My colleagues have shared lots of important information about the benefits of open access curricular materials, as well as some of the projects they have been involved in, and both their positive and negative results.
Since academic libraries have traditionally acquired, curated, and preserved materials to support teaching and research across the college, I thought I’d wrap us up by sharing a few thoughts on the library perspective on OA course materials.

And considering the library as a platform – a place where stuff is located and can be accessed by many people – I’ll finish by talking a bit about how libraries might help coordinate and share the OA resources already in use across the university, and encourage the development of additional OA curricular materials.
Why do libraries care about open access textbooks?

Many of the same reasons you also care about open access in general: ensuring access to information for our patrons is a core library value, so open access advocacy is a natural fit for many librarians.

And as fellow educators and members of the faculty we’re of course concerned with any stumbling blocks our students encounter during their college career, and the exorbitant price of textbooks bothers us too.
Textbooks in general are tricky materials for libraries to own and circulate. As we know, they’re quite expensive, and for libraries they are literally disposable items.

With new editions coming out frequently, libraries need to replace their copies of these books often, even though there are sometimes very few content changes between editions.

Also, textbooks on reserve in the library see hard use: reserve books circulate for only 2 hours at a time, and the most popular texts are in use nearly continuously, which means that they often fall apart after only a semester or two and must be replaced.
This adds costs in both the book itself and the staff time required to catalog, bind, and circulate these items.

Further, we’ve found at City Tech that these books are subject to frequent vandalism (and, from what I’ve heard, at other libraries too). Students sometimes just slice out the chapter or pages they need rather than wait in what might be a long line for the photocopier or scanner.
Electronic versions of and additions to these textbooks come with their own problems.

Additional information on a CD or a website is rarely used – for example, at City Tech the CDs must be used in our Multimedia Lab, and students don’t tend to take that extra step to view the material on CD.

For a website with additional course content, the publisher-supplied code really only works with the single-user model, and it’s usually difficult if not impossible for multiple students to use the same code from a single library textbook.

One might think that ebooks would solve many of these problems, especially the need to replace textbooks frequently when they physically disintegrate or a new edition is released. But thus far publishers have been extremely reluctant to sell ebook versions of textbooks to libraries, I’d wager because their profit margins are so high on traditional, paper textbook sales.
Because textbooks are so problematic, many academic libraries simply don’t buy these materials. But at CUNY, with our strong focus on teaching and the demographics of our student body, the libraries do typically purchase at least some textbooks.

You might have heard about the additional funds for textbooks that have come through to the libraries as a result of the recent tuition increases. These funds came to the libraries in 2010-11 and again this academic year (2012-13).

And while these funds do allow us to purchase more textbooks for students, they can also be problematic. The libraries can only use the funds for the books themselves, not for additional staff to catalog, bind, or circulate them.
So, given all of these issues with traditionally published textbooks, what are the libraries doing now, and what might we do in the future?

Many of us in the libraries at CUNY and at academic libraries worldwide have been actively involved in promoting open access across the spectrum of academic publishing, from research and scholarly publishing through textbooks and course materials.

Libraries also can and are helping faculty leverage the materials we already have access to (because we pay for it!) in library databases and ebooks. These resources can be linked to on course websites, Blackboard and others, to be easily accessible for students.

Of course there are also lots of OA curricular materials available online from a variety of academic institutions, publishers, and individual faculty members. There have been several interesting experiments with libraries and faculty to provide OA materials for courses.
Some of you may have come to the Open Access Week program at the Graduate Center at the end of October, in which Kristina Baumli, an English professor from Temple University, spoke about the Temple University Library’s “Ditch the Textbook” Project. During this pilot project a small number of faculty members received a small stipend to compile or create materials for their courses and make them available to students free of charge.

While Kristina found that some of her students grumbled about accessing the course materials online and being required to bring a device to class, in the end they were pleased not to have to purchase a textbook. As an aside, Kristina also let us know that she felt that the class really benefitted from integrating technology so thoroughly.

We don’t have a project like this at CUNY, but I can imagine that many CUNY faculty in libraries and other departments would be interested in trying something like this out.
And one thing we don’t have at CUNY right now is a university-wide platform on which to share OA course materials, efforts like those my colleagues have spoken about during this session.

I imagine that some of you attended this morning’s session on the university’s plans for an institutional repository. I’m a member of the committee that’s working on this project, which is made up of faculty in the libraries and other departments, and I’m excited about the possibilities for this platform.

I think an institutional repository that is available for use by all of the colleges at CUNY and open for browsing and viewing to faculty, students, and the wider internet, will be a perfect platform for us to use to create, share, and promote open access course materials.
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