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Abstract

In academic year 2007-08 the south campus library at Erie Community College had a total of 11 course reserve items and very low course reserve circulation. Resulting from a concerted effort to expand course reserve holdings, the south campus library held over 300 items, circulating hundreds of times, in the 2011-12 academic year.

The results of a student survey on course reserves are presented as are student perceptions of information control reported in LibQual 2008 and 2012. Findings and experiences are placed within the context of textbook costs and textbook purchases by students.

Introduction

In fall 2007, Erie Community College had a collective student headcount of 13,053. Of those, 3,028 attended the Buffalo campus, 5,911 attended the Williamsville campus and 4,114 students attended the Orchard Park campus (known locally as the south campus). Although the south campus was attended by 31.5% of ECC students, several significant library statistics were out of sync with both student statistics and in terms of library usage and satisfaction for academic year 2007-08.

For instance, the daytime gate count for the south campus library for the entire academic year 2007-08, was only 126,205. The ECC libraries administered the LibQual survey in spring 2008. Students, faculty and staff reported that when it comes to “the printed materials I need for my work”, the south campus library was performing less than desired. Further, in the 2007-08 academic year the south campus library had only 11 books on course reserve that circulated a total of 51 times.

Given the rising costs of course textbooks, the rising reluctance of students to buy textbooks and our desire to improve satisfaction with library collections, we selected course reserves as an area for expansion of services, seeking to increase the number of items placed on course reserve and increase the circulation of reserve items. We felt that this improvement would have the residual effect of improving satisfaction with the south campus print collections generally, and perhaps increase the overall relevance of the library as reflected in gate counts.

Chart 1. Stated Means of Obtaining Textbooks

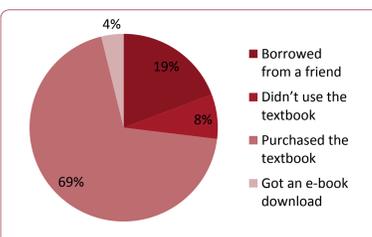
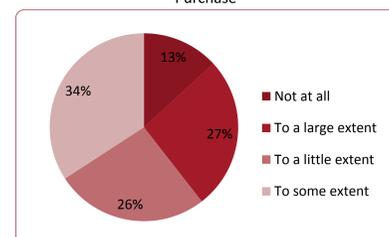


Chart 2. Stated Influence of Course Reserve on Textbook Purchase



Methods

A small workgroup was recruited for this effort in 2008. The project was named the *Academic Success Program* in order to make improved student outcomes the motivational focus for all participants. We were very fortunate to earn the cooperation of very important allies: the campus bookstore, faculty and local textbook sales representatives. Each semester the campus bookstore shares with the library its book adoptions list. From that list, the library workgroup identifies titles to be added to the reserve collection. Both book representatives and faculty are then contacted for their assistance in obtaining a library copy for reserve.

It is important to make both faculty and textbook sales representatives comfortable in their participation. The library promises that students will have access to reserve books within the library only and that circulations are limited to two hours. Reserve titles will never become part of the general collection and will not circulate outside of the library. Obsolete titles are returned to the appropriate faculty or properly disposed of. The library does not sell or give away obsolete or duplicate textbooks.

The majority of the work is completed during the intercessions, a period of relative downtime for librarians. Circulation reports of reserve titles to faculty and book processing is completed by one full-time library support staff.

In addition to reserves circulation statistics and LibQual results, in the fall 2012 semester we asked students using reserve textbooks to participate voluntarily in a brief three question survey. We collected 38 responses.

Results

What began as an initiative in 2008 grew each year and withstood changes.

Student headcount at the south campus has fallen slightly to 3,433 in spring 2011, however the daytime library gate count has soared to 334,476 in academic year 2011-12, a 165% increase from 2007-08.

As shown in chart 3, from our original 11 items held in 2007, the south campus library in spring 2012 held 308 reserve titles that circulated 2108 times in academic year 2011-12, a 4033% increase in circulations from 2007-08.

The ECC libraries also administered LibQual again in spring 2012. Student satisfaction with print collections improved such that the perceived mean score was higher than the desired mean. Although several possibilities may explain the improvement, expanding the reserve collection was the greatest change and effort made by the library to improve and expand collections.

In addition to the impact on the library circulation and gate count statistics, we wanted to know what sort of impact our reserve collections had on students. The answers they gave are in charts 1 and 2.

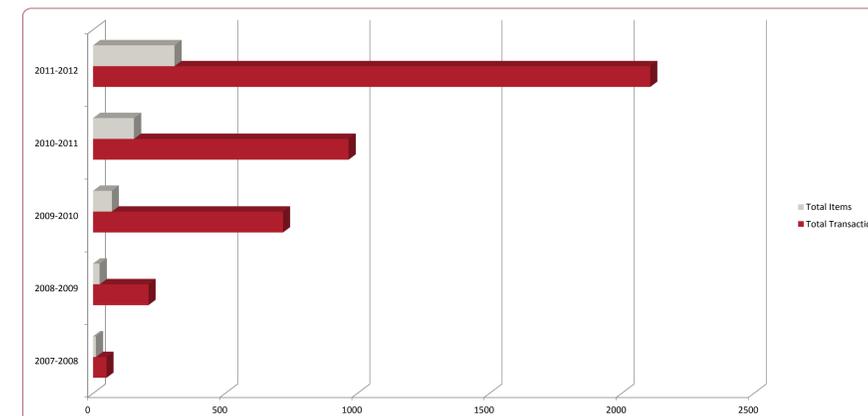


Chart 3. South Campus Course Reserve Transactions 2007-2012.

Discussion & Conclusion

The issue of textbooks in the library is one of contradiction for library professionals. While we want to give students access to textbooks and improve their success, we also want to encourage alternative content delivery methods that may be less costly and more accessible than traditional textbooks. We don't want to compete with local businesses, but we do want to provide free access to the products they offer. Also, textbook reserves require a lot of library resources as book editions change frequently and become obsolete quickly.

Despite the contradictions and resources required, the *Academic Success Program* workgroup agrees that enhancing course reserves is a worthwhile effort. While we do not want to build our relevance on textbook formats and models that are becoming a thing of the past, for now textbooks are the dominant assigned reading at ECC. We want to build a reputation and the relationships for offering course content and transition smoothly to new formats and models as they are adopted. Similarly, we are learning to negotiate and find common ground with our for-profit counterparts, as their roles in higher education are evolving as well. The library's partnership with faculty is very important and offering textbooks to students is further evidence of our role in student success, retention, persistence and graduation.

The students in our survey told us that while 69% of them purchased a textbook, reliance on library course reserve, to a large extent, influenced 27% of them to not purchase a textbook. These statistics should pose no threat to the bookstore or to textbook sales representatives. The majority of students are buying at least some of their texts. The reliance on library copies of texts may influence faculty to keep assigning texts, thereby sustaining the market for textbook producers.

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