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Disrupting the Model: Fostering Cultural Change Through Academic Partnerships

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CHAPTER EIGHT

DISRUPTING THE MODEL

FOSTERING CULTURAL CHANGE THROUGH ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS

Aimee deNoyelles, John Raible, Penny Beile, and Sarah Norris

The escalating cost of a higher education in the United States is receiving increased attention. The rising cost of college textbooks and course materials is one factor contributing to this. The U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that textbook prices have increased 82 percent from 2002 to 2012, while overall consumer inflation rose 27 percent.¹ On average, students spend around \$1,300 per year on course materials at public four-year institutions.² The amount that students spend on course materials has recently declined, in part because the inflated expense drives students to sometimes avoid purchasing textbooks altogether.³ While college affordability is a systemic issue, faculty, librarians, and instructional designers can make an impact by transitioning traditional course materials to lower-cost options.

Recent federal and state laws have been passed to promote more affordable course materials. At the national level, Section 133 of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 contains language to ensure that “students have access to affordable course materials by decreasing costs to students and enhancing transparency and disclosure with respect to the selection, purchase, sale, and use of course materials.”⁴ The Affordable College Textbook Bill was introduced to Congress in 2015, seeking to provide federal support to create and maintain open higher education textbooks.⁵ Several states have responded accordingly. For example, in 2008 Florida passed statute 1004.085, the Textbook Affordability act.⁶ This was in response to the Board of Governors’ charge for each institution to establish “textbook adoption procedures to minimize the cost of textbooks for students while maintaining the quality of education and

academic freedom.”⁷ The statute was revised in 2016. Major changes included critically scrutinizing new textbook editions, creating and using open educational resources such as open textbooks, and institutional reporting of textbook adoption and prices of general education textbooks.⁸

These laws broadly impact colleges and universities in the United States; however, at the University of Central Florida (UCF), there are no institution-level initiatives or dedicated personnel to directly address textbook affordability at the time of this writing. In this quickly changing climate, several librarians and instructional designers at UCF have formed a unique partnership in the form of a working group to foster change regarding the affordability of course materials. The purpose of this chapter is to characterize the cultural environment in which the group operates, describe the nature of the group, and explain the collective efforts to make change from the top down and bottom up. In the conclusion, the working group model is presented, along with recommendations and reflection on future directions.

CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

Organizational Structure

It is first necessary to describe the overall organizational structure at the university, and explain where the working group members reside (see figure 8.1). There are two major tiers of leadership at the institution: The President’s Office and the Provost’s Office. The President’s Office oversees the nonacademic areas of the institution: General Counsel, Administration and Finance, and Business Services, which is the primary university liaison to the campus bookstore. The Provost’s Office is responsible for the academic areas: the teaching and learning division, the UCF Libraries, and the Center for Distributed Learning (CDL). The libraries support teaching, learning, and research by providing information resources, services, facilities, and

technology. A subject librarian model, in which each academic program has a dedicated librarian, was implemented in 2013. The CDL serves as the central agent for online learning at UCF, providing leadership in distance learning policies, strategies, and practices. Similar to the subject librarian model, instructional designers collaborate with instructors in certain departments to consult and support. The libraries and CDL are located in the same division (represented in figure 8.1 as falling under the vice-president and CIO for instructional technology and resources) and have similar academic support roles, thus leading to a sensible collaborative effort. Figure 8.1 showcases the many stakeholders who directly and indirectly influence textbook affordability issues, and also demonstrates the inherent conflict between the educational, nonprofit mission and financial center of the university. With regard to textbook affordability efforts on campus, the most visible example of this tension is the potential to disrupt the revenue stream supplied by the bookstore.

[INSERT FIGURE 8.1 APPROXIMATELY HERE]

FIGURE 8.1

TEXTBOOK AFFORDABILITY STAKEHOLDERS

Catalysts

Prior to forming the partnership, both the libraries and the CDL had undertaken separate efforts to bring the textbook affordability discussion to the attention of faculty and students. In 2012, the vice president of the CDL called for members of the Instructional Design team to identify key players, understand what options were available, and grasp how instructors and students could potentially benefit from the use of digital textbooks. A few instructional designers took action in several ways: the forming of a special interest group; deployment of a survey to UCF students and faculty about digital textbook practices; and various demonstrations of reading technologies

and devices. Conversations began with an e-textbook company to provide e-textbooks directly in UCF's learning management system. In order for integration to take place, the group learned that a formal agreement between the university and the provider was required. The University Office of General Counsel determined that the agreement violated the institution's contractual agreement with the bookstore provider, which states that the provider is the "exclusive University-owned property buyer and seller of all required, recommended or suggested course materials and tools, including books and course packs, including any of these materials which are published or distributed electronically, or sold over the Internet through any links associated with the University of Central Florida."⁸ This response led two coauthors to take a focused look at this contract and compare it to others in the state university system. The comparative analysis revealed that the majority of the Florida bookstore contracts were exclusive sellers, although some had more flexibility concerning textbook affordability measures. This analysis provided a more informed understanding of the local and state landscape, and how UCF's contract with the bookstore provider could be modified to better support textbook affordability efforts.

The exclusivity clause in the bookstore contract has also affected library efforts. In 2014 a textbook affordability research guide that offered alternative ways to obtain textbooks was created, but after it came to the attention of university administrators the guide was asked to be removed due to the "exclusive campus bookseller provision" language in the bookstore contract.⁹ Armed with federal and state legislative mandates, such as the Higher Education Opportunity Act and a 2008 state statute, the librarian who created the guide and the associate director of the libraries met with attorneys from the Office of General Counsel. After discussion, the librarians were stunned by counsel's conclusion that existing textbook affordability legislation was not written strongly enough to override the exclusivity clause of the bookstore contract. Of most

concern was a link to a searchable third-party database that compared the cost of textbooks across Amazon, Chegg, the bookstore provider, and other vendors. Counsel maintained that they “did not have a dog in this fight,” and their decision was based solely on the lack of direct language in the legislation to address the cost of course materials. Consequently, the guide was removed. On the positive side, counsel did maintain that the use of free, open course materials and library-sourced materials was not in conflict with the exclusivity clause.

Aside from discussions about textbook affordability at several library faculty meetings and a presentation by Springer publishing representatives, librarian efforts languished until a new academic program was approved. In 2015 the College of Business Administration introduced its new integrated business program. Seeking a competitive edge by lowering the cost of the degree, eight core courses were specifically developed for the new major with the provision that all classes would make use of open, current resources rather than rely solely on textbooks. Several librarians commented that they were working with their respective business faculty to locate high-quality course materials that were free to students, and went on to add that they also had been in contact with instructional designers, who were likewise supporting faculty with new course development. An informal working group of librarians and instructional designers began meeting regularly to discuss issues, suggest course content to academic faculty, and identify course materials for the eight courses. As that project concluded, the group discussed prior efforts to support textbook affordability and realized that we had many of the same goals and perceived barriers. A partnership was born, and the group began meeting regularly.

Nature of Collaborative Efforts

Currently, the core working group consists of three librarians and two instructional designers, and is complemented by other librarians and instructional designers who join on an “as-

warranted” basis to support program faculty in transitioning to free, library-sourced or low-cost alternatives to traditional textbooks. Over time, the working group articulated a mission, identified immediate and long-term goals, shared knowledge, solicited faculty participation, and communicated intent and progress to key university stakeholders. The efforts of the group can be classified in two broad ways: macro and micro. The goal of the macro, “top-down” approach is to positively influence the large-scale factors which affect change at the university level, and an example is meeting with campus leaders and advocating for policy change concerning course materials exclusivity and booklist ownership. The micro, “bottom-up” grassroots approach to promoting textbook affordability includes marketing to individual faculty in various ways, including campus presentations, facilitating the efforts of those interested in migrating course materials, and conducting research with program faculty.

Macro Efforts

One objective of the working group was to inform UCF leadership about local, state, and national textbook affordability efforts. Almost immediately upon forming, high-level administrators were invited to discuss college affordability legislative mandates, the group’s goals, and the perceived barriers concerning the bookstore contract. Representatives from Business Services (which oversees the contract), General Counsel, Student Accessibility Services, administrative units charged with complying with textbook legislative mandates, and vice-presidents and vice-provosts with an interest in the topic attended the meeting. The results of the contract analysis were presented, and specific language that would be more favorable to textbook affordability adoption at the institution was proposed. General Counsel reiterated their opinion that open or library-sourced materials were not in competition with the bookstore contract, which provided an avenue in which to begin our work.

Another macro-level effort is gaining access to the university's required textbook list, in order to further pursue low-cost or open materials. The main challenge appeared in the language in the existing bookstore contract, which states, "[bookstore provider] creates a computer database containing, among other things, course book adoption information. These forms and the database are [bookstore provider] proprietary information."¹⁰ Without access to the textbook list, we could not easily identify required course materials already licensed by the library or available openly online. Another campus unit, Student Accessibility Services, likewise was interested in accessing the booklist. After attending a meeting of high-level campus administrators and regional bookstore managers to discuss access to the booklist, both interested parties were able to secure the list after submitting a Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) request. At the current time, we are working with library Acquisitions to run the 12,500 titles against library holdings.

We continue to reach out to and work with pertinent campus units, and have formed a relationship with the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (and have presented on the topic twice at their faculty development institutes). We also continue to meet with Business Services regarding the upcoming bookstore contract renewal, and members met with consultants writing criteria for the new bookstore contract which is being renegotiated in 2017. Thanks to the group input, more inclusive language was presented to honor textbook affordability measures. A quarterly update is sent to each of the units regarding our successes and activities.

Micro Efforts

We also have facilitated individual faculty efforts to transition to free or lower-cost course materials. The expectation is that these efforts will prove successful, word will spread, and whole departments will begin adopting cost-saving course materials.

Presentations at faculty development conferences within the institution have proven effective in recruiting faculty interested in migrating to free or low-cost course materials. The authors also gave a presentation about the open textbook provider OpenStax and invited librarians, instructional designers, interested faculty, and campus administrators to attend. We found that despite the lack of monetary incentives, faculty attend the presentations and are interested in textbook affordability because they desire a competitive edge concerning student enrollment. All share the belief that costs are simply too high.

Several projects have been undertaken at the individual faculty level. From these efforts, three approaches organically emerged: (1) locate open-licensed or copyright-free versions of existing course materials; (2) offer open alternatives to the traditional textbook; and (3) replace an existing textbook with an OER. In this section, three case studies will be presented. Each example includes a description of the project, the roles and resources involved, projected savings to students, and an evaluation. Projected cost savings of the three examples are presented later in the chapter (see Figure 8.3).

Case #1: Locate open-licensed or copyright-free versions of existing course materials

During spring 2016, the UCF Libraries subject librarian for English contacted an English literature lecturer regarding open alternatives to the course-required text. The early English literature textbook was comprised of readings from the medieval period through the late eighteenth century, with much of the content available in the public domain. The course typically experiences enrollments of 75–80 students during the fall and spring semesters and 35–40 students during the summer semester. The lecturer was interested in finding out more information in regard to a possible open solution to the required textbook.

With the required reading list in hand, the Libraries' Office of Scholarly Communication worked in conjunction with the English subject librarian to conduct an analysis of the required reading list, looking for freely accessible and acceptable public domain versions of each text on the list. The Scholarly Communication adjunct created a spreadsheet of all required texts with open alternative options, which the English subject librarian, Scholarly Communication librarian, and the lecturer were able to review for appropriateness and copyright compliance.

After completing the analysis, the working group and the English subject librarian met with the lecturer to discuss options for providing open alternative texts for the course. Of the texts analyzed for the course, only a small number had particular copyright-related issues, including several with translations. It was determined that one text would be translated by the lecturer, who applied a Creative Commons license to this translation, in an effort to provide an accessible version to others outside of the institution. Additionally, the group was unable to obtain an open version of a specific text translation. The lecturer decided that this reading would be the only text to be purchased by the students in the course since it was available at a nominal fee. Despite having to purchase the one text, the students saw a significant savings.

Once open readings were identified, an instructional designer in the working group created an EPUB version of the readings using an open source software called Sigil. This was done to provide a uniform reading experience for students, because source readings were found in their original versions in various file formats and quality levels. This proved to be the most laborious part of the process, as the formatting and re-versioning of text into the EPUB format was both time-consuming and challenging. During this time, several additional questions regarding copyright arose, in particular Creative Commons licenses and permissions from the

original copyright holders. In addition to formatting and copyright considerations, proper attributions were added to the required text.

A survey was distributed at the end of the summer 2016 course to gather information about students' perceptions of these open, digital readings. Eighteen of the 22 students who responded to the question indicated that they accessed the readings that were located in each module, and 3 primarily used the e-book version. Nineteen of the 22 found the digital readings easy to access and use, while 17 indicated that the EPUB was easy to read and study from. The only concern was one comment about file sizes and pages loading slowly. Perhaps most rewarding was one student's summary: "Most importantly, the fact that the textbook was free is probably the best benefit. However, there are many more benefits from using the online textbook. It was much easier to be able to take the book anywhere, whether it be on a phone, laptop, tablet, etc. Also, if you're like me, and you like to physically hold paper and write notes out, you could easily print out the PDF pages and have a hard copy in your hands. Overall, I think that the online textbook is a FANTASTIC idea."

Case #2: Offering open alternatives to the traditional textbook

While researching high-quality open online textbooks, an instructional designer discovered OpenStax, a grant-funded open textbook initiative hosted by Rice University. After contacting OpenStax and receiving a list of UCF faculty who were utilizing their materials, she found that one was a microeconomics professor from the College of Business Administration. The popular introductory course enrolls approximately 1,400 students in a single course section and is offered as a "lecture-capture" format, where students can come to the live class session, watch the session streamed online, or watch the recording online later. While the professor lists a

“traditional” textbook on his syllabus (which costs around \$200 for a new edition), he also mentions that the OpenStax book could be used as a free alternative.

Intrigued by the idea of offering an open textbook as an alternative, working group members proposed to conduct research in the spring 2016 and summer 2016 sections of the course by surveying students to find out which book(s) they reviewed and used, and their perceptions of the reading experience. Out of a total of 1,568 students, 123 completed the survey, resulting in an 8 percent response rate. The results are preliminary since the participation rate was low, but some unexpected findings were revealed. First, nearly half of all participants chose to forgo using either textbook because they indicated that the lectures were sufficient enough to be successful in the course. Second, 80 percent of the participants who used the open textbook said that they primarily chose it because it was affordable. As one student noted, “The fact that I could use an alternative book for free was the deciding factor and truly the only factor I used when selecting a book for this class.” Another declared, “It was a great alternative to buying the book. I usually prefer hard copies of textbooks, but I was okay with using this one because it didn’t cost me a penny.” Finally, and perhaps most importantly, participants using the open textbook agreed or strongly agreed at a higher rate than students who used the “official” course text in response to questions about the ease of use and quality of the open textbooks (see figure 8.2).

[INSERT FIGURE 8.2 APPROXIMATELY HERE]

FIGURE 8.2

MICROECONOMICS STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS—SPRING AND SUMMER 2016

Students who used the OpenStax textbook rated their reading experience higher than students who used the traditional textbook on every survey item except for “the textbook challenged the way I think” (although the difference is slight). These results suggest that the

open textbook was perceived as high in quality and served as a more than suitable alternative to the costly textbook. Conducting this research allowed us to make recommendations to the instructor, namely, offering the print version of the OpenStax book in the bookstore for rental/purchase, being more clear about the open option in the syllabus, and tailoring the content more to the OpenStax book (or at least indicating which weekly reading goes with which chapter in the text).

Case #3: Replace existing textbook with an OER

In the spring of 2016, we were approached by an American history lecturer who had attended a campus presentation we had previously given. The faculty member was interested in a low-cost alternative to the current costly textbook. We recommended using an OpenStax textbook, and instructional designers on the project secured a print version of the text from OpenStax for his review. The instructional designers also secured and reviewed the digital companion components, such as presentation slides and test questions, and formatted and uploaded quiz questions into the faculty member's online course. As this was a new model, the bookstore was consulted to determine the "proper" way to make the print version available at the cheapest possible price (in this case, through rental options).

A survey was distributed in the faculty member's summer 2016 course, and the results were positive. Twelve of the thirteen students who responded to the survey used the digital version of the textbook and found it easy to acquire. They also found it valuable and relevant to the course, and felt the open text supported their course performance. Eleven of thirteen indicated that the digital textbook was high in quality, easy to use, increased their learning, and prompted them to think about the course content in a new way. Ten of thirteen respondents found the resource easy to read and study from, and felt that the text helped prepare them for

tests. The concerns of the faculty member about using a digital text were largely alleviated, and based on student perceptions and performance, the faculty member used the OpenStax text for a larger number in the fall and spring. In a recent meeting, the faculty member noted that his course was no longer a required general education class and that marketing his course as a no-cost textbook could result in a competitive advantage over other classes that require expensive texts.

Potential cost savings for students for each of the three case study examples follows (see figure 8.3). The savings are based on cost of the traditional text, current cost (if any), and average number of enrollments by year. Savings are projected for one and five years.

[INSERT FIGURE 8.3 APPROXIMATELY HERE]

FIGURE 8.3

PROJECTED SAVINGS FROM CURRENT PROJECTS

CONCLUSION

This chapter described the genesis and nature of a working group which organically formed to address textbook affordability on a large university campus in the absence of institutionally led textbook affordability initiatives. Over time, as goals and projects evolved, our workflow and processes also developed organically. As figure 8.2 indicates, much of the grassroots activity is driven by the instructional designer's and subject librarian's relationships with program faculty. As librarians and instructional designers, working group members both reach out to faculty and help support others with textbook affordability adoption projects. The workflow continues by meeting with faculty and discussing objectives, and then the librarian and/or instructional designer looks for open, library-sourced, or low-cost course material. The review of copyright permissions of material is performed by the Scholarly Communication librarian. Upon faculty

approval, materials are created and integrated into the course; this step is accomplished primarily by the instructional designers. Evaluation of the product and revision are critical final steps performed by the working group in conjunction with the faculty member. This workflow resulted from three scenarios: (1) existing open-licensed materials are adopted as is; (2) the working group comes together to find and adopt existing resources, dealing with issues such as copyright and licensing, as well as technical production; and (3) a new product is created by faculty and the working group, and openly licensed. This model is one that could be replicated at other institutions. (See figure 8.4.)

[INSERT FIGURE 8.4 APPROXIMATELY HERE]

FIGURE 8.4

WORKING GROUP WORKFLOW AND PROCESS

Several important factors—namely, scalability, collaboration, and evaluation—have been identified that could prove useful to others in similar situations. Ultimately, the process of working with individual faculty, as it currently exists, is neither feasible nor scalable without additional staff resources. For instance, transitioning the English literature textbook to a compilation of open or library-sourced readings was time- and labor-intensive and would be difficult to “scale up” to the institutional level. The value of collaboration also emerged as a theme of successful projects. The core working group members continue to be instructional designers and librarians, but representatives from Student Accessibility Services, Business Services, the division of teaching and learning, and compliance officers all have a stake and vested interest in what we are doing. Communication is an underlying motif of each recommendation, and is the cornerstone of successful collaboration. Finally, evaluations are necessary to show the effectiveness and outcomes of this process. Not only were survey results shared with faculty, but also with institutional stakeholders. Certainly, reports that 71 percent of

the survey participants decided not to purchase a textbook because of high cost, and 81 percent delayed the purchase (at least once in their college careers) are cause for discussion at the institutional level.

From our initial work, a number of goals we established are coming to fruition while others continue to be added. We have decided to continue to work with individual faculty who want to transition to free or lower-cost course materials, but we realize that the largest return on investment will be locating one-to-one replacements with library-sourced e-books and articles and working with General Education Program coordinators to adopt open textbooks in lieu of traditional ones. Now that the textbook list has been acquired, it is being run against library holdings to identify library-sourced materials. Program instructors will be contacted about the potential to replace the existing textbook with one supplied by the library. Further research on classroom practices and textbook affordability projects also will be conducted. Assessment of the student experience is key to getting faculty buy-in and bringing textbook affordability issues to the forefront of the institution.

On a macro level, we will continue exploring the impact of the recently passed state legislation on the existing bookstore contract. Success here will allow us the option to pilot and possibly implement an OER/low-cost alternative platform, establish a presence about textbook affordability on the university website, and work with relevant campus units to explore additional, large-scale cost-saving measures. One outcome of our relationship with institutional stakeholders was the opportunity to provide input into the renegotiation of the bookstore contract. In addition, we have been able to secure some modest funding in partnership with the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning in order for several faculty to discover, review, create, and share open educational resources in 2017.

The question remains, did we disrupt the model and foster cultural change? Although too soon to give an unequivocal “yes,” we are disrupting the model through our talks with campus administrators and our work with individual faculty. Did we foster cultural change through partnerships? Certainly, the academic conversation is changing here. However, for real cultural change to take place, a few things still need to happen: (1) act upon the library holdings of course materials identified from acquiring the textbook list; (2) increase the use of open course materials in general education courses that reach thousands of students, which is dependent upon getting support from program coordinators as well as individual faculty; and (3) further expand relationships with campus units. Creating cultural change requires cultural buy-in. For us, the heart of this effort is working with faculty in creating and sharing open and low-cost course materials. This will take time, expertise, and support. We have demonstrated that we can successfully lower the cost of a college education and our work to date stands as proof of that concept. However, an official charge and/or staff or financial support would make this a reality quicker. And another goal is added to the list.

NOTES

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