CREATING AFFORDABLE DIGITAL TEXTBOOKS THROUGH COLLABORATION

A Case Study from Purdue

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INTRODUCTION

Today’s undergraduate students, born in the mid-nineties, interact with their world in very different ways than their predecessors. These students have no concept of a world without the internet; indeed, they have grown up with internet access literally at their fingertips. Equally important, however, is the fact that they have grown up in a very different economic climate than their parents, or even students only a few years older. Costs of secondary education have risen faster than household income. Those cost increases are not limited to tuition; between 2002 and 2012, the cost of new college textbooks increased 82%, as compared to only a 28% rise in overall consumer prices. According to the College Board’s Annual Survey of Colleges, four-year public university students can expect to budget an average of $1,307 annually to cover the costs of books and supplies during the 2013-2014 academic year.

These increasing costs have an immediate effect on students. Tuition costs may be unavoidable, but students have some immediate control over their spending on textbooks. According to a 2014 study by the Center for Public Interest, 64% of Purdue University students reported that they had decided not to purchase a textbook due to cost, even though 94% of those students were concerned that the lack of class materials would hurt their grade. Many students reported that the cost of textbooks affected their course selections.

ALIGNMENT WITH PURDUE MOVES AND LIBRARIES PILLAR PLAN

The appointment of former Indiana governor Mitch Daniels to the presidency of Purdue University has sparked a wave of new long-term goals, many of which are oriented around the related aspirations of both affordable and transformative education. Purdue strives to "place a premium on education and enabling Open Access products, from a growing library of Open Access journals to conference proceedings and a university press.

PURDUE UNIVERSITY AND OPEN ACCESS

Purdue University Press and Scholarly Publishing Services operate as one organization, and their collaboration gives the Purdue University Libraries the opportunity to offer a full range of publishing services, from formal monograph publishing and subscription-based journals to conference proceedings and a university press. Furthermore, both organizations have a strong history of pursuing and enabling Open Access products, from a growing library of Open Access e-journals to participation in the first collection of books unlocked by Knowledge Unlatched.

The majority of our Open Access offerings have utilized our Digital Commons repository structure to provide stable access to PODs of books and scholarly articles. This does platform doesn't provide the interactive structure necessary to engage today’s born-digital generation of students in an e-textbook. Creating a wholly new online platform, as has been done at some other libraries, wasn’t an option for us.

Instead, we searched for a ready-built solution, one that offered strong, practical support for the needs of instructors and students. As we began work on Perspectives in Bioethics, Science, and Public Policy, edited by two enthusiastic Purdue PhDs, we wanted to create a new paradigm of learning that recognized the experience, networked learning style of current students.

A FIRST COLLABORATION

Perspectives in Bioethics, Science, and Public Policy, edited by Jonathan Beever and Nicolae Morar, is a groundbreaking book for PUP/SPS. It was the first book published by these editors, who had organized the lecture series it was based on while they were both Purdue professors. It marked the beginning of an ongoing series collaboration with Purdue’s Global Policy Research Institute (GPR), which is committed to wide dissemination of books that address real-world policy issues. It also marked the first collaboration of PUP/SPS and local startup Skyepack.

The book was published traditionally, and the text was also uploaded into Skyepack’s system, with each chapter constituting a pack. Videos of especially compelling arguments from the original lecture notes were added, and the editors created all new-interactive quizzes for students to test their understanding of the material. Ironically, the first undergraduate class scheduled to use the enhanced Skyepack version, in Fall 2013, was not at Purdue at all, but at Penn State.

SKYPEACK

Skyepack is a digital publishing environment that allows authors to create a richly-interactive digital textbook, without the cost concerns associated with printing, as a digital audio and video, creating a truly immersive learning experience. For example, materials can incorporate both multiple-choice quizzes, short-answer assignments, and open-ended discussion boards. Skyepack can either be new materials to replace a traditional textbook, or can incorporate outside texts into a less formal coursepack.

Poor course performance is usually an indicator of a low level of engagement with the course material. Unfortunately, that indicator often becomes apparent too late for the instructor to impact the student’s success in the course. With Skyepack’s Student Engagement Dashboard, faculty can assess each student’s interactions with the course materials and intervention becomes easy. Additionally, the Dashboard allows faculty to directly correlate specific pieces of content to learning outcomes. The Dashboard also allows students to direct questions about the materials to their instructors and receive replies in real time, and in immediate context.

REFERENCES

4. Ibid.