

Supporting an Inclusive and Equitable Classroom: Student Perspectives on a Textbook Affordability Initiative

Julie A. Murphy, Rachel E. Scott, Anne Shelley,
Mallory Jallas, and Rachel Park

abstract: As academic librarians become aware of the challenges textbook expenses pose to student success, they have increased efforts to provide free access to required course materials. Librarians at Illinois State University initiated a program to license course-assigned e-books, surveying participating students and faculty regarding their perspectives on textbook affordability and their experiences with the provided e-books. Student responses were overwhelmingly positive, and they identified several ways the e-books enhanced their experience in the course. The findings suggest that library-provided course materials contribute to students' engagement as learners and their academic success within courses.

Introduction

Adequate finances are critical to students' academic engagement and success.¹ Academic librarians are increasingly aware of financial insecurity as an obstacle to student success, and many are engaged in removing or mitigating these obstacles. At Illinois State University (ISU), recent strategic initiatives explicitly and holistically support student success. A variety of employment positions, university services, and spaces have recently been created to support student success, including the new position of student success librarian, which was filled in July 2020. In Fall 2020, a group of librarians—including the student success librarian—at ISU began meeting regularly to discuss what support Milner Library could provide to students with respect

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to the growing problem of textbook affordability. Librarians have addressed the issue of costly textbooks in a variety of ways, including funding Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives, facilitating textbook swapping, purchasing assigned materials, offering electronic and physical course reserves, and publishing assigned materials, among other

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options. The authors —librarians representing five departments at Milner Library— took stock of local needs and resources before developing a plan to address textbook affordability at ISU.

The scholarly communication librarian initially secured \$10,000 to promote and fund OER creation and adoption, but when administrative issues precluded that course of action, the group received permission to use these funds to license electronic books (e-books) that were required course materials. In spring

2021, the authors initiated a pilot program to license texts assigned in ISU courses as e-books. The librarians then conducted focus groups and surveyed the participating students and faculty regarding their perspectives on textbook affordability and their experiences with the provided texts. Student participants reported overwhelmingly positive experiences while having free access to these materials. Students highlighted several ways in which access to assigned course materials is an equity issue that has profound implications for who is positioned to thrive from the outset of college and who will struggle to catch up.

The 2019 report *Open and Equitable Scholarly Communications: Creating a More Inclusive Future* calls for progress in the “development of strategies that promote not only openness but also inclusion and equity. Such strategies include, for example, leveraging libraries’ purchasing power to provide broad access to online materials.”² This project reflects librarians’ work to use available funds and leverage existing workflows to provide access to e-books that are assigned in courses, with the goal of promoting a more inclusive, equitable, and engaging classroom experience. The authors have published articles offering faculty perspectives on textbook assignment and affordability and the value of course-assigned e-books from a collections perspective.³ By shifting their focus to students, the authors consider how free access to assigned texts creates a more inclusive and participatory learning environment. The authors explore three research questions:

1. How did students perceive the experience of having access to and using library-licensed e-books?
2. How did having e-books provided change students’ impressions of Milner Library?
3. How did having e-books provided impact students’ academic success?



Literature Review

Librarians have long been part of conversations about textbook affordability and have performed a variety of related roles. Most notably, perhaps, librarians have demonstrated that library course reserves—whether print or digital— make textbooks more accessible to students.⁴ In addition, librarians have partnered with teaching faculty to facilitate OER programs at their institutions.⁵ There has also been an acknowledgment, however, that because the instructor of record selects assigned texts, librarians might be better served by focusing on affordability initiatives or attempting to support both OER and affordability.⁶ Much of the library literature on textbook affordability has focused on the potential savings to students.⁷ Only a few librarian-led studies have investigated student perspectives beyond cost savings; the study at hand aims to enrich and expand this literature.⁸

A growing body of literature details student perspectives on zero-cost textbooks. Periodic surveys conducted by the Florida Virtual Campus offer over 20,000 student responses to questions about the amount of money spent on textbooks and course materials, the frequency with which students buy “unused” textbooks, how the cost of textbooks affects students, and what materials students find most beneficial to their learning.⁹ Early studies documented student perceptions about the quality of OER and the impact on their learning.¹⁰ Teaching faculty have authored studies that focus on the integration of cost-free materials into their courses and the resultant implications for course design and delivery.¹¹ Quantitative studies explicitly explore the impact of OER and zero-cost texts on student success metrics.¹²

Obstacles surrounding textbook affordability parallel existing inequities in higher education. One study of textbook affordability as a social justice issue notes that “barriers were even more significant among historically underserved college students; thus, confirming textbook affordability as a redistributive justice issue, and positing OER as a potential avenue for realizing a more socially just college experience.”¹³ Lucinda Rush Wittkower and Leo S. Lo further demonstrate that student demographics, work-study status, and hours worked per week shape perspectives on the cost of course materials. “When asked how they usually pay for their course materials each semester, the most selected answer (61 percent) was students using money earned from a work-study or outside job. It is, therefore, likely that students who have to work and have to use their work earnings on course materials would be more sensitive to the cost than those who do not work.”¹⁴

Wittkower and Lo’s findings echo results from a student survey conducted at ISU in spring 2019.¹⁵ That survey sought to determine the extent to which textbook costs are a problem for ISU students. The results indicated that 89 percent of students delayed purchasing a textbook or another course material due to cost, and that rate was 8 percent higher for students of color, as compared to white students. Availability of student funds for the purchase of assigned materials also showed racial disparities, with 43 percent of Black students using work money to purchase assigned materials, compared to 34 percent of white students. The 2019 ISU student survey data provided evidence that the cost of textbooks was a hardship to many students, a barrier that compounded existing inequities. This study documents how a specific intervention—licensing assigned texts as e-books—impacted student learners at ISU and addressed the inequity presented by costly course materials.



Method

Institution

ISU is a public university in the Midwestern United States with a Carnegie classification of Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity.¹⁶ The fall 2020 total enrollment was 20,770, of which 15 percent identified as first-generation college students and 6 percent registered as students with disabilities. The authors first met in August 2020 to discuss how to address textbook affordability from their respective positions in Milner Library. They received permission from the dean to use \$10,000 funding to license texts assigned in the spring 2021 semester as e-books. The collection assessment librarian identified eligible courses based on the availability of institutional licenses with unlimited simultaneous users and a high ratio of potential student savings relative to the licensing cost.

The Institutional Review Board at ISU reviewed the study, including all survey and focus group instruments, and determined it to be exempt. Instructors of record from fifty-two course sections elected to participate in the study. The details of calculating the cost-benefit ratio, identifying and licensing e-books, and faculty perspectives on assigning texts and textbook affordability are provided in separate publications.¹⁷ The results and analysis of student focus groups are also not included here. This paper focuses exclusively on the analysis of student responses to a survey (see Appendix A). Respondents participated voluntarily, but they knew that librarians were conducting the research and may have answered questions more positively out of a sense of politeness or gratitude for having received cost-free texts. The authors employed ATLAS.ti, an OpenAI-driven qualitative data analysis tool, to analyze free-response questions to identify themes and count the prevalence of statements that aligned with these themes.

Participant Demographics

The authors encouraged faculty to invite students in participating spring 2021 courses to complete a survey about their experiences with textbook affordability, the provided e-books, and Milner Library. The response rate was 20 percent, and respondents included students from sixty-one majors across twenty-eight of ISU's forty-one academic departments. Eighty-nine percent reported that the course was required for their degree. The spring 2021 enrollment of 19,218 was distributed across the University's colleges as shown in Figure 1. Figure 2 shows the class standing of participants relative to the overall enrollment. These figures clearly demonstrate over-representation of students from the College of Education and Mennonite College of Nursing, as well as juniors, which can be explained by the availability of institutional e-book licenses for courses in those colleges and at that level. Participants who identified as Black or African American (4 percent, compared to 9 percent of university enrollment) or Hispanic (5 percent, compared to 11 percent of university enrollment) were underrepresented in this study and those who identify as female were disproportionately represented in this study—almost 72 percent, compared to 58 percent University-wide. The disproportional representation of participants identifying as white, female, and undergraduate juniors is especially important to acknowledge due to the focus on inclusion and equity.

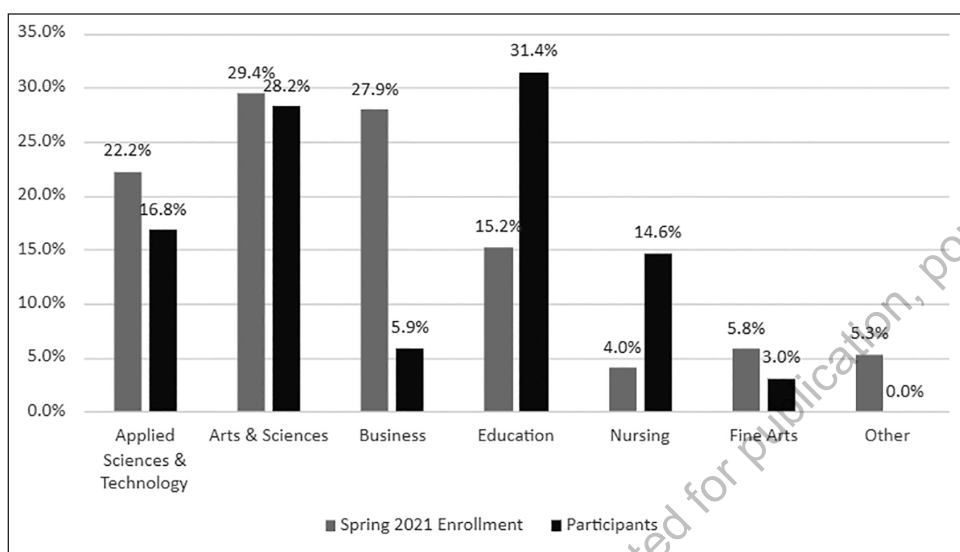


Figure 1. Study participants by college and total enrollment by college, where $n = 404$ and enrollment equals 19,218.

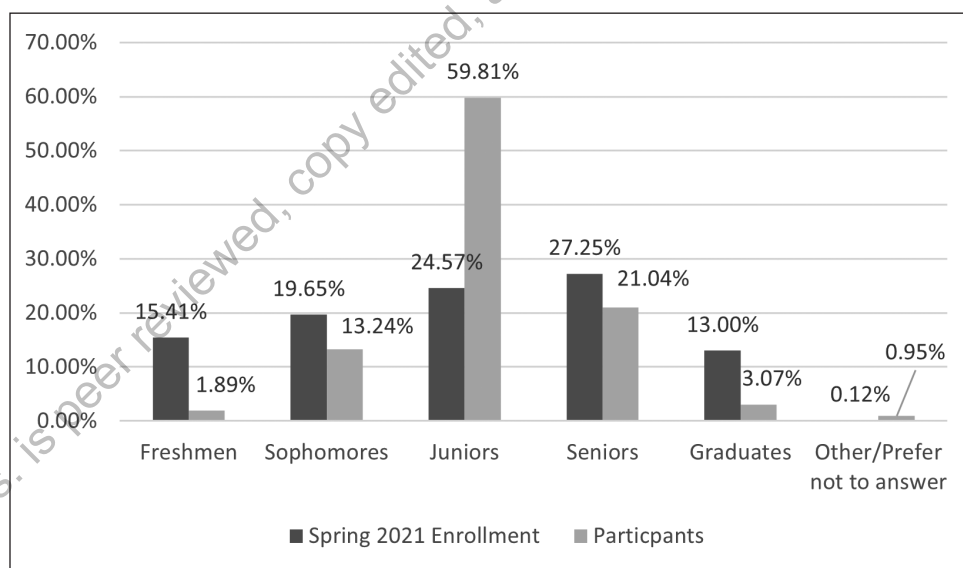


Figure 2. Study participants by class standing and total enrollment by class standing, where $n = 423$ and enrollment equals 19,218.

Results

Student Perceptions of Experience with E-book Access

The study’s first research question investigated how students perceived having access to and using library-licensed e-books. To contextualize students’ experiences with the library-provided e-books, the authors posed several questions about students’ typical encounters with course-assigned materials more broadly. Of 426 responses to the question of what percentage of their textbooks students typically purchase, the average was 71.5 percent with a minimum value of zero, a maximum of 100 percent, and a standard deviation of 27.18. Both a Kolmogorov-Smirnov and a Shapiro-Wilk test of normality returned p-values of < .001, which combined with the histogram (see Figure 3), strongly suggest a non-normal distribution.

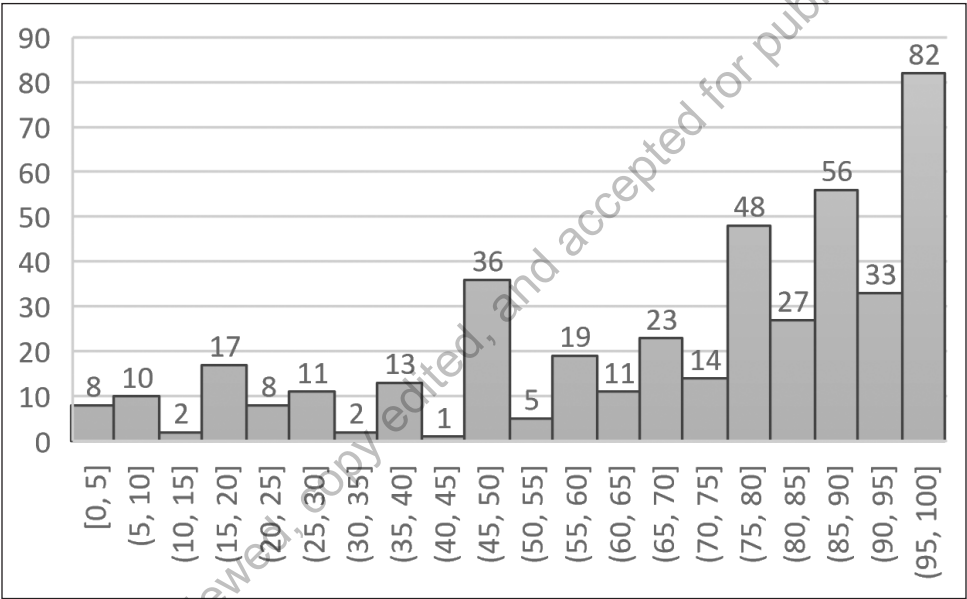


Figure 3. Histogram showing the percentage of required textbooks that student participants reported purchasing, where x equals percentage of textbooks acquired and y equals number of participants.

Because the data is non-normal and the distributions by gender are not the same shape, a Kruskal-Wallis H Test was employed to compare the mean ranks of each gender. The Kruskal-Wallis H test (see Figure 4) shows a statistically significant difference in the percentage of textbooks purchased between the different genders, $\chi^2(3) = 27.116$, and $p < .001$, with mean rank scores for participants who identify as female (75.13), male (62.64), and nonbinary (61.6).

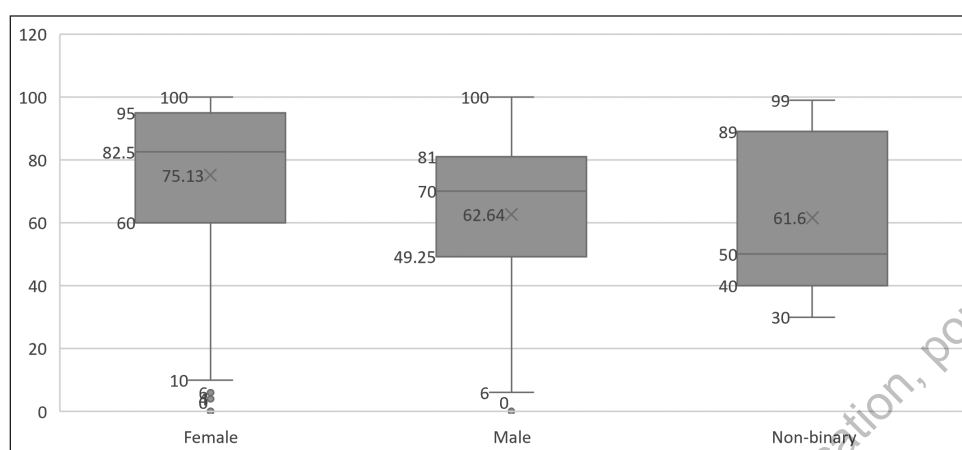


Figure 4. Box plot showing the percentage of required textbooks that student participants reported purchasing, sorted by participant gender.

Students reported multiple approaches and considerations when deciding if, when, and how to acquire assigned texts. To the question of “if,” 126 students reported that they always buy required texts, 40 always buy all books, 37 buy the book if it is required for completing assigned work or assessments, three buy if an access code is necessary, three never buy textbooks, and one buys used texts and returns them afterward. Participants reported making a variety of considerations before acquiring materials, including their professor’s recommendation, how frequently the book appears on the syllabus, previous students’ reported experiences, RateMyProfessor testimonies, free online availability of textbooks, and textbook price.

Other reported considerations included whether the textbook purchase can be delayed until the point in the semester when the book is needed, whether the books will be useful for future classes or careers, buying books only for classes in their major, and how difficult or important the course is.

How texts are acquired varies as well; participants reported renting some or all books, checking the library for their textbooks, trying to find their texts for free online, borrowing or sharing books with friends or classmates, and preferring e-books if they are cheaper than print. Searching for the best price is a time-consuming and taxing venture. In response to a question about having access to a free e-book, one participant noted, “Without the stress of running around to find a textbook at a reasonable price, I was

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able to dive into the course and semester right away with no hesitation. It has allowed me to prepare and do well in all tests and other assignments thus far.”

Participants overwhelmingly appreciated the library-provided e-books because they were free (81 percent), easy to use (61 percent), and allowed keyword searches (49 percent). Participants also noted they could save and/or annotate the e-books (28 percent) and find related materials in the library databases (28 percent). Those who selected “other” noted they could access the e-book from anywhere, it gave them a smoother start to the class, and it reduced anxiety and stress. Participants less frequently identified challenges in using the e-books. The survey did not include an option for no challenges, which led to only 366 students responding to this question, thus artificially inflating the percentages of the challenges reported. Ten percent used the “other” option to indicate that they had had no problems at all. Those who responded reported difficulties with use (40 percent), downloading or annotation (27 percent), and access (17 percent).

Over half of the participants mentioned that the most positive aspect of the provided e-books was the convenience of access. A representative comment was “I like the convenience of them because I can search keywords to try and get to that section. They are also very easy to use and give me what is necessary.” Almost half of the participants mentioned the financial benefit and several comments drew a relationship between finances and stress. At least five participants specifically noted that having the text provided meant they did not have to work additional hours. One student stated, “It allowed me to focus more on course material instead of picking up extra hours at work to replace the lost income.”

Several comments had to do with how students engaged with the material or the way they learned. Having free access to the e-books enabled participants to:

- gain a better understanding of material or learning, complete assigned work,
- study more effectively,
- complete assigned work,
- do better on assigned work and assessments,
- read and use the book more,
- follow along or keep on top of the class better,
- feel more prepared, participate from “day one” (first day of class),
- improve their organization,
- increase their engagement with the course, and
- enhance their work ethic.

Representative comments include “It was easy to use an e-book during an online class because I was able to search for anything I needed,” and “It made me more successful in my course. I am also able to copy and paste notes directly onto my study guide from the book, saving time.”

Another theme that emerged was the features and function of e-books: they are easy to use, have useful search tools, helped students answer questions or easily find information, are valuable resources, include helpful tools such as annotation or highlighting, and make taking notes easier. A final group of responses had to do with affective or personal elements. E-books are lightweight and easy to transport, facilitate improved focus on school work and increased motivation, enable a better start to the semester and



foster a better outlook on of the class, are available to all and create a more equitable experience, and they offer time savings. Like faculty participants, several students suggested that having access to the e-books meant there was “no excuse not to” do reading or work.¹⁸ The perceived negatives were minimal; a few students mentioned screen fatigue or difficulty navigating e-books, and one mentioned technical lag while using the e-book.

When the quantitative and qualitative results are considered together, several noteworthy findings surface. Normalized gender data analysis shows that those who identify as female were almost three times as likely to indicate they did more reading, used the e-book more, or were more likely to use it. Only female participants reported sharing textbooks with friends to save money, having a better outlook on the class due to the e-book, struggling in a course where they had not bought the textbook, or not having an excuse to do the assigned classwork as a result of having access to the e-book. Female participants were almost twice as likely to say they always buy all of the books on their list and more than twice as likely to report that it had been harder or impossible to complete assigned work without access to the assigned text. Finally, female participants were twice as likely to report having rented textbooks, twice as likely to have checked with other students or RateMyProfessor to find out how important having the required textbook was, and five times as likely to report buying books they expect to be useful in their future courses or careers.

Meanwhile, those who identify as male were 1.5 times as likely to report having had difficulty following along in a course for which they had not bought the textbook, nearly twice as likely to report only buying books that are required for completing assignments or assessments, and twice as likely to report searching online for free textbooks. Male participants were also five times as likely to report focusing more on coursework with e-book access and twice as likely to say that the provided e-book was a useful resource.

E-books and Student Impressions of the Library

The second question the authors explored examined how student impressions of the library might have changed as a result of their access to free e-books. A vast majority (85 percent) of participants reported having previously used both print and electronic resources at Milner Library. The authors conducted a chi-square test of independence between previous use of electronic resources and self-identified gender. Figure 5 shows a statistically significant association between prior use of electronic resources and gender, $\chi^2(6) = 21.306$, and $p = .002$.

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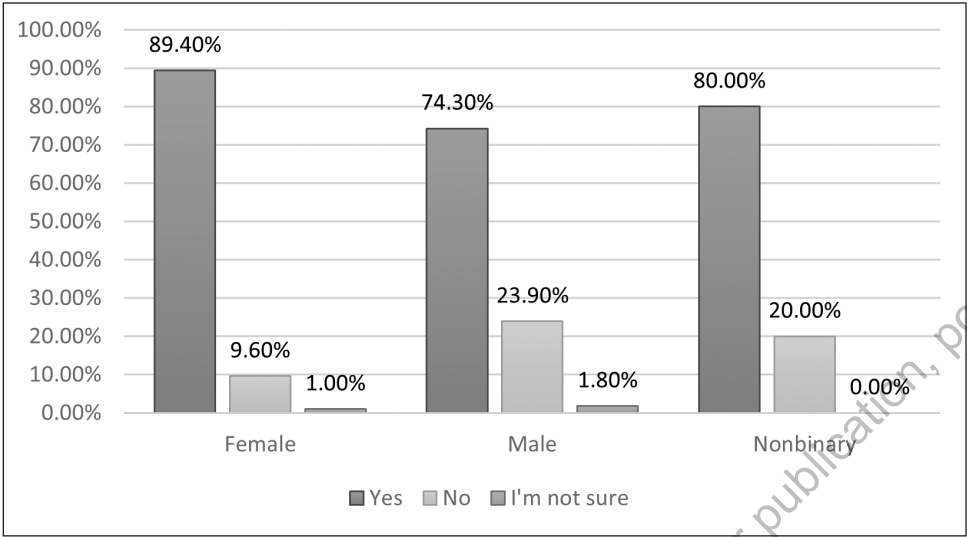


Figure 5. Study participants' reported previous use of the library, sorted by participant gender, where y equals the percentage of responses.

Questions also assessed how well Milner Library met student resource needs prior to this study. Of the 417 respondents, most indicated that Milner typically has what they need (65 percent). About a third indicated the library sometimes has what they need (34 percent), and only one percent indicated the library never has what they need. These perspectives varied by self-identified race. Figure 6 presents a chi-square test of independence between students' previous opinions of resources and race, which shows a statistically significant association, $\chi^2(10) = 24.741$, and $p = .006$.

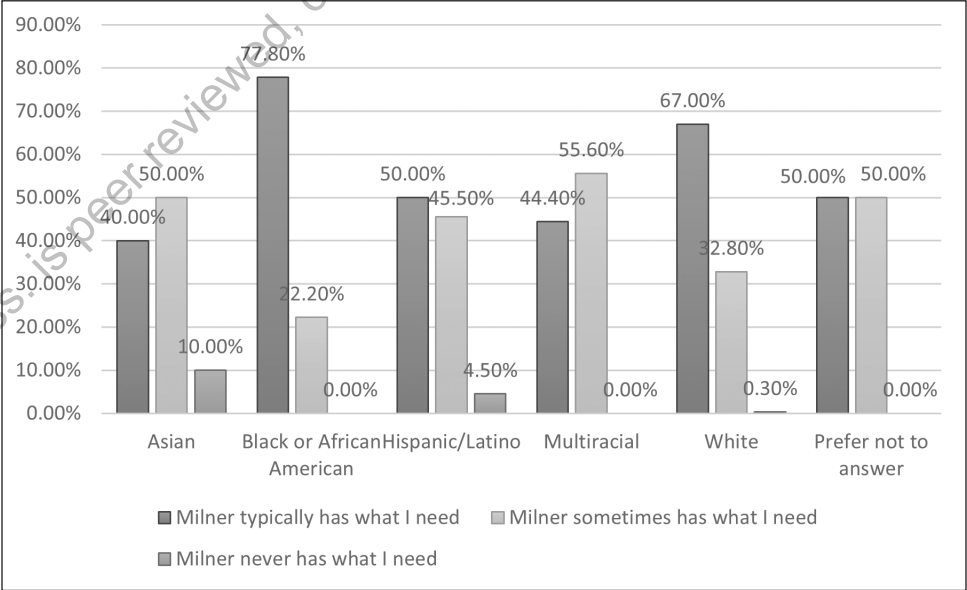


Figure 6. Participant responses to how well the library met their resource needs prior to the e-book pilot, sorted by self-reported race, where y equals the percentage of responses.

Students also reflected on how their opinions of Milner Library had changed after using a library-supplied e-book. Sixty-eight percent reported a positive change and 32 percent reported no change. Figure 7 presents the results of a chi-square test of independence between change of opinion and race. There was a statistically significant association between change of opinion and race, $\chi^2(10) = 68.371$, and $p < .001$.

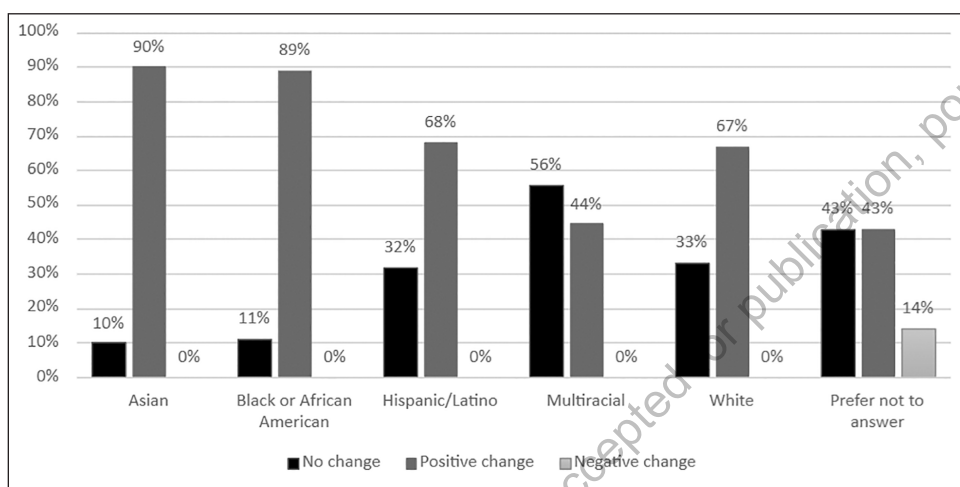


Figure 7. Chart reflecting reported changes in opinion of the library, sorted by self-reported race, where y equals the percentage of responses.

Students indicated their preference given two equally desirable course sections, one using a digital textbook and the other a traditional textbook. Fifty-five percent indicated they would enroll in the digital textbook section, 27 percent had no preference, and 18 percent preferred the course with a traditional textbook. Almost all participants indicated they would be very likely (62 percent) or somewhat likely (34 percent) to register for a future course that used a library-provided e-book. A chi-square test of independence was conducted between future course choice and race. Figure 8 shows a statistically significant association between future course choice and race, $\chi^2(10) = 18.975$, and $p = .041$. Participants who identified as non-white were significantly more likely to indicate they would select a course that offered a free e-book than participants who identified as white.

E-books and Academic Success

The third and final research question for this study focused on whether free access to course e-books impacted student success. Students shared their expected grade for the course in which e-books were provided. The average response was 90 percent with a minimum value of 50 percent, a maximum of 100 percent, and a standard deviation of 6.867. Both a Kolmogorov-Smirnov and a Shapiro-Wilk test of normality returned p-values of $< .001$, which, combined with the histogram (see Figure 9), strongly suggest a non-normal distribution. Because the data is non-normal and the distributions by gender are not the same shape, the Kruskal-Wallis H Test was used to compare the mean ranks

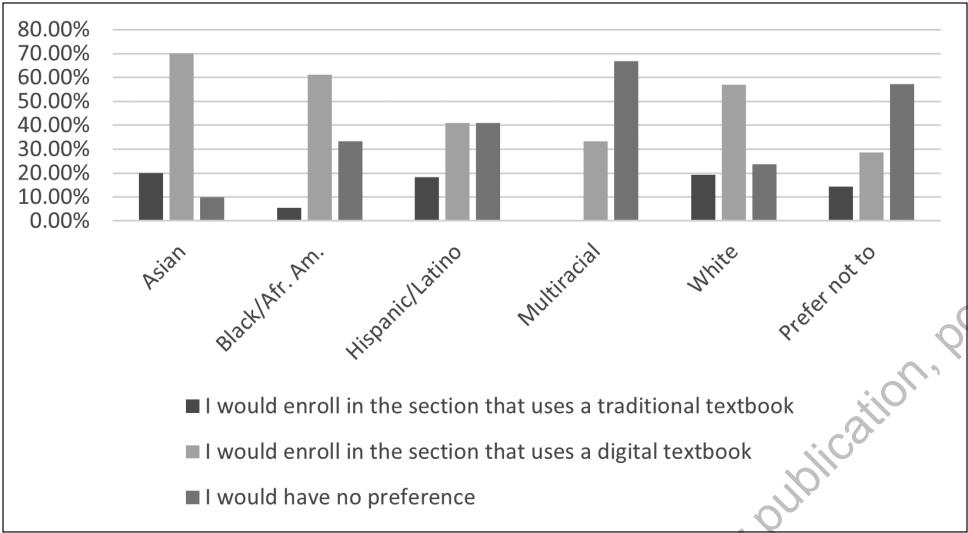


Figure 8. Participant responses to whether they would select a course offering free e-textbooks in the future, sorted by self-reported race where y equals the percentage of responses.

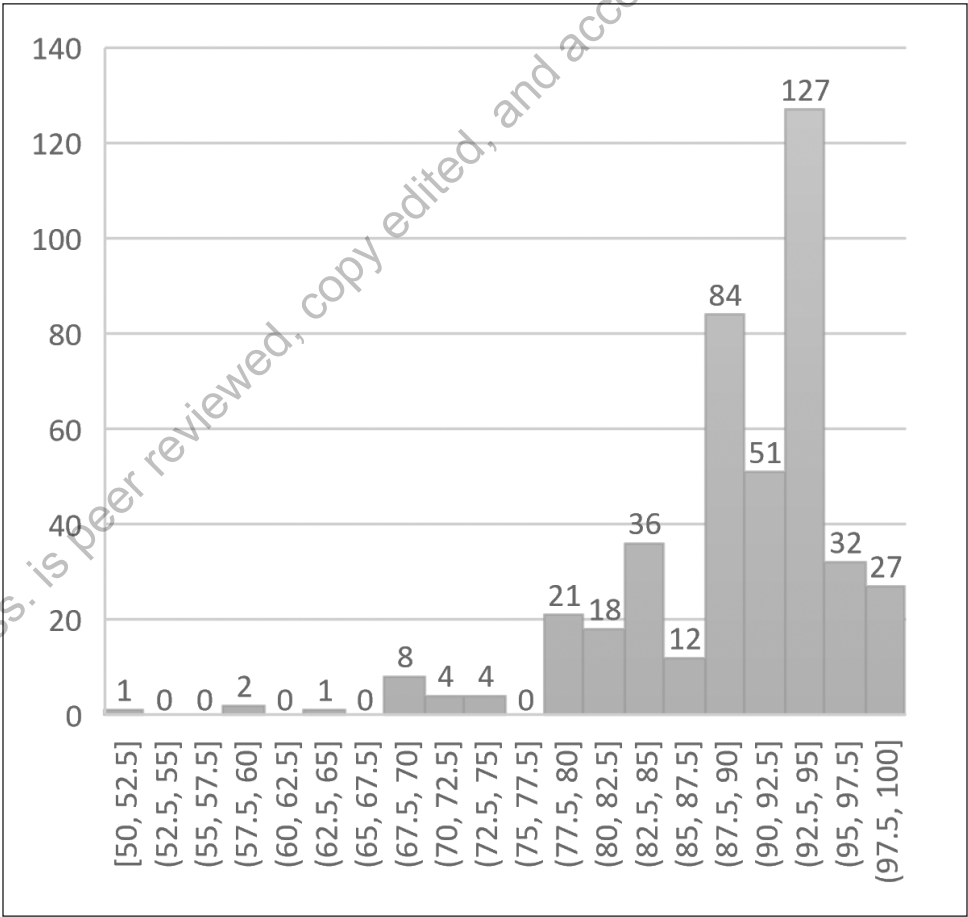


Figure 9. Histogram showing the grades participants expected to receive in their course, where x equals grade range and y equals number of students.

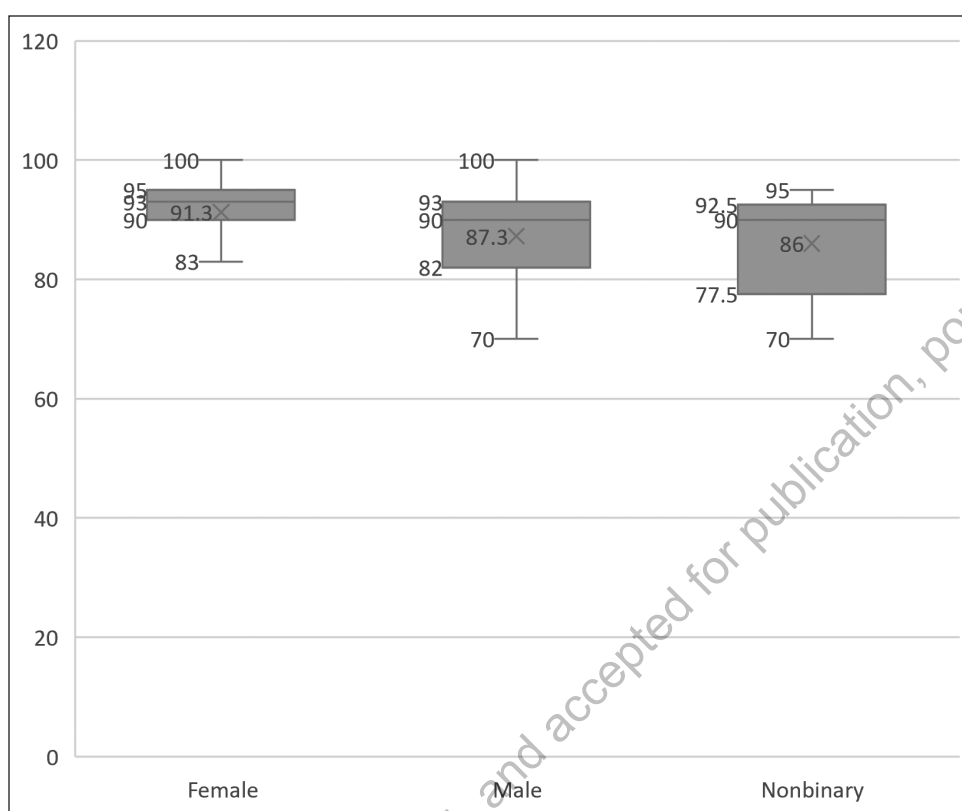


Figure 10. Box plot showing students' anticipated grades, sorted by participant gender.

of each gender. The Kruskal-Wallis H test showed a statistically significant difference in the self-reported expected grade between the different genders, $\chi^2(3) = 35.390$, and $p < .001$, with a mean rank score of 91.25 for those who identify as female, 87.27 for those who identify as male, and 86.00 for those who identify as nonbinary (see Figure 10).

To contextualize how having textbooks provided at no cost might impact academic success, the authors asked questions related to students' previous experiences taking classes without access to an assigned text. One student summed up their experience by offering, "In the cases where I'm unable to purchase the required texts, it leaves me playing catch up and attempting to understand what the main themes of each chapter / book are by the class discussions. It's not the best outcome, but it's the best I could do when it comes to super expensive textbooks." The sentiment of attempting to catch up and keep up but struggling to do so was common.

Of the students who reported having taken a class without buying the textbook, about half noted it had affected them negatively in some way. Adverse effects included struggling to follow along or keep up with the class, difficulties navigating the class, challenges completing assigned work, and feeling less prepared. A smaller group reported receiving lower assessment scores or a lower overall grade. Still others experienced confusion, felt additional stress, or had lower confidence. One student reported having dropped the course and another described having to work more hours to buy the textbook partway through. Analysis reveals gendered elements to this experience, with 53 percent



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of female-identifying respondents reporting a negative experience trying to take a class without a textbook compared to only 40 percent of male identifying respondents.

When reflecting on the spring 2021 pilot program, almost 90 percent of participants expressed positive sentiments in response to the question of how having the library-provided e-books impacted student success in the course. No respondents indicated that the e-text had negatively affected their success. Of the seven percent who expressed a neutral sentiment, some indi-

cated that the book was not necessary or that they chose not to use it; some responded that they rarely used the book; a few said they had already purchased the print book before finding out an e-book was available; and one each indicated they had difficulty navigating e-books, experienced screen fatigue, chose to buy the book, prefer print, or would have bought the book anyway.

Of those who expressed a positive sentiment, over one-third noted accessibility. Other benefits included:

- cost savings,
- a better understanding of the material,
- ease of use,
- reduction of stress,
- searchability, and
- ease of completing assigned work

In addition, the e-books made studying easier, helped students answer questions or find information more easily, lightened student backpacks, saved students time, and helped them do better on assessments. Students reported that they did more reading, were more likely to use the book, and felt more prepared for class. Students appreciated the annotation and highlighting features of the e-books and felt that it was easier to follow along. Students felt that they were more focused on school work, more organized, and that having the assigned text available on day one was necessary to succeed in the class. Many participants noted that they prefer e-books, and that they did not have to work to pay for the books. Finally, some noted that they had more motivation, a better opinion of the class, and that the e-books created an equitable situation. Students offered strong endorsements of the project's support for equity: "Having this text free to use has been an enriching and fulfilling experience. Eliminating payment walls is a massive stride toward an anti-racist movement and bridging the academic gap." Several responses cited factors to describe the impact of the project. For example, one student wrote, "Honestly, when I have to drop a few 100 on textbooks for a class, I walk in bitter. I'm already upset with the class. I don't want to do anything. Tuition is expensive and I don't like paying for unnecessary paper out of pocket. So, having a more positive view towards the class helped my motivation. Plus, financial stress makes it difficult to focus, so that was gotten rid of."

The survey asked whether students believe that access to the library-provided e-books impacted their grade in this course, and why. Of the 421 participants who answered, eight expressed no opinion or uncertainty; 111 responses were neutral, indicating that e-book access had little or no influence on their grade; and 302 were positive, indicating e-book access had positively influenced their grade. No responses indicated that the e-book had negatively affected student grades. Of the neutral responses, some stated the book was not necessary to succeed in the class, some shared that they rarely or did not use the e-book, a few indicated the student had already acquired the print book before finding out the e-book was provided or chose to purchase the print version or prefer print generally. Such responses underlined that stable access to assigned materials is essential to academic success: "Well I need the book in general to learn the content and succeed. It's the added benefit of not having to pay for another book when we have enough to pay for to attend college in the first place. I think it also really impacts the students who can't afford to purchase the books because how can they be successful without the book."

Discussion

Students overwhelmingly indicated that the ease of access to provided e-books was beneficial. Having an assigned text that can be accessed for free from any device seemed to provide peace of mind. This suggestion is bolstered by the considerable number of students who indicated that the pilot reduced the anxiety they typically feel related to acquiring or sourcing texts. The financial benefit that many students mentioned reiterates that finding the money to purchase assigned texts is a hardship for many students. For some students, purchasing texts means working more hours—several participants said this explicitly—which are then unavailable for studying and other forms of engagement that support student success. Because students felt the provided e-books saved them time, they were able to invest that time in more meaningful activities.

Students overwhelmingly indicated that the ease of access to provided e-books was beneficial. Having an assigned text that can be accessed for free from any device seemed to provide peace of mind.

Some students noted they did more reading and used the e-book more because it was provided, and several felt more prepared. The digital tools built into e-books—especially the capacity to search within the text and annotate or highlight important passages—also enhanced students' experiences. Students reported only minor challenges in using the provided e-books and any difficulties with use or access did not diminish the overall positive experience with the e-books.

The majority of participants—68 percent—noted a positive change in their perception of Milner Library after participating in this pilot project and using library-provided e-books. This illustrates that licensing even one of multiple assigned texts in a semester holds the opportunity to improve students' impressions of the academic library. Their experience using library-provided e-books exposed students to other library resources as well; some students indicated that they discovered other useful resources when accessing their assigned text through the library's databases. The degree to which students



perceive the library to be useful has implications for their academic success and sense of belonging at the university. By investing a relatively small amount of its budget in licensing assigned texts and soliciting student input, Milner Library conveyed that librarians

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are eager to be part of a solution to an issue that is the source of anxiety for many students.

Although faculty members and students who participated in this pilot received the library-provided e-books with enthusiasm, faculty members were not convinced that increased student success could be attributed to the provided e-books.¹⁹ Student participants in this study, however, did make this connection; 372 of 414 students expressed positive sentiments about the role of the provided e-text

in their academic success. This aligns with findings that report slight improvements to learning after adopting affordable materials.²⁰ The articulated reasons for positive sentiment provide insight into how having the text provided enhanced student success.

Many students felt they gained a better understanding of the material or learned more, that the e-book made completing assignments and studying easier, and that it assisted in answering questions or finding information. The provided e-books, then, were useful and engaging tools the students had at their disposal and which facilitated their participation within the learning environment of their courses.

Some of the students' positive sentiments may seem trivial, such as not needing to carry heavy books; or hard to prove, such as attributing to the e-book a better opinion of the class. The interactions of several factors—material and emotional—shape learning and engagement. Students noted a variety of concrete ways in which the e-books helped students, from having access on day one of classes, to being able to take better notes and stay organized. In addition, students were able to engage in coursework more equitably and with less anxiety. The results indicate that students were able to focus on learning, which is what they enrolled in college to do.

Conclusion

This paper reports data from a survey conducted with 423 undergraduate student participants in a library pilot project to license e-book copies of required course textbooks. The findings suggest that providing assigned materials as e-books not only addresses equity issues in the classroom but also contributes to students' engagement as learners and their academic success within courses. The research contributes to the literature by exploring connections between textbook affordability and student success, amplifying student perspectives on textbook affordability, and outlining one example of a library strategy that directly benefits student learning and engagement.

Collecting this information from students has informed the authors' next steps. The authors are in the midst of their fifth consecutive semester of the project and have revised workflows in accordance with changes in funding sources and amounts as well as personnel within and outside the library.²¹ The student responses from this pilot aligned

with studies conducted at ISU and elsewhere but collecting the data has been essential to conveying the value of textbook affordability initiatives to university administrators and has led to an increasing amount of funding over the project's five semesters. Collecting the data has also demonstrated that librarians throughout the library—whether in a technical services or public services unit—care deeply about the academic success of ISU students and are working within their functional roles and affordances to help alleviate the burden of costly textbooks.

Julie A. Murphy is the collection assessment librarian for the Milner Library at Illinois State University. She can be reached at jamurph@ilstu.edu.

Rachel Scott is the associate dean for information assets for the Milner Library at Illinois State University. She can be reached at rescot2@ilstu.edu.

Anne Shelley is the digital repository services librarian for the University Library at Iowa State University. She can be reached at aeshelle@iastate.edu.

Mallory Jallas is the student success librarian for the Milner Library at Illinois State University. She can be reached at mrjalla@ilstu.edu.

Rachel Park is the business and technology librarian for the Normal Public Library. She can be reached at rachel@normalpl.org.

Appendix A

Student Survey Instrument

Had you previously used Milner Library resources (e-books/articles/books/etc.)?

What did you like about using library e-book(s)? (Choose all that apply)

– Other, please explain:

What challenges did you encounter in using the e-book(s)? (Choose all that apply)

– Other, please explain:

What percentage of your assigned textbooks do you typically purchase?

How do you decide which assigned texts to purchase?

How has not purchasing the required text(s) impacted your success in a course?

How did having this(these) e-book(s) provided for you impact your success in this course?

What grade do you expect to receive in this course?

Do you believe that access to the e-book(s) has impacted your grade in this course?

Why or why not?



If you had previously used Milner Library resources, what was your general opinion on their availability?

Now that you've used a Milner Library e-book for your class, how has this opinion changed?

How likely are you to register for a future course that uses a library-provided online textbook like the one used in this course?

Imagine a future course you are required to take. If two different sections of this course are offered by the same instructor during equally desirable time slots, but one section uses digital textbooks and the other uses traditional published textbooks, which section would you prefer to enroll in?

What is your major (if multiple, list both)?

What year are you?

Other: - Text

Do you identify as (choose all that apply):

What gender do you identify as?

Please enter the course number(s) for the class(es) in which you have a library-provided e-book (for example, AGR 203, BUS 100, COM 101).

Is this a required course for your degree?

Is this course in your major program?

Approximately how much did you spend on other textbooks for this course?

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