The Saint Xavier University Freshman OER Challenge

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Conference Presentation: "Textbook Alternatives: Less Expensive and Better Pedagogy," Charleston

Conference 2018, Charleston, South Carolina, November 8, 2018.

Abstract

A previous article¹ described a variety of possibilities for enhancing pedagogy while reducing costs to students. The impetus was a migration away from expensive textbooks and toward more affordable or free teaching materials. The conference presentation "Textbook Alternatives: Less Expensive and Better Pedagogy" discussed many of these issues, with suggestions for implementation incentives. This paper provides additional information about the Freshman OER Challenge initiative mentioned in the presentation.

In some instances, curriculum costs can be contained through the replacement of expensive commercial textbooks by free open educational resources (OER), the use of already purchased library materials, and/or through the creation of local alternative learning materials.

Potential pedagogical advantages arise from the ability to customize teaching materials, and the ability to develop testing procedures that provide evidence of understanding. These granular tests allow for more efficient and effective flipped classroom time to be concentrated on identified problem areas and more interactive extensions of the previous lessons under new conditions. This makes for a more interesting, enjoyable, and effective classroom experience.

Recognizing these possible cost reductions and enhancements, Saint Xavier University embarked upon a new initiative to improve our student-centered learning environment. SXU announced a new high-priority Freshman OER Challenge initiative intended to make freshman year less expensive and more dynamic. The freshman population efforts would eventually be expanded to other years, leading to additional savings and incorporating pedagogical enhancements more deeply throughout the curriculum.

The challenge was supported by the administration, the faculty senate, and the student government. Conversations continue, in order to discuss the longer-term consequences of such activities for all populations. For faculty, the implications include academic freedom to select teaching materials, copyright compliance, and intellectual property rights such as Creative Commons designations as materials are contributed to our local institutional repository

and/or national OER platforms. The administration is concerned with the seamless integration and long-term preservation of these available and locally developed materials and procedures, as well as the promotion of these cost reduction and pedagogical enhancements to potential students. Students are interested in both cost and effectiveness aspects of nontraditional teaching methods, and in some cases, are already requesting such changes.

In order to implement these desirable modifications, a number of phased steps were undertaken. The first stage included a number of preliminary strategic conversations. This moved us from the recognition of possibilities to a specific plan. Once there was agreement on the desired outcome, the infrastructure was created to provide the required orientations, followed by faculty assistance, and then the documentation of the logical service quality improvement steps of setting goals and tracking progress.

Phase 1: Discussing the possibilities and obtaining buy-in and advocacy.

There was a concerted effort to explain the existing scenario and the positive implications of such an initiative to various stakeholder groups in order to obtain proactive engagement. The topics we addressed included:

- Provides significant monetary savings for students.
- Removes a significant threat to student success (studies show that approximately 63% of students simply do not buy textbooks).
- Removes the long-standing challenge of submitting information about selected

textbooks by the required compliance deadline for textbook reporting (faculty information provided to the bookstore and to our Student Information page).

- Allows for more flexible and interactive pedagogy (allows for local customization and better integration into our CANVAS testing and gradebook).
- Prepares faculty for the future adoption of additional higher-level OER use, and perhaps even encourages the creation of local materials.

Phase 2: Identifying existing OER, or library-purchased materials, that could substitute for commercial textbooks.

We instituted a schedule of workshops, and offered department-level and individual faculty visitations by librarians and our CIDAT (Center for Instructional Design and Academic Technology) staff to assist faculty in discovering existing alternative resources.

- Provided orientations to existing OER tools and platforms highlighted in our “Faculty Toolkit” (<http://www.sxu.edu/academics/resources/cidat/faculty-toolkit/index.asp>).
- Promoted our collaborations with other OER initiatives found in the statewide CARLI Open Textbook Network membership (best practices for implementation).
- Assisted in developing possible alternative materials; see our local support page (<https://lib.sxu.edu/friendly.php?s=oer>).

Phase 3: Collaborate with other campus units to assist with embedding materials into revised syllabi (with enhanced pedagogical opportunities).

- Coordinate with CIDAT for promoting enhanced teaching, testing, and review opportunities in training sessions, online teaching certification sessions, and on Professional Development Day and Tech Day.
- Promote various enhanced tools and techniques to the faculty (i.e., permalinks to articles, search hedges, comprehension quizzes, and other embedded materials and techniques).

Phase 4: Document implementations, perform evaluations, and promote savings and improvements; especially gather testimonials.

- We created a list of freshman courses and recorded progress in each course toward removing any commercial materials.
- We documented courses with no required textbooks, those with excellent and inexpensive textbooks that will be maintained after a review of alternative materials, those that have already switched to OER or library alternatives, and those still under review with later reporting dates.
- We will be generating a database of student savings based upon these initiatives.
- We will monitor classroom success to observe if there are any noticeable improvements in quality of work and/or grades.
- We will survey students to determine if class sessions are more effective and interesting.

The Departmental Faculty Advisory Council, composed of subject librarians and representative faculty from each academic unit, will periodically review progress on this initiative and provide additional feedback and advocacy.

Note

1. Stern, D. (July/August 2017). Textbook alternatives: Less expensive for students with possibilities for greatly enhanced pedagogy. *C&RL News*, 78(7), 378–384.