



WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

Balancing Students' Desire for Textbooks and the Library Budget

Rhonda Glazier and Carla Myers

The circulation of college textbooks through academic library reserve services has long been a contentious issue. Some libraries have readily embraced the practice, some strictly forbid it, and the remaining institutions usually circulate textbooks on a case-by-case basis. While the circulation of textbooks is often heartily embraced by students, it does pose certain problems for academic libraries, including:

- Which textbooks will be acquired?
- If the library will be purchasing the books, what funds are available to support this practice?
- Will multiple copies of the most popular textbooks be acquired?
- How will circulation parameters such as length of checkout time be determined?

This chapter will explore how one academic library launched a reserve textbook checkout service and their answers to these questions.

ABOUT THE KRAEMER FAMILY LIBRARY

The Kraemer Family Library (KFL) serves the University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) campus community, which includes approximately 11,000 on-campus students and another 2,000 students enrolled in online courses (University of Colorado Colorado Springs, 2015).¹ For the 2014–15 fiscal year the library had a materials expenditure budget of \$1,866,136. The library currently has over 407,000 print volumes in its collection and has approximately 32 employees, 5 of whom work in Circulation, 1.5 staff members in Acquisitions, and 3 in the Cataloging Department. There are currently 11 librarians on staff who have collection development responsibilities. In FY 2015 the library had more than 860,000 patron visits and 90,400 item circulations.²

THE KRAEMER FAMILY LIBRARY AND TEXTBOOK ACQUISITIONS

For many years KFL shied away from offering textbooks through its reserve service. While there was no formal collection development policy in place that prohibited the acquisition of textbooks for the collection, librarians were actively encouraged to not purchase textbooks so that the library would not set unrealistic expectations for students. The major concern voiced during this time was that the library would not be able to purchase all the titles being used in classes across campus, and therefore the library should not set up unrealistic expectations by offering “some.” The result was that most librarians did not purchase textbooks unless specifically asked to do so by a course instructor.

Even though librarians were encouraged to not purchase textbooks, the library did own and circulate a few random titles. Some instructors lent the library their own personal copies of textbooks that were placed on reserve and circulated to students. Other textbooks on reserve were titles acquired “by accident.” In other words, if a title that met the scope of the collection was purchased and it happened to be a title that a professor required for a class, it could be placed on reserve. Unfortunately, this set up a situation where the library was inadvertently supporting some classes by having the textbook available while ignoring other classes. Primarily, it created situations where students in the humanities would have access to some of their course materials—plays, poetry collections, and other literature that was purchased by the library—while students in the hard sciences or business area were less likely to find

materials required for their courses in the library. Adding to this problem was the fact that there was no effort to systematically identify items in the library's collection that were being used for course instruction and proactively place them on reserve. This resulted in some savvy students checking out these items from the library well before the semester started. When the course instructor later learned that the library owned the course materials and requested that they be recalled and placed on reserve, the circulation staff often had trouble getting the student to return the items. Sometimes these items were checked out through interlibrary loan or the Colorado library consortium, Prospector, and then it would be even more difficult for the library to recall the items in a timely manner in order to make them available for UCCS students. As a result, accessing what few textbooks the library did own was often a frustrating experience for both students and course instructors.

This informal policy of not purchasing textbooks was in place until 2010. At that time a librarian who had experience circulating textbooks through reserve became the head of the Access Services Department and began to examine ways to expand this service. At first, this involved tracking student requests for textbook titles and then approaching the instructor for these courses to see if he or she owned a copy of the book that could be placed on reserve. It also involved the intentional purchase of the required textbooks for several lower-division, high-enrollment courses in business and economics, this librarian's collection development areas. With the initial success of the program, several other librarians began purchasing textbooks for lower-division, high-enrollment courses in their subject areas as well.

At the end of the first semester of this informal project, the circulation statistics for all of the textbooks that were on reserve in each subject area were shared with the librarians who had purchased textbooks for their subject area. The circulation statistics for the personal copies of textbooks that were on loan to the library by instructors were included alongside those that had been purchased as part of this project. Based on the circulation statistics, almost all of the librarians who were participating in this project decided to purchase textbooks for additional lower-division, high-enrollment courses, and some even began purchasing textbooks for higher-division courses. Statistics for all of these titles were tracked and evaluated by the subject librarians and circulation staff each semester. This initial pilot project was formalized in 2015 with six of the eleven librarians purchasing textbooks for reserve. While there have been adjustments made over the years, most of the librarians who are participating in the textbook program are happy with the results.

LESSONS LEARNED

Textbook Identification and Use Tracking

In this project's infancy, the only way to determine what titles instructors were using was to obtain a copy of the course syllabus or use the UCCS Bookstore's website to identify what titles were being sold for each course. Frustrated with trying to identify textbook titles piecemeal, the head of Access Services contacted the campus bookstore and asked if they would be willing to provide the library with a list of the course textbooks for the entire campus each semester. They readily agreed. The list is provided to the Circulation Department about forty-five days before the start of each semester. The circulation staff divide the list by subject area and search each title in the library's catalog first by ISBN and then, if no results are found, by title. A note is added to the list if the library owns the item, if it is the current edition being used or a previous edition, the location of the item (currently on reserve, reference, circulating collection, etc.), and the status of the item (available, checked out, missing, billed, etc.). If the item is not owned, the circulation staff look the item up on Amazon .com and notes the selling price. This information is passed along to the subject librarians who are interested in purchasing textbooks in their subject areas, and allows them to make an informed choice on whether or not to keep the item on reserve, place it on reserve, or to acquire a copy of the work to add to the reserve collection. This proactive approach of identifying, acquiring, and placing textbooks on reserve was beneficial to students, primarily because many of the questions and requests for textbook titles occur right before the semester starts, or during the first two weeks. By having these materials in the catalog before the peak demand time, we were able to accurately inform a student looking for a textbook about whether or not we have that title.

Some UCCS instructors continue to provide personal copies of textbooks to circulate on reserve, and these are readily accepted. As each semester gets underway, the circulation staff monitors the circulation counts of textbooks. When books are being checked out more than five times a week for several weeks straight, the subject librarian is notified that the item is in high demand. One of the greatest indicators that multiple copies of a textbook are needed is when numerous students ask for the title in the course of a day, but are unable to access it because it is constantly checked out. Subject librarians are also notified when this occurs so that they can consider purchasing a second, or even a third copy of the title to meet this high level of demand. When students inquire about a title that the library does not currently own, the information for the item and course are documented and the information is made available to the

subject librarians. There have been times when a librarian initially chose not to purchase a particular textbook but, due to popular demand, changed her mind.

Purchasing

Once the library decided to purchase select textbooks, a process needed to be put in place to make sure that copies were received and cataloged before the beginning of each semester. Acquisitions needed to know at the time of order that the book being ordered is a textbook and will be going on reserve. Since these are titles that will be used in the classroom during the semester, the chance that a hold would be placed on the title before receipt is very likely. To get around this problem, a "patron" was set up in the system for reserve and at the time of order, a hold is placed using this account. By placing the hold at the time of ordering, the library is guaranteed to be the first "patron" to get the book. If other patrons have placed a hold before the book is received, these holds are canceled and the patrons are notified that the item is on reserve.

In many cases the library does not have the list of textbooks being used until a few weeks before the semester. To keep these materials moving, all textbook orders are marked RUSH so that they are ordered first, and the vendor to purchase the title from is chosen based on availability, not price. Once the title is received it will then be rushed through cataloging and processing and taken down to circulation within forty-eight hours of receipt. The primary advantage to rushing these materials through technical services is that the title shows up in the catalog almost immediately, and is placed on reserve quickly, so that students looking for a textbook know it is available, and for how long.

Collection Development

As the library began purchasing textbooks on a more proactive basis, it became clear that the library needed to decide whether or not a formal collection development policy on textbooks needed to be established. As expected, there were good reasons for creating a collection development policy, and there were also arguments presented on why not having a formal policy may work best. Some of the collection development issues that kept coming up over and over had to do with the very nature of textbooks. In many cases, extra content such as study guides and quizzes is included electronically and the textbook would have an activation code needed to access that information. Many of the librarians selecting textbooks were informally deciding not to purchase titles with extra content that would be limited to one user. But others did not make a distinction and would purchase a title with online content that had

Chapter Eight

limited use. There were also cases where acquisitions staff were unclear about whether or not a specific title included this extra content. It was determined that preference would be given to editions that do not include extra online content unless that content could be used by multiple users. When a librarian selects a title with online content, acquisitions staff at the time of receipt will remove the information on how to access the online content if it is limited to one user. If the online content is available through a code that can be used by more than one person, the information is left with the book.

Another area of concern was the cost of these titles. Many of the textbooks being selected cost \$200 or \$300. Some librarians had budgets with enough money to absorb the purchase of textbooks, while other librarians were concerned that one or two textbooks could wipe out their entire book budget. Because the library does not have a collection development policy limiting the amount of money that can be spent on any given title, collection development librarians can spend any amount that they feel necessary for any title, and are responsible for balancing the cost of purchasing the textbook with other titles available in that subject area.

After working through these issues around textbooks, KFL decided against a formal collection development policy on textbooks. This was primarily because many of the issues could be handled with a procedure, for example, removing information on online access content, and a comprehensive definition of textbook would be almost impossible to determine. In the end, the library decided that limiting what titles an individual librarian could purchase for her subject area was counterproductive.

Budget

Budget constraints are focusing how funds are being spent, and each librarian has the flexibility to purchase textbooks for her area if that is the greatest need in her subject area. KFL has experienced flat to minimal growth in the materials budget over the last three years. In FY 2014 a little under 26 percent of the materials budget was spent on print materials. By FY 2016 that percentage was down to a little over 20 percent. This means that each subject librarian has received a smaller allocation for print materials each fiscal year. This decrease is offset by the number of patron-driven acquisition e-book programs managed by the library. The library is actively adding discovery records to the library's catalog, and most subject librarians are not purchasing in print titles that are available electronically. Interestingly, with the e-book programs many subject librarians are finding it difficult to spend their print funds, and having the

Walking the Tightrope

option to purchase textbooks that they know will be used has helped. Over the years this has resulted in the liaisons for areas such as business, math, and science spending more of their funds on textbooks and the liaisons for subject areas in the arts and English spending less.

When comparing the average cost of books purchased for each subject area over the past three years, the increase in the cost of books has been anywhere from no increase to a 23 percent increase over that three-year period. Cost increases were higher for the subject areas where textbooks were purchased. However, there were subject areas where textbooks were purchased that had little or no increase; for example, chemistry. Moreover, some subject areas had higher-than-average increases even though only a few textbooks were purchased; for example, art. Figure 8.1 gives representative increases across subject areas and whether or not textbooks were purchased in that subject area.

PURCHASING TEXTBOOKS	AVERAGE YEARLY INCREASE (%)				
BUSINESS	23				
BIOLOGY	5				
CHEMISTRY	—				
		PURCHASING LIMITED NUMBER OF TEXTBOOKS	AVERAGE YEARLY INCREASE (%)		
		MUSIC	11		
		THEATER	6		
		ART	11		
		MECHANICAL ENGINEERING	4		
				NOT PURCHASING TEXTBOOKS	
				AVERAGE YEARLY INCREASE (%)	
				NURSING	—
				COMPUTER SCIENCE	3
				POLITICAL SCIENCE	8
				ANTHROPOLOGY	1

Figure 8.1 | **Representative Subject Areas, Percentage Increase by Textbook Purchasing Decision, FY2014–FY2016**

Chapter Eight

To put these numbers in context, the average increase across all disciplines was 2 percent each year.

It should be noted that subject librarians have not indicated a lack of funds. Most librarians are adding materials throughout the year and are not running out of money before the end of the fiscal year. That being said, as more of the librarians choose to purchase textbooks, the rate of cost increase will need to be managed. The library is hoping to use resource sharing such as interlibrary loan or the statewide shared catalog Prospector for titles that would be considered secondary to the curriculum and research needs of the university. It is clear that reserve books are being used, and finding ways to move secondary titles to "just in time" will allow the library to manage the cost increases. We are also looking at gift funds and auxiliary accounts to supplement the cost of textbooks. In general, the budget question becomes what level of secondary materials does the library want to maintain, instead of not purchasing textbooks that we know will be used by students.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

As the library's reserve service grew in popularity, the staff found that many members of the campus community had mistaken expectations of the service that included item availability, placing items on reserve, and circulation periods.

Item Availability

Many students and instructors mistakenly believe that the library acquires every textbook in use on campus. Some instructors who were under this impression would tell students on the first day of class that the library had their textbook available when in fact it was not. When these students would ask for their book, they often became frustrated and angry to learn it was not available. To combat this problem, a LibGuide was developed to help students better understand the library's reserve textbooks circulation service. It outlines the circulation periods of reserve items, highlights the fact that we do not own every textbook, and guides students through the process of searching for their particular course texts.

Placing Items on Reserve

Some instructors proactively check the library's catalog to see if we already own course materials, but after discovering that we do own the item they failed to

place a request for it to be placed on reserve. Inevitably the item gets checked out under normal loan rules by a UCCS student who is enrolled in their class, or is requested by a patron from a library in the statewide consortium or through interlibrary loan. Other times an instructor will ask a subject librarian to purchase a film or book he intends to use as part of course instruction, but he does not convey this intent to the librarian. Consequently, the item does not get placed on reserve and it may not be available when they need it. To encourage instructors to be proactive in placing items on reserve, information on the reserve submission process was placed on the library's website. Periodic e-mail reminders about how to place items on reserve are also sent out over a campus discussion list.

Circulation Periods

When students first check out a reserve item, many are surprised to find that it only circulates for two or four hours and not the normal three-to-six-week circulation period they are accustomed to. While information regarding these circulation periods is included in our LibGuide, most of our education on this misconception occurs in person. Most students come to understand this practice once the circulation staff explains that the shorter circulation periods are used for reserve items in order to allow as many students as possible to access the item.

PROGRAM EXPANSION

We have seen an increase in the number of students in junior and senior-level classes inquiring whether or not the library has a copy of their textbook. The circulation staff was initially surprised by the increased number of requests for these higher-level textbooks, but then realized that the students asking for these books were those who had started as freshmen at UCCS as the library's textbook acquisition program was gaining steam. Having become accustomed to the library having many of their lower-level textbooks available, they were surprised to learn that many of the higher-level textbooks were not actively being purchased as well. As a result, more attention has been given to textbooks for the higher-level courses, and some librarians have begun purchasing textbooks for required higher-level courses where there is a lot of demand for the textbook.

In addition to asking for textbooks, many students began to ask if other resources they needed for their courses were available for checkout, such as

graphing calculators and materials that can be used for class presentations or study, such as HDMI cables, clickers, dry erase boards (8.5 × 11 in.), high-lighters, headphones, and even charging cables for electronic devices. Consequently, the library began acquiring these items as well. Students' response to the program expansion has been overwhelming.

GOING FORWARD

The checkout statistics for reserve items illustrate the success of the program. For the 2013–14 academic year (August through July) there were a total of 9,269 reserve checkouts, which accounted for about 14.9 percent of the total checkouts for the library during this time. In the 2014–15 academic year the number of reserve checkouts jumped to 12,949, which accounted for about 22.3 percent of the total checkouts for the library. In the 2015–16 academic year the 19,357 reserve checkouts accounted for 30.9 percent of the total checkouts for the library during this time.

Given the positive response to this program from the campus community, those librarians who have been participating in it have been pursuing options to expand the program going forward. Ideas include:

Explore options to create a dedicated fund that can be used to acquire course materials in order to better track the cost of this program for the library. This could include textbooks as well as other items that enhance classroom learning and support the curriculum. Examples include acquiring anatomical models such as a skeleton that can be used by students studying anatomy and physiology, and acquiring molecular model kits that can be used by students studying chemistry.

Partner with the campus bookstore to acquire textbooks directly from them. In the past custom textbooks have been acquired through the campus bookstore, but most other textbooks are acquired from other vendors. Acquiring textbooks directly from the campus bookstore would cut the time needed for these items to ship from the online vendor, allowing the library to make these items available to students more quickly.

Analyze the regular circulating collection against the textbook reserve program. It is clear that reserve items, in general, have a higher

circulation. It will be important to put those numbers in perspective so that the librarians who are not purchasing textbooks will be able to understand the impact that these titles have on supporting students. It is also important to analyze the impact of this program on the collection as a whole.

Build in more assessment tools. While circulation is one indicator of success, the library would like to identify assessment tools that will supplement the circulation data.

The textbook reserve has been a very popular program for KFL. It will be important to begin to systematically assess the impact of this service on the faculty, students, and library. Though still an informal endeavor, the library's textbook circulation program has generally been a success and has helped many students gain access to materials that they might not have otherwise been able to afford. At this time there are no plans to formalize the program, but there are also no plans to eliminate it. For the librarians who are acquiring textbooks and other class materials, the primary goal is to continue to do so in a way that balances the library's budget with student need.

Notes

1. University of Colorado Colorado Springs, "Facts and Figures," last modified October 2015, www.uccs.edu/about/facts.html.
2. Kraemer Family Library, "Library Statistics," www.uccs.edu/library/info/statistics.html.

Bibliography

Kraemer Family Library. "Library Statistics." www.uccs.edu/library/info/statistics.html.
University of Colorado Colorado Springs. "Facts and Figures." Last modified October 2015. www.uccs.edu/about/facts.html.