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Sheila Beck

CUNY Queensborough Community College

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Queensborough Community College: Textbook Reserve Collection

Sheila Beck, Queensborough Community College

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This paper examines the textbook reserve collection at Queensborough Community College. Although the collection is heavily used in its current configuration, the library is looking for less labor intensive and less costly alternatives.

The cost of textbooks is skyrocketing. Textbooks are a major, unexpected bill for many students beginning college. Students and their family, used to having their textbooks provided or loaned free of charge at the start of the school year, face often large and unexpected bills when the first term begins. Many times, financial aid does not cover the cost of the books;. Even if it is covered there might be a delayed in receiving the check. In general college courses are dependent on textbooks, and for the student to not be able to have the proper book is a cause of student difficulties, and in some cases of overall failure.

According to Berry et al. (2011), textbook prices have increased at twice the rate of inflation over the past twenty years. In 2009, students at the City University of New York spent an average of \$536 per semester for textbook according to a survey conducted by City Councilman Eric N. Gioia Textbook costs ran approximately 20% of the cost of (in state) tuition. (Gioia 2009).

In 2005, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) evaluated the textbook industry, examining the factors influencing textbook pricing. The fundamental question was "who is responsible for the high cost of textbooks?" Publishers were accused of desiring high profit because new editions of textbooks are published frequently. College bookstores were accused of bundling materials and not providing an adequate supply of used textbooks. Faculty members were accused of not being sensitive to the cost of the materials they choice. Libraries were seldom mentioned in the conversation. Some solutions raised then, and that continue to be raised, are digital textbooks, less bundling of materials, more used textbooks, rental programs for textbooks and less costly choices by professors (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance 2007). In 2008, the Higher Education Opportunity Act recommended universities attempt to publish the price of textbooks before the beginning of the semester and that textbooks be separated from workbooks and CDs. Bundling leads to markups of 10 to 15% according to Student Public Interest Groups (Student PIRGS 2012).

Internationally, prices of textbooks are much lower than in the United States. The average price of a hardcover textbook in the United States is 50% higher than the same book abroad. Cost factors do not explain the difference (Cabolis et al. 2006).

There are various opinions on whether libraries should offer textbooks on reserve. Reserve means lending the textbook to students in the library for a limited period of time. Inler (2009) thinks it is outrageous that students expect libraries to own their textbooks. She feels it is unfair to use the entire acquisition budget on textbooks. Some librarians such as Krista McDonald and John Burke (2007) feel that libraries should supply textbooks to students who cannot afford them, purchase them in a timely manner or wish to carry them. Others such as Wendell Johnson (2012) and Laskowski (2009) as reported in Christie, Pollitz and Middleton (2009) see it as a demand to be met. Laura Kane McElfresh (2009) concludes that one reason libraries do not maintain a reserve collection of physical textbooks is cost. Her opinion is supported by a survey authored by Hsieh and Runner (2005) and by Pollitz and Christie (2006), as reported in Laura Kane McElfresh (2009). The space used to store textbooks and the cost of their purchase are obstacles to maintaining such a collection. In addition, the textbooks are replaced frequently with new editions, making the prior (recent) investments as almost valueless.

The future of reserve collections is uncertain. With students increasing ownership of mobile devices, it seems natural that they use digital textbooks. Oddly, a majority of students prefer print textbooks. In a survey by the National Association of College Bookstores in 2010, 75% of students preferred print (NACS OnCampus Research 2010.) In an experiment by the University of Wisconsin Cornell, University of Minnesota, University of Virginia and Indianan University students found the etextbook difficult to use. The etextbooks were hard to read and navigate. (Schwartz 2012).

At present, not all books are available digitally. Of those available, most are provided to students as single users. The cost is less than a print textbooks but it is not free. CoureSmart is owned by Cengage, Mc-Graw Hill, Pearson, Bedford, Freeman and Worth (Macmillan) and John Wiley and Sons. They sell new textbooks for half the price of print textbooks. Student costs are approximately what the student would pay if he/she brought a used book and resold it (Acker2011). Libraries are bypassed if there is not an agreement with publishers which allows multiple simultaneous users. One complication is the use of custom editions. .

Current student strategies for dealing with the high cost of textbooks are:

1. Purchase required textbooks only. –
2. - Purchase books in their major courses only
3. Purchase books where most of the book is required reading
4. Purchase used books
5. Exchange or borrow books

(Christie, Pollitz and Middleton 2009)

Research Questions:

1. Is Queensborough Community College reserve collection successful?
2. Should the collection continue? If so, in what form?

Queensborough Community College is a two year college that is part of the City University of New York. The 2012 enrollment is approximately 16, 000 students. The student body is almost equally divided amongst Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanics and Asians. Almost 40% speak a language other than English at home. Over 70% of the students are remedial in one area. Around 10% are remedial in three areas- reading, writing and math (Factbook 2011).

This paper focuses on the reserve collection which consists primarily of print textbooks. The students use the collection extensively. The library tries to have at least one copy of each required textbook to aid students who: cannot afford to purchase textbooks. Students use their ID cards to check out books for two hours. Most of the students copy or scan the assigned textbook pages so the two hour limit has not proven to be a problem. The cost of scanning is currently covered by the student technology fee (paper, toner, etc.) but with the large use of these resources the fee structure is changing.

Circulation

The cost of textbooks is subject specific. Mathematics and science textbooks are the most costly and circulate the most. Below is a chart of current textbooks that circulated at least 50 times in the last 5 years with prices. Titles are organized by subject

Titles that Circulated 50 Times in the Last 5 Years

Title	Price New	Price Used
Essentials of Visual Basic 6.0 Programming	104.80	78.60
Introduction to HTML	23.65	17.75
Mathematical reasoning for elementary teachers	114.70	86.05
Introductory algebra	105.50	79.15
Algebra with trigonometry for college students	157.80	118.35
Applied calculus for business students	150.75	113.05
Precalculus	133.35	100
Beginning algebra : early graphing	142.45	106.55
Calculus	243	182.25
PH-110 Principles of astronomy and space laboratory manual	16.45	
Fundamentals of general organic and biochemistry	178.20	133.65
Organic chemistry by Wade	271.45	203.60
Biology by Campbell	215.05-	161.30
Foundations for life science	56.50-	42.40
Hole's human anatomy and physiology	212.35-	159.25
Your health today	110.35	82.75
Kozier& Erb's fundamentals of nursing concepts process and practice	122.60	91.95
Brunner & Suddarht's textbook of medical surgical nursing	147.99	111
Introduction to feedback control systems	32	
Introductory circuit analysis	138.35	103.75
Nutrition	39	
Keyboarding & word processing essentials	116	87
Relating: reflections of a psychologist	37.20	27.90

Title	Price New	Price Used
Life-span human development	143.85	107.90
Making Europe	110	82.50
Sources of western tradition	105.35	79
Maus: a survivor's tale	15.95	11.95
Making America	165.65	124.25
Statistical techniques in business & economics	111.65	83.75
Business - Ferrell	73.35	55.66

Circulation of textbooks by Month 2008-2012

Month	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
January	939	1964	637	744	1552
February		3996	6584	8889	8650
March		3604	5159	7220	5565
April		2038	3896	3129	3178
May	1652	2321	3190	3798	3371
June	722	1014	1574	1712	1221
July	695	1044	1562	1448	1307
August	289	439	1077	1538	2000
September		6771	6758	9526	6315
October	2641	5056	5379	5817	
November		3593	4233	4866	
December		2436	2753	3068	

From the chart, it is obvious that the textbook service is used extensively. As enrollment increased, the circulation of reserve books correspondingly increased. . The peak demand is at the beginning of the semester and around exam time. Students' order books online reducing circulation after September. Although the availability of reserve textbooks is not advertised, the service is used extensively. The circulation is three times that of circulation books.]

Funding

The on-campus Barnes and Noble bookstore provides the library with \$15,000 in textbooks each academic year. Under the current agreement, the money is used for one current textbook for each course offered. Usually the number of textbooks per course has to be supplemented. One copy of Hole's *Anatomy and Physiology* for 500 students enrolled in the course is inadequate. The library has seen physical fights over the use of the book. As a consequence the library uses its acquisition budget to purchase additional copies of popular textbooks. In 2010, this was approximately an additional \$10,000. Currently the City University of New York provides community college libraries with additional funds to purchase both physical and digital textbooks. The rationale is to ease the burden caused by tuition increases. With increased funding the library replaces and supplements the textbook collection.

The library has an uneasy relationship with the bookstore. After an initial delivery of new textbooks before the semester begins, the bookstore wants to delay delivery of additional textbooks so more students purchase books.

Condition of the materials

The materials that circulate the most are in poor condition and need to be replaced often. This is particularly true for mathematics and science textbooks. In addition, students rip out pages. Innovations to lower the cost of textbooks such as using loose-leaf and spiral bindings produce books that are more fragile and more easily mutilated. In 2012, over \$12,000 has been spent to replace tattered books.

Cost of Staffing Course Reserve Services

There are two staff members available during business hours to circulate laptops and textbooks. The reserve section employs three tech fee workers and approximately ten work study students to supplement the support staff. A librarian selects the books and a cataloguer adds the records to the CUNY catalogue. Since the staff members and librarians have other responsibilities it is impossible to calculate the cost of the salaries. Space

At Queensborough Community College, reserve textbooks take up about 10 feet by 13 feet of shelf space. This is considerable when the library lacks space. There is insufficient space for study carrels, group study rooms and silent study rooms. Textbooks are consistently being weeded to make room for newer editions. It is an educated guess when to purchase new books versus keeping older ones.

Student behavior

Most of the students are very cooperative and patient. When there is one copy of a book at the beginning of the semester, most of the students take it in stride. Occasionally students do not follow directions and the staff calls security. A minority of student steal books by removing call numbers and bar codes; these books must be replaced which can be a costly and time-consuming affair, denying needed textbooks to students often when their availability is most crucial.

Discussion

At Queensborough Community College the reserve collection is heavily used. Many students receive financial aid. (In 2009, 6,179 students received TAP awards and 6,295 students received PELL awards). This is a way to assist students with the expense of college and to avoid additional student debt. The library feels this service is part of its mission to support the curriculum. Indirectly, each contact between student and staff aids in retention. The QCC library is committed to this service although financial costs are considerable and hard to calculate.

The Future

Queensborough Community College wants to make the transition to digital textbooks because electronic media solves the problems of accessibility and cost. Students would have 24/7 access with no physical wear and tear on the materials. The labor costs are reduced as staff to hand out the books unnecessary, although technical staff needs may increase. There are difficulties in making the transition- both technical attitudinal. Technical concerns address format, reliability, and distribution. Surveys cited above show students still prefer print, so the transition will not be simple, immediate and smooth. Specific media may relate better to some subjects than others, and online study tools are in their infancy. These tools will need to be evaluated, compared and understood before a decision on supporting one format over another can be made.

For further study, the author is surveying the department chairpersons to see which courses currently use etextbooks. The author plans to speak to the professors involved and survey the students on their preference and the usefulness of the format. The author also plans to review existing offerings in the electronic textbook space to determine their suitability for use at QCC.

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