Focus Group Report

Faculty focus groups on textbooks

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College of DuPage

Research & Analytics

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Executive Summary

The College of DuPage (COD) Office of Research and Analytics was approached by the Open Educational Resources Steering Committee to conduct a series of focus groups with faculty members to gain insight into how textbooks fit into the learning landscape at COD. Between February 5 and March 6, 2020, the Office of Research and Analytics conducted twelve focus groups and one interview. A total of 51 COD faculty members participated. The feedback faculty members shared on textbooks has been organized into eight themes.

I. Alignment with course objectives and active course files

Textbooks need to be aligned with all of the course objectives in the active course files. If a textbook does not effectively address the objectives in sufficient depth, it will not be selected for a course. For most courses, there are textbooks available that cover all of the foundational information on core concepts. However, no textbook is perfect and there is always something that can be improved.

- Many faculty members use textbooks as a foundation and supplement course content with original source materials that are available online.
- Some publishers allow faculty to customize textbook content or create their own lab manuals.
- Faculty members in a few areas are currently developing new Open Textbooks, although these take a lot of work to write and maintain.

II. Cost

The cost of textbooks is a concern for students and faculty members, both the textbooks themselves and the incremental costs for purchasing required supplemental materials or versions of textbooks in different formats.

- Most faculty members try to use less expensive textbook options when they are available and offer options such as reserve copies in the library.
- Some programs have been able to use one textbook for multiple courses in a program.
- Many faculty members take steps to ensure students can access textbook content while they wait for financial aid to start, such as communicating purchasing, free trial, and financial aid options.
- Some faculty members have stopped using traditional textbooks and only use learning materials that are available at a low cost or for free.

III. Inclusion of current information, language, & practice that reflects program approach

The content of textbooks must be current and relevant and the presentation of information and viewpoints must be consistent with a program's philosophy and approach. The information and visuals in textbooks tend to be consistently updated, although some are updated too frequently and others not enough.

- Faculty members have opted for different strategies to ensure learning materials convey current, appropriate information. This includes use of carefully selected Traditional or Open Textbooks, customization of textbooks with publishers, or writing their own textbooks and laboratory manuals.
- Faculty members regularly compile their own libraries of media and resources, instead of or in addition to a textbook, to overcome challenges associated with textbook cost, quality, comprehensiveness, etc.

IV. Availability in different formats for different learning needs and preferences

Students have a range of learning needs and both students and faculty have varying preferences with regard to the format of textbooks and learning materials. Textbooks are available in multiple formats such as traditional bound books, loose-leaf books, and e-books; however, each version presents its own challenges.

- Faculty members recognize students have different learning styles and needs.
- Many faculty summers allow students to use their preferred version of the textbook.
- In addition to using different textbook formats, faculty members present content in multiple ways.

V. Readability (writing style, organization, and format)

It is important that textbooks be readable. This includes being well written, well organized, easy to understand and straightforward to follow. For most courses, there are textbooks available that are well written and use understandable language to convey core concepts in relatable ways. However, some textbooks are intimidating and not reader friendly.

- Faculty members provide students with guidance on how to read their textbooks effectively.
- Faculty members also offer study skills seminars and often refer students to the Learning Commons.

VI. Ability of textbooks and learning materials to interest and engage students

Traditionally, textbooks are not learner-centered and they tend to present information in ways that are static and dry. Newer textbooks approach concepts in ways that are more engaging than older textbooks, but it is still hard to make course content come alive with just a textbook.

- Faculty members often use learner-centered approaches that layer reference to the textbook with lecture and hands-on learning, such as projects, activities, and problem sets.
- To supplement textbook content, faculty members incorporate media from daily life (TV, film, videos, social media) and use original sources that report on current events (news clips, live feeds, web sites, etc.).

VII. Supplemental materials that publishers offer to accompany textbooks

Textbook selection is no longer just based on the textbook itself but also the additional materials the publishers offer to supplement textbook content. Some faculty members appreciate the value of these supplements, while others see them as unnecessary or lacking in evidence for how they contribute to student success.

- Faculty members pick and choose from the available supplemental materials and use what they have found to work for themselves and their students.
- Many faculty members use the discussion, assignment, and test suggestions provided in the supplemental materials as a basis for developing their own custom material.
- Some faculty members have written their own homework systems, so they are not tied to a particular book.

VIII. Responsiveness of publishers in providing good advice and information

Faculty members have had different experiences with publishers' representatives. Some representatives are responsive and provide good information on the strengths and weaknesses of different textbook options, while others are hard to contact or overly aggressive in promoting materials.

- Faculty members work with publishers to negotiate costs. This is often not an option for smaller programs and unique courses.
- Faculty members work with publishers to bundle all the textbooks for a program at a discounted rate.

Open Educational Resources

While faculty members were not asked questions specifically about Open Educational Resources (OER) during the focus groups, some groups did share their thoughts and experiences.

- Some faculty members define OER as free, online textbooks, others as any resource that is widely available for free or low cost.
- Some fields have Open Textbooks that are well written by reputable authors, while others do not have good quality Open Textbook options.
- Transitioning to Open Educational Resources is an ongoing process that should be initiated by faculty members and will require time as well as support and resources from COD.
- Faculty members who are interested in expanding their use of OER have questions about the process.

Introduction, Methods, & Participants

The College of DuPage (COD) Office of Research and Analytics was approached by the Open Educational Resources Steering Committee to conduct a series of focus groups with faculty to gain insight into how textbooks fit into the learning landscape at COD. Between February 5 and March 6, 2020, the Office of Research and Analytics conducted twelve focus groups and one interview. A total of 51 COD faculty members participated.

❖ Participant selection

A total of 144 full time and 96 adjunct faculty members were invited to participate in a focus group.

- In January 2019, staff in the Office of Research and Analytics downloaded a list of all faculty members.
- The list was separated into full time faculty members and adjunct faculty members.
- Each list of faculty members was categorized by their division (six categories) and their years of teaching at College of DuPage (four categories).
- A total of 4 faculty members had expressed interest in attending a focus group to a member of the OER Steering Committee. These faculty members were all invited to participate in one of the focus groups
- The remaining invitations were sent to a randomly selected sample stratified by division, years teaching at COD, and faculty type.

Full time faculty groups (six division specific groups, three cross division groups, one volunteer group)

- Division specific focus groups. Four faculty members were randomly selected in each of four tenure categories for each of the divisions (16 faculty members invited from each division).
- Cross division focus groups. Two faculty members were randomly selected in each of four tenure categories for each of the divisions (8 faculty members invited from each division). *
- Volunteer focus group. Faculty members who had volunteered to take part in a focus group, but who were not selected in the random sample, were included in a volunteer focus group.

Adjunct faculty groups (two cross division groups, one interview)

- A total of 16 faculty members were selected from each of the six divisions.
  - These 96 faculty members were randomly selected across tenure categories and divisions.

❖ Focus group invitations

Staff from the Office of Research and Analytics drafted email invitations for each faculty focus group.

- Invitations were emailed by the Deans for each of the six Divisions.
- Faculty members who wanted to participate were asked to indicate in which session they wished to participate. One option was offered for full time faculty for each of the division-specific groups, four options were offered to full time faculty for the cross divisional groups, five options were offered to adjunct faculty for their groups, and two options were offered to the full time faculty volunteers for their groups.

*In one division (Business & Applied Technology), there were fewer than six full time faculty members in two tenure categories. In this case, all faculty members in the tenure category were invited.

❖ **Focus group protocol (full protocol included in the report on page 26)**

Each focus group session was led by two staff members from the Office of Research and Analytics, one serving as facilitator and one as note taker.

- All focus group participants were asked, as they entered the room, to sign a consent form if they had not already submitted one to the facilitator.
- The facilitator began each session by welcoming the participants and describing the purpose of the focus groups (to gain insight into how textbooks fit into the learning landscape at College of DuPage).
- The facilitator then explained that the information provided by all of the focus groups would be combined, summarized, and shared with the Open Educational Resources Steering Committee.
- The facilitator outlined how participant confidentiality would be protected. Notes would not include names or attribute statements to individuals, recordings and notes would be stored in password protected network folders accessible only to the research team, recordings would be deleted once a report was completed, participants could choose not to answer any questions, and participants were asked not to discuss the comments of other participants outside of the group.
- The facilitator then asked participants to share their thoughts on a series of questions,
  - How do you decide what textbooks or materials you use with your classes?
  - What are the strengths associated with using textbooks?
  - What are the challenges associated with using textbooks?
  - What strategies have you used to overcome the challenges of using textbooks?
- Participants were then asked to indicate what strategies s they would say had the most value.
- The facilitator concluded the session and thanked the participants for their time.

❖ **Participant profile**

A total of 51 faculty members took part in a focus group or an interview. This included 45 full time faculty members and six adjunct faculty members.

Division	Participated	Invited Full Time	Invited Adjunct
Arts, Communications & Hospitality	2	24	16
Business & Applied Technology	11	21	16
Liberal Arts	8	24	16
Nursing and Health Sciences	12	24	16
Social/Behavioral Science & Library	11	25	16
STEM	7	26	16
	51	144	96

Years teaching at COD	Participated	Invited Full Time	Invited Adjunct
Less than one year to five years	13	33	52
Six to thirteen years	14	38	30
Fourteen to nineteen years	12	35	9
Twenty years and over	12	38	5
	51	144	96

Textbook Selection

The process for selecting textbooks varies by discipline. There are also differences in process for courses that are taught by one faculty member, a small number of faculty members, or many faculty members.

❖ Participants in textbook selection

Courses taught by one faculty member

- If one *full time* faculty member is the only one teaching a course, they typically decide on their own what textbook and materials to use.
- If one *adjunct* faculty member is the only one teaching a course, depending on the department, they may select textbooks on their own or they may work with a full time faculty member to make their selection.

Courses taught by a small number of faculty members

- *Independent decisions*. In some areas, full time and adjunct faculty members choose their own textbooks.
- *Informal groups.* In other areas, full time faculty members gather feedback from adjunct faculty members, discuss the textbook options, and make decisions together.
- *Advisory boards*. For programs that adhere to accreditation / credentialing standards, full time faculty members review textbook options and then discuss the options with their program advisory board.

Courses with multiple sections taught by several faculty members

- *Independent decisions*. In some departments, multiple faculty members teach different course sections but each define their own syllabus and select their own textbooks or learning resources.
- *Informal groups*. In some departments, textbook decisions are made by the all the full time faculty members who teach the courses. The faculty members gather feedback from adjuncts, review and discuss their options, and select the textbook(s) that best aligns with and meets the needs of the curriculum.
- *Textbook committees*. Other departments convene committees that meet to review and discuss options.
  - Some committees include adjunct faculty, while others ask adjuncts to provide feedback.
  - Some textbook committees have members complete a rubric while others rely only on discussion.
  - Some textbook committees review a range of textbook options and compile a textbook list from which faculty members can choose. For example, the Speech department provides adjunct faculty members with a list of books from various publishers and at multiple price points.

❖ Timing of textbook review and selection

Ad hoc

- Some faculty members are continuously looking for new textbook options that better meet student needs.
- Faculty members may try a textbook and find it does not work, so they review other options and change.
- Some books become dated over time in how they present content or students stop connecting with a book.
- When faculty members begin teaching a new course, they often start with the existing textbook. Over time, as they become comfortable with the content, they will consider new textbook options.

Once or twice a year

- Some faculty members review all the textbooks that come out each year to assess alignment with objectives.
- Some textbook committees meet once a term to review new textbooks and ensure book lists are up to date.
- Some faculty members change textbooks every year to maintain up-to-date information. In particular, fields that experience constant change in laws, standards, practice, etc.

Every two to three years

- In some areas, textbooks are reviewed every two to three years to coincide with publication of new editions or changes in staffing levels.
- For some areas, review is initiated when a new edition is coming out.

Rarely

Some faculty members rarely change the textbooks they use.

- It takes a long time to fully convert to a new textbook from reading the textbook to setting up a syllabus and curriculum. To justify the change, a new textbook would have to be better in more than one area (be cheaper, more engaging, better mapped to course objectives, or include more student resources).
- Some fields have few good textbooks, so once faculty members find a textbook they can use they keep it for a long time. As new faculty members are hired, there are ongoing discussions about new options.

❖ Process for textbook review

Individuals, groups, and committees begin by selecting the list of textbooks they will review. Some faculty members concentrate on specific chapters they know include content that is challenging for students.

- Faculty members learn about textbook options from colleagues at other institutions, conferences, professional associations, publishers, accreditors, certification exam lists, or subject matter experts such as adjuncts or advisors.
- Some faculty members review all the textbooks that have been published in their field over the last year.

Faculty members often do a quick review of different textbook options if the current textbook is meeting their needs. If there are specific issues with the current textbook they will conduct a more thorough review.

- Committees that use an evaluation rubric assess textbooks on readability, reading level, relevance, examples, figures, and ancillary materials. The committees meet multiple times to discuss scoring, rank the options, and then reach consensus on which textbook to select.
- Some departments bring in sales representatives from different publishers to make presentations.
- Some faculty members ask students to compare different options and provide feedback on which is more relatable and understandable.
- Sometimes departments pilot test a textbook with one or more faculty members (full time and adjunct).

For departments that designate approved textbooks or textbook lists, there is room for flexibility.

- In some areas where adjunct faculty must work from approved lists, the adjunct faculty members may directly request approval from their Dean to use alternate resources.
- In some cases, adjunct faculty members need to work with a full time faculty member to review their alternate approach or resource. They can then submit a formal request for approval to their Dean.
- For the nursing program, faculty members may make textbook suggestions by filling out a review request form and submitting it to the curriculum committee for consideration.

Discussion Themes

The feedback faculty shared on textbooks has been organized into eight themes. This section describes each theme, including influence on textbook selection, associated strengths and challenges, and strategies for overcoming challenges.

I. Alignment with course objectives and active course files

Influence on textbook selection

Textbooks need to be aligned with all of the course objectives in the active course files. If a textbook does not effectively address the objectives in sufficient depth, it will not be selected for a course. As appropriate, the selected textbook should allow a course to meet certification, accreditation, and federal requirements; covering information students may be tested on for any credentialing exams.

Strengths of textbooks

For most courses, there are textbooks available that cover all of the foundational information on core concepts. These textbooks can serve as a comprehensive resource for faculty members and students.

- Transfer institutions may review the textbooks that are used for a course. If a textbook does not cover a course objective in enough detail, the transfer institution may not accept the course credits.
- Textbooks that are recognized by accrediting or credentialing bodies as mapping to a curriculum can be used by programs to document that they cover required content and use appropriate learning materials.

Textbooks can provide structure for standardizing the content covered in courses, in particular courses taught by multiple instructors. Some programs opt to select one textbook that is used for all course sections. Other programs provide adjunct faculty with a list of approved textbook options.

- By using one textbook across all course sections, programs can help students get a consistent learning experience that meets field standards.
- Even when having to use a standard textbook, or select from an approved textbook list, faculty can apply their own teaching methods and approaches to the course.
- For faculty who are new to teaching or just new to teaching a course, a good textbook that is aligned with the course objectives can serve as a reliable guide to covering all the active course file content.
- Textbooks can help faculty stay accountable. It is easy to spend too much time on a topic that engages students. The textbook and syllabus provide a reminder of other topics that need to be addressed in a course.

Challenges of textbooks

There are a finite number of textbooks that cover all of a course's objectives and no single one will be perfect or cover everything. There is always something in a textbook that can be improved.

- For some courses, there are multiple textbooks that all cover the course objectives. In other fields, there are few or no textbooks that cover all of the course objectives.
- Even if a course has multiple textbook options, there may be little difference in content, organization, or cost among them (for example introductory math or science textbooks).
- When faculty members teach courses that require the use of a standard textbook, not everyone will like the selected textbook.
- Even using a high quality textbook is no guarantee all of the required content will be covered in a course.

Strategies for overcoming challenges

Many faculty members use textbooks as foundation for a course and supplement the content with original source material and resources that are free and online or available through the College of DuPage library.

- These additional resources often use easier to read language than textbooks, include more up-to-date content, are directly relevant to their fields, and demonstrate application of concepts.
- Supplemental resources can be found through professional colleagues, advisory boards, online groups, conferences, teaching blogs, social media groups, and other networks.

Faculty members who have taught in a field for a period of time will have the background and experience to work with less structure and compile their own materials to supplement the textbook.

- For programs that have opted to use an approved textbook list for certain classes, there is still an opportunity to provide experienced adjuncts with more flexibility. Faculty members may suggest textbooks for the list or submit a preferred textbook to the program for review and approval.

Some publishers allow faculty members to create their own content for a textbook or customize textbook content. This approach has strengths and weaknesses, as it creates a cheaper product but one that cannot be rented or resold.

- Faculty members for several courses have worked with publishers to create their own laboratory manuals. These are either sold through the College of DuPage Bookstore for a low cost or created as PDFs and circulated for free through Blackboard. These manuals include input from multiple faculty members, are specific to the lab exercises of a particular class, and can be updated as needed. Unfortunately, the option is not available for courses with smaller enrollments.
- Faculty members have also worked with publishers to customize textbooks by selecting to only include specific relevant chapters from one or more sources.

Faculty members in a few areas are currently developing new Open Textbooks.

- It takes a lot of work to develop a new Open Textbook.
- It also takes a lot of work to maintain the content in an Open Textbook. To be successful, faculty members need ongoing support from the institution to keep the materials updated with changing information, practices, and examples.
- One option for updating an OER textbook over time would be to incorporate student contributions.

Participants voted on what strategies had the most potential for supporting students within this topic area. The following received the most votes:

Curate custom libraries of resources (free, online) to supplement textbooks.

Work with publishers to create custom textbooks, write lab manuals.

Explore the option of writing an Open Textbook.

II. Cost

Influence on textbook selection

The cost of textbooks is a concern for students and faculty members, both the textbooks themselves and the incremental costs for purchasing required supplemental materials or versions of textbooks in different formats.

Strengths of textbooks

E-versions of textbooks or loose-leaf copies of textbooks can be cheaper than traditional print versions.

Expensive textbooks for courses related to a career path are often chosen because they are key resources in a field and can be kept as a professional reference beyond the course.

Challenges of textbooks

Textbooks can be very expensive. Many faculty members indicate that some students express concern about the cost of books while other faculty members have not heard concerns.
- Financial aid can be easily depleted by textbook costs and students cannot use financial aid to purchase textbooks until a specified date, which can be after the course has begun.
- Some courses have students purchase a textbook even when they only use a short excerpt.
- Renting some textbooks can be as expensive as buying the textbooks.
- Small programs or classes with low enrollment cannot get textbook discounts from publishers.

The COD Bookstore contract prevents faculty members from referring students to more affordable sources for textbooks. Students know to check textbook availability with online retailers, but they may not be aware of all their options.
- The COD Bookstore adds fees to the base price of textbooks.
- Older editions of books cannot be sold back to the COD Bookstore.
- The process for ordering books through the COD Bookstore can be confusing.

The value of textbooks is no longer in the book itself, but the supplemental material the publisher provides to go along with the textbook. Textbooks that come with more supplemental materials or higher quality supplemental materials are more expensive.

E-books are often the cheapest format for textbooks, but some students prefer having a hard copy of a textbook for note taking. Hard copies are not always available and when they are there can be an additional cost.
- For textbooks that are only available as e-books, students cannot buy them for a reduced price on the resale market, faculty members cannot put them in the library on reserve, and they cannot be returned or sold back to the Bookstore.
- Access to e-books is often limited to the course term or year.

Strategies for overcoming challenges

Most faculty members try to use less expensive textbook options when they are available.

- Many faculty members select the cheapest, most readable textbook that meets the course objectives.
- Faculty members also use older editions of textbooks, which tend to be significantly cheaper. However, publishers do not always have sufficient copies of older textbook editions available.
- For the nursing program, all textbooks are purchased as a bundle through the publisher and come electronically on an e-reader. There is a reduced cost for purchasing the bundle.
- Some programs use one textbook for multiple courses, a series of courses, or all the courses in a program.
- Most faculty members provide copies of textbooks in the laboratories and on reserve in the library. These copies may be older editions or review copies provided by publishers.
- Several faculty members requested more freedom to refer students to different purchasing options.

Many faculty members take steps to ensure students can access textbook content while they wait for financial aid to start.

- Faculty members use email to communicate with students, prior to classes starting, about their options for procuring textbooks. This includes whether the book is optional or required, purchasing options, acceptable and available formats, available financial aid and book scholarships, rental options, two week free trials from publishers, whether chapters are available free from Google books, etc.
- Some faculty members print off a small portion of the textbooks, provide screenshots, or lend copies of books until students can purchase their own copies.
- Some faculty members postpone content and assignments that require the textbook to the second or third week of class to ensure students have time to purchase the textbook.

Several faculty members have stopped using traditional textbooks and indicate they only use learning materials that are available at a low cost (online, used book stores, etc.) or for free (online, libraries).

- A few faculty members have found good quality Open Textbooks to use with their courses. These Open Textbooks have been developed by universities, current and retired professors, governments (such as Germany for language learning), etc.
- Some faculty members avoid using textbooks entirely (Open or Traditional), instead opting to use books, novels, and a library of other low cost or free resources and media.
- Many faculty members blend the use of a textbook with a library of other resources. This can allow them to use a lower cost textbook, as they are supplementing its content.

Participants voted on what strategies had the most potential for supporting students within this topic area. The following received the most votes:

Use free or very low cost textbooks (Open or Traditional), supplemented with online resources and media.

Eliminate use of a textbook (Traditional or Open) altogether.

Use older edition textbooks, have copies of textbooks on reserve in in library and in laboratories.

Have more freedom to share information with students about where to purchase affordable materials.

Communicate with students about financial aid and book scholarships.

Select one textbook that students can use for multiple courses.

III. Inclusion of current information, language, & practice that reflects program approach

Influence on textbook selection

The content of textbooks must be current and relevant and the presentation of information and viewpoints must be consistent with a program's philosophy and approach. All fields continually generate new knowledge, refine how they think about or approach content, and incorporate new voices and perspectives.

Strengths of textbooks

The information and visuals in textbooks are consistently updated.
- Faculty members can trust a textbook is covering the subject matter appropriately and accurately if it is written by a known author who is an expert in their field. Faculty members may even have the opportunity to talk with authors about textbook content through professional conferences or networks.
- Faculty members who do not actively practice in a field may not be aware of current updates to a field and textbooks are reliable sources of information as protocols and practices change.
- Textbooks include relevant case studies and examples and teach students to use professional tools.

Challenges of textbooks

Some textbooks are updated every two years while others may only be updated every five years or so. As such, all textbooks will include some outdated content. This is less true for theories and principles than for trends, technologies, information on culture, and some images, case studies, and examples.
- The content of some fields changes frequently (for example, tax law) and textbooks must be updated often.
- Since there is a lag between when professional practice changes and the length of times it takes to update a textbook, some textbooks will be out of out of date by the time they are published.

Reviewing options and selecting an appropriate, up-to-date textbook takes a lot of time and effort.
- Not all faculty members, in particular adjunct faculty members, have time to review all of the available textbook options to find something appropriate to use for their courses.
- When new editions of textbooks come out, faculty members need to update all of their teaching materials.

Textbooks can have errors and outdated information.
- Faculty members have encountered textbooks with mislabeled images and captions, outdated illustrations, and confusing descriptions and examples.
- Some older editions of textbooks use language that is no longer appropriate.
- It can be confusing for students if the language used in the selected textbook or the associated supplemental materials does not match the language used by faculty members in the course.

Textbooks may not demonstrate the lessons faculty members want students to learn.
- On their own, textbooks often encourage memorization instead of critical thinking.
- If a course is teaching information literacy, it does not make sense to provide students with a textbook that gives them all of the information and answers. Instead, faculty members want to encourage curiosity and teach students how to identify reliable sources of information.
- Selection of textbook content is not neutral from the perspective of history and culture (whose stories get told and from what angle). Textbooks often have little diversity in perspective.

Discussion Themes

Strategies for overcoming challenges

Faculty members have opted for different strategies to ensure learning materials convey current, appropriate information. This includes use of,

- Carefully selected Traditional or Open Textbooks.
- Customized textbooks, created by working with publishers to select content from multiple textbook sources.
- Textbooks and laboratory manuals written by COD faculty members for our courses (some faculty members are in the process of writing their own Open Textbooks).

Some faculty members have decided to not use a textbook, or to supplement the textbook they use with other resources and media. Faculty members who compile their own libraries of media and resources, instead of or in addition to a textbook, do so to overcome a range of challenges. These challenges may include concerns about having updated information, as well as concerns about cost, quality and comprehensiveness, inclusion of diverse perspectives, reference to real word application, and ability to engage students.

- Some of the original online sources that faculty members use include, news sites and articles, magazine sites and articles, journal articles, blogs, podcasts, videos, TED Talks, live feeds, TV, film, Google Earth, professional and government web sites, trade articles and booklets, vendor tutorials, and academic databases.
  - o Faculty members who compile their own libraries of materials express interest in having access to a bank of options that are curated by program faculty for use with specific courses. This includes documents, links, and royalty free images (important for science courses).
  - o Some faculty members indicate their areas have these types of searchable repositories, set up as a team site or Google Drive. The repositories take a lot of time to organize and maintain and they can become hard to use when a lot of people are contributing to them.
  - o Every term, all links need to be checked to make sure they are still available and up-to-date.

Faculty members in some areas change textbooks every year to ensure the content is up-to-date. Other areas review textbooks and consider new options each time a new edition of their current textbook is released. In many cases, the new edition of the current textbook is selected.

- Faculty members look for textbooks that are evidence-based, inquiry-based, and promote active learning.
- Some areas have advisory committees that include practicing professionals who provide notice when there are updates to a field.
- Faculty members look for textbooks that reflect diverse perspectives and are written from different viewpoints by authors from multicultural backgrounds.
- Textbook authors and editors must have appropriate qualifications and credentials.
- Textbooks must use language and theories in the same way they will be presented in a course.

> Participants voted on what strategies had the most potential for supporting students within this topic area. The following received the most votes:
>
> Curate custom libraries of resources (free, online) to supplement textbooks.
>
> Work with publishers to create custom textbooks, write lab manuals.
>
> Explore the option of writing an Open Textbook.
>
> Document sources of original and validated materials to supplement textbooks (library databases, professional connections, university sources, etc.).

IV. Availability in different formats for different learning needs and preferences

Influence on textbook selection

Students have a range of learning needs and both students and faculty members have varying preferences with regard to the format of textbooks and learning materials. One approach to presenting information will not work for every student, instructor, disciple, or class and it is important to stay flexible.

Strengths of textbooks

Textbooks are available in multiple formats such as a traditional bound books, loose-leaf books, and e-books. Students sometimes have the option of deciding which format to purchase and use. For some courses, textbook purchase comes with access to the e-book or the e-book purchase allows add-on of a print copy for a small fee.

- Some faculty members are more familiar and comfortable with traditional textbooks.
- Some students are more familiar and comfortable with traditional textbooks, for example, students returning to college after time off. Some students may drop a course if it does not use a traditional textbook.
- Some faculty members notice more students use the textbook when they do not have to buy it but can access it using a link.
- Textbooks can be accessible as large print versions, audio versions, and with other accommodations.

Challenges of textbooks

Different versions of textbooks each present their own challenges.

- Some students prefer technology (e-books, videos) to traditional textbooks. As grade and high schools move to more online and electronic content, students will increasingly arrive to COD expecting more technology.
- Other students do not have reliable access to technology or prefer having a printed version of a textbook to read and highlight. Providing only e-books or only online options could be a barrier to textbook access.
- Some students like having a loose-leaf textbook option, especially when it is available at a low cost, while other students and faculty members find it awkward and less durable to transport and use.
- When students need to purchase more than one version of a textbook, they typically have to pay additional fees. For example, if the course requires purchase of an e-book and they want a hard copy for taking notes.

Technology comes with technical difficulties and students and faculty members may need technical support.

- For programs that use an e-reader, there are times when the system has gone down. If e-books have not been downloaded, students may be unable to access materials for a couple of days.
- Some e-books are difficult to access or link to Blackboard, causing frustration even before class starts.
- E-books that require an access code or a subscription may be only accessible for a limited period of time.

Strategies for overcoming challenges

Faculty members recognize students have different learning styles and needs. Many recommend having conversations with students about their needs and concerns related to textbooks and their preferred formats.

- Some faculty members incorporate conversations with students into their courses, so they can discuss as a group the strengths and challenges of different textbook options.
- Some faculty members suggest customizing course information so students know the format when they register (for example, tag courses as traditional textbook, open textbook, or non-traditional format).

Discussion Themes

Many faculty members allow students to use their preferred version of the textbook, whether it is an e-book, traditional bound textbook, loose-leaf textbook, audio book, etc.

- Faculty members also incorporate inclusion practices to ensure they are meeting the needs of all students. This requires they look at the textbooks and ancillary materials to identify possible access issues and associated accommodations. This helps improve delivery of material for everyone.
- It is important to be flexible and seek assistance from experts to meet student needs.

In addition to using different textbook formats, faculty members present content in multiple ways at different points in time (repeat and reinforce).

- This includes lecture, Blackboard posts, emails, video demonstrations (either found online or created), etc.
- Some faculty members refer students to LinkedIn Learning.
- Some faculty members use adaptive learning systems. These require an access code, but they are cheaper than print textbooks.
- When materials become affordable for everyone, some faculty members are interested in incorporating Virtual or Augmented Reality tools into their courses.

Faculty members have found that many students prefer receiving content from a video instead of a lecture and have taken steps to incorporate this into their instruction.

- Faculty members have begun to video-record lectures and demonstrations so students can replay them from YouTube at any time and when they are most ready to learn. This includes short videos to supplement lectures or longer videos that can recreate a lecture.
- Faculty members use short videos (that they have created or found online) in class with instruction or as a standalone that students can review on their own.
- If faculty members provide detailed lecture content as a video, they spend class time working together on problem sets and working through student questions.
- Faculty members invite students to share good resources (videos, tutorials) they find online.

> Participants voted on what strategies had the most potential for supporting students within this topic area. The following received the most votes:
>
> Ask students about their concerns and preferences, what they need to be effective learners. Share information about course formats.
>
> Integrate the use of technology in class.
>
> Use more inclusive methods for students across abilities. Allow use of online or print materials to meet learning needs.
>
> Video record lectures for student reference, create videos of lecture highlights.
>
> Repeat and reinforce content using different learning modalities (written, audio, video).

V. Readability (writing style, organization, and format)

Influence on textbook selection

It is important that textbooks be readable. This includes being well written, well organized, easy to understand and straightforward to follow. The reading level of a textbook should be appropriate for College of DuPage students and the content should be challenging without being too advanced or technical. There should be a good balance of text and high quality visuals, such as images and charts.

Strengths of textbooks

For most courses, there are textbooks available that are well written and use understandable language to convey core concepts in relatable ways.
- Most textbooks have good pictures, images, figures, charts, and illustrations. Publishers pay illustrators for their work, so they invest time in creating images that accurately represent the concepts being taught.
- Textbooks include tips, such as acronyms and memory tools, to help students learn content and pass exams.

Textbooks contain detailed information on a broad array of topics.
- A course may only have time to focus in depth on a finite number of topics, while the textbook can fill in the gaps for areas that are not covered in as much detail.
- Good textbooks convey content in a way that is immediately understandable. When students seek help from tutors or others, the textbook provides all the necessary information on how to approach the content. For faculty who use their own libraries of materials, it is harder for students to convey where they are struggling.
- Textbooks are designed to make connections between content and the real world. When faculty members compile their own libraries of materials, it can be harder to find resources that illustrate specific themes.

Challenges of textbooks

Some textbooks are intimidating and not reader friendly.
- Textbooks may include high quality content, but if it is presented in a thick volume with small, dense font, students may be too intimidated to access it.
- Students may struggle with reading textbooks that are written at too high of a reading or comprehension level. These textbooks may use language that is difficult to understand or too technical.
- Some textbooks are poorly organized and may not start with sufficiently basic information.
- Textbooks that are more readable may not cover all of the concepts that are required for a course.
- Some students may not be at the reading level required for a course or some may be more visual learners.

Faculty members expressed their need to balance making textbook content accessible for students while also preparing them to work in professional fields.
- In many fields, students will need to read and understand complex documents, manuals, and source material to fulfill their jobs. If they have not practiced doing this in college, they will not be prepared for the work.

Strategies for overcoming challenges

Faculty members provide guidance so students can learn to read their textbooks effectively.

- This includes communicating the key sections of chapters, pointing out the summaries at the start of a chapter and the review questions at the end, and conveying the importance of headings, items in bold, call outs, and highlighted items.
- Faculty members also offer study skills seminars and often refer students to the Learning Commons (Writing, Reading, Speech Assistance). Some provide extra credit for seeking assistance.

Participants voted on what strategies had the most potential for supporting students within this topic area. The following received the most votes:

Talk with students about strategies to read textbooks effectively and leverage reading specialists.

VI. Ability of textbooks and learning materials to interest and engage students

Influence on textbook selection

Traditionally, textbooks are not learner-centered and they tend to present information in ways that are static and dry. When they review textbooks, faculty members look for options that have elements to engage students, encourage critical thinking, and promote application of information.

Strengths of textbooks

Newer textbooks tend to approach concepts in ways that are more engaging than older textbooks. For example, newer textbooks are more likely to use an inquiry-based approach that structures concepts around the answers to questions that students would want to answer.

Challenges of textbooks

Students in some areas choose to not buy a required textbook, or they may buy the textbook but not read it.
- In some cases, students do not buy the textbook and instead only use the supplemental materials such as notes, study guides, and videos.

Textbooks present a one-dimensional learning experience is that often dry and discourages curiosity / passion.
- It is hard to make course content come alive with just a textbook, there is always a need to supplement textbook content.
- In some areas, as faculty members incorporate more technology in the classroom, the textbook will become increasingly less relevant to student success.
- Students learn better from content that is dynamic, interactive, and learner centered.

Strategies for overcoming challenges

Adopt the approaches shared in "Teach Students How to Learn", the book provided at Fall 2019 In-Service.
- Gather information from conferences and colleagues to stay up-to-date with strategies for engaging students.

Use learner-centered approaches that layer reference to the textbook with lecture and hands-on learning.
- Structure courses around projects, activities, and problem sets. Ensure the textbook includes projects and activities for students to use.
- Identify real life, up-to-date examples that encourage critical thinking and active learning.
- Use synchronous webcam technology with online classes. Language courses have used this for 12 years to incorporate the conversational practice that had been missing from online homework components.

Encourage students to read textbook content.
- Reference textbook content in lectures and encourage students to form study groups that discuss readings.
- Require pre-class assignments and quizzes that are graded.
- Use online homework systems that accompany textbooks. Assignments do not have to be graded, but they can be required. Once an assignment is finished, it can be noted in Blackboard. Faculty members communicate to students that modules are designed to be completed in 45 minutes, but can take up to three hours if students try to do them without reading the material.

Discussion Themes

Allow for flexibility to pull in resources as they become relevant based on class discussion and current events.

- Supplement textbook content with original sources that report on current events (news clips, live feeds, web sites, etc.).
- Incorporate media from daily life (TV, film, videos, social media) to reinforce the relevance of content.
- Invite students to use their phones in class to search for and share ways to apply content.
- Use online discussion tools to capture real time reflection.
- Demonstrate application of content using field trips, guest speakers, and video calls with professionals.
- Incorporate books and novels into courses instead of textbooks. These cost less and are more readable.

> Participants voted on what strategies had the most potential for supporting students within this topic area. The following received the most votes:
>
> Use original sources to engage students in content, including news clips, live feeds, web sites, etc.
>
> Use social media and videos (YouTube) to engage students in content and discussion. Invite students to use their phones in class to find and share examples of content being applied.
>
> Tie textbook content to activities, layer strategies for student engagement (book, lecture, activities).

VII. Supplemental materials that publishers offer to accompany textbooks

Influence on textbook selection

Selection of a textbook is no longer just based on the textbook itself but also the additional materials the publishers offer to supplement textbook content. Some faculty members appreciate the value of these supplements, while others see them as unnecessary or lacking evidence for how they contribute to student success.

Strengths of textbooks

Examples of additional materials that some publishers provide to assist faculty. These can be especially useful for adjunct faculty members who may be teaching a course for the first time with limited time to prepare.
- Instructor manuals and e-versions of books, Blackboard shells and linkages, PowerPoint slides.
- High quality images (it can be hard to find high quality options online).
- Discussion questions and ideas.
- Assignments, solutions, sample test questions, and assessments (some limit students' ability to Google responses, show patterns in responses).

Examples of additional materials that some publishers provide to assist students.
- Video explanations, audio and video clips for demonstration, interactive videos and assignments.
- Online interactive activities, discussion boards, problem sets, and study tools (crossword puzzles, flashcards).
- Quizzes, exams, and test banks (including online, intuitive platforms that help students review weak areas)
- Nursing simulations and longitudinal testing (require an extra fee).

Challenges of textbooks

There is a lack of consensus around the effectiveness of supplemental materials to aid student success.
- Some faculty members indicate books have been shown to contribute less to learning than other resources.
- Some faculty members indicate there is limited evidence to support the effectiveness of some supplements.
- Some faculty members use adaptive learning systems, which they indicate may not work for all students.
  - For some faculty members and disciplines, adaptive learning systems are tedious.
  - The presentation of content in the adaptive learning systems is rigorous and students may not catch up if they fall behind. There is some hesitancy to incorporate it more widely, as it won't work for all students.

The availability and quality of supplemental materials varies by field.
- The textbooks for some smaller fields do not have online support, supplements, or teaching resources.
- Some supporting materials are not good quality. For example, online grading from some publishers can be wrong and some homework systems don't function properly.
- Digital platforms that go with language books have shortcomings. They are contracted to programmers and the activities are not appropriate for language learning. The activities are tedious and not designed for critical thinking,
- Students can experience problems with online components provided by publishers and faculty members can't respond because the provider is a third party. Some issues require IT intervention and take days to fix.

Having standard assignments and test questions make it easy for students to find answers online.

- Answers to end of chapter assignments, case studies, problem sets, and test bank items are all available using search engines to query the internet.
- Faculty members need to constantly update the way the questions are presented so students can't easily find the answers online.

A subscription to online content only provides access during the length of the course or in some cases the year. Content and resources that are shared online through Blackboard are also only available during the length of the course

Strategies for overcoming challenges

- Faculty members pick and choose from the available supplemental materials and use only what they have found to work for themselves and their students.
- Many faculty members use the discussion, assignment, and test suggestions provided in the supplemental materials as a basis for developing their own custom material.
- Some faculty members have written their own homework systems, so they are not tied to a particular textbook. They use online tools to create homework sets, online testing, quizzes, and other resources.

> Participants voted on what strategies had the most potential for supporting students within this topic area. The following received the most votes:
>
> It is an ongoing process to update discussion questions, assignments, test items, etc. to prevent students from easily finding answers online.

VIII. Responsiveness of publishers in providing good advice and information

Influence on textbook selection

Faculty members have had different experiences with publishers' representatives. Some representatives are responsive and provide good information on the strengths and weaknesses of different textbook options, while others are hard to contact or overly aggressive in promoting materials.

Strengths of textbooks

Textbook publishers have been around for many years, so they offer products that have been tested and refined over time.

- There are incentives for publishers creating new and updated resources.
- To be competitive, textbook publishers must create products with different perspectives and approaches.
- Some publishers provide good advice, information, and guidance.
- Some publishers allow faculty members to customize their textbooks to meet course needs. This includes piecing together chapters from different textbooks for a negotiated, manageable price. These custom textbooks cannot be sold back.
- One publisher offers the option of a set price no matter how many books are ordered across the institution. This can put pressure on faculty to choose the publisher, even if they prefer other publishers' products.

Challenges of textbooks

Some publishers' representatives are hard to contact, others are too aggressive or persistent.

Textbooks are marketing machines; some publishers release new editions too often, with few changes, and are aggressive in promoting materials that have not always been proven to help students.

- Faculty members who prefer to use older editions of textbooks may have a hard time procuring these editions from the Bookstore or the publisher, who may not maintain enough copies of older editions.
- Some programs require students to use the newest edition of a textbook. If students stay in the program longer than the textbook cycle, they may need to purchase a new set of updated textbooks.
- Publishers will only work with faculty members to customize textbooks or lab manuals if there are a threshold number of students enrolled in a course.
- Publishers can lose the rights to textbooks, so there is no guarantee a textbook you have used for a long time will continue to be available.
- Every semester faculty members receive an out of stock list that can include a textbook they have selected.

Strategies for overcoming challenges

- Faculty members work with publishers to negotiate costs. This is often not an option for smaller programs and unique courses with small enrollments.
- Faculty members work with publishers to bundle all the textbooks for a program at a discounted rate.

Participants voted on what strategies had the most potential for supporting students within this topic area. The following received the most votes:

> Work with publishers to negotiate textbook costs and create reduced cost textbook bundles.

While faculty members were not asked questions specifically about Open Educational Resources (OER) during the focus groups, some groups did share their thoughts and experiences.

Definitions of Open Educational Resources (OER)

Several faculty members shared their experience using Open Educational Resources, as part or all of their course materials. There were variations in how faculty members defined Open Educational Resources.

- Some faculty members use Open Educational Resources defined as a free, online textbooks. These can be widely used Open Textbooks that are authored by recognized, reputable sources.
- Other faculty members use Open Educational Resources defined as any resource that is widely available for free or low cost. This includes books, journal articles, news articles, web sites, etc. Students have options for getting these resources when there is a cost (used book stores, libraries, online retailers, etc.).

Strengths of Open Educational Resources (OER)

Some fields have Open Textbooks that are well written and may be easier to read than traditional textbooks.

- Open Textbooks are free or very low cost. In some fields with good quality options, faculty members elect to use Open Textbook when the cost of traditional textbooks increases too much too quickly.
- Some Open Textbooks offer a print version that students can order if they want a physical copy.
- Some Open Textbooks offer resources such as professional development for instructors (for example, resources developed by the German government for language learning).

Challenges of Open Educational Resources (OER)

Open Educational Resources are very new, especially when compared to the textbook publishing industry. There is an ongoing effort to create and improve resources, but it will take time.

For some fields, there are no Open Textbooks or no good quality Open Textbooks.

- Faculty members who compile their own open materials must spend a lot of time researching and reviewing options because they are spread throughout the Internet and there are a lot of poor quality choices.
- Open Textbooks tend to be revised infrequently.
- Open Educational Resources do not yet have the same quantity of supplemental content as traditional textbooks. There are few aligned resources such as PowerPoint slides, assignments, videos, etc.

Transitioning to Open Educational Resources is an ongoing process for faculty and students that will take time.

- Students will need consistent access and support to use digital resources.
- Faculty members will need training and time to compile and review or create resources.

Questions about the use of Open Educational Resources (OER)

Faculty members who are interested in expanding their use of Open Educational Resources (OER) shared some questions they have about the process.

- Are there guidelines for using OER materials? What strategies are there for integrating OER into class?
- Are there guidelines for creating OER materials? What are the copyright and usage laws?
- Can COD offer training for faculty (including adjunct) on using OER and making courses learner-centered?
- Can COD update course descriptions so students know if a course uses a traditional, open, or no textbook?

Conclusion

The Open Educational Resources (OER) Steering Committee is committed to working toward a sustainable, institutional approach to textbook affordability. In support of this goal, the steering committee enlisted the Office of Research and Analytics to conduct a series of focus groups and gather feedback from faculty members on how textbooks fit into the learning landscape at COD.

The focus groups explored how faculty members select textbooks, identified both strengths and challenges of traditional textbooks, and suggested strategies for overcoming the challenges inherent in textbooks. Overall, the findings show that faculty members are passionate about eliminating barriers to student success and they consistently take steps to ensure the textbooks and learning resources they use are affordable, available when students need them, and in formats that are broadly accessible. Faculty members emphasize the importance of maintaining flexibility, always being open to new approaches, and giving students a voice to share their needs.

Faculty members felt strongly that no institution should impose requirements related to the use of textbooks or Open Educational Resources. What they do advocate for is ongoing support from COD as they try new approaches and make informed choices about what learning resources are most appropriate for their programs and classes.

Consent. Collect signed consent forms as participants arrive, answer questions.

Facilitator's welcome, introduction, and instructions to participants (2 minutes)
Welcome and thank you for taking part in this focus group on textbooks. My name is [Name] and assisting me is [Name]. We are both staff members in COD's Research & Analytics office. We have been working with the Open Educational Resources (OER) Steering Committee to gain insight into how textbooks fit into the learning landscape at College of DuPage.

Topic overview (2 minutes): We have invited you to today's focus group discussion to gather your thoughts about textbooks, including what are their strengths and weaknesses, how you choose textbooks, and how you use textbooks with your students.

We hope to gather insight to inform recommendations toward a sustainable, institutional approach to textbook affordability. The information you provide today and that is provided by other faculty focus groups will be combined, summarized, and shared with the Open Educational Resources (OER) steering committee.

Confidentiality (2 minutes): We will take steps to protect the privacy of your information.
- The notes we take will not include names or attribute statements to individuals.
- The recording will be secured while it is being reviewed and will be deleted once a report on the focus groups is completed.
- If there are any questions you do not wish to answer, you do not have to do so; however, we hope you will be as involved as possible.
- After we leave today, we would appreciate it if you would avoid repeating the comments of other group members outside the focus group.

Ground rules (2 minutes)
- There are no wrong answers and we understand there will be many different perspectives on each question.
- We are looking to learn from you and gather information, we do not need to reach consensus.
- We ask that you speak one at a time and not interrupt others when they are talking. This will help us capture everyone's thoughts in our notes.

Logistics (2 minutes)
- This focus group will last about ninety minutes.
- Feel free to move around and use the restroom as you need it.
- Please help yourself to refreshments
- Does anyone have any questions?
- I am now going to turn on the recording device.
- And let's begin

Warm up (5 minutes)
To start, I'd like to ask everyone to share their first name, what you teach, and how long you have been at COD.

Guiding questions (60 minutes)

Now I will ask you to take a minute to consider the first question. After a minute I will ask each of you to share your thoughts one at a time.

- How do you decide what textbooks or materials you use with your classes? (Do you decide on your own, is the decision made by an informal group, does a committee decide, etc.)
- What are the strengths associated with using textbooks?
- What are the challenges associated with using textbooks?
- What strategies have you used to overcome the challenges of using textbooks?

Looking at the list of strategies you have just listed, I would like you to take your colored stickers and use them to indicate what strategies you think College of DuPage should consider adopting more broadly.

Concluding question (10 minutes)

- Of everything we have discussed today, what would you say is most important to making sure students have access to all the learning resources they need to succeed?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Thank you very much for participating, we truly appreciate your time. Your thoughts and contributions will be very valuable to the OER steering committee as they consider recommendations toward a sustainable, institutional approach to textbook affordability
- If you have any questions, feel free to talk with us after the session.
- Thank you.