

Textbooks, E-books, and the Library

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Background

For some years, the library's book budget has been steadily transferred to pay for electronic journal subscriptions and is now at its lowest level in 15 years (before the upcoming budget cuts!). Most recently, much of that book budget is going to e-books, including some "textbooks," in a "demand driven" system on Electronic Book Library. Here are some points to consider when thinking about the future of the library's e-book collections, especially Electronic Book Library (EBL is our main aggregator of e-books), how e-books relate to the cost of student textbooks, and how your choices are influencing decisions and ultimately the kind of library UAF will have long-term.

E-books are great!

- The Electronic Book Library program operates on a pay-per-use basis, with the first 4 uses of a book costing 10, 20, 30, or 50% of the full price of the book, depending on the publisher fees. Why does this model make sense? Because **most books are used once, and never again**. Paying a percent of the full price saves the university money over buying books outright. A few books are used a lot: "Applied linear regression" was used 154 times in 2014, the "New history of anthropology" was used 84 times. But most books are used only once. In this system, we never pay for something that gathers dust.

Transfer of textbook costs from student to library

- The library cannot afford to buy textbooks for students and has never been able to do so, while also continuing its function as a library. Faculty need to consider whether they want a library, which has a collection with more lasting value for the future, or just a textbook service; **current funding does not allow both**. Most universities do not provide textbooks for their students; that is an expected cost of going to college. Example: Total cost, if the library were to purchase a single required textbook for each UAF class in AY12-13, the bill would come to more than \$266,000. (source: UAF Bookstore, 2/2013). For AY13-14, more than \$300,000. That's not a textbook for each student; that is one textbook per course. E-books are not cheaper, not at all; we would pay the same list price whether e or print.
- The EBL system has quite a few books in the collection that are being used as class textbooks. This is great! Students don't have to pay, access is convenient. But they are not "free;" **the library is paying the cost with the book budget**. The total library book budget for the last several academic years: **\$150,000**. That includes all print and electronic books, whether textbooks or other books. The more people use e-books, the less money the library has for print. The more the e-book program is used as a substitute for textbooks, the fewer print or e-books the library will purchase for the permanent collection.

Due to rising costs (but not rising budgets):

- In December 2015, the library had almost 500,000 EBL titles in the Library Catalog, accessible to patrons. In January 2015, the library had 225,173 EBL books in the Library Catalog. To reduce on-going use costs and meet budget for FY15, the options were either to reduce the availability of e-books, or turn off the program entirely. Because...

- E-books can have sudden cost increases. In August, 2014, many publishers raised their e-book prices substantially - 20-50% for each single use. No notice was provided to the library. Our estimated monthly budget for the e-book program was less than half what was needed to pay the bills. The library removed certain publishers due to high costs. This could happen again.

Conclusion:

- **Tell us what you're using!** The library could save quite a bit of money - 20-50% per book! - if faculty who want to use an e-book for a class would send the title(s) needed in advance of the course! It may make it more supportable in the short term.
- **Collection gaps.** Because of the huge use of EBL for textbooks, the library is now purchasing very few printed books; our collection will reflect that substantial gap in the future, from 2010-on. When you look at library shelves and wonder where the new books are, remember this discussion.
- Open access textbooks and course materials may be the long-term solution, that helps libraries maintain better research collections, and students have lower education costs. Many UAF faculty are already using open access textbooks, or creating their own. Consider this option if you have the desire to save students some money (in light of tuition hikes or other student expenses).
- Using library funded e-books as textbooks ultimately shifts the cost to the institution and is unsustainable. We're glad you like the format and program. We're glad students have a better alternative. But if you like it too much, we can't afford it under current budgets. Consider alternatives for your course.