

## From Course Reserves . . . to Course Reversed? The Library's Changing Role in Providing Textbook Content

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Nicole Allen, Charles Lyons, and Bob Nardini, "From Course Reserves . . . to Course Reversed? The Library's Changing Role in Providing Textbook Content" (2014). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284315617>

## From Course Reserves . . . to Course Reversed? The Library's Changing Role in Providing Textbook Content

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*The following is a lightly edited transcript of a live presentation at the 2014 Charleston Conference.*

*Slides and videos are available at*

*<http://2014charlestonconference.sched.org/>*

### The Evolving Landscape of Course Content

*Nicole Allen, Director of Open Education, SPARC*

**Nicole Allen:** Hi, everybody. Nicole Allen from SPARC, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition. I direct our program on open educational resources. And my talk today here is going to focus on kind of setting the stage of what's happening in the environment right now with course content and textbooks and the solution which SPARC advocates for, which is open educational resources. Before I begin, I do want to apologize for my voice. I'm getting over a cold, so it's probably good that I'm up here rather than among all of you, although sorry. So apologies for water breaks and so on. So I want to start the talk today with a textbook. This is a very popular Physics textbook used in undergraduate Intro Physics courses. And just take a second and think how much does this book cost. How much do you think it costs? So sorry, Beth, to plug UNCG. At UNCG, this book costs \$241 to buy it new at the college bookstore. \$241 for Introductory Physics where the material is very well established. And of course, you can rent a used copy for \$108. So that's better, right? This is what college students face today. Not every course has a \$240 textbook, but a lot of them do, especially undergraduate high-enrollment courses. Right now, the average student budget for books and course supplies is about \$1,200 a year according to the College Board. And textbook prices have risen more than 80% over the last decade. Actually, that's been as long as I've been out of college, and I thought textbooks were expensive when I was in school. So put this in the

larger context of the rising cost of education. Students are taking on more and more debt to finance their education. And when you think about it, textbook expenses are actually particularly burdensome on students because they're often an out-of-pocket expense. They often come after grants and loans have subsidized the cost of tuition, so students don't feel that expense. But they feel this expense. And of course, we know there are many ways for students to save money, renting, buying used books, shopping around online. I think we all recognize that there's huge potential in moving into digital platforms to reduce costs for students.

So let's see what's going on in the market with that right now. This is that same Physics textbook on the digital published textbook platform started by the main textbook publishing companies. It's called Course Smart. This book on that platform costs \$103 to rent an ebook. But notice that you rent it for 180 days. This is a two-semester course, Intro Physics. So 180 days means that this book is probably going to expire before you finish the second semester of the course. At the end of the day, buying the digital textbook is not going to help students save much money, and in fact, it could end up harming their learning. I mean, think about the message that that sends, that the way that we're moving into the digital environment is by actually limiting access and limiting the ability to keep and save and use your books for future reference. The message it sends to students is kind of like this: at the end of the course, zap, poof, the knowledge you were learning from goes away. And that's just not the way it should be in today's world.

With the textbook market right now, what's led to this dynamic is that the market doesn't work like a normal market because students are the ones that have to purchase textbooks, but professors make

the decision on their behalf what to buy and don't actually have to buy the books themselves. They're not quite as sensitive to price as they would be otherwise. The result is that students are essentially a captive market, that the publishing industry is able to change these really inflated high prices. And as we think about where to go from here, as textbook publishers are starting to innovate and come up with new types of course content to sell, this is the dynamic we need to work with and we need to find ways to help students not be a captive market because what is happening today is not working.

There's been study after study that has found students are actually not buying their required textbooks because the cost is too high. In this study released earlier this year, it was two out of every three students say they've done that at least once. One out of every two students in another study say they've taken fewer courses because the cost of textbook is too high. So they're not advancing in their degree as fast as they could. The lesson here is that students can't learn from materials they can't afford. As we think about where we go from here in terms of providing access to course content, we need to make sure that it's both high-quality and affordable. And that's where we come to Open Educational Resources, which is the solution that SPARC advocates for. The definition is any sort of teaching and learning materials that are either in the public domain or released under an open license that allows their free use and repurposing by others. It sounds similar to the definition of Open Access for Open Access journals. It contains the same two key parts, which are "free," meaning no cost to the user and no barriers to access, and two, "open," meaning the right to fully use the materials. In the OER world, we typically refer to the permissions that make a material an open educational resource as the "five R's." The right to make and own copies, to use it in any way that you want, to adapt and modify and improve the material, to mix different open educational resources together and share whatever you've created without fear of rebuke.

Many of you may be familiar with Creative Commons licensing, which is the most commonly

used form of open licensing. What's happening in the OER space right now? There are really three main pathways for advancing OER. The first is to create new materials and release them under this open license and make them freely available. The most common case of this is open textbooks, so textbooks just like any other textbook that have been released under this open license. They're available free online, free in PDF versions, free in an EPUB version. You can go online right now and access the entire contents of this textbook for free. You can also buy a print copy of this book for \$49. It's about this thick, full color, hardbound, and just looks like any traditional printed textbook. But it costs about a fifth of the price. This is what's possible in today's world. This is through a project out of Rice University called Open Stacks College. They're building 20 open textbooks for high-enrollment courses, building tools around those books to support it. Some of them charge fees which help sustain the project. They fund authors and provide compensation with up-front lump-sum payments instead of royalties. And at the end of the day, their books have been used by enough students to save over \$30 million across the world. This Intro Physics textbook has already gained at least 5% of the Intro Physics market in the last two years, which is really remarkable.

There's also a public policy side of this. A few years ago, the state of Washington realized that students were spending a lot of their student financial aid to buy expensive textbooks, so they funded a program for faculty to develop and curate high-quality free and low-cost materials for the 81 highest enrollment courses in the state. And then finally, we all know what MOOCs are, but the problem with MOOCs is that the materials that are assigned with them often aren't accessible by the students that are using them across the world. For example, research articles that are licensed by your library aren't accessible in Africa. This is an example of a truly open course produced by Carnegie Mellon University that uses a data-driven approach to actually learn as the student learns and help present the concept that the student hasn't quite gotten yet over and over again until they get it. And they also use the data to go back and improve the material over time,

which is something that's only possible when you have the permission to do so under an open license.

The second pathway is sharing OER. And of course, sharing is what education is all about. That's why institutions of higher education exist is to share knowledge. This is what MIT recognized in the early 2000s with their Open Courseware program, which allowed faculty members to share the resources that they're already creating through their teaching with the entire world, including lectures, videos, course materials, and the like. And there're actually over 200 institutions across the world that have programs set up like this. There are also online repositories, for example, OER Commons, that allow anybody anywhere who has educational materials to share them freely under an open license, and you can go there to search for materials. And then again, on the public policy front, the U.S. government has, in a number of grant programs, recently required open licenses on federal grants, on the outcomes of federal grants like this \$2 billion grant program through the Department of Labor that's creating workforce training materials. All of the materials come out of it are under a Creative Commons attribution license. It makes sense, because we don't need to create five open nursing curriculums. Really, we need to create one and then enable other schools to adapt it.

Then finally, the pathway of supporting OER. Because open educational resources, even though they're out there, they're not necessarily easy to find or easy to use. There are a number of startup companies that have popped up to support the use of open educational resources, for example, Lumen Learning, which actually contracts with institutions of higher education that want to expand the use of OER on their campus and gain the benefits of it. Also, at the University of Minnesota, they've curated a catalog of open textbooks where any faculty member can go and search for materials, and they're actually collecting reviews of the books by faculty members to help assess the quality. And this is a realm where SPARC is really interested in working with and engaging and supporting our member libraries to provide support on their campus for

open educational resources, whether it's helping to find materials, helping to publish materials, or a combination of the two. But I will leave it to my colleagues to delve into that a little bit more.

So by way of closing, I just want to illustrate a couple of the impacts and the things that are possible with open educational resources. So first, at Tidewater Community College in Virginia, they've assembled an entire two-year business administration degree that uses open educational resources in every single course. So a student can literally graduate without spending a single dollar on textbooks. So imagine how much faster students get through their degrees, how much faster they're able to get into the workforce. And while this doesn't necessarily work at a four-year institution, imagine a gen-ed curriculum knocking out the 101 courses using all OER. Another example is at Mercy College in New York, the math faculty there replaced their developmental math curriculum with open educational resources, and they saw a 12% jump in the students passing the course with a C or better. So imagine that at your institutions, imagine that with the materials that you create. That's enormous. And it's not likely that those materials are that much better. It's because the students have access to the material starting day one of the course.

Moving forward, when you look at what the medieval lecture looked like, medieval universities, it hasn't changed much since then. So today we're on the cusp of the ability to use today's technology to advance openness and open education and do what we do more effectively. So that's the kind of stage that I want to set for the conversation today.

### **Five Myths Librarians Should Know about Textbook Affordability**

*Charles Lyons, Electronic Resources Librarian, SUNY University of Buffalo*

**Anthony Watkinson:** Thank you so much. While Charles is just getting his notes together, can I just say that Charles Lyons has done the latest *Against the Grain*, which is in your pack, though you may not have looked at it yet. There's a massively good, really impressive collection of essays on this

topic. It's one of the best things of its type I've ever seen, Charles.

**Charles Lyons:** Oh, wow. Thank you very much. And you've stolen a bit of my thunder, so I save a little bit of time. Nicole did a great job of explaining the really devastating impact that high-cost textbooks are having on higher education today. And my role in 10 minutes is to convince you that libraries can do something about this. My role is to convince you all that we can work with the teaching faculty on our campuses, that we can work with students and we can work with textbook authors and we can work with our university bookstores and we can work even with commercial publishers to make a difference in textbook affordability. So with that, I'll get started here.

In 1901, the *New York Times* published this article describing the controversy that occurred when the law library at New York University decided to stop circulating textbooks to students due to high costs. And in the article, they cite the fact that a single textbook at the time could cost, I apologize for this, up to \$5 in 1901. So it puts it in a little bit of context. And the interesting thing I find about this article, and it's not simply that the *New York Times* found this newsworthy, but that in the 113 years since this article was published, not a lot has really changed in the way that libraries handle textbooks. Of course, besides ignoring or avoiding textbooks, we've always put textbooks on reserve, and I think reserves do provide important access points for many students on our campuses. Especially if we use data, interlibrary loan data and circulation data and course enrollment data to identify the courses that can really benefit from having textbooks on reserve. But certainly two-hour in-library use, one student at a time access to textbooks on reserve has certain limitations that are always going to limit the value that reserves can provide. So the question is, can we do more?

At the University of Buffalo for the past two years, we've been running a series of e-textbook pilots in which we've been negotiating with commercial publishers for discounted pricing on the electronic versions of the textbooks that are being used at the University of Buffalo. And we've been having

mixed results, some significant discounts and some not so significant. And we're at the point now where we don't know about the sustainability of our initiative. But one of the great things about doing these pilots is that we are awash in data about student preferences and student attitudes towards textbooks. And in the surveys that we run, one thing that is always very abundantly clear is that the library is not even on students' radar screens when it comes to textbooks. We're pretty much at the bottom of the list when they're looking for access to their textbooks. And maybe that's how it should be, right? Maybe given the way our policies towards textbooks over the past 113 years or so, that's appropriate and that's okay. I'm not being critical of the way we've handled textbooks either, but what I am suggesting is that the time is right for change. Given the proliferation of open education resources, given the evolution of e-textbooks, given the fact that the dynamics of the textbook market have just gotten so unsustainable, the time is right for all of us in this room to sort of reassess our position on textbooks.

Many librarians are already doing this and finding that they can play significant and impactful roles in the way that textbooks are used on their campuses. And, as Anthony mentioned, many of those roles are highlighted in the current edition of the *Against the Grain* newsletter that's in your conference tote bag. I won't go into too many of them, but the thrust of most of the initiatives is, as Nicole mentioned, substituting high-priced textbooks with open education resources. And with that is some context. I thought I would explain or say the five things I think are important for any librarian to know who might be interested in getting more involved in textbook affordability.

The first thing is that as you go around your campus and start talking to instructors, your entreaties will not fall on deaf ears. This notion that faculty are unaware of textbook costs or unconcerned by textbook costs is a thing of the past. I know in the past publishers were not 100% transparent about disclosing the cost of textbooks and so forth, but today every single instructor worth their salt is aware of textbook costs and wants to do something about that. I genuinely

believe that. We can find exceptions to the rule, of course, but instructors are sensitive to this issue and they will be receptive when you come talking to them about doing something about it. The main challenge is not that they're unaware but that doing something about it is difficult, right, that swapping out a high priced, commercially published textbook with things like open education resources, open textbooks, open courseware, or substituting a high priced book with library licensed resources like e-books and journal articles is hard. It's challenging. It's time consuming. It's a daunting endeavor, and this is new territory for many people, for instructors and librarians alike. But many librarians are finding a role in providing support to instructors with helping them identify relevant open education resources, helping assess the quality of those resources, helping curate and customize those resources so they can be used effectively in the classroom.

The next myth is that all textbook authors are only in it for the money. And I'm not saying that royalties are unimportant or insignificant. This particular textbook is a broadly adopted, widely used introductory economics textbook that's written by a respected Harvard economist named Gregory Mankiw. And usually the information about the sorts of royalties that authors get is kind of hard to find and not disclosed, but because Cengage, the publisher, recently filed for bankruptcy, they had to disclose that they actually owed this author \$1.6 million in royalties. I say that just as the "wow" factor, but this really isn't the norm, obviously. There's a group of high-impact blockbuster textbooks that make a ton of money for the authors and for the publishers, but by and large, most authors are not making a killing off their textbooks. But incentives are important, right? Mainly, the people who write these books don't get the same sort of recognition that they might get for writing a scholarly monograph or for publishing a scholarly journal article, so the money is important. Many libraries are recognizing that and they're setting up incentive and award programs at their schools. So at San Jose State University, they have a program set up where faculty are rewarded with a \$1,000 grant, if you like, or an award, to support their making this

shift from a traditional textbook to an alternative textbook that costs less money. Temple has a similar program. UCLA has a similar program, and UMass Amherst has a similar program.

Another myth is that as you embark on your textbook affordability initiative, the bookstore is not your enemy. They probably are not the most affordable option for students for buying textbooks, but in my experience, bookstores are starting to get the message and they're starting to embrace textbook affordability and they are partnering with organizations all across their campuses, including libraries, to support textbook affordability initiatives. One example of this is at San Jose State University where the bookstore provides the library each semester with a list of all the textbook adoptions that are being used each semester. The library runs that list through their ebook holdings and then they identify the ones that are already available through ebrary and EBL and EBSCO ebooks and so forth for use for students for quote, unquote "free." And the really radical collaboration with the bookstore here was that the bookstore put a little sign up in their store next to the books that were available for free in the library, indicating to students, "Did you know you can access this book for free in the library?" So be aware that the bookstore may be an important partner, an important collaborator for textbook affordability initiatives.

And finally, this is perhaps the most mildly controversial myth that I'd like to say. Anthea said, "Mention that 86% of students prefer print textbooks over electronic textbooks." And yeah, it's true that currently at this point in time, most students do prefer print. On the surveys we've been doing at the University of Buffalo it's probably about 70/30. But that's taking a poll in a vacuum, and that's with all things being equal. And we know that in real life, all things are not equal. So in the surveys that we've been administering at the University of Buffalo, we ask students, "So if the price is equal, e-textbook and print textbook is equal, which would you prefer?" 70% prefer the print. What if the e-textbook is half off, 50% cheaper? The numbers actually flip flop. 70% would choose the e-textbook, and 30% would choose the print. So when we're doing

these surveys in a vacuum, you're getting results that can only be used in a vacuum, and I think the reality is not that print is king and that students hold print sacred, but that they see value in both. There's positives to print and electronic and choice is really what's paramount here.

In closing, I like to just remind people whenever I do a presentation like this that the economics of the textbook market tends to get the most attention, and I know that in my initiatives, I tend to pay most attention to affordability and prices and so forth, but it's important to remember that it's equally important that we focus on learning outcomes and creating better textbooks. So as you begin to pursue textbook affordability initiatives on your campus, remember that it's also important to improve learning outcomes and create better textbooks. Thank you.

### **The View of a Library Content Vendor**

*Bob Nardini, Vice President, Product Development  
Ingram Library Services*

**Bob Nardini:** My name's Bob Nardini. I work for Ingram, and I'm the business guy up here. And like many of you in traveling to a conference like Charleston, I sometimes get into conversations on airplanes with my seatmates. Usually that ends up with somebody asking me, "What kind of business are you in?" and I say, "Well, I work for a company that sells books to libraries." And without fail, the reply is, "Oh, you sell textbooks." And my answer is, "Well, yes. Well, no. Well, not really." And it ends up being a very short conversation. But it could be a longer conversation, it really could, if my seatmate were interested in having it, which they usually would not be. And you can see that conversation in all its facets today in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, especially in their forums where you can find pretty much any point of view you're looking at, you want to find having to do with print versus e, as we've talked about already, we've heard. Having to do with commercial textbooks versus open textbooks, you can find a range of opinions there. And here's the one statement that I saw in the *Chronicle* that I think everybody would agree with, that there's a lot of answers these days and no single answer. If you look in the journal literature, you can find the

same thing, varying points of view on whatever question it is you want to study.

Can we agree on this much, anyway, that e-textbooks are greener? Well, actually not. Thanks to the *Chronicle*, there's a study that proves that they're not really very different when you take into account all the various costs associated with the two types of textbooks. But one thing we do know. We do know this. Students have more options than ever before. And I have this on impeccable authority. Here are some of the options. Here are some of the commercial options. And this is just a few of them. This is campus book rentals. One of my sons, when I asked him about where he got his textbooks, he got most of his textbooks from this company, he rented them. Let's not forget about Amazon, nor Apple. Flat World Learning was one of the early pioneers in trying to develop print and low-cost e-textbooks. Lumen, already mentioned by Nicole, a consulting company. Chegg, a pioneer in rental of textbooks, moving in a digital direction. Follett now offers on the BryteWave platform of theirs textbooks from the K-12 through higher education spaces. Courseload, another company. Rafter was a pioneer in textbook rental. Now they're referred to what their business as "digital," as "course materials management" is the way they're referring to it. And we have Akademos, works most closely with bookstores, helping bookstores to develop virtual stores. So those are some of the commercial spaces.

Other choices are the open choices, and Nicole mentioned some of these. So did Charles. Open Textbook Library, Open Course Library, Open SUNY Textbooks. We have the Open State College. We have Wikibooks. We have The Orange Grove in Florida. We have the Ohio Digital Bookshelf. We have Affordable Learning Solutions in California, very well-known, associated with Cal State. And we have the Maricopa Millions, also in California. And Merlot, which is associated with Affordable Learning Solutions. That's a repository of low-cost or free textbooks. So it is a crowded, confusing space. There's no answers, there's a lot of entrants, a lot of potential answers.

How's it going to go? We think it's going to go in every direction. We think there's going to be a

mixture of print and e and commercial and open. It's not going to be one or the other. I will say this, though, that even free textbooks are not free. It's very expensive to produce a textbook in terms of time, in terms of money, in terms of talent. Somebody's paying something somewhere in one of those currencies for even a free textbook. So we see a mixed future, and we're seeing that already.

Here's an example from last year when Chegg announced that they were going to be working directly with Open Stacks. There's a commercial company and an OER organization working together. Here's an announcement from last, this is a news report having to do with Pearson on their project, Blue Sky, which enables professors to develop course content combining commercial content with open content. Ingram, the company I work for, has a lot of interest in textbooks. We don't publish textbooks, but we sell a lot of them. The book part of Ingram actually began as a textbook company, and the Tennessee Book Company, this is an early picture here, is still part of the business. It's the K-12 book repository for the state of Tennessee. That has evolved, that origin in our textbook business, to VitalSource, which is our ebook platform in higher ed, which is the world's largest ebook platform. We have over 500 publishers, over three million users on 6,000 campuses, and the largest list of textbooks in the world. We also sell a lot of print textbooks. On the left, you'll see a photo of our warehouse. Those are mostly used textbooks, which we sell or rent to students. On the right is a shot of one of our Lightning Source facilities, our print on-demand facilities, where some of the largest textbook publishers and many other publishers too print their books, one at a time, via Lightning Source as needed.

Customization of textbooks. We've mentioned the disruption already: used, new, rental, used. Customization of textbooks is probably going to disrupt everything. When every textbook in every class is a one-off object, a material assembled by the professor, that is really going to be disruptive. Ingram has a piece of software too just recently introduced called Ingram Construct that will allow people to put together textbooks from different

sources. So each textbook is not a unified thing; it could be customized by a professor for a class. Aggregation is another one of the qualities that a company like ours brings to the textbook market. When you aggregate, you can have many thousands of textbooks from many, many publishers in one place. Giving the institution, in this case, in Brazil, a consortium of 70-some institutions that represent three million students, the ability to offer over 5,000 textbooks to their students in one place and to negotiate a good deal to moderate the price of textbooks. So here in Brazil, students were paying approximately \$800 to \$900 per year for their textbooks. Now they're paying \$200 or less per year for those textbooks thanks to the deal cut because of the aggregation we were able to offer.

In California, with Affordable Learning Solutions, which I already mentioned, VitalSource is one of the preferred vendors. And because there's a negotiation, a central negotiation with those institutions and the publishers, we were able to enable discounts to students that go up to 40%. And sometimes, depending upon the publisher, students who wished to have print with their e-textbook, and we've heard about the different choices, the different preferences that students have, they could have a low-cost pure, just black and white, very plain print textbook to go with the online textbook if they prefer to use both. Very inexpensively produced textbook from a major publisher. It looks like that. No bells and whistles, but very serviceable. That would come off of Lightning Source. Individual institutions too, if they negotiate centrally, can offer very good deals to their students. Southern New Hampshire University, I used to live nearby there. I would drive by them all the time. It was this sleepy little institution that about 10 years ago got a new president who decided the only way we're going to grow and survive is to become an online sort of institution. So this is a nonprofit institution, but they behave like the private, profit-making higher education institutions. And Southern New Hampshire today has 40,000 online learners around the country, and because they centralize negotiations, have been able to offer very good discounts to their students. So here again,



aggregation has enabled a moderation of the price of textbooks.

In some parts of the world, the UK being one, this photo is from the UK, Middle East being another, this centralization of negotiation with textbooks is more common. This is a popup bookstore in the UK where the negotiations for the textbooks, print in this case, are made centrally. One company is chosen to deliver them all, they put up a popup bookstore on the campus. We have some experience in this, there are other companies that have more than we do, but we expect that institutional licensing of online textbooks is going to be more and more prevalent. And that's an area where librarians have expertise, the licensing of online resources. So we expect that the content on campus, which in the past has been separately negotiated, purchased, talked about in libraries, in

the bookstore, with the academic departments, we expect more centralization of negotiation and a blending, a blurring of the different types of content and the business discussions that surround them in the future. We expect librarians like Charles to be involved in that. We expect to be involved too.

Pearson, whom I've already mentioned, huge textbook publisher, as you all know. They began in the 1840s as a construction company doing projects like this, which was Tower Bridge in London. Ingram began as a river transportation company. This is a photo from the 1940s of an Ingram barge. Still an important part of the company, by the way. So in closing, I would just like to say don't underestimate the ability of a smart, agile company to be open to change and to new ideas. So thank you very much.