

Amy Chang and Judy Garrison

# Textbook lending service

## Providing a service students need when they need it

The 21st century student-centered academic library movement has created a new learning environment. The transformation of traditional library space enables students to work socially, in collaboration with friends and fellow students on projects, or engage in individual study using the library's print and electronic resources. These new changes attract more students to the library, and, as a result, student use of library resources and services increases. Inevitably, this increase generates demands for new services.

The University of Texas-San Antonio Libraries is driven by a student-centered library service paradigm. To understand how students use our services, we carefully monitor the usage patterns for services, laptops, equipment, study rooms, and devices, such as chargers and headphones. To further anticipate their changing needs, we encourage students to submit comments and requests when their needs are not being fulfilled. This led us to the recognition that student demand for a textbook lending service was escalating.

### Why textbook lending?

During summer 2009, lending textbooks to students was considered. Traditional library collection development does not support textbook purchasing for various reasons, mainly due to the fact that textbooks are replaced by new editions and only provide for short-term usage by current students, and thus it does not serve a long-term value to the library collection. However,

as the library faced a growing demand for textbooks, we began to see the connection between the needs of our students and our student-centered library service philosophy. Nonetheless, we faced certain dilemmas:

- How could we satisfy the textbook needs of more than 30,000 students in various fields?
- Which textbooks did we need to purchase?
- How much money should be allocated to this project to guarantee the success of the service?
- Did we have policies to support this new textbook collection?

Although we did not have the answers to these questions, we did not let that impede our forward thinking for implementing the new service endeavor. It was difficult to justify textbooks serving any long-term value for the collections, but we believed this new nontraditional service could fulfill many students' urgent needs for just-in-time learning resources. In summer 2009, we developed a budget line, drafted easy-to-follow policies and procedures, and streamlined the approval channels for the implementation of the service.

### Planning the new service

In the planning stage, we identified two tasks: one is deciding which textbooks

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needed to be purchased and the other is allocating funds. These textbooks were identified by the course level, discipline, and student enrollment. Required courses for freshmen were selected from Science/Engineering, Business, English, Social Sciences, Arts/Humanities, and History. When these criteria were approved by the dean, funding was immediately allocated for the 2010 fiscal year (September–August). Of this total, a small amount was earmarked for obtaining extra copies and/or filling special requests from faculty.

The first purchase of 110 textbooks, of which a number of titles were additional copies for large enrollments, was made in January 2010. In the following semester, rather than adding new titles to the textbook collection, we identified titles that had been circulated heavily the previous semester and added multiple copies. Many were replaced by new editions.

We knew from the beginning that the key to ensuring the success of this service is the timely acquisition of identified titles. Acquisitions knows well that most traditional library vendors cannot always turn around orders as quickly as this service required, so we have used the college bookstore and online vendors specializing in quick turn-arounds. Initially Acquisitions purchased the books locally, but the quantity purchased and the logistics of moving the books to the library, as well as the fortuitous discovery that online vendors provided deeper discounts, led us to accept the slight delay in receiving the books from online vendors, since we purchase these textbooks prior to the start of the semester and the delay is not critical.

Textbooks are a priority for Acquisitions staff with a streamlined process within the department. Upon receiving these books, they are immediately processed and paid for, OCLC holdings are added, and the books are delivered to Access Services the same day. Staff in Access Services adds access records to the reserve module and shelves them without any delay.

## Managing the new service

When the textbook lending service began, it immediately became a popular service for our students. Inevitably, it can generate much higher traffic at the front desk. As an add-on service, it creates extra workloads for staff. Having anticipated these changes, we were able to ensure that the new lending service would meet our already established quality desk service standards. These standards are measured by just-in-time service, convenience, and efficiency.

- Just-in-time service for textbook lending service means textbooks must be ready for students to access when they need them. We ensure selection and purchase of textbooks takes place early enough so the books are in place in the weeks before the semester starts. As soon as books are moved to Access Services from Acquisitions, any Circulation staff member on duty at any time of the day or night is able to process them, enabling students to access the books the same day they are received.

- One-stop service means seamless service. We took advantage of the new configuration in Circulation (resulting from renovation) to consolidate various services into one-stop service points. We have integrated the textbooks with reserve books and media items, and electronic devices and equipment, such as calculators, headphone, and chargers. Desk service staff members are trained to perform multiple services and are able to search and locate textbooks efficiently without referral. This means that students can approach any of the desk workstations to get everything they might need, including textbooks, laptops, and/or group study rooms, during regular library hours.

- Efficiency for the service is an ongoing improvement effort to ensure the consistency of quality services. The popularity of textbook lending quickly generated high demands and long waiting lines as soon as the service was provided. To minimize waiting time for our students, we monitor circulation transactions hour-by-hour through the circulation module to identify the busy, peak, and

slow times of the day and week. We use the transaction pattern to staff the desk service, staff two workstations during the slow time, all four stations for busy times, and add a student assistant as a “runner” during the peak time. The “runner” is assigned to pick up returning items from patrons standing in line, check in and re-shelve textbooks, and/or page the student for the availability of the textbook. The runner frees desk staff from having to perform these tasks, so they are better able to focus on serving patrons needing more than routine assistance.

To meet just-in-time, one-stop, and efficient service standards, we also have developed an intensive three-layer training program for both full-time staff and student assistants. The program includes a customer-service orientation, service performance expectations, and using circulation/reserve systems, followed by customized one-on-one training.

We also added textbook lending to our restaurant pager service launched in January 2009 for group study rooms and laptops. It quickly took off; circulation staff provided 3,314 pagers to students in the first semester; two years later, the usage jumped to more than 6,000. Students are always delighted to take pagers since they can wait for the availability of the desired material in the library’s information commons or the café in the library building. Another side-effect of the pager usage is that our waiting list for textbooks gives us an advantage in knowing exactly which textbooks are in higher demand. We monitor the list on a daily basis and then use this information to add additional copies to better serve our students.

### **Usage analysis**

When the textbook lending service was introduced in spring 2010, the first month showed a 145 percent increase in reserve circulation from the previous spring semester. In spring 2011, it reached the highest volume of circulation. If 70 percent of freshmen used the service, we estimated per student usage would equal four textbook circulations. This

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usage analysis demonstrated the great need and demands of our students.

Our analysis also demonstrates that the second month of the semester is on average the busiest time for textbook lending, the third and the first months are second, and the last month of the semester is the least busy time. This usage pattern confirms the textbooks must be ready for students to access when the semester begins. Unlike other books in the library, textbook borrowing activity begins a week prior to the beginning of the semester. Freshmen tend to use the textbook service most often on weekdays, with the active time beginning around noon.

Over the course of a year, circulation transactions for textbooks have totaled approximately 54,000. We have estimated the average cost per circulation transaction is \$1.65. Although textbook lending is an add-on service for Circulation, we have been able to provide the new service without increasing staffing costs.

### **Value and challenges of this service endeavor**

Based on the usage and cost analysis of the service, we are convinced that our goal of providing freshmen the learning resources they need when they need them has been successfully achieved.

Though the textbook lending and paging service has created extra workloads for Access Service staff, the thank-you notes and verbal comments from our students are the best reward for our staff. Students constantly

let us how much they appreciate the service. Our students even brought Starbucks cards and cookies to Circulation staff to show how much they appreciate the service.

Though students have responded to the new textbook service positively in every measure, we have faced a few challenges in providing this new endeavor:

- In a very short period of time before classes begin, we have to decide which books and how many copies to purchase.

- The textbooks we purchase for freshmen are replaced quickly by later editions; a newly purchased edition can become outdated soon. In some cases, it is difficult to anticipate the needs before the semester begins, particularly the edition that will be used in the upcoming semester.

- Since budgeting is set and approved on a yearly basis, we need to monitor spending, while trying to be responsive to students' needs.

- The most hectic time for this service is the first two weeks of the semester. Often, students don't provide adequate information, e.g., title of the textbook, course number, or faculty name, making it difficult for staff to locate the desired textbook.

- It can be difficult to quickly discern textbook borrowing trends. The unknown factor, as we move forward, is the possible development and adoption of e-textbooks on a wider scale. Therefore we need to stay abreast of these changes to adapt as needed.

### **Conclusion: what we have learned**

As the mission of the libraries is to contribute to our students' academic success through the provision of resources, shifting our textbook purchasing paradigm from the traditional collection practices has proved its value of supporting the student learning experience.

The establishment of this new service also demonstrates how two departments, Access Services and Acquisitions, which have not traditionally collaborated, were able to build positive and collegial working relations for the benefit of our students and

to achieve the goal of better serving them. Our initial process for expediting textbook ordering and receiving has been refined as the service has evolved.

For example, when Access Services staff members identify textbooks that circulate heavily and frequently land on the textbook waiting list, they fill in bibliographic information on a spreadsheet, which is sent to Acquisitions. This data allows the ordering process to proceed seamlessly with the highest efficiency. This process has allowed Acquisitions staff members, working behind the scenes, to gain a real sense of the immediate impact of their efforts and has enhanced the bibliographic knowledge of Access Services staff, who can use this knowledge to better assist patrons.

In the past, libraries believed offering a new service would require more library staff time and would consume already allocated budgetary resources. Often, staff members perceived that add-on services could affect work routines. Facing these dilemmas and unknown risks, managers may be reluctant to launch new services, such as textbook lending, that may not guarantee success. Nonetheless, the 21st century student-centered library requires innovative thinking and vision, and managers and top administrators must look at the costs involved in change as a great investment in tomorrow's library.

Through implementing the textbook lending service, we envision that when incoming freshmen come to the library and use the service as part of their daily routine, it will instantaneously open a pathway for the library to connect to these students.

Like businesses trying to build their customer relationship with young generations, the library can develop an analogous relationship with freshmen by offering services they need, when they need them. This unique "relationship" will enable the library to usher students through the gate of learning at the earliest stage of their academic journey and continue throughout their college years. *~*