

Academic BRASS

Published by the
BRASS Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee

Vol 11 (1), Spring 2016

Sue Wozniak
Business Librarian
Foster Business Library
University of Washington

Open Educational Resource Textbooks: A Case Study in the Business Library

As a librarian of the Foster Business Library at the University of Washington, I attended a workshop in January of 2016 that sought to bring awareness to Open Educational Resources (OER) textbooks. OER texts have come into prominence in reaction to rising textbook prices, leading to growing collections of high quality, relevant textbooks published with open licenses. The University of Washington Libraries joined the Open Textbook Network in spring of 2015 to raise awareness of the availability of OER as a textbook resource. After attending the OER workshop I became inspired to investigate the potential use of OER texts as a case study within the Foster Business Library.

I began my investigation looking into business titles within OER collections, as well as prices of current textbooks. After finding significant representation of business content, I researched textbooks to correspond with current material used for the core classes. I found relevant replacement OER textbooks for all the main texts used for the core classes. There are 13 required core classes for undergraduate students at the Foster School of Business. At current textbook prices, fees for these core textbooks total \$2,874 per student if purchased new. Given such relevant content and huge potential savings I felt compelled to investigate the receptivity to a different model of textbook within the business school.

Having worked at the Foster Business Library for less than a year, I had minimal contact with business faculty. I knew I needed to get a cultural sense of how OER textbooks might fit within the Foster School of Business and was searching for an administrative level contact. I heard a presentation by the Assistant Dean of Marketing, who had replaced the textbook for a marketing class with recorded lecture material and case studies as active learning exercises. He found the traditional text to not cover the material well, noted the rising cost, and was looking for more effective teaching methods. I contacted him, realizing he had seriously considered price and learning implications of the use of textbooks. He was enthusiastic about the potential savings and value of OER texts within the business school, and introduced me via email to course coordinators who choose the textbooks for all sections of the core classes.

I met with several course coordinators where I presented OER business texts as an optional learning resource. I emphasized the high quality, peer-review nature of the textbooks, cost savings to students, and the ability to adapt content to the needs of the class. I also presented specific titles that I thought matched the content of their classes based on class descriptions and current textbooks. Each faculty member was enthusiastic about the potential for OER use within the business school and happy to review the title I presented. The content was a good match for 2 of 3 courses and the quality highly regarded. One issue that emerged is that there are additional learning materials included with traditional textbooks that faculty consider essential. An accounting professor uses grading software with his current traditional textbook that provides electronic grading of weekly assignments, while a management professor uses PowerPoint materials for lectures that correspond with his current textbook. Neither of these peripheral learning materials were available with the OER texts under consideration. These materials have sent me on another quest to investigate other types of open source materials.

My OER case study in the business library is still in process. While the initial faculty I contacted have not yet decided on whether the OER textbook will be suitable for their teaching needs for the next academic year, they have each endorsed value of OER as a viable option within the business school. Two other business faculty have since learned about OER texts and are also considering their use. The potential savings of student fees is huge due to large undergraduate class sizes, each with a required textbook. The accounting faculty member made a quick calculation that he has 1,000 students taking his class per quarter; if he could replace the text it would save almost \$200,000 in textbook fees in just one quarter. I feel highly motivated to bring awareness and advocate for OER textbooks to the larger business school community given the cost savings and the ability to adapt the contents of a textbook to become very relevant to the scenario of a class.