Narrative Description

Explanation

The majority of college students are tremendously challenged by the costs of higher education as evidenced by an all-time high cumulative student debt total in the United States. The cost of tuition is beyond the control of the academic library. However, academic librarians concerned about students’ reeling from the cost of acquiring a diploma can be innovative in developing programs to help make higher education more affordable. This submission describes just such an innovation spearheaded at two research university libraries. We call it the Temple University Alternate Textbook Project and the Open Education Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Amherst respectively. While the project differs slightly at each of the two institutions, Temple University and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, they were started at roughly the same time and are based on the same concepts, principles and mechanics. As the librarian administrators worked cooperatively to establish the Project at their institutions, they wish to submit a single application that will recognize this innovation at each institution. Owing to the similarity of both programs this application will be primarily based on the Temple University implementation.

At the beginning of each semester both academic libraries experience a similar phenomenon. For the first week or two, the majority of the questions concern one topic: does the library have a required textbook? As most research university libraries do not acquire textbooks the answer is usually no. What we learned in speaking with these students is that they will take almost any action to avoid purchasing an expensive textbook. Whether it might be sharing the text with other students, making do with an old, outdated edition the library does have or doing without the textbook altogether (according to Nicole Allen of the Public Interest Research Group for Affordable Textbooks as many as 7 out of 10 students have reported not buying one or more textbooks). Clearly, doing without required learning materials is detrimental to learning. Innovations emerge when environmental observations identify what’s broken and lead to insights for elegant solutions. That’s what happened at Temple University.

Seeing so many students unable to afford their textbooks, yet lacking the necessary budget to help them directly with acquiring textbooks, the Alternate Textbook Project and the Open Education Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Amherst were envisioned as a way to encourage faculty to provide free or low-cost learning materials to their students as an alternate to costly traditional textbooks. This project does not require faculty to create a full-fledged digital open textbook as is the case with some other projects of this type. Rather, faculty are encouraged to use or re-purpose existing learning materials that may be open or accessible through the library’s content systems. Faculty may request support from librarians in helping them to identify appropriate content for use as alternate learning material.

Although these projects reach only a limited number of students in each award cycle, at both institutions the combined savings for students over the first two years is many thousands of dollars. Evaluations from the individual project courses demonstrate that when students have access to learning material it improves their quality of learning. So this innovation has dual impact as it both saves students
money and enhances their learning experience. We believe the Temple University Alternate Book Project and the Open Education Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Amherst meet the classic definition of an innovation. It is a new or different service or product and it provides value to the individuals to whom it is directed.

We also believe the Temple University Alternative Textbook Project and the Open Education Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Amherst appropriately meet the criteria for the Stanford Prize for Innovation in Research Libraries.

- This project clearly provides evidence of providing significant financial and pedagogical benefits to the members of the library’s user community. Because the faculty develop their alternate textbooks using library content, it serves to better connect our students with high quality research resources.
- The nature of the innovation is unique for a research library. Traditionally academic research libraries either purchased one or two copies of selected textbooks to provide to students through a reserve system or chose to ignore the textbook problem by refusing to purchase them. This innovation is clearly a completely new and responsive approach in which libraries provide campus leadership in developing solutions to the textbook dilemma for students.
- We believe this innovation can have widespread impact throughout higher education by encouraging faculty within the disciplines to think differently about open education resources and the virtues of providing open access to learning material and scholarship. If the Alternate Textbook Project can create more awareness about openness in higher education then the potential contribution can reach far beyond the library.
- The project at both institutions is already proving to be sustainable. More faculty are gaining an interest in participating, the funding requirements are not costly to the institution and the alternate textbooks can be used sustainably. We have heard from quite a few colleagues at other institutions who want to implement alternate or open textbook projects at their institutions. Among those who have reached out to us or our faculty for information about the project are: UCLA; University of Arizona;, Rice University; Washington State; CUNY; and SUNY. As more institutions adopt these projects, the potential for sustainability reaches far beyond our own institutions.
- Because these projects are grassroots in nature, require little new funding, specialized resources or cutting-edge technologies, they are fairly simple to replicate. All it takes is an idea champion on a campus to promote the importance of taking action to resolve the problem of costly textbooks for students. The structure of the project is easy to replicate and the libraries at Temple and University of Massachusetts Amherst invite their colleagues to freely use their existing proposal and evaluation documents, so we support the adoption of this project to other research libraries.

History and Implementation

At Temple University the Alternative Textbook Project was originated at both the Library and in meetings of the institution’s Teaching, Learning and Technology Roundtable (TLTR). Steven Bell,
Associate University Librarian for Research and Instructional Services, began thinking in 2010 about a project to help make textbooks more affordable by using existing content as well as the expanding collection of open access. He was inspired by a panel session at the American Library Association Mid-Winter Conference, at the SPARC Forum, that shared information about the crisis in textbook affordability and the rise of open textbooks. In 2010 he began discussions with the library administration about developing a new project to help students save money on textbooks, but that it would require an incentive for faculty to participate. The library dean agreed to fund ten $1,000 awards to faculty from across the institution. When introduced to the idea, the faculty and administrators who sit on the TLTR also demonstrated strong support for the idea. They saw it as a positive step to give students relief from high textbook costs, as well as increasing awareness about the availability of open educational resources.

It was decided that the first awards for Alternate Textbook Project would take place in the spring of 2011. Steven Bell wrote the guidelines for submitting proposals for a Project Award along with a call for proposals. These documents were distributed to all faculty in March, 2011. Eleven proposals were submitted and a decision was made to fund all eleven, since there were all quite good. The proposals would fund projects in the arts and humanities, social sciences, communications and education. The Project was timed so that faculty would be notified of their awards in the spring, have time to develop their Alternate Textbook in the summer and launch it in their fall semester course sections. Examples of the project can be found at http://sites.temple.edu/alttextbook/event-calendar/. Faculty members are required to evaluate their projects at the end of the fall semester. In the first round of the project, the evaluations showed near unanimous approval by the students who were thrilled to be provided with learning materials at no cost. The faculty uniformly reported improvements in student learning and coursework in these sections. Owing to the success of the Project, the library dean, with support from the TLTR, agreed to provide funding for a second round of the Project – now underway.

The Open Education Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Amherst began with participation in a SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Resource Coalition) ARL Directors phone conversation in which Steven Bell was one of two guest speakers. While on the phone, the University Libraries decided that this was a project that could be replicated as an open education initiative (OEI) and sought support from the Provost’s Office, resulting in a grant fund where each contributed $5000. The OEI was born in spring 2011 under the leadership of Marilyn Billings with support from the Teaching Commons partners (Center for Teaching and Faculty Development, Academic Computing, University Libraries) and involvement of faculty in the Information Technology minor academic program as peer reviewers of the proposals. A Call for Proposals developed by Ms. Billings was sent out from the Provost’s Office to the entire faculty body of the University in April seeking faculty interested in exploring alternatives to high cost textbooks. Each faculty member’s proposal that was accepted for funding received $1000 per course to convert from their previous high cost textbook to other options, including new materials generated by the faculty member, openly available educational materials, or library licensed content. Workshops were held for librarians and for faculty interested in submitting proposals. After the proposal review process was completed, eleven proposals in both undergraduate and graduate studies
representing faculty from academic departments throughout the university and were funded in the first round.

The first round was so successful, that the University Libraries and Provost's Office decided to proceed with Round Two, which was announced during an OEI faculty panel presentation on Friday October 24, 2011 of Open Access Week. The same procedure was followed except the funding partners doubled their commitment to a total of $20,000 with the intent of attracting some faculty teaching very large general education (gen ed) classes with $2500 grant awards. Even though we received many proposals, we didn’t get any applications for the two General Education awards so we saved those monies for Round Three. When the third round was announced on campus in fall 2012 there were two proposals from faculty members teaching large General Education courses.

**February 2011:** Temple University’s Teaching, Learning and Technology Roundtable launches e-text project

**March 2011:** Director of UMass Libraries and Provost establish a fund of $10,000 for Open Education Initiative grants

**March 2011:** The University Libraries Open Educational Resources LibGuide is created [http://guides.library.umass.edu/oer](http://guides.library.umass.edu/oer)

**March 2011:** Workshops held for librarians to learn about the OEI

**April 2011:** Round One of the Open Education Initiative begins. Workshops, consultation sessions held for faculty

**May 2011:** Round One grant awards given to 8 faculty for 11 courses
The results of Round Two are summarized on the OEI LibGuide
http://guides.library.umass.edu/content.php?pid=87648&sid=1714807

Summary results of Rounds One and Two were stunning for the Provost. With a total investment of $26,000 ($11,000 in Round One, $15,000 in Round Two), grants were awarded to 21 faculty members teaching 26 courses. There were 1,616 students affected with an average savings of approximately $127 per student. Total recurring savings from these courses being taught multiple times are over $205,500.

Intended clientele

There are two categories of intended clientele. The primary clientele are the students at our institutions. The whole purpose of this innovation is to ultimately benefit the students by eliminating the need for textbooks in their courses thereby saving them money and reducing the overall cost of higher education. Each faculty member who receives a grant for the Alternate Textbook Project is required to conduct an evaluation at the conclusion of the semester. That is the primary way in which we are determining the impact of the Project on the students. Overall students have responded favorably to the elimination of traditional textbooks in their courses. This is particularly the case for those courses, such as one in economics, where the textbooks are traditionally quite expensive. The evaluations also indicated the range of alternate learning materials used in the courses includes government documents, sections from existing open textbooks, content from articles and book chapters available through the libraries licensed e-content, primary research documents in digital format, and multimedia learning objects available through existing repositories.

While the alternate textbooks require significantly more time to develop compared to the ordering of print textbooks, all the faculty who participated believed that the time invested was well worth it in terms of both cost savings to students and improved learning. Multiple faculty indicated that students spent more time with the learning content owing to the ease of access and affordability. The general observation was that making the learning content free to the students encouraged its use. No student needed to forego an expensive textbook or rely on an old, outdated edition. Faculty, once freed from the traditional textbook, reported being more at ease with adding content to the course on-the-fly and keeping their alternate textbooks up-to-date as needed. Others reported feeling less pressure (and guilt) to push through the textbook, faster than learning was happening, in order to justify the cost of the textbook purchase. Moving at a slower pace contributed to better learning. In nearly every course some students indicated they preferred print, traditional textbooks because they consolidated the learning material into a single source that was easy to use. Some students were less enamored having to find the material needed for each class session within the course site, and there was less satisfaction with having to print materials when desired. However, students indicated that the cost-savings of the alternate textbook outweighed all the advantages of print textbooks.

The secondary clientele for the Alternate Textbook Project was the faculty themselves. The librarians hoped that by engaging faculty in a project that relied more on library content and open educational resources, that they could raise awareness of both sources among the faculty. An examination of the resources used in the courses does indicate that in most cases the faculty are adding more library
content to their courses. A lesser number are depending directly on open educational resources. Anecdotally we know that the faculty who participate share news about the project with their colleagues so we are hoping that this helps to spread greater awareness for the possibility of developing alternatives to expensive textbooks. We are not able to say yet whether our faculty are changing their attitudes and perspectives about open content in general. For example, the Project has not launched a campus conversation about open access. The value of an Alternate Textbook Project for that purpose was discussed in more detail in this article published in 2012, “Coming in the Back Door: Leveraging Open Textbooks to Promote Scholarly Communications on Campus” (http://jlsc-pub.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1040&context=jlsc)

The Open Education Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Amherst also requires faculty to submit a brief evaluation after they teach the course. Anecdotal evidence from those reports plus informal focus group meetings indicates that students are much more engaged in the classroom when the faculty have incorporated some form of alternative to high cost textbooks. One faculty member reported that his “Student Response to Instruction (SRTI)” evaluation score increased exponentially after years of being flat. He was so impressed by this change that he stated that he needs no further incentive to switch all his courses to an Open Education model. This faculty member is in the process of redesigning all of the courses that he teaches. Some faculty members chose to create their own textbook or lab manual from past class lecture notes and employed student teaching assistants with their grant monies to create this new material. One such example “Introduction to Geographic Information Systems for Natural Resources Management” is now hosted on the institutional repository ScholarWorks @ UMass Amherst http://scholarworks.umass.edu/eco_ed_materials/1/ where students can download to read in class or print as they prefer. More original faculty content will be posted on ScholarWorks as they are completed. In fact, we are now planning to create a new section on the repository specifically for open education materials that are created at UMass Amherst.

One of the priorities for the OEI during the 2012-13 academic year is to engage in more formal assessment of student learning by developing a partnership with the University’s Institutional Research Office which is responsible for this area. We plan to include formal questions on the SRTI form specifically for OEI courses. In addition, we have begun developing survey instruments and tools to conduct focus groups of faculty and students during spring semester.

A second priority has been to develop a Faculty Senate Committee to examine the open education movement and the use of OERs in the classroom hoping that open educational resources will be incorporated more fully into the entire curriculum going forward. http://www.umass.edu/senate/adhoc/AHCOOER.html. This committee’s report is due to the full Faculty Senate by the end of spring semester. As the campus begins conversation about MOOCs (massive open online courses), we expect that the support model we have developed with the OEI can be expanded to include support for MOOC classes that are created at UMass Amherst. There is already considerable interest to explore this model.

Nominator’s statement: Why is the nominee particularly worthy of this recognition?
As this submission is a self-nomination from the institutions themselves, we believe the response to this question is provided in the “explanation” section. However, to summarize, we believe this project is particularly worthy of recognition owing to the following reasons:

- It meets the definition of an innovation (new or different and of value to people);
- It directly benefits students by making higher education more affordable to them and increasing the quality of their learning experience;
- It is a unique innovation for a research library because these organizations typically have little to do with textbook support for students;
- It is an excellent example of how research libraries can demonstrate leadership for creating change at a higher education institution;
- It demonstrates and promotes social entrepreneurship by empowering faculty to do good for their students by offering them an affordable alternative to costly commercial textbooks;
- It is designed to be relatively easy to replicate elsewhere;
- It will motivate more institutions to replicate this innovation for their communities;
- It creates greater awareness about open education resources and the value of the open sharing of learning materials among faculty;
- It encourages faculty to leverage existing library resources into their course learning materials, thus making greater use of this content and exposing students to it;
- It can lead to new research opportunities when faculty study how shifting to open educational resources impacts student learning;

Principal Players

**Steven J. Bell** is the Associate University Librarian for Research and Instructional Services at Temple University. He is serving as the president of ACRL for 2012-13. He writes and speaks about academic librarianship, learning technologies, library management, higher education, design thinking and user experience. Steven is a co-founder of the Blended Librarian’s Online Learning Community on the Learning Times Network and enjoys delivering virtual presentations. He was the founding blogger of ACRLog, ACRL’s official Weblog, and currently writes at Designing Better Libraries, a blog about design thinking and library user experiences. He authors weekly columns for Library Journal Academic Newswire, "From the Bell Tower" and "Leading From the Library". He is co-author of the book “Academic Librarianship by Design”. For additional information about Steven J. Bell or links to his projects, point your browser to http://stevenbell.info

**Marilyn Billings** is the Scholarly Communication & Special Initiatives Librarian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She provides campus and regional leadership and education in alternative scholarly communication strategies and gives presentations on author rights, new digital publishing models and the role of digital repositories in today's research and scholarship endeavors as well as providing oversight to the UMass Amherst digital repository ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. Her most recent activity has focused on her work as a campus leader and national speaker on the topic of alternatives to high cost textbooks, the use of open educational resources, and coordinator of the Open Education Initiative (OEI) launched at UMass Amherst in spring 2011. Ms. Billings’ recent presentations
include “The Open Education Initiative at UMass Amherst, Alternatives to High Cost Textbooks” presented at the Academic Library Futures Symposium (Rice University, Sept 2012), “Transforming Library Services in a Time of Rapid Scholarly Communication Change” during sabbatical site visits around the country in March-May 2012, “The Open Education Initiative at UMass Amherst, Taking a Bite Out of High Cost Textbooks presented at the Living the Future Conference (University of Arizona, April 2012), and “Open Education Resources at UMass Amherst” given at the Charleston Conference, Nov 2010. For a more complete listing of presentations and publications, visit http://works.bepress.com/marilyn_billings/

Resources and Press Coverage

See Temple University’s Alternate Textbook Website at: http://sites.temple.edu/alttextbook

See University of Massachusetts Amherst’s Open Education Initiative LibGuide at http://guides.library.umass.edu/oer

“Temple U Project Ditches Textbooks for Digital Alternatives”

“Open Textbook Idea is Gaining Steam”
http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/open-textbook-idea-is-gaining-steam/34701

“UMass-Amherst wise to tackle high price of student textbooks through Open Education Initiative program”

Publications/References


Forthcoming:
Letters of Support

We are providing four letters in support of our application.

From Dr. Charles M. Schweik, UMass faculty

1/14/13

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a faculty at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I am writing you to urge you to strongly consider the UMass Amherst Research Library for your Stanford Prize for Innovation in Research Libraries (SPIRL).

In your entry form information, you suggest that libraries will be considered on the basis of the following criteria: “... a single programmatic or project undertaking and/or a sustained culture and profile of encouraging effective and sustainable innovation; the effect of such efforts must have measurable impact on the library's own clientele as well as the potential for influencing the practices and/or standards of research librarianship generally.”

Over the last two years, the UMass Library, working in conjunction with our Provost, has been working to encourage the faculty at UMass to embrace open educational materials. This is in part to help reduce some of the costs that our students are facing year to year given the skyrocketing costs of textbooks. Library staff took on this initiative themselves, and worked to develop Open Educational Resource materials and then a small grant program to encourage faculty to consider lower cost or open access readings in their classes as an alternative to the traditional textbooks. In a year of tight budgets, the Library, working in conjunction with our Provost’s office, initiated a small grant program ($1000 awards) to faculty who submitted proposals to somehow convert their teaching offerings to more open access reading materials.

I was one of the initial group of faculty grantees, and I was awarded, not one, but two such awards: one to hire a graduate student to assist me in searching for high quality, open access materials that could be used in my relatively large undergraduate class in Natural Resource Policy and Administration, and the other to allow me to get graduate student help to convert some of my own teaching materials and make sure everything was my own material and not copyrighted, and then allow me to make that material Creative Commons licensed and offered to students for free through our Library’s Institutional Repository we call Scholarworks.
In my view – and more importantly in my student’s views – these efforts were a total success. In both classes (over 100 students in total), my students praised me for using the material I used, and thanked me for helping make the cost of higher education more affordable for them, while at the same time, not diminishing their learning experience. More importantly, their initial efforts with their first two sets of faculty recipients have saved UMass undergraduates in those classes significant amounts of money. I, as well as other faculty who participated in this program, would not have embarked on this effort without the urging of the Library staff through their innovative Open Education Initiative and encouragement.

I think their innovative use of small grants to faculty, and perhaps more importantly their willingness to support faculty through the building of a website to help faculty search for material (see [1]) and the “can-do” attitude of the Open Education Initiative affiliated librarians, makes the UMass Library a perfect candidate for your award.

Moreover, they are not just pushing for change on our campus – they’ve taken their show on the road and are showing real leadership both regionally and nationally. At their request, I have participated in a number of panels with OEI librarians, to talk about my experiences using OEI materials in my classroom at other Research Library conferences. I also participated in writing a paper led by these librarians on our OEI efforts that will most likely be published in the next volume of Research Library Issues by the Association of Research Libraries. In short, the UMass Library is not only leading on campus in this important area, but is leading regionally and nationally. They absolutely deserve to be recognized for this leadership.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to email me at cschweik@pubpol.umass.edu.

Sincerely,

Dr. Charles M. Schweik
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From Dr. Robert M. Aiken, Temple Faculty and TLTR Chair

Dear Steven:

I am writing to let you know how pleased I am to learn that you will be submitting a proposal to a library innovation competition being offered by Stanford University’s library. My understanding is that you will
be proposing the Alternative Textbook Project. As the Chair of Temple University’s Teaching and Learning Technology Roundtable (TLTR 2) I have found that this has been one of our most successful projects. Without your leadership, and funding from the University Libraries system, it would not have happened.

This is a terrific idea for several reasons. First, this project has had an impact on the way that a number of our colleagues teach. For example, I know that Eric Kondratieff made significant use of the library’s e-book collection in developing the alternate textbook for his roman history course. I also recall that Sherri Culver, one of our TLTR2 members who participated, made significant use of video, podcasts and other multimedia resources.

Second, as alluded to in the previous paragraph, Temple students have been appreciative of the efforts of you (and your committee and library associates) working to help alleviate the mounting costs of textbooks. Through your project colleagues in a number of different disciplines have explored and utilized a wide variety of alternatives to a standard textbook. Students have commented that not only have they found the alternatives less expensive but the idea to work on ways to assist them in this endeavor is widely appreciated.

Third, this project has resonated with colleagues in diverse fields and those who have been innovators have been willing, even eager, to share their wisdom and research with their peers. When the TLTR 2 held our second annual Technology Day last spring, I noted that sessions where colleagues described their Alternative Textbook projects were well attended with even a good number of questions (and suggestions) coming from the audience! I believe that one of the reasons that the project directors have been active is your organizing sessions where they can get together and share experiences, as well as you encouraging them to keep in touch via email.

All of this is a long way of saying, “Thanks for a job well done”. I am particularly pleased that the libraries will again sponsor a third round of Projects this coming Academic Year. I look forward to having the second cadre of participants speak at our Technology Day this year as well as seeing what form future projects will take.

Sincerely,
Dr. Robert M. Aiken, Professor Emeritus
CIS Department
Temple University
Chair, Teaching, Learning & Technology Roundtable 2

From Jay Schaefer, Director, UMass Amherst Libraries
To Whom It May Concern,

It is my pleasure to support the innovative work accomplished by the Libraries of Temple University and the University of Massachusetts in the Alternate Textbook Project, also known at UMass
Amherst as the Open Education Initiative. While the project differs slightly at each of the two institutions, they were started at roughly the same time and are based on the same concepts, principles and mechanics.

At UMass Amherst, the Provost and Director of Libraries have successfully sponsored several rounds of grants that encourage the use of Open Educational Resources (OER’s) and hybrid-OER’s. The first round of the Open Education Initiative saw nine faculty members, in a variety of disciplines, receive eleven $1,000 awards. Using class enrollment numbers and the costs identified in the grant proposals, the savings amounted to about $70,000 for students in a single semester. Faculty and student responses to the new concept were observed to be favorable in all courses.

The success of the first round of the OEI prompted a second round of grants in the fall of 2011. This time, twelve faculty teaching fifteen courses were awarded grants, for a total of $15,000 dispensed and approximately $135,000 saved. This brought the total recurring savings to just over $205,000 on a $27,000 investment. Using course enrollment figures, over 1,600 students stand to be affected by the Open Education Initiative each time these courses are taught.

At UMass Amherst, the Open Education Initiative has been an outstanding example of efforts to integrate 21st Century technologies into the curriculum and to provide innovative programs that offer students easily accessible, cost effective educational resources. The Provost and other University administrators point to the Open Education Initiative as an excellent example of how the Libraries can facilitate student access to valuable learning resources at a minimal cost.

As this project grows, it will have an immense impact on the cost of higher education for students. It will also demonstrate to faculty the value of using open and hybrid solutions to replacing high-priced, commercial textbooks.

Thank you for considering the efforts of the Libraries of Temple University and the University of Massachusetts Amherst to create open educational resources as a deserving candidate for the Stanford Prize for Innovation in Research Libraries.

Sincerely,

Jay Schafer
Director of Libraries

From Kristina Morris Baumli, Temple Faculty
To Whom It May Concern:

As an instructor in the Temple University First Year Writing Program, I can say that the Temple Library’s Alternate Textbook Project has positively changed our students’ experience, the practice of teaching writing, and the culture of our department.

The initial grant from the project was used to implement an open access textbook for students in order to save them money. The original plan was to ask students to bring laptops, tablets, or smart phones to class, and to work from an e-book during class. If a student owned none of these, the money saved from regular textbooks might be used toward purchasing a laptop, or would completely cover the price of a basic tablet computer. What ultimately resulted, with the help of Temple’s reference and special collections librarians, was a more sophisticated plan that involved the creation of modules for each paper required in the general composition course, English 802.

The modules were designed to be a template, so other instructors could potentially modify them to their own interests and needs. Each module featured links to scans of public domain sources or secondary sources to which Temple subscribed. Students used the archival or primary source documents as a point of departure for their research—the student moved from mere summary to nuanced analysis in a series of exercises with the materials. As students explored a topic—say the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793 or the Civil Rights in a Northern City exhibit—they were encouraged to ask research questions that related to their majors.

The results really exceeded expectations. Students began checking and crosschecking footnotes in secondary sources with primary sources, they made unrequired visits to special collections just to “check out” the archival material, became acquainted with interlibrary loan, and became truly active and educated consumers of the library. They used their electronic devices in class- not only writing and doing bibliographic work, but also to participating in a culture of technological civility—a bonus. Therefore, beyond saving freshman the price of materials, the textbook initiative changed our student learning culture. Through this process, students became active participants in the research process.

The textbook initiative also changed my department’s culture; when I first discussed this grant with our chair, he enthusiastically convened a technology committee. In addition to other instructors being encouraged and mentored to produce new modules for the general course, another group was formed to develop electronic materials for the remedial class: English 701. This summer, all classes will be delivered in a hybrid or completely paperless classes: a massive change from just two years ago, when no one offered paperless classes or electronic devices in the classroom.

I also believe that this program will be easily translatable to other institutions. I gave a presentation on this program at CUNY, and after hearing about our experience, they were eager to adopt the project at their libraries.

Kristina Morris Baumli
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