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## Collaboration is Key to Innovative Textbook Affordability Solutions

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# Collaboration Is Key to Innovative Textbook Affordability Solutions

by **Robert A. Walton** (CEO, National Association of College Stores, Oberlin, OH 44074) <rwalton@nacs.org>

**L**ibraries have long been leaders of collaboration in higher education. Librarians frequently jump into a leadership role and act as catalysts for their colleges and universities, nimbly adopting, and then helping faculty and students adapt to new ideas and processes for improving how they access, compile, and use information. At no time has this knowledge of the variety of content and formats been more critical than today, as technology fuels the proliferation of options, and increasing costs push higher-education institutions to evaluate how learning content is sourced, selected and priced, and how it ultimately contributes to student success. John Naisbitt's populist quote increasingly rings true; the students of today are "...drowning in information but starved for knowledge."

It's a tall order, finding the sweet spot that upholds faculty requirements while meeting the cost expectations and learning preferences of students. Options that run the gamut from print and electronic textbooks to digital media to course packs and Open Educational Resources (OER) must be considered through a lens of other issues that include publishing costs, content licensing, and budget constraints. While technology offers many options, today's faculty span several generations of teaching styles. The intersections of pedagogy and technology strategy are inconsistent and frequently inelegant. Librarians and other campus stakeholders stand in the center of an increasingly complex challenge.

Fortunately, no single department has to shoulder this alone. Forward-thinking groups at campuses across the country are forming partnerships to pool their ideas and resources. They're developing solutions to satisfy students and faculty, as well as administrators, as they improve quality and availability of learning content while working within budget limitations and even reducing costs.

## Libraries and Bookstores Lead the Charge

Who is leading these successful collaborations? In many cases, it's libraries and campus bookstores. As a lifelong librarian and now an advocate for the college store, I believe that these two core functions in higher education share many of the same goals and challenges. These groups are finding that, working together, they are well positioned to engage stakeholders, particularly faculty and the administration, to take a holistic approach to textbook affordability.

## Textbook Affordability: An Update from page 22

Commons with 336,806 downloads to date. We are now in the midst of creating our second fully funded open textbook which focuses on probability and statistics, with faculty member **Kingsley Reeves** from the College of Engineering. He is participating in this program as he too wants to create an interactive textbook with multi-media that helps not only students at **USF** understand the concepts of probability and statistics, but also students around the world.

Where are we headed next in our attempt to help our students better afford classroom materials? We are exploring the development of programs similar to Affordable Georgia and **Temple University's** Alternate Textbook Project where financial incentives are awarded to faculty who move to an open access textbook or adopt library content in lieu of a commercially published textbook. We will join the **Open Textbook Network** through the **University of Minnesota** and develop a database of ebooks similar to the one created at **UNC Charlotte** for possible adoption. Finally, we are currently analyzing how best to negotiate with commercial textbook publishers for e-textbooks on our campuses. Our commitment to textbook affordability for students at **USF** not only continues but has intensified to match the growing importance of this issue to students, faculty, administrators, and now Florida lawmakers. 🌱

While much opportunity presents itself, these collaborations are still the exception rather than the norm at most campuses. Traditionally, libraries and bookstores have worked independently of each other. In part this has been due to organizational boundaries reflective of separate reporting lines, with libraries reporting through the core academic program and stores through auxiliary or enterprise/business services. The issue of licensing often has stood between these two groups as well, with some disagreement as to whether licensing costs should be absorbed by the library or passed along to the student through the bookstore. Until recently, many librarians simply didn't think to reach out to the bookstore as a collaborative partner.



"Mapping the Learning Content Ecosystem," a research project led by **The National Association of College Stores (NACS)** last year, bears this out. When asked to name the key players in the evolution of course materials, librarians seldom mentioned the campus store. If they had no prior working relationship with the campus store, the potential for partnership didn't even occur to them. However, campus librarians who had engaged with their institution's store said they were open to, and enthusiastic about, future joint ventures.

As these librarians share their experiences, others are following suit, pushing organizational boundaries aside and letting go of restrictive historical models to identify and implement textbook affordability programs.

## Case Study: University of Kansas

A great example of a collaborative effort led by the library and bookstore comes from the **University of Kansas (KU)**, Lawrence. Roughly six years ago, as budget cuts were becoming increasingly common in higher education, **KU** formed a digital content collaboration committee including representatives of the library, campus bookstore, IT, and instructional learning. The committee's goal was to develop and implement a program for providing course materials that would reduce costs by leveraging each entity's resources and capabilities.

One issue the committee addressed was determining whether the money paid by the library to secure copyrights for its e-reserves program was well spent. In other words, should the library continue to spend its limited budget on e-reserves that were requested by faculty in place of or to supplement course materials? Without metrics to determine whether or how many students were accessing the e-reserve content, the library had difficulty assessing whether the cost of buying copyrights was justified.

Following careful analysis, the library determined that it should save the money spent on faculty requested e-reserve copyrights. Instead, the bookstore would create custom course packs, incorporating the content previously requested as an e-reserve. This solution shifted the payment of copyright fees for course-specific e-reserves from the library to the bookstore but only when a course pack was purchased by a student.

Committee members worked out a process between the library and bookstore to help them transition from e-reserves to course packs, and put a system in place to identify copyrights already held, thus eliminating duplicate purchases. Additionally, they communicated this change to faculty members, helping them understand and support the change.

## Case Study: Simon Fraser University

At **Simon Fraser University** in British Columbia, collaborative efforts between the library and bookstore began about five years ago, as a task force of representatives responsible for classroom support and curriculum development began exploring the options and issues surrounding the delivery of course materials.

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The bookstore and library were challenged with reexamining their copyright policies. An analysis supported by campus legal representatives and IT Services revealed that the bookstore was often unknowingly purchasing licenses for its course-pack content that had already been purchased by the library. To eliminate these double payments, the collaboration enabled bookstore representatives to use a portal on the library Website to check the licensing status of materials prior to redistributing them.

More recently, SFU library and bookstore representatives began collaborating with the Teaching and Learning Centre, IT Services, and several other departments on a series of efforts, including pilot programs, to determine how to best serve students and faculty in the delivery of OER and commercial course materials. Among the issues being addressed are how to transition from traditional commercial textbooks to digital and how to provide students with easy access through a single platform.

This collaboration has brought a number of questions to the fore, including whether changes to the policies governing how content is collected and made available to students should be considered, and possibly standardized, across universities. It has garnered the attention of higher-education institutions across the province; 25 of these have joined the collaboration to work toward broader change.

### Starting the Discussion

Building a collaborative team to address issues related to course material affordability and availability begins by including the campus store. I encourage librarians to initiate this process by seeking out the entrepreneurial college store leader. Compare notes with the store director about your respective goals and challenges. Discuss your commitment to students and faculty and any ideas you might have for supporting their success.

Next, identify and engage other stakeholders on your campus. Consider including representatives from IT and instructional design/content management (or whatever group manages your LMS), disability support services, and the appropriate academic leader (e.g., provost or dean of instruction).

At your first meeting with this cross-functional team of collaborators, begin by discussing:

- Your common goals in supporting the needs of the two core content users, students and faculty
- The challenges you face, individually and collectively, in striving to achieve these goals
- What constitutes student success and affordability at your campus
- What resources each of you brings to the table, and ideas for pooling those resources to resolve issues and launch new ideas
- Which faculty members you should invite to join the group

Keep in mind when you are recruiting faculty members that they already juggle many competing demands in both time and priorities with the greatest priority on academic student success. With this in mind, focus on faculty members who are either very passionate and self-motivated, or incentivized to take on such an initiative. At your first meeting, you might discuss ideas for making the discovery and adoption process easier or ways to fund potential incentives.

Subsequent committee meetings will give you the opportunity to begin forming an action plan and timeline. You might consider activities such as conducting research among students to collect data on their content and learning preferences; developing a communication plan to keep faculty and other stakeholders informed of course-materials options and opportunities for pilot program participation; and capturing data from pilot programs to measure success.

### Partnerships for the Future

As the challenges of higher education continue to grow in scope and sophistication, institutions that have a strong culture of collaboration among functional areas will be the ones that thrive. There is an opportunity for libraries and bookstores to work together to lead this transformation on their campuses. In so doing, you will not only help your students, faculty and institutions, but also increase your relevance to them. 🌸

### Research Examines How Students and Faculty View the Library and Bookstore

Recent NACS research examines student and faculty perspectives and uncovers opportunities for strengthening their perceptions about the library and bookstore.

#### Student Perspectives

In early summer 2016, NACS surveyed a panel of college students about their relationships with the campus library and, to a lesser degree, with the campus bookstore. With 1,655 students responding, the survey uncovered a variety of interesting perspectives, summarized below.

When asked how they feel about the campus library, 89 percent of respondents said they feel that the library is extremely, very, or moderately valuable in helping them achieve academic success. They value the assistance of librarians as well, with nearly half saying they consult a librarian when seeking information for coursework or research.

As they research course materials prior to purchase, 30 percent of students said that the library is among their resources; 66 percent mentioned the bookstore. A question about accessing or acquiring materials revealed a similar pattern, with 26 percent saying they access or acquire materials through the library; 69 percent utilize the bookstore.

The survey also revealed some areas where libraries have the opportunity to improve student awareness. For example, only half of students believe that the library is working collaboratively with the university to provide them with access to affordable course materials, and nearly a third don't know whether their library offers course materials via reserved print copies or digital access. Many of those who do know feel that the library could improve access to these resources.

Also, libraries are perceived to be more innovative in their implementation of learning/study spaces (7.47 on a 10-point scale, with 10 being "Cutting Edge") than either digital books/references (6.98) or new technologies (6.75). There is an opportunity to raise students' awareness of the library's proactive efforts to incorporate state-of-the-art technology into research and learning.

#### Faculty Perspectives

In examining faculty perceptions of their relationships with the library and bookstore, as well as their role in course-material collaborations, data collected through the 2015 NACS faculty survey for the "Mapping the Learning Content Ecosystem" research project reflects a need for libraries and bookstores to keep faculty members apprised of new options in affordable course materials and to help them better understand issues of affordability, technology and licensing.

While they don't see themselves as out of touch or unconcerned about the cost of course materials, many faculty members do admit to not knowing what's going on with OER in their disciplines. They do anticipate a trend toward digital materials, although 82 percent said they still specify print textbooks as part of their assigned course materials.

In terms of how they view the campus library and bookstore, 80 percent of those who advise students on where to acquire course materials refer them to the campus bookstore; 34 percent direct them to the campus library. They consider the library among their advisors for course materials, though to a lesser extent than their academic colleagues. Both libraries and bookstores have the opportunity to raise their profile as knowledgeable consultants in this area. 🌸