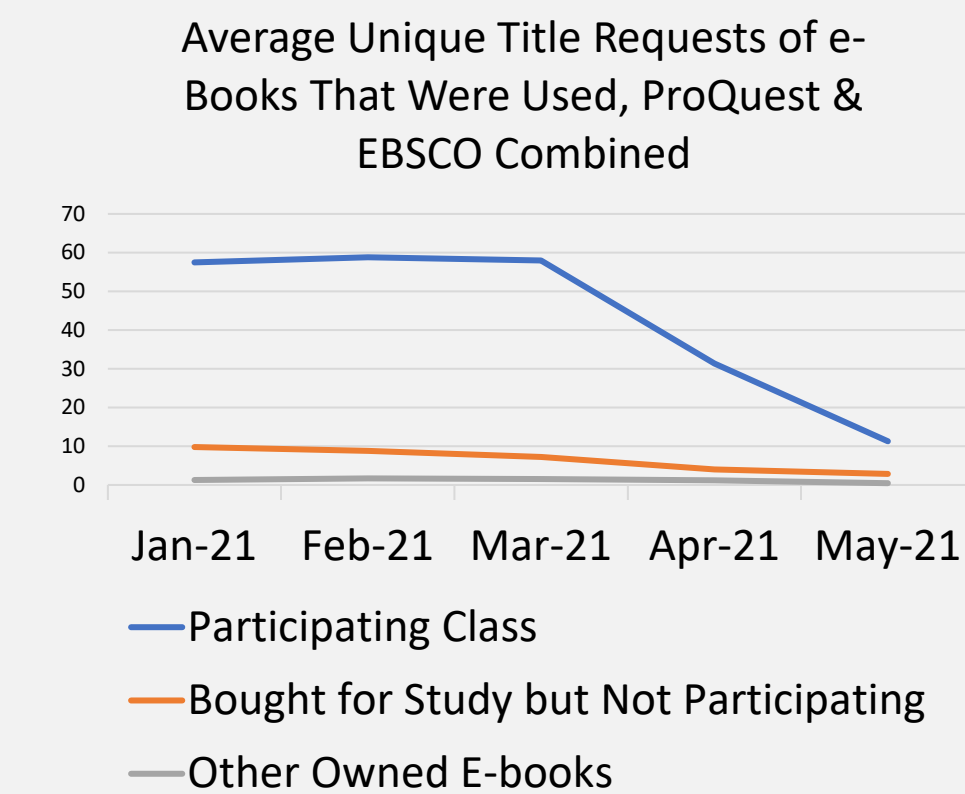
"Students who can't access these resources are at a serious disadvantage, and finances seem like one of the top reasons students leave our college. I see centrally accessible textbooks like this as contributing to that process as well –this seems like a wise use of our university funds/tuition dollars."


 **Students read more, learned more, and understood the material better**
"When texts are free and easily accessible I am much more likely to use that resource."


"It motivated me to do reading that I may not otherwise have done."


"These e-books have been super helpful in supplementing my learning about the main topics in my class. They were useful for understanding the course's other materials, and they aided my papers."


 **The average grade expected by participating students was 90.2%**




 **Less stress for students**
"Being a student you have to worry about a lot of things, but the material you NEED to excel shouldn't be one of them. Having access to the ebook made that a reality. A reality it took me 3 and a half years to witness."

 **Accessibility and portability facilitate learning on the go**
"It made class material accessible anywhere at any time, which is very helpful when I am traveling as a student-athlete."

 **Easy to use**
"I reference this book more than any of my others because it was so easy to use which really helped me in understanding the material."

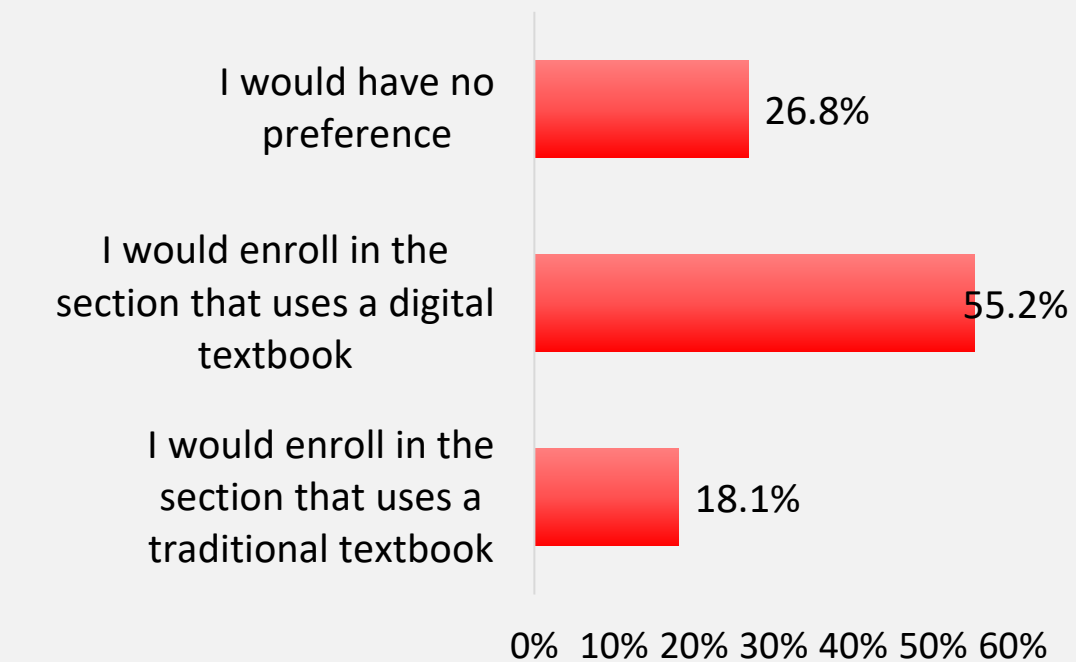
 **Keyword searching made studying and work more efficient.**
"I really liked being able to search for key words and the annotating features as it made assignments easier because I could find notes easily."

 **Goodwill was generated for the university, library, and professors**
"Not having to purchase a text has made me appreciate the resources ISU provides, as college can already be really pricey and adding purchase of textbooks is challenging."

"It has put this class in a positive light from the beginning that I didn't have to pay hundreds of dollars for a textbook."

"Having access to it helped me feel supported by my professor, so the work felt like less of a chore and more of a great opportunity to learn."

Preference of course sections using digital vs. traditional textbook



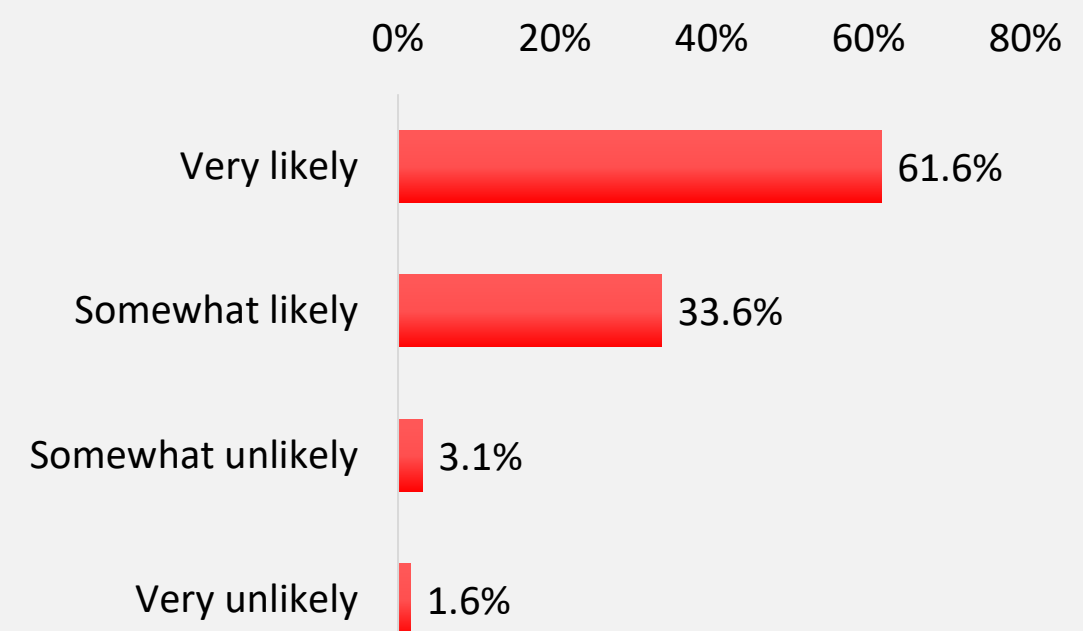
 **Students want this program to continue**

"Keep this program forever!"

"It was truly a godsend."

"I wish every class made them available for free."

Likelihood of registering for courses using library-provided e-books in the future



Next Steps

• The project team compiled the findings from the survey and focus groups from Spring 2020 into a campus report that secured \$20,000 in funding from campus administration for the project to continue in the 2021-2022 academic year.

• In addition to securing funding, our use of student voices in the reporting about the project has brought more librarians and campus partners to contribute to the project.

• Currently, we are identifying additional assessment strategies to further connect this pilot project with student success and student voice in future semesters.

• These strategies include using student population data to determine who benefits from this program and the overlap with metrics connected with student persistence and retention.