

E-Books and Textbook Affordability:

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Let's Talk About It

The Textbook Affordability Problem: National Trends Reveal Multifaceted Solutions

This table summarizes recent studies (including our own) of libraries seeking to alleviate the burden of textbook costs. The use of e-books proved to be a common theme.

Year of Article	Authors	Institution	Strategy	Books Purchased	Estimated Library Costs	Estimated Student Savings*
2015	Carr, Cardin, and Shouse	East Carolina University	Library e-books	31 e-books (42 already owned)	\$3,000	Over \$34,000
2016	Riha and LeMay	University of Minnesota	Library e-books, print books, and borrowing	120 e-books and print books	\$14,000	\$61,777
2017	Eighmy-Brown, McCready, and Riha	University of Minnesota	Library e-books, borrowing, and publishing	Unknown	Unknown	\$700,000
2017	Boscar and Pascual	University of South Florida	Library e-books and borrowing	Unknown	Unknown	\$1,000,000
2019	Rokusek and Cooke	Florida Gulf Coast University	Library e-books	26 e-books	\$4,000	\$74,313

*Results were based on savings quoted in the article for the length of the study (commonly one semester or one year). The actual savings is greater if the same titles are assigned in subsequent semesters. Also, some numbers were rounded or estimated for comparison purposes. Study criteria varied widely.

Post-Study Initiatives

- We expanded our “OER” and “E-books as Textbooks” tabs on our OER online guide.
- Our purchased e-books are searchable under a large “Textbooks” icon.
- Our librarians are buying more course-adopted textbooks (both print and e-books)
- Our collections and analytics team are tracking textbook loan counts.
- We are getting more interest in e-book adoption from faculty, including multimedia solutions like Drama Online for our high enrollment Theatre Appreciation course.
- We are exploring using questions from Project Outcome (ACRL) to survey faculty on their opinions regarding e-books as textbooks.

The Story Behind Our Study

Prior to our study we had been hearing a lot about open educational resources (OER). From articles to conferences to discussions in our own library, OER had been (and still is) a hot topic.

But what about library-owned e-books? From the students’ perspective, these are just as affordable (i.e., free) as OER. Can unlimited-user library e-books help solve the textbook affordability problem?

Has your library explored this option?

Another reason we were drawn to e-books as a solution was that professors are often reluctant to consider OER. They would rather continue to work with titles and publishers they are already familiar with.

Have you found this to be the case at your institution?

We see the value of OER, but we also see this option as a continuation of what have always done: help faculty find the best resources (whether free or library-owned) to support their courses.

Let's Talk!

References

Table adapted from Rokusek, S. & Cooke, R. (2019). Will Library E-Books Help Solve the Textbook Affordability Issue? Using Textbook Adoption Lists to Target Collection Development. *The Reference Librarian*, 60(3), 179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2019.1584597>