

Against the Grain

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How Libraries Can Lead: An Introduction to Affordable Learning for Libraries and Publishers

Gwen Evans

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Against the Grain

“Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians”

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How Libraries Can Lead: An Introduction to Affordable Learning for Libraries and Publishers

by **Gwen Evans** (Executive Director, OhioLINK) <gwen@ohiolink.edu>



Libraries have always been at the crux of affordable learning. A collection of content shared by many, over many generations, means more people have access to more and better content than they could ever afford on their own. All libraries that serve more than a single private individual share this characteristic — public, academic, and special. In institutions of higher education, libraries actively support learning and discovery for students, instructors, and researchers by acquiring materials on their behalf which may be used for curricular purposes.

In the contemporary institutional context, however, affordable learning usually means addressing the staggering jump in the cost of attending college, specifically the cost of commercial textbooks. Major student costs include

tuition and fees (often influenced by levels of state support for higher education), room and board, personal expenses, transportation, and books and supplies. As **Dave Ernst**, Executive Director of the **Open Textbook Network**, often points out, when we ask ourselves what we can do, the only category where libraries in particular can have a direct impact is the last one.¹

Affordable learning is an integral part of an academic library’s service model — so integral that it is often invisible or unremarkable to administrators and faculty. However, it is extremely and viscerally appreciated by students when they can use the library to reduce their textbook costs. Many librarians and consortial library leaders can tell you how often students credit the library or consortium with

getting their assigned materials or textbooks for free, whether because the assigned material was already part of the library’s print or digital collection, the library put class materials on reserve, or consortial lending arrangements mean that multiple students can borrow multiple copies from across the lending network. Delivering affordable learning is a core mission of libraries and explains why many academic libraries are widening their scope of endeavor to include OER curation, promotion, and publishing; acquiring textbooks in packages in partnership with departments or divisions; and negotiating with textbook publishers directly to lower prices for students. Libraries and library consortia, both in their re-

continued on page 12

If Rumors Were Horses

Now hear this! The theme for the **2019 Charleston Conference** is — *The Time has Come to Talk of Many Things...* (Lewis Carroll). Many thanks to **Heather Staines** for the suggestion!

Speaking of the **Charleston Conference**, after nearly twenty years, the Hotel Bennett (next to the Embassy Suites Historic District, overlooking Marion Square and across from the Francis Marion Hotel) has just opened! We tried to get sleeping and meeting rooms but, guess what, they are already booked. The vivaciously wonderful **Shirley Davidson**, our liaison with the hotels, has been working hard to make this happen in 2020. Did I tell you that **Shirley** was the first person who helped me with the conference back in 1980?!



Archaeologists, Mayanists, and Hershey’s collaborated to reveal this ancient vessel’s secrets. See page 32 to read more about this bowl and what it contained.

Congratulations to **Kaetrena Davis Kendrick** who was named **2019 ACRL Academic/Research Librarian of the Year**. **Kaetrena** is associate librarian at the **University of South Carolina-Lancaster Medford Library**. The award, sponsored by **GOBI Library Solutions from EBSCO**, recognizes an outstanding member of the library profession who has made a significant national or international contribution to academic/research librarianship and library development. **Kendrick** will receive a \$5,000 award during the Middle



continued on page 6

What To Look For In This Issue:

- Combating Copyrights for Artists*..... 41
- Appropriation Art*..... 42
- Random Podcasts: An Earful for Library Patrons* 54
- Digitization Workflows*..... 61

Reports of Meetings

- WikiCite 2018* 45
- 2018 Charleston Conference* 47
- 2018 Fiesole Retreat*..... 58

Interviews

- Steve Potash*..... 38
- Anne Osterman* 39

Profiles Encouraged

- People and Library Profiles* 68
- Plus more*..... See inside



How Libraries Can Lead: An Introduction ... from page 1

relationships with publishers and their relationships on campus, are ideally placed to spearhead efforts to relieve financial pressure on students. A recent survey of university and community college students found 36% to 46% percent suffered basic needs insecurity (food or housing).² In another widespread survey, 66% of student respondents said they didn't buy required texts at least once due to cost, and just under 50% said the cost of textbooks caused them to take fewer courses or not register for a specific course. Adverse effects on grades or completion were also tied to prohibitive cost.³ This is a critical issue for our students, and one in which libraries are actively addressing in leadership roles on campus.

What goes into the cost of a textbook? What's driving the cost of textbooks? How do publishers approach textbooks (or potential "course adopted" monographs) when they are pricing eBook packages? What's the role for open access monographs from established presses? What's the business model for open textbook publishing houses or library publishing initiatives? How can commercial textbook costs be mitigated on campus in a sustainable manner? How do libraries help faculty find and assess options, either library materials or initiatives designed to promote OER? What's the faculty opinion on these initiatives? It's important we all begin to ask these questions, and look closely at how academic libraries can assist in discovering, and in many cases, providing, the

What is Inclusive Access?

- Digital-only course materials from commercial publishers
- Access of the first day of class
- All enrolled students (with an opt out process)
- Integrated in Course Management System and billed automatically to students through the bursar

What is OER?

While definitions vary, at their core, Open Educational Resources are freely accessible, openly licensed text, media, and other digital assets that are useful for teaching, learning, and assessing as well as for research purposes. — Creative Commons

Open Education "...is the simple and powerful idea that the world's knowledge is a public good and that technology in general and the Web in particular provide an extraordinary opportunity for everyone to share, use, and reuse knowledge."
— The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

solutions. At **OhioLINK**, we often say "Students first." We take our role in affordable learning seriously and we are appreciative of the opportunity to bring more information to the readers of *Against The Grain*. This special issue purposefully presents a variety of perspectives on textbooks and affordable learning; we sincerely hope you find it helpful to your own strategies and efforts. 🌱

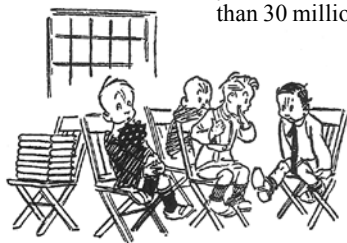
Endnotes

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Little Red Herrings from page 8

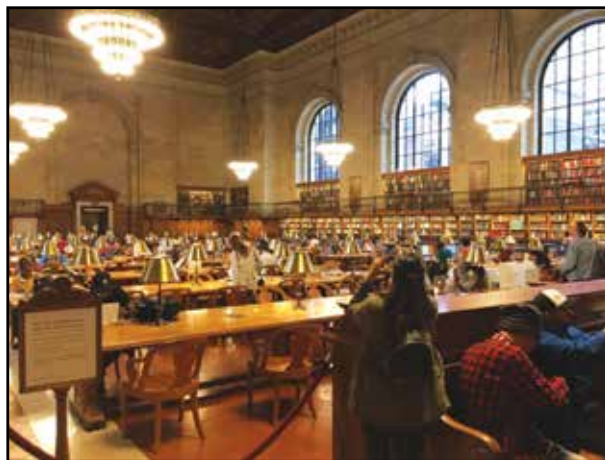
the original big four robber barons). While the evilfare of robber barons on the whole cannot be gainsaid, we can recognize at least some of the good some of them did.

As my eyes lingered over the names of the original donors, I marveled at the foresight and generosity of so many of them. **Samuel Tilden** deserves, of course, singular notice, bequeathing his estate and, through the brilliance of one of his trustees, **John Bigelow**, the rescue of the **Astor** and **Lenox** libraries and their absorption into the **NYPL**. While **Tilden's** estate (almost \$70 million in today's dollars) assured the success of **NYPL**, future donors made certain its perpetuation. According to the library's website, the building cost \$9 million to complete, or nearly \$260 million in today's dollars. Even with our billionaires — **Gates**, **Zuckerberg**, **Buffet**, **Ellison**, **Page**, **Koch**, **Waltons**, and **Bezos**, to name only a few — is there any confidence we could count on them — any of them — to undertake such a structure today? I think it highly doubtful.



The philanthropists who built the **NYPL** have left it to a generation that no longer understands why we need libraries when you can carry (an ersatz) one in the palm of your hand. What's more, they have no stomach for their continued, and admittedly expensive, upkeep. This leaves me with a melancholy sense of loss. In some ways, just as medieval scribes poured their souls into illustrated manuscripts, giving their lives, literally, to preserve and prescribe knowledge, so also those philanthropists at the turn of the last century did the same in their own way: poured their fortunes into magnificent libraries which now, more than 100 years later, are still serving millions — more than 30 million at **NYPL** alone — every year.

Patience and Fortitude are perfect symbols for what has become one of the most glorious libraries in the world. And as I think about it, maybe the **NYPL** really is "only" that, a library, because it does what any library must



do: open to all its patrons worlds they never dreamed of, until they dreamed them there.

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