

The Bottom Line: DDA, E-Textbooks, and Student Savings at LSU Libraries

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Deposited 02/28/2024

This is a book chapter published by American Library Association in the book *Affordable Course Materials: Electronic Textbooks and Open Educational Resources for Louisiana Libraries* published in 2017. The book is available at: <https://alastore.ala.org/content/affordable-course-materials-electronic-textbooks-and-open-educational-resources>

Citation of published version:

Daugherty, A.L., and Frank, E. (2017). "The Bottom Line: DDA, E-Textbooks, and Student Savings at LSU Libraries." In Chris Diaz (Ed.) *Affordable Course Materials: Electronic Textbooks and Open Educational Resources*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions. <https://alastore.ala.org/content/affordable-course-materials-electronic-textbooks-and-open-educational-resources>

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Keywords: Academic Libraries, Demand Driven Acquisition, Collection Development, E-books, E-textbooks

Introduction

Collection development has passed through various trend cycles in academic libraries with the demand driven acquisition (DDA) model being one currently experiencing widespread acceptance and adoption. Also known as patron driven acquisition, this acquisition strategy moves the purchasing impetus from being "just-in-case"—a model attempting to anticipate user needs, to a "just-in-time"—a point-of-need model. Librarians face the challenge of developing a collection that supports learning, teaching, and research needs, now and in the future, all with limited funds. DDA plans are intended to help address this challenge by being more responsive to immediate needs than traditional acquisition models.

Yet, librarians at Louisiana State University (LSU) Libraries recently ended all DDA plans in an attempt to more adequately meet user needs and support learning, teaching, and research. The focus of collection development shifted to large e-book collections. These met user preferences for titles without restrictions on printing and saving and provided simultaneous access for an unlimited number of users. Given these features, their potential for course use was examined. Through the subsequent process, course adopted titles were identified and promoted as a library-funded alternative to the traditional student-purchased textbooks. This chapter details how the decision to terminate DDA plans and invest in e-book packages resulted in large upfront costs but enabled advantages in key areas of usability and curricular integration. Collecting and promoting high quality course titles has allowed the Libraries to drive e-book usage and engage in impactful collection development.

Background

With ever tightening financial constraints in recent years, the need for new, more efficient ways to purchase books became apparent. The enormous growth of e-book publications has allowed for new business models to develop and enabled purchasing at the point of need through DDA, as opposed to purchasing in advance of projected need via the approval plan model. DDA plans allow the library to build a profile of specific book collections based on factors like subject or cost and to load these MARC records into local catalog or discovery layer. Typically, there is no cost for patrons to view basic content, such as the table of contents, or during a brief preview period, usually less than 10 minutes. If a title is used beyond this or if certain actions occur, such as a title download, the patron triggers a short term loan (STLs). This STL rents the books and charges the library a percentage of the retail cost of the title. A threshold number of STLs triggers the title to be purchased at the retail cost. The user experience with DDA offers seamless access to the title whether it is for a preview, STL, or full purchase. Application of a DDA plan offers immediate benefits. With minimal local resources in terms of staffing and time, the collection can be vastly increased. Librarians are able to engage users in the collection development process and purchase titles with immediate utility.

Nonetheless, DDA plans present limitations. Patrons have long influenced selection and subject librarians work closely with faculty to receive input and recommendations. Under the DDA model, users' choices are harnessed and applied without a librarian serving as the intermediary, leaving librarians unsure of who exactly these selectors are. At LSU Libraries, given budget restrictions, understanding the profile of patron selectors was increasingly important as a way to determine if and to what degree new purchases supported the overall research needs of the campus. In addition to not clearly knowing who was making selection

decisions, these patron selectors were working to fill short-term information needs, not strategizing to develop a long-lasting collection, leaving some librarians to question the long term value of the investments.

DDA plans also pose usability challenges. The influx of records into the catalog provides the savvy researcher with a bounty of options from which to explore and select. But for other users, these additional titles can represent more noise in the search results, further encouraging them to satisfice and select from the top results. In reflecting on DDA plans, Fister commented how “[t]he recent Project Information Literacy Study clarifies something I’ve long sensed: undergraduates don’t necessarily need a bigger banquet. They need a limited number of good choices, not all-you-can-eat.”¹ Additionally, titles provided through DDA plans largely include Digital Rights Management (DRM). DRM represent the technological restrictions applied to e-books and other digital media to prevent different types of unauthorized use. With e-books, these DRM restrictions are manifested through limitations on downloading and printing, requirement of additional accounts beyond the library account to access the title for check out, and use of a proprietary e-book reader software.

Beginning in 2011, LSU Libraries explored this strategy with the vendor, Ebrary, focusing solely on e-books within the sciences. By repurposing and adapting an approval plan to the new e-DDA model, LSU Libraries was able to buy or “borrow” only books that were needed, when they were needed, without having to buy any that were not going to be used. This process was seen as a strategy to greatly reduce monographic expenditures while at the same time

¹ Barbara Fister, “Puzzled by Patron-Driven Acquisitions,” *Inside Higher Ed* (blog), November 11, 2010, https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/library_babel_fish/puzzled_by_patron_driven_acquisitions

increase the number of titles available for immediate full-text access. Nearly a year and a half later the LSU Libraries decided to launch another DDA service using EBSCO as primary aggregator. The decision to add EBSCO occurred because the LSU Libraries had begun subscribing to the EBSCO eBook Academic Collection and administratively it made more sense to consolidate and order through one vendor. After becoming more integrated into EBSCO's services, the Ebrary DDA plan was discontinued.

During that time, many of the public services staff anecdotally reported negative feedback from users regarding the e-book collection, including the vast number of titles added through DDA. Some of this was attributed to preference for print over electronic while others did not find the platforms user-friendly. Both factors can be seen in the literature on users' preferences and behaviors with e-books and e-textbooks. While some users state a preference for print books, Moore noted how libraries nonetheless see "usage statistics imply that e-books are being used at a much higher rate than their print counterparts."² Furthermore, research at the University of Ulster found that while users preferred print books, e-textbooks were the most popular type of e-book (56% of respondents) over other choices, including fiction, research monographs, and reference titles.³ Moving beyond statements of preference, the majority of user complaints at LSU Libraries revolved around usability restrictions from DRM. Folb, Wessel, and Czechowski found that users value "printing, saving, and searching" features most with e-

² Kate Moore, "Are We There Yet? Moving to an E-Only Collection Development Policy for Books." *Serials Librarian* 68, no. 1-4 (2015): 127-136, doi: 10.1080/0361526X.2015.1016836

³ Sarah Smyth and Andrew P. Carlin, "Use and Perception of Ebooks in the University of Ulster: A Case Study," *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 18, no. 2 (2012): 176-205, doi:10.1080/13614533.2012.719851

books—functions that are often restricted with DRM.⁴ Similarly, Moore reviewed how users face a range of usability concerns when using e-books including “difficulties with ease of use, general interface issues, problems with downloading to multiple devices and searching functionality, lack of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, the inability to annotate and highlight passages easily, too restrictive digital rights management (DRM).”⁵

At LSU Libraries, accessing e-book content through the larger DDA providers proved to be an onerous process. If users wanted to download material to their personal devices as opposed to reading the e-book in the native web-interface, several technical steps were required. Most titles required the additional software, Adobe Digital Editions, to be downloaded prior to download or checkout of the e-book material. Often patrons were required to login to three different systems in order to access e-books. The first login was authenticating into the LSU Libraries, the second login had to be through the vendor’s site, and the third login into Adobe Digital Editions. These types of issues, experienced by users when interacting with titles from the DDA plans, revealed major limitations. While the DDA plans allowed for a more expansive collection, most plans required DRM and represented a hoop users were unhappy if not unwilling to jump through.

Shift Away from DDA

After over three years of using DDA through EBSCO and reflecting on the benefits and limitations, the decision was made to discontinue the process. This decision coincided with the arrival of a new dean in July 2014 and his application of a critical eye to established collection

⁴ Barbara Folb, Charles B. Wessel, and Leslie J. Czechowski. "Clinical and Academic Use of Electronic and Print Books: The Health Sciences Library System E-Book Study at The University of Pittsburgh." *Journal Of The Medical Library Association* 99, no. 3 (2011): 218-228, doi: 10.3163/1536-5050.99.3.009

⁵ Moore, *Serials Librarian*, 131.

development practice. This triggered the shift away from using any DDA model and was part of a sweeping collection development shift that removed the majority of e-books with DRM from the collection. In their place, the Libraries focused on investing in large e-book collections that met 3 essential criteria: DRM-free titles that allowed for an unlimited number of simultaneous users and provided perpetual access and archival rights. These principles were identified in the *Charlotte Initiative for Permanent Acquisition of E-books by Academic Libraries* project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Scholarly Communications Program.⁶

Once the decision was made to only purchase e-book collections within this set of parameters and to forego purchases otherwise, LSU Libraries discontinued the DDA plan with EBSCO July 15th, 2014--two weeks into the new administration. All records were shadowed and removed. In their place, LSU Libraries purchased new and updated a significant number of e-book packages. These included De Gruyter Online University Press eBook Collections from Harvard University Press, Elsevier's Freedom Collection, GeoScienceWorld e-books, JSTOR e-books, UPCC Book Collections on Project Muse, Springer, and Wiley. Furthermore, titles available DRM-free for title by title purchasing were bought at the publisher level.

E-textbook Impact of the Shift

A significant outcome of this change in policy has been how it has enabled a textbook initiative. Traditionally, LSU Libraries did not intentionally collect textbooks despite a strong user demand from students for the library to provide alternatives to the traditional student-purchase model. Whereas previously the DRM and multiple simultaneous user restrictions of e-books had prevented e-books from being used effectively as course materials, the focus on large

⁶ "Charlotte Initiative," *UNC Charlotte*, last modified June 13, 2016, <http://guides.library.uncc.edu/Charlotteinitiative>.

e-books collections without DRM and associated usability roadblocks positioned the library to respond to these user demands. This led to the recognition that the e-book collection could be aligned with required course textbooks to provide students with free access to required materials.

The Libraries had been receiving a list of required textbooks from the campus bookstore in order to prevent students from interlibrary loaning course materials. Librarians informed the campus bookstore contact of the additional use to examine the bookstore list for matches with the e-book collection. This process initially occurred by visually reviewing the list for publishers included in the packages before becoming more automated using scripts to scrape and match data. Regardless of the level of sophistication, the process allows for the identification of course-adopted titles available within the e-book collections or for purchase title-by-title. Once identified and purchased, if necessary, permalinks were shared with the affected faculty that could be embedded in the learning management system, course syllabus, or emailed to students. Additionally, a student-facing webpage was created to promote all matching titles for each semester as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: LSU Libraries E-Textbooks Webpage

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Quickly, this initiative proved to be a high visibility avenue for connecting users with e-book collections. Since textbooks are materials critical for academic success, students and faculty feedback was positive. Faculty appreciated how use of a library-provided e-textbook meant that all students would have access to the title from the first day of class and would all be working with the same edition. Students appreciated e-book features like searchable text, the ability to save and print, and the portability of an e-book.

Beyond this, cost savings represented the most important factor for students and a powerful way to convey impact to faculty and administrators. Exact cost savings have been difficult to pinpoint. Firstly, the exact price student would have paid were the book not free is not known. Students use a range of mechanisms to access textbooks: purchasing of new or used titles, renting or buying e-books, sharing copies with friends, photocopying or scanning a print copy, or pirating an illegal e-version. They can explore the cost of titles from different retail locations offering unique markups and discounts. As a result, a student can select among a variety of price points. Therefore to calculate cost savings, librarians used the cost of a new print textbook from the campus bookstore. This was then multiplied by the full enrollment of the course. Secondly, pinpointing an actual enrollment number presents a challenge. Students drop a course after purchasing a textbook or add a class after the initial days of the semester. Some courses fail to meet full enrollment but some exceed it and total seats are added to the course. Therefore, although imprecise, the librarians have used total potential enrollment—the course at full enrollment—captured at a point just prior to the start of the semester. This calculation makes assumptions including that the course will be enrolled to capacity and that no students will purchase the textbook. In reality, courses fail to meet or exceed full enrollment and students use a variety of ways with a range of price points to access a textbook. Furthermore, while the goal of the program is to provide comprehensive access—something enabled with DRM-free titles, some students still select to purchase a print copy due to preferences in reading format or a desire to build a personal library.

Once the number of students times textbook price are multiplied, the potential cost savings for students is determined, as seen in Table 1. This number is gross and does not deduct the investments made by LSU Libraries to purchase these e-book collections. This information is

then shared with a variety of stakeholders. It is broken down by academic colleges and shared with deans and used in library annual report documents and promotional materials. The outcomes of the initiative were presented to Student Government to raise awareness and encourage their promotion of the program.

Table 1: Potential E-textbooks Savings by Semester

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Implications

The continual increase of textbook costs places a substantial burden on students, even more so for those needing financial assistance (defined as grants, scholarships, or loans) where on average “70% of their total textbook expenses [are] covered by financial aid.”⁷ According to the College Board’s Annual Survey of Colleges, 2015-16, the average cost of textbooks nears \$1,300 per student per year for a public four-year institution.⁸ To further illustrate the strain students feel, a 2013 Government Accountability Office report on college textbooks found that between 2002 and 2012 textbook prices rose eighty-two percent.⁹ This helps to explain why it is

⁷ The Student Public Interest Research Groups. 2016. “Covering the Cost.” *StudentPIRGs.org*. <http://www.studentpirgs.org/textbooks>.

⁸ The College Board. 2016. “Average Estimated Undergraduate Budgets, 2015-16.” *Collegeboard.org*. <https://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/average-estimated-undergraduate-budgets-2015-16>.

⁹ United States Government accountability Office. 2013. “College Textbooks: Students Have Greater Access to Textbook Information.” *Report to Congressional Committees*, June, GAO-13-368. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/655066.pdf>.

difficult for students to find cost-saving options when new textbook prices rise at a cost increase four times the rate of inflation.¹⁰

In addition, a 2013 Student Public Interest Research Group study indicated, “65% of students said they had decided against buying a textbook because it was too expensive,” and also noted, “students are not only choosing not to purchase the materials they are assigned by their professor, but they are knowingly accepting the risk of a lower grade to avoid paying for the textbook.”¹¹ Additional studies by the Florida Virtual Campus and Nebraska Book Company as referenced by Gallant indicate “the cost of textbooks caused thirty-one percent of [students] to decline registering for a course” and “nearly half of students surveyed would choose one university over another if they offered free textbooks for all four years of undergraduate college.”¹²

Concerns related to the cost of textbooks are almost universally felt by students at LSU and strategies to reduce the escalating cost of higher education have become a focal point in the state. This collection development strategy acts as a tool to mitigate the cost of higher education. Purchasing e-book collections that enable use of the titles in classes and promoting their role as such drove usage and positioned the Libraries in a relevant role (see Table 2).

Table 2: LSU Libraries E-Textbook Usage

¹⁰ The Student Public Interest Research Groups. 2016. “Covering the Cost.” *StudentPIRGs.org*. <http://www.studentpirgs.org/textbooks>.

¹¹ The Student Public Interest Research Groups. 2014. “Fixing the Broken Textbook Market: How Students Respond to Higher Textbook Costs and Demand Alternatives.” *StudentPIRGs.org*. <http://www.studentpirgs.org/textbooks>.

¹² Jeff Gallant, “Librarians Transforming Textbooks: The Past, Present, and Future of the Affordable Learning Georgia Initiative,” *Georgia Library Quarterly* 52, no. 2(2015): 12-17.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

This process began with the decision to terminate DDA plans and the concerted effort to add many new titles to the collection. By prioritizing titles without DRM, these e-books provided a user-friendly experience. Through strong promotion to ensure awareness, these new large packages received impressive use as demonstrated in Table 3. Usage metrics reflected in COUNTER Book Reports 2 showed a forty percent increase of chapter downloads and usage from fiscal year 2014 to fiscal year 2015 which is the timeframe when DDA was cancelled. Within that one year, approximately 17,000 unique e-book titles were used by our students, faculty, and staff.

Table 3: LSU Libraries E-Book Usage

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

Upon implementation of the e-textbook initiative, increase in usage of e-book titles used as course materials was almost immediate. As an example, one title used in a fall 2014 course continued to have consistent and extensive usage the following spring when the specific course was not offered. This particular title which is part of the engineering curriculum now averages 20,000 chapter downloads a year. This high and steady usage anecdotally suggests a word of mouth marketing campaign among students in need of curriculum support regardless of course enrollment status.

Conclusion

The LSU Libraries views the addition of e-books that can be used as course materials as a critical component to the libraries' collection. This is a new step and a shift away from a legacy practice which deemed textbooks as unacceptable expenditures. By tailoring and customizing our e-book acquisitions to fit our needs (DRM-free, perpetual access, unlimited simultaneous users) we are able to provide financial relief to students and continued robust support of university teaching and learning. Alignment with courses drove use and provided a compelling use case for librarians eager to highlight to administrators the importance and value of investment in e-collections. We hope to continue building the LSU Libraries' e-textbook initiative through future large package and title by title purchases of e-books with the usability principles that enable use in the classroom, and to further expand the project by exploring additional cost saving measures for students such as open access solutions and open educational resources.

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