

Open and Affordable Textbooks

Incentives and Barriers to Their Use and Creation by Faculty

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1. Review some of our findings on a small study of faculty attitudes regarding **textbook affordability and open text books** and reference the large **digital resource use in humanities/social sciences**.
2. Brief discussion of our work in the **Future of Scholarly Communication** project and issues around what counts in tenure and promotion
 - Concentrate on issues around open textbooks and the barriers to faculty of both **using** and **creating** them. Not on economics.
 - Our work conducted under the aegis of the **Higher Education in the Digital Age Project** at the Center for Studies in Higher Education: <http://cshe.berkeley.edu/people/dharley>

**AFFORDABLE AND OPEN TEXTBOOKS:
An Exploratory Study of Faculty Attitudes**
<http://cshe.berkeley.edu/research/opentextbooks/>

[Use and Users of Digital Resources: A Focus on Undergraduate Education in the Humanities and Social Sciences.](#)

**Academic Values and Scholarly Communication Practices:
Faculty Choice and Opinion in Twelve Disciplines**
<http://cshe.berkeley.edu/research/scholarlycommunication>

**Principal Investigator:
Diane Harley, Ph.D.**

Discussion about textbook affordability solutions must acknowledge:

- Most faculty are active and independent decision makers when it comes to choosing a textbook or other curricular materials for their courses;
- The top-down high-school model of textbook adoption is anathema to many professors and instructors.
- There are natural, heterogeneous needs among institutions, disciplines, students, and courses encompassed by higher education;
- The type of institution and the level and content of the course will ultimately determine which curricular forms offer the best solutions.

Textbook Study: Survey and Focus Groups 2009-2011

Two studies: 2009 and 2010-2011. PIRGS/Hewlett funding

Sample California community, state, and private colleges. UC's

Did not sample faculty in the social sciences (other than economics) and humanities.

Response Rates

- 1st: Of the 3801 invited participants, a total of 224 faculty responded to the survey, resulting in a 5.9% response rate.
- 2nd: 569 invited participants, a total of 64 individuals responded to the survey, an 11.2% overall response rate.

Focus Group and Survey Protocol

- Do you or don't you use open textbooks? Why or why not?
- Would you support a change in the published medium of a textbook (e.g., paper vs. electronic) if the only change to your textbook was the manner in which students could access it (online, downloadable, printable, affordable, etc.)?
- What features in an open textbook would be necessary for you to consider it a viable choice for your class(es)? What features in current textbooks need to be changed or improved?
- Are you aware of discussions about textbook affordability (among faculty and/or administrators) in your department or college? If so, what is the nature of those discussions? What actions, if any, have been taken by your department or elsewhere in the administration? Who makes decisions about textbook adoption?

Faculty want a diversity of choices.

- Independent thinkers
- Exceptionally busy
- Suffer from extreme information overload,
- Are generally dedicated to ensuring their students' success, and
- Do not take well to “one size fits all” solutions.

We should not underestimate limits on personal time.

Choosing a Textbook

Most faculty we spoke with select their own textbooks; this autonomy is a *sine qua non* of college-level teaching in many departments.

Faculty careful to consider cost when choosing textbooks, but that issues around quality of content, including reliability and accuracy of answers, often do (and should) trump price.

It was apparent that an electronic book (in any form) must, first and foremost, function like a printed book (e.g., the ability to print in its entirety and the ability to mark up).

Choosing a Textbook

Larger or sequential courses with multiple faculty -- not uncommon for a small number of faculty to informally or formally reach consensus regarding a specific textbook or series of books.

Quandaries. Faculty want flexibility and control over content, the ability to customize textbooks, to pick and choose supplementary materials, and to incorporate their own materials at will. Some expressed frustration, particularly with publishers, that that flexibility was seldom provided.

But even when they had access to such amendments, faculty lamented that **limited personal time and resources** often prevented them from fully taking advantage of available options to customize.

Supplementary Materials

Valued supplementary materials and flexibility in picking and choosing such options.

Graphics/illustrations/animations, detailed exercises, and especially homework sets and solutions (particularly graded homework, which was an essential feature for departments without TA support) are useful adjuncts to standard textbooks.

Bundled textbooks (with DVDs, or CD-ROMs) made the books more expensive, and might not be used by the students or the faculty.

Supplementary Materials

Several create their own online supplements and/or point students to existing online resources (including but not exclusive to OERs); ability to customize online materials was perceived as attractive.

Concern that essential supplementary materials might not be included with an open or free textbook.

Some noted that online supplements could be made open source to enable more frequent updates, particularly by users (with editorial oversight).

Course and Student Needs

Students' needs are diverse; like faculty they value choice and flexibility.

Most faculty perceived that students in introductory/lower-division courses needed the textbook as an anchor, particularly as fundamental concepts in most fields are unchanging.

An introductory textbook includes “fundamental principles” and can be an important part of a personal library for majors. In such cases, it was noted that textbook costs can be spread over many classes.

Field Specificity/Type of Course

Students in advanced courses may also need a textbook to understand complex principles that cannot be taught during class time.

Each course has unique values and requirements for textbook use.

Some fields don't use textbooks much.

Digital Resource Study H/SS

Curricular materials usage

- Aggregate (UC,CSU,CC): 35%
- CC's higher @ 45%

Curricular Materials x Discipline

- Foreign Language 49%
- Writing 47
- Art/Architecture 46
- Geography 44
- Anthropology 35
- Literature/Language 31
- History 28
- Political Science 21

Course and Student Needs

Faculty acknowledged that textbooks are often one of many resources students use; students have access to (and use) a variety of both good and bad resources on the Web.

Faculty teach, and choose their textbooks, with that understanding.

Some seek out and incorporate these supplementary Web resources into their courses and/or point students to them.

Student Needs and Demands

The upper/lower division distinctions are important but particular courses or thematic subject areas may be more relevant than larger disciplinary divides.

CSU and, particularly, community college faculty noted the diverse demographic backgrounds and uneven preparation of their students and the challenges that arise in choosing effective curricular materials.

Publishers

While many faculty had complaints about publishers—ranging from hard (or constant) sales pitches to a lack of editorial oversight—the publishing industry was not universally vilified.

More than a few noted that publishers provide a real service (editorial, production, illustrations/artwork, etc.) and that those relevant support personnel have to be remunerated.

Wanted ability to make their own choices (or have some say) about possible solutions rather than have those solutions (e.g., “open”) dictated to them, including those that put blame exclusively in the publishers’ laps.

Perceptions of “Open textbooks”

A common understanding of open textbooks did not emerge.

Discussions around open textbooks often morphed into broader discussion about available online resources or online courses.

The landscape is complex because many faculty replace textbooks with a pastiche of self-generated and other resources, rather than a so-called “open textbook.”

Perceptions of “Open textbooks”

Faculty expressed concerns about open textbooks as an affordability solution.

Concerned that “open/free/affordable” and “high-quality” were oxymoronic.

Perceptions of “open textbooks”

Issues around remuneration for authors, protection of intellectual property, quality of the content/production values, and overall accessibility deemed important.

Open-textbook solutions in general did not consider the value that publishers bring to the table, and that the educational professionals involved in textbook writing, illustration, and production need to be paid for their work.

Content and quality were foremost among the necessary inducements to switch to open textbooks, followed closely by good supplementary materials and built-in flexibility.

Barriers to Going Open

Some might be amenable to using open textbooks, BUT there were no high-quality and reliable open textbooks currently available in their subjects that were comparable to the printed traditional textbooks they used.

The few faculty who had worked with open textbooks and/or open educational resources had been disappointed in the low quality or lack of easy access/usability (e.g., the ability to only print by topic).

Vigorous peer review and editorial oversight are essential components for open textbooks, and it may be possible to tap disciplinary associations to serve these functions.

Open

Many faculty wanted more (or easier to find) information on the issue of open textbooks.

Some faculty suggested that there is a need for a trustworthy entity to compile and maintain easily discoverable online lists of open textbooks and online educational resources.

Faculty were generally supportive of the concept of sharing free and open knowledge and could envision open textbooks playing some role. CSU faculty, in particular, were eager to embrace an alternative to their current textbook options.

Lack of free time cited as one reason that open textbooks have not been adopted, since it takes time to navigate through the available options and customize them.

Authoring

Time

Mixed perceptions about contributing to the creation of an open textbook. Some noted that seasoned instructors were more likely to participate. Limitations of time and resources, and/or the need for a good editor.

The dearest commodity is time, the time to do all this stuff.

I would be delighted to maybe write an open text if I had free time, despite the fact that I do have one textbook that I really do love.

They should lobby university presidents and provosts to give faculty free time. If that doesn't happen, it's just not possible.

Our experience (Digital Resource study and the Digital Chem study) is that most faculty don't reuse others' digital stuff.

Approximately 75% of faculty said they maintained a personal collection but fewer than 40% said they make their material available to others via the internet.

(On an H-Net survey, where we asked more detailed questions, over three-quarters of instructors used their own personal digital collections while fewer than one-third used a colleague's.)

Incentives for Open Textbook Creation?

Faculty take commitment to teaching seriously; efforts to produce and customize OERs should be incentivized by their institutions as part of the teaching process.

Incentives

Encourage faculty to contribute to the production of curricular materials by offering paid leave and/or acknowledgement in the promotion system.

Faculty sabbaticals for textbook writing, academic “credit” for open textbook publications, or low-cost technical and editorial support for faculty, as well as liaising between these faculty and open textbook publishers, are all possible incentives.

The creation of a monetary “prize” or form of recognition for high-quality, well-received open textbooks in particular fields may also spur more open textbook development.

Creating More Open Textbooks?

Supporting faculty in the effort of writing and producing open textbooks could help to saturate the market with open textbooks.

Any move to incentivize open-textbook production will help create more alternatives for open-textbook consumption.

BUT... won't faculty actually try to do a commercial textbook for the monetary and prestige rewards?

Academic Values and Scholarly Communication Practices: Faculty Choice and Opinion in Twelve Disciplines

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Project Website and Associated Document Links:

<http://cshe.berkeley.edu/research/scholarlycommunication>

http://escholarship.org/uc/cshe_fsc

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Drivers of Faculty Behavior

Primary drivers of faculty behavior:

- Career advancement**
- Moving the field forward**
- Receiving credit and attribution**

Emphasis in Tenure and Promotion (T&P) is on interpretive scholarly work vs. cataloguing or curating, writing textbooks, building websites, etc.

T&P as a Flexible System?

- **Stellar Publication record impt for T&P.**
- **Service, Teaching, Public Engagement secondary (age and institution dependent).**
- **“Groundbreaking, moves field forward, judged of high quality by internal and external reviewers, original”**
- **Quality over quantity. Metrics such as impact factor often viewed w/ suspicion.**
- **Exceptions to the “rules” made—qualitative review is stated ideal.**
- **Databases, cell lines, critical editions, software, textbooks: credited in T&P decisions; rarely sole criteria in most fields and are not given equal weight as peer reviewed publications.**
- **New journals (OA), New Genres, teaching materials, etc. are acceptable as long as peer reviewed.**

Peer Review in Tenure and Promotion

Concern that T&P committees rely too heavily on quantity over quality of publications, on proxy of imprimatur and citation metrics, and lack of focus on alignment of expectations with institutional mission.

Publication as a proxy for assessing scholarship follows from the exponential growth and resulting compartmentalization of knowledge across the Academy, which has meant that individuals within a faculty can no longer effectively review the work of their peers.

- **Expectations trickle-down from R-1 to aspirant institutions.**
- **Leads to explosion of low quality publications (“arms race,” “inflationary currency”)**
- **Proliferation of (esp. commercial) publishing entities/journals**
- **Peer review and reviewers are being swamped with low quality scholarship that has been produced in service of T&P**
- **Teaching institutions are adopting norms of research universities in T&P leading to less reward and incentive for different forms of scholarship.**

= Economically unsustainable system

Increasing demand for and use of open textbooks?

There simply are not enough currently available in enough disciplines to satisfy the multitude of faculty and student needs in lower and upper division courses; a much wider array of high-quality, easy-to-use, and reliable open textbooks will have to be produced for more widespread faculty adoption to be realized.

Issues of incentives and rewards for use and creation will be important.

Open textbooks will likely be only one of many players in the curricular materials market. A single, predetermined solution (e.g., “open textbooks” or “open educational resources”) and such jargon may very well work against the OER movement and faculty’s willingness to explore new options.

Peer Review and the Advancement Process

- **Heavy reliance on peer reviewed publications to aid institution/T&P committees and external reviewers in evaluation of scholarly work.**
- **Impt. of external reviews in T&P. Damning: “No one has heard of you.” “High impact” publications are a way of making a name.**
- **New Journals (OA), New Genres are acceptable as long as peer reviewed. Many worry that lack of peer review is associated with newer, untested forms of publication.**
- **Advancement process can and *should* be supportive (and unprejudiced) of non-traditional publishing models, provided that peer review is strongly embedded.**
- **Written policy: New electronic genres should NOT be undervalued in consideration of advancement. Does actual practice vary?**
- **Committees not seeing many examples that deviate from the norms.**

Recommendations (modified)

- **Reward good publication practices that benefit society and the academy.**
- **Highest levels of university leadership must make shift a priority.**
- **Improve peer review in tenure, promotion, and grantmaking to reduce the reliance on secondary indicators and emphasis on quantity vs quality.**
- **Read a candidate's tenure/promotion dossier and shun Impact Factors and other bibliometrics as primary indicators of the quality of that scholar's work.**
- **Limit what goes through the peer-review process, and encourage new forms of publication for work deemed more ephemeral and of lower impact.**

Student Diversity

Students represent a plethora of learning backgrounds and goals, and desire flexibility and choice in textbook options.

Reasons for resistance to purely electronic solutions included students' need for the safety net of a printed textbook and the positive pedagogical practice of engaging with the text by “writing in the margins”

Student Needs and Demands

Textbooks can also anchor sophisticated concepts in higher level courses.

Students in advanced courses may also need a textbook to understand complex principles that cannot be taught during class time.

Majors and graduate students will want the textbook as a reference in subsequent coursework.

The nature of upper-division and graduate student coursework in some disciplines may not lend itself to a traditional textbook model, as evidenced by the extensive use of readers and other cobbled-together resources.

Institutional Differences

CSU and, particularly, community college faculty noted the diverse demographic backgrounds and uneven preparation of their students.

They were attuned to the wide diversity of student needs and learning styles that are present in the classroom and the challenges that arise in choosing effective curricular materials.

Students, particularly freshmen and sophomores, want a “real” physical book, just like they want a “real” brick-and-mortar classroom. Faculty recounted several instances in which students demanded hard-copy textbooks as a safety net if one was not provided or assigned by the instructor.

Faculty at UC campuses were aware of and sympathetic to concerns about textbook affordability, but did not perceive textbook cost as the most pressing financial issue facing students today. UC faculty expressed concern about quality of the materials they assigned to students, the (over)abundance of available resources to students, and their roles as information filterers.

Institutional Differences

CSU faculty appeared to be less aware than UC faculty about what was happening in the publishing industry and open textbooks and wanted more information, but they were sympathetic to the issue of textbook affordability.

They also emphasized textbook quality over a hasty solution to cost and were willing to expend effort to produce their own materials.

Expressed interest in open textbooks, but also a concern about how open textbooks would effectively meet both their own and their students' needs.

We got the sense that CSU faculty saw themselves on the “front line” of teaching and were very aware of quality issues surrounding textbooks.

Individual faculty seemed to spend a lot of time thinking about how to choose textbooks and present material. They wanted to learn more about alternatives and seemed eager to contribute to them, if they were given credit for doing so.

Textbooks play an important role in student feedback for CSU faculty, which could affect their advancement (via course evaluations).

Institutional Differences

Community college faculty expressed disparate interests and perspectives.

These faculty seemed attuned to a wide range of student needs, including the particular needs of English-language learners.

Overall, community college instructors were interested in the idea of open textbooks and were amenable to the idea of helping with the development of these resources, though they viewed such an undertaking as a collaborative effort, not a route to sole authorship.

Faculty felt they had to negotiate multiple teaching and learning styles and spent a fair amount of time thinking about how to present information effectively to students.

They were skeptical about open textbooks because they want students to have a “correct” repository of information to refer to, and did not see open textbook options as yet providing an effective solution to that need.