Faculty and Student Experiences with Textbooks
Survey Conducted by the Alfred University Libraries, April 2017

Why do a survey?
• Growing student concerns about the rising cost of textbooks
• A recent faculty senate resolution encouraging faculty to take cost into consideration when choosing textbooks
• Greater awareness of Open Educational Resources (OERs) among librarians, faculty, and administrators
• The possibility of joining SUNY’s OER initiative (NYS allocated $8 million to SUNY/CUNY for OERs)
• An opportunity to gather information that could inform next steps at Alfred University

Faculty Survey Highlights
- 33% response rate (88 of 264 potential respondents)
- 62% of faculty require textbooks in most of their courses, 28% require textbooks in some of their courses, 10% never require textbooks
- 55% of faculty say that students occasionally tell them that they can’t afford the textbook for their class, 20% of faculty say that students tell them this frequently
- 51% of faculty never put copies of textbooks on reserve in the libraries, 40% sometimes do, 9% always do
- 55% of faculty had not heard of OERs prior to taking the survey
- 10% of faculty say that they have assigned open textbooks in the past (9% are unsure)
- Faculty say that not knowing enough about OERs is the biggest barrier to using them, followed by a lack of OER resources in certain subject areas, concerns about quality, and not knowing where to find OER material
- In evaluating the possible benefits of OERs, faculty put the highest value on the ability to help reduce the cost of our students’ education
- 60% of faculty say that they might be interested in using currently available OERs, 27% say that they are definitely interested
- 11% of faculty say they are very interested in participating in the creation of new OERs, 52% say they are interested but need to learn more about OERs first
- 53 faculty members provided their names for follow up

Concerns expressed by faculty in open-ended questions:
- Time to implement OERs
- Availability and quality of OERs in some subject areas

Student Survey Highlights
- 13% response rate (328 of 2498 potential respondents)
- 20% of students spend $0-$100 per semester on textbooks, 52% spend $101-$300, 20% spend $301-$500, 7% spend $501-$800
- Students report that the high cost of textbooks has caused them to not purchase the text (47%), to charge texts to credit card even though they can’t afford them (25%), to forego essentials such as food or rent to pay for texts (23%), or to earn a poor grade because they could not afford the text (15%)
- 64% of students are very likely to acquire a required textbook, 31% are somewhat likely, 5% very unlikely
- The most-used methods for acquiring textbooks are: to purchase used from a source other than the bookstore (53%), to rent from the bookstore (37%), to purchase used
from the bookstore (33%), and to purchase new from a source other than the bookstore OR find a free copy online (tied at 27%)

- When students don’t purchase books, it’s because they don’t think that the textbook will be used enough to justify the cost (61%), they can find other ways to access the material (48%), or they can’t afford the books (47%)
- The vast majority of students (76%) prefer textbooks in print rather than electronic format, with 15% having no preference
- 53% of students say that the high cost of textbooks sometimes prevents them from doing readings or assignments, 11% say that it frequently prevents them from doing readings or assignments

**Concerns expressed by students in open-ended questions:**
- A belief that the textbook market is a racket
- Frustration that expensive textbooks sometimes aren’t used in class, or aren’t used enough to justify the high cost
- Worry or embarrassment about not being able to afford textbooks
- A sense that the bookstore is expensive and that the buyback program pays too little for the books
- The use of workarounds in cases where students can’t (or don’t want to) buy textbooks (for example: borrowing books from classmates, skipping class on days when the books are used, or missing assignments)

**Planned Follow-Up**
- Raise awareness among faculty about this important issue
- Do a pilot project with a small number of faculty who would like to try using OER
- Encourage faculty to put textbooks on reserve in the libraries
- Create an online resource about OERs for faculty (underway: http://libguides.alfred.edu/oer)
- Continue to learn about the opportunities and challenges of using OERs

**Other Possible Follow-Up**
- Invite SUNY OER Services to conduct a needs/stakeholders assessment on our campus
- Follow up with students about survey results
- Provide students with information and resources for finding required books at lower costs
- Consider asking students to donate used textbooks, to be placed on reserve in the library

**Some OER Resources for Faculty**
- SUNY Open Textbooks/OER Services: https://textbooks.opensuny.org/
- Open Textbook Library: http://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/
- OpenStax: http://cnx.org/
- BCcampus Open Ed: https://open.bccampus.ca/
- Saylor Academy: https://www.saylor.org/books/
- American Institute of Mathematics: http://aimath.org/textbooks/approved-textbooks/
- InTech: https://www.intechopen.com/books
- MIT OpenCourseWare: Online Textbooks: https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/online-textbooks/
- College Open Textbooks: http://www.collegeopentextbooks.org/
- The Global Text Project: http://globaltext.terry.uga.edu/books

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