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All Dressed Up and Nowhere to Go

Internet2/EDUCAUSE E-textbook Pilot Projects, a Collaborative Venture with Textbook Publishers and Academic Institutions

by **Monica Metz-Wiseman** (Coordinator of Electronic Collections, University of South Florida) <monica@lib.usf.edu>

Chances are, if you know a recent college graduate, you know someone grappling with student debt. According to the Project on Student Debt (<http://projectonstudentdebt.org/>), students who graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2012 accrued an average student debt of \$29,400 and seven out of ten college seniors reported having student loans. In 2013 and 2014, student debt surpassed auto and credit card debt in the U.S. Meanwhile, over the past decade the price of textbooks in the U.S. has risen substantially higher than the rate of inflation. With many textbooks selling for \$200 or more, it can be argued that the cost of textbooks is contributing to rising student debt.

Expensive textbooks also negatively impact teaching and student learning outcomes. The National Survey of Student Engagement (<http://www.nsse.iub.edu/>) reports that 27% of freshmen and 34% of seniors "often" or "very often" chose not to purchase required academic materials because of cost. Students who cannot afford required textbooks often struggle in their courses. Some students cannot take required courses or delay enrolling in courses based on the price of the textbook. As a result, their course loads drop, they take longer to graduate, or, worse of all, they drop out altogether.

Faculty, on the other hand, concern themselves with the quality and suitability of textbook content and not always with price. A faculty survey conducted at the **University of South Florida (USF)** revealed that over 90% of faculty participate in the selection of textbooks adopted for courses. Faculty invest considerable time and effort in designing course curriculum around an adopted textbook. They often select traditional, sometimes expensive, textbooks where the only change they need to deal with is the release of a new edition. According to the survey, faculty place value on particular publishers and familiarity with the content. They also cite ease of use and the amount of time required to find an alternative textbook as reasons for using the same commercially-created textbooks semester after semester.

Academic institutions and federal and state governments continue to look for solutions to the problem of high-cost textbooks, solutions that take into consideration both student's financial needs and faculty's focus on quality content. Some solutions that are being explored include open access textbooks, online

course readings in lieu of a textbook, collaborations between university presses and academic libraries, experimentation with online course reserve, and eBooks that might take the place of traditional textbooks. This article explores a possible solution through the efforts of academic institutions working in conjunction with major textbook publishers in three e-textbook pilots sponsored by **Internet2/EDUCAUSE**.

The Internet2/EDUCAUSE E-textbook Pilots, a Proof-of-Concept Initiative

Following in the footsteps of **Indiana University** and other universities, the first e-textbook pilot was launched under the organizational umbrella of **Internet2/EDUCAUSE** in the fall of 2012 with 23 colleges and universities participating. The last of the three pilots ended in December of 2013.

Institutions paid a flat fee based on the anticipated number of participating students and the e-textbooks were provided to students and faculty at no cost. Course load, the e-textbook platform used in the pilots, featured capabilities that allowed students and faculty to take and share notes, search within the e-textbook, and to bookmark, highlight, and

read sections offline. Access to the e-textbook was granted through the course management system. Only one publisher participated in the initial pilot. In subsequent pilots, launched in the spring and fall of 2013, there was an increase in the number of publishers and a mix of new and returning institutions. In all pilots, institutions could opt to include open access course materials, such as open access textbooks, on the Courseload platform at no additional cost.

Why did Librarians Get Involved?

Twenty-three institutions including **Cornell, Michigan State, Iowa State, Dartmouth, University of Kentucky, University of Buffalo**, and **USF** participated in the fall 2012 pilot documented in the report, *Understanding What Higher Education Needs from E-Textbooks: An EDUCAUSE/Internet2 Pilot* (<http://www.educause.edu/library/resources/understanding-what-higher-education-needs-e-textbooks-educauseinternet2-pilot>). According to this report, of all of the stakeholders involved in the fall 2012 pilot — libraries, teaching and learning centers, information technology and instructional technology departments — the

library was the most involved unit across all campuses.

USF became involved primarily to determine if e-textbooks were an acceptable format to students and faculty and in the hopes of realizing lower textbook costs. The **USF Library** viewed the pilot as an opportunity to help our students. We decided to participate as the neutral party, in a domain where there was significant money at stake. For the library, there was no potential for loss of revenue, unlike our commercially-run campus bookstore or the university itself, which realizes some of the bookstore profit.

More generally, we reasoned that librarians have a unique set of competencies and skills which are necessary to successfully implement an e-textbook pilot. Librarians are no stranger to innovative technologies, accessibility issues, the publishing industry, budgets, support issues, vendor negotiations, licensing, working with faculty and students, or dealing with bibliographic information. Librarians also possess strong project management skills and research and assessment expertise. Finally, librarians are curious. We wanted to know if an e-textbook and the e-textbook platform would have an impact on teaching and learning. This curiosity, coupled with the skills and abilities encompassed within librarianship, made it seem natural that the library should take on a leadership role and engage in the pilot implementations and assessments.

The Logistics of Implementing the Pilot

In order to participate, colleges and universities were required to be members of **EDUCAUSE** or **Internet2** and had to secure funding in advance. Fees for the first pilot were based on tiers that ranged from 800 students (Tier I, \$20,000) to 1,600 students (Tier II, \$35,000). To help determine level of participation, each campus gathered data on publisher specific textbook adoptions. There was some financial risk involved in deciding whether to participate in the pilot at Tier I or II, as faculty had to be both willing to participate in the pilot and able to adopt an e-textbook that was included in the pilot.

Administrative and academic buy-in from diverse units on campus was necessary. **USF's** Provost, Faculty Senate, General Counsel, Information Technology (IT), Office of Student Disabilities, and the University Bookstore all had a say in whether to move forward on the pilot. For many institutions, getting permission or a waiver from the campus bookstore was a non-starter. Each

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college or university was required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding confirming that there were no contractual conflicts, such as an exclusivity clause, with the textbook provider on campus.

Once the agreements were signed, faculty were recruited at each institution. Criteria used to select faculty and courses for participation varied from campus to campus, but at a minimum, faculty who were selected had to adopt a textbook from a publisher included in the pilot. Additional criteria for inclusion in the pilots included: faculty interest and comfort in experimenting with new technology; number of students and discipline of the course; and e-textbook availability. To ensure return on investment, each institution worked to ensure the highest level of participation based on the designated tier while applying the institutional specific selection criteria.

The Work of the Pilots: Commercial E-textbook Publishers and Courseload

Once faculty were recruited, content had to be secured and enabled in the learning management system (LMS). Frustratingly, not all textbooks from each publisher's catalog were available to be used in the pilots. Some e-textbooks were withheld for financial reasons: publishers, concerned about lost revenue, removed many popular and heavily-used e-textbooks from their catalogs during the pilot. The electronic versions of other textbooks were simply not available at all, and the conversion process from print to online could take weeks from point of notification to delivery. Plus, if the electronic version of a textbook wasn't requested from the publisher in the first pilot, that textbook was often ineligible for inclusion in the second and third pilots. Finally, some textbooks were not available at all, for reasons unknown.

Activation of the content began with communicating the information on textbook adoption, course data, and student counts to Courseload and to the publisher(s). Institutions installed the Courseload building block in their learning management system and then Courseload linked the e-textbook to the appropriate course using the course code. Once the content was in place, unique user aids and documentation were created for students and faculty by the participating colleges and universities. Staff developed Web pages, provided in-person or virtual training for the faculty, and engaged IT for possible support issues.

While the pilot was in progress, work on assessment began. Pilot participants could engage in any or all three of the following assessments which were developed by the participants with the guidance and organizational expertise of **Internet2**:

- 1) baseline study that gathered basic elements such as demographics and course information using two different instruments, one for students and another for faculty;

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BORN & LIVED: Philadelphia / Haverford, PA.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Graduated from **Drexel University's** library science program in 1978. Worked in several special libraries before moving on to a business reference librarian position at the **Lippincott Library** of the **Wharton School** at the **University of Pennsylvania** in 1986. While at **UP** I earned a Doctorate of Education with a specialization in Higher Education Administration. In 1997 I became the Library Director at **Philadelphia University**, but moved on to my present position at **Temple University** in 2007.

FAMILY: My wife and I are empty nesters with two sons in their thirties. We now have two grandchildren. Librarians like to know about pets. I've got one. A cat.

IN MY SPARE TIME: Currently taking online courses at **Temple** towards an Instruction, Learning, and Technology certificate. That is leaving less spare time, but when I have it I'll be walking, biking, yoga, fitness training, or writing.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *Farrell's Studs Lonigan Trilogy*, all **Travis McGee** mysteries.

PET PEEVES: People riding on the "quiet car" of the train who don't understand what "quiet" means.

PHILOSOPHY: Having and enjoying life experiences is better than accumulating objects.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Having the honor and privilege to serve as president of the **Association of College & Research Libraries** for 2013-2014.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: The number of faculty using OER (and collaborating with academic librarians to do so) as student learning content far exceeds the number of faculty using commercial textbooks; academic libraries no longer need to purchase and supply any copies of textbooks.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I think the name of the game will be information personalization. We need to figure out better ways to make library services unique to the individual or allow individuals to harness the power of their consumer technology to shape a more customized library experience. Artificial intelligence agents should play some role in this area of industry development. All technology is likely to advance enough in the next five years to allow us or our community members to create that more personally-enhanced relationship with the library. 🌱



- 2) pilot implementation survey; and
- 3) teaching and learning survey.

All Dressed Up and No Where to Go

All three e-textbook pilots required considerable investments in time, energy, and money. Even with the support of **Internet2** and **EDUCAUSE**, there are unresolved issues following the pilots. At the end of the fall 2012 pilot, the cost of e-textbooks emerged as the most important issue. **USF** and other pilot participants have yet to arrive at a business plan beyond the "100% sell-through" model in which all students pay a fee upon enrollment in a course in order to access the e-textbook. Many colleges and universities are reluctant or unable to disallow student choice, and publishers need that guarantee of revenue to begin discussions on reduced pricing. Another barrier is the implementation of such fees, especially because they are often viewed as an additional financial burden on students. The process for obtaining approval

for such fees is arduous and lengthy. Finally, in some states or institutions, such fees cannot even be considered.

Scalability is another issue. Supporting a relatively small number of courses during a pilot for one semester was a huge, complicated undertaking; scaling up to a production-level environment will require significant investments, ones that will eat away at the costs savings passed on to students.

At **USF**, faculty who participated in the three pilots remain enthusiastic about the use of e-textbooks and the pilots. They expressed their primary motivation for participation as an opportunity to save students money and experiment with e-textbook technology. However, without the ability to advance a student e-textbook fee and the publishers' reluctance to negotiate without the guarantee of full student participation, we are all dressed up and have nowhere to go. 🌱