

# Solving & Promoting Textbook Affordability

## A Case Study Series of Best Practices for Developing and Promoting Affordable Learning

### How a Large Metropolitan University Saves Its Students Money: University of Central Florida

Founded in 1963 and opened in 1968 to support the growing U.S. space program, University of Central Florida (UCF) is an Orlando-based metropolitan research institution and one of the state's 12 public universities. As of fall 2021 its total enrollment of 70,406 students includes 60,075 undergraduates, 9,847 graduate students, and 484 medical students, making UCF one of the largest universities in the nation. Minorities comprise 49.1% of the student body; 27.8% are Hispanic, and 20.6% of undergraduates are first-generation students.

#### A Need for Affordable Textbooks

“Free textbooks benefit any student,” says Textbook Affordability Librarian Lily Dubach, who assumed the position at UCF Libraries in May 2021. “But we definitely have large populations where the choice may be to either feed their family or buy textbooks.” Such options have consequences for student success. A 2018 statewide survey revealed that 64.2% of Florida higher education students did not buy a required textbook due to cost. Further, 42.8% took fewer courses, 40.5% did not register for a specific course, and 35.6% attributed earning a poor grade because of textbook cost. (UCF Data is available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucfscholar/1055/>).

Active efforts to tackle affordability began in 2016. “It started with a few librarians and instructional designers who were very aware of the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement and the difficulties with textbook costs,” explains Dubach. “It was combining the skills of librarians for finding those [open source] materials with the skills of instructional designers to put those materials that are legal and licensable into another format.”

#### Partnering with a Campus-wide Initiative

Today UCF Libraries' Textbook Affordability program, in partnership with a campus-wide collaboration known as the Affordable Instructional Materials (AIM) Initiative, offers free or lower-cost alternatives through library-sourced ebooks, OER materials, and print textbook reserves. Working closely with the university bookstore, Dubach checks the list of textbooks adopted each semester for possible one-to-one ebook replacements.

Most of the library's eTextbooks are considered unlimited-user access, meaning that all UCF students, staff, and faculty can access the eTextbooks simultaneously. Dubach cites the case of a medical terminology class in which 1,200 students

#### The Highlights

##### The Challenge:

While the University of Central Florida library has been pursuing OER efforts since 2016, it continues to look for ways to grow its programs.

##### The Solution:

The library manually reviews textbooks to see if they're already in the catalog. In the meantime, a library eTextbook portal is in the works. Collaboration with teaching faculty has also been crucial.

##### The Results:

Over 300 UCF faculty members have adopted open or library-sourced materials as replacements for traditional textbooks. Since 2016, instructors have taught over 1,200 classes using OER or library-sourced materials, reaching over 92,000 students and potentially saving them just over \$9.2 million.

Presented by



**Taylor & Francis Group**  
an informa business

per semester used a library-sourced ebook instead of buying the textbook. “In one year alone, that’s close to \$300,000 in savings just for one course,” she notes.

### The Possibility of a Textbook Portal

This summer Dubach is manually reviewing 4,000 textbooks to see if they are in the library’s catalog. But as the program grows, she is looking ahead to developing a library eTextbook portal, which will have the ISBNs of print and library ebook editions as well as course and instructor information. And if a course used OER materials, the portal will list it as well. “Once we get our eTextbook portal running, I would love for the bookstore to have a link in there so that it’s a complete, connected circuit.” The lack of a programmer and website technical issues are impeding progress, but Dubach believes that once those issues are resolved UCF Libraries will be able to build a feasible database.

A challenge in building a collection of library-sourced digital textbooks is funding. “Historically we don’t have set funds, but we pull money in from other things,” explains Dubach. Subject librarians will collaborate by donating any leftover collection development money in their areas to buying textbooks. Meanwhile the print reserve relies primarily on donations from faculty, but UCF Libraries also partners with the student union on textbook drives. “They can pull in textbooks that we then review and put in course reserves.”

### Collaborative OER Efforts

Collaboration is also key when an instructor decides to incorporate OER materials into a course. A faculty member will either start with Dubach, their subject librarian, or an instructional designer. “If the person comes to me, I will help address such questions as ‘what can we find that’s already out there?’ After we exhaust that, it starts getting into ‘what can we find that’s close enough that you can change?’”

When the professor is close to adapting or authoring

their own OER textbook, the textbook affordability librarian will get instructional designers from the Center for Distributed Learning (CDL) involved. One such faculty member is Christian Beck, who developed an *Anthology of Medieval Literature* OER with the assistance of UCF librarians and CDL instructional designers. “When we couldn’t find a translation of an Old English poem called ‘The Wife’s Lament’ that we could use, Dr. Beck translated it himself,” says Dubach.

But these OER projects can be time consuming for UCF Libraries and CDL faculty. The team must think critically and prioritize: “What is our bandwidth? How many faculty can we work with at one time? Can the quality be high enough for us to support that endeavor?”

### Big Savings and Awards

Over 300 UCF faculty members have adopted open or library-sourced materials as replacements for traditional textbooks. Since 2016, instructors have taught over 1,200 classes using OER or library-sourced materials, reaching over 92,000 students and potentially saving them just over \$9.2 million. “As of fall 2021, we’re about \$3.4 million for library-sourced materials, and \$4.6 million for OERs,” states Dubach, who works with an OER team of instructional designers to track faculty adoptions of free materials and OER savings.

Such cost-saving efforts by faculty are recognized at UCF’s annual AIM High Event with group and individual recipients honored. Also launched this year is the inaugural student-nominated AIM Knights’ Choice Award. Several varied factors go into determining winners. “We look at creativity,” explains Dubach. “We look at student feedback. We look at savings over time.”

Everyone involved in textbook affordability, argues Dubach, must remind themselves of what is best for the students. “What’s going to improve their GPA? What’s going to increase their retention? How do textbooks’ overall usability and access lead to better outcomes?”

“But we definitely have large populations where the choice may be to either feed their family or buy textbooks.”

[Website](#) | [Email](#)

Choice case studies are paid sponsorship opportunities and do not reflect the views of Choice, ACRL, or the ALA.

Presented by



**Taylor & Francis Group**  
an informa business