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Incentivizing faculty for open educational resources (OER) adoption and open textbookauthoring

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Abstract

This survey assessed the experiences of faculty who participated in a textbook affordability program at Rutgers University. The program provided incentive awards in exchange for replacing commercial textbooks with affordable course materials such as open educational resources (OER), self-developed course materials, course reserves, or library-licensed content. The survey collected faculty’s perceptions about the award program, experiences with OER, and interest in open textbook authoring. Responses suggest that the program is well received and that funds are adequate for adopting new course materials. However, they also indicate that even participating faculty vary greatly in their knowledge and use of OER and their interest in authoring open textbooks. Ultimately, these survey results indicate the lack of a “one size fits all” approach to incentivizing the adoption of affordable course materials, the use of OER, and the creation of new open resources.

Introduction

In 2016, the president of Rutgers University charged Rutgers University Libraries with designing and administering a program intended to promote textbook affordability. The result, the Open and Affordable Textbooks (OAT) Program, provides incentive awards to faculty who choose to make their courses more affordable to students by replacing traditional course materials with alternatives such as open educational resources (OER), library-licensed content, or other materials available to students at no or low cost. Full-time teaching faculty, adjuncts, and graduate teaching assistants are eligible to receive such awards through the OAT program. To date the program has impacted over 19,000 students at Rutgers University-Camden, Rutgers University-Newark, Rutgers University-New Brunswick, and Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences, generating estimated student savings of around $3.5 million across the university. In addition, students enrolled in OAT courses report that their redesigned course materials provided an improved experience in terms of access, reading, taking notes, and collaboration (Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2019), demonstrating benefits beyond the financial savings alone.

As part of the evaluation of the program, a survey was administered to the 56 instructors who received OAT awards during the first two rounds of the program (2016–2018). The survey functioned as programmatic assessment, and, to this end, it included questions about instructors’ perceptions of the award program and monetary amount, their use of the award funds, and their chosen course materials. However, in order to explore future directions for the OAT program, the survey also featured questions about course material selection, faculty knowledge and past use of OER faculty interest in OER creation, and perceptions of the support received from their academic departments generally toward these efforts. In addition to helping set local priorities at Rutgers University, these results contribute to the body of literature on the outcomes of textbook affordability initiatives and the factors contributing to the successful adoption of open and affordable course materials.

Literature review

Concern about rising textbook costs is often the driving force behind programs designed to promote textbook affordability, and many universities have seen a rise in student activism focused on reducing financial demands on students. Although there are many approaches to reducing textbooks costs, most of the existing literature focuses specifically on the adoption of OER such as open textbooks. Many factors affect faculty members’ ability to move beyond commercial textbooks. Jung et al. (2017) found that, when considering shifting to an open textbook, faculty place a great deal of value on the perceived quality of the book, which is in turn often influenced by colleague...
recommendations, personal knowledge of the author, and the existence of rigorous peer review (Jung et al., 2017). In their study, faculty ranked cost, content quality, content difficulty, and readability as the most important factors when evaluating the quality of an open textbook. While all potential new course materials take time to review, this particular focus on perceived quality may increase the time required to evaluate and adopt new material. Perhaps as a result, faculty tend to report spending more time preparing to teach with open materials than with commercial textbooks (Bliss et al., 2013). Faculty in disciplines or departments that typically rely on ancillary materials bundled with textbooks or provided via access codes may also find it challenging to transition to open or affordable course materials.

Yet despite such considerations, the adoption of OER is associated with many educational benefits. In 2018, a groundbreaking study demonstrated that the use of OER offers direct benefits to students, especially minority and Pell grant recipient students, in the form of improved end-of-course grades and reduced DFW (D, F, and withdrawal) rates (Colvard et al., 2018). Faculty generally report that students in courses that use OER are equally as prepared or more prepared than when using commercial textbooks (Bliss et al., 2013; Petrides et al., 2011). In a survey of community college faculty and students, both groups believed that using open course materials had positive impact on teaching and learning activities, with particular focus on the potential for interactivity and collaboration (Petrides et al., 2011). The use of OER may inspire or facilitate pedagogical innovation or experimentation, which would offer additional benefits to students. Jung et al. (2017) found that faculty “felt empowered” to change their instructional practices when using open textbooks because they knew all students had access to the material immediately (130). In particular, using OER may offer faculty the opportunity to experiment with new pedagogical models such as student-centered or active learning and the flipped classroom (Conole & Weller, 2008; Jung et al., 2017).

In response to the potential of OER to reduce barriers to access, increase student achievement, and encourage pedagogical innovation, many academic libraries have taken on the oversight of programs that incentivize the adoption of open and affordable course materials on their campuses. Many articles have described local library-coordinated OER or textbook affordability incentive programs (Blick & Marcus, 2017; Thomas & Bernhardt, 2018). The structure of textbook affordability programs varies greatly between institutions of higher education. Some focus very narrowly on the adoption and/or creation of OER, while others take a broader approach and may incentivize the use of any materials that are freely available to students on the web or through library subscriptions, but not necessarily published under an open license. Generally, these programs include monetary awards or “mini grants” that are intended to incentivize faculty to investigate and adopt new course materials, or fund activities related to this work, or some combination of the two. While some studies have examined the impact of teaching grants and awards on overall teaching effectiveness (Brawer et al., 2006; Jacobsen & DuCette, 1989), at present no known studies have examined their use in a textbook affordability context. The incentive stipends offered by most of these OER initiatives are typically relatively modest, but some institutions offer larger monetary awards or tiered award amounts that reflect the complexity of the proposed projects.

Many libraries also seek to support OER creation and authorship in addition to OER adoption. Although academic libraries are increasingly taking on responsibility for the promotion, discovery, evaluation, and preservation of open textbooks, library involvement in the creation and publication of open textbooks is still relatively new (Okamoto, 2013). In 2012, SUNY Libraries launched Open SUNY Textbooks in order to promote the creation of open textbooks and establish an infrastructure to support publishing projects (Pitcher, 2014). In 2013, Oregon State University Libraries and Press began collaborating on a similar open textbook publishing program (Sutton & Chadwell, 2014). OER publishing programs enable faculty to create course materials tailored to the needs of their students and showcase their expertise beyond their own institution. These resources can fill gaps in existing OER, leading to their adoption elsewhere, which in turn provides opportunities for the authoring faculty to demonstrate far-reaching impact. However, because OER creation is more time-consuming than simply adopting an existing resource, such programs may need to consider different financial incentives. For example, Kansas University offers up to $5000 to faculty who are interested in creating an open textbook (“Open Educational Resources”), an amount that seeks to acknowledge the level of time and effort required.

One of the major challenges faced by OER and textbook affordability incentive programs is recruiting interested faculty and determining how to best support and reward the considerable work involved in adopting new course materials. As described previously, most programs offer a modest stipend or “mini grant,” but financial support for the adoption of open and course materials alone may not be enough. A 2016 study suggests that faculty’s willingness to embrace OER is more complex and affected by interconnected factors, such as their prior familiarity with OER and their investment in improving student learning outcomes (Coleman-Prisco, 2016). The same study also discusses the importance of explicit higher-level administrator support, as well as the availability of OER-related workshops and professional development (Coleman-Prisco, 2016). In an article in American Libraries, Dankowski (2016) discusses a number of alternatives to the aforementioned mini grant incentive programs, such as a student-nominated OER award administered by Texas A&M University Libraries. This award does not offer a cash prize, but instead focuses on recognizing faculty in a way that might be valued in their tenure and promotion system. Tapping into the tenure and promotion process may indeed be an important way to influence faculty behavior. Some universities, such as the University of British Columbia, are moving toward revising their tenure and promotion guidelines in order to include OER (Yano, 2017). While only a subset of the population that might embrace OER would be impacted by changes in the tenure and promotion process, other incentives may be more relevant to adjuncts, graduate teaching assistants, or full-time non-tenure track faculty.

Librarians who administer textbook affordability/OER incentive programs would benefit from understanding of how faculty awardees perceive textbook affordability programs, the work required in redesigning a course to be affordable, and the offered incentives. This information can aid in determining the role of the incentive in faculty’s decision-making process, as well as help calibrate the incentive to suit their needs. This study is an exploratory step in that direction, intended to gather some initial feedback from a small group of faculty about their participation in a textbook affordability program, their course redesign activities and impact, and their knowledge and use of OER. By focusing on faculty already participating in a textbook affordability initiative, the present study can inform the literature on best practices for starting, maintaining, and improving such programs.

Methods

The survey was administered to the 56 instructors who received OAT awards in the first two rounds of the program and was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Rutgers University. Some of the survey questions were adapted from the OER Research Toolkit (OER Research Toolkit) created by the Open Education Group. Survey questions directly asked about the course materials used in redesigned OAT courses, the financial incentive award offered, and the impact of the new course materials on students. They also asked about faculty’s perceptions of OER and pedagogical innovation more generally. Most of the questions were closed-response, but in most cases, respondents were offered the opportunity to add an optional open-response comment to provide more information or detail. The survey was administered by email and took approximately 10–15 min to complete. Faculty received a link to the survey and two reminders before the survey closed. The
participants were made aware that the survey was not a required part of the OAT award process and would not affect their award status, and that their responses would be completely confidential. Because the pool of potential respondents was small, faculty were encouraged to answer open-response questions as generally as possible in order to avoid identifying themselves. Only questions related to informed consent were required; any others, including potentially identifying demographic questions, could be skipped if the respondents preferred not to answer. Therefore, unless indicated otherwise, percentages reported in the results section have been calculated based on the number of respondents for each individual question.

Limitations

The survey used a convenience sample comprised of participants of the OAT program. Respondents were not representative of Rutgers University faculty as a whole or teaching faculty in general. In fact, these respondents may in fact be predisposed to concerns about affordability, an interest in OER, or a desire to experiment with their teaching. In addition, the small sample size could not be avoided due to the limited number of program participants. These limitations were determined to be appropriate for this study, as the survey was intended primarily to gather information about a single initiative in an institutional context.

Results

The survey received 30 responses, which constitutes a response rate of approximately 54%. The first set of questions was intended to gather demographic information. A breakdown of participation by campus location, teaching and tenure status, and time in current position can be found in Table 1. These demographic questions were not required.

The majority of respondents for this question were full-time (88%). Non-tenure track faculty accounted for 54% of respondents (14 responses) and tenured faculty constituted 31%. Respondents were fairly well distributed in terms of number of years in their current position, although the 4–6 years received the highest number of responses. The respondents’ academic disciplines are reflected in Fig. 1. The highest number of responses (42%) was from faculty in departments they identified as social sciences (11 responses).

Next, the survey presented a series of questions about respondents’ participation in the OAT program. Most faculty (90%) had already taught their OAT course, and none reported that they were teaching it for the first time at the time. Thus, respondents seemed fairly well positioned to evaluate their participation in OAT. Because OAT applicants are not expected to have a finalized list of new course materials at the time they submit the OAT application, the survey first asked about the types of resources used in the completed course. The results of this question are listed in Fig. 2. The materials used most frequently were websites or free internet resources, OER, and library resources.

A subsequent question asked what types of library support they used while redesigning their OAT course. Respondents primarily selected library resources (12), consultations with a librarian (7), and course reserves (4).

Faculty respondents were next presented with three statements about student preparation, engagement, and performance and were asked to select strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, or “I have yet not taught my OAT course.” These statements were as follows:

- Students are more prepared when using OAT materials.
- Students are more engaged when using OAT materials.
- Students achieve learning outcomes to a greater degree when using OAT materials.

Fig. 3 displays the relevant responses. In general, respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students were more prepared (54.5%), more engaged (63.7%), and achieved learning outcomes to a greater degree (63.7%) when using OAT materials. No respondents selected “disagree” or “strongly disagree” for any of the three statements.

Participants were also asked specifically about the monetary component of the OAT award. The monetary award is distributed to faculty as a “research fund” via their department, and the library does not place any restrictions on the usage of the money beyond the applicable university-wide policies. The majority of respondents (80%) found that the research fund was an adequate monetary incentive, while 20% felt it was too little. Respondents were also given the option of providing more information on how they used the funds. Fig. 4 shows responses to this question. Responses varied overall, but funding professional development such as travel for conferences was the most popular response (36.4%).

In an open text response that invited information about other incentives they wished for, faculty listed course releases, applying pressure on departments to support OER, and a higher monetary award.

The next several questions asked about respondents’ textbook use and evaluation in general, as well as their knowledge of alternatives such as OER. Respondents were first asked how they learn about new course materials and given the opportunity to rank multiple options on a five-point scale (1 = important, 5 = unimportant): colleagues in their department, colleagues in their professional network, publisher advertisement, librarian recommendation, and “other.” Fig. 5 displays the responses to this question. In general, faculty respondents most value the recommendations of colleagues in professional networks, followed by colleagues in their departments. Librarians do not seem to be perceived as a resource when it comes to choosing new course materials; no respondent selected “librarian recommendation” as the most important, and many ranked it as either a 4 or a 5, the highest combined negative score of any option.

The survey also asked about awardees’ familiarity with OER, as well as their perceptions of the quality of OER in their disciplinary area. At this point the survey provided a definition of OER as follows: “Open educational resources (OER) are openly licensed teaching, learning, and research materials that you can use or re-use with no cost.” Slightly more than half (54.5%) reported that they were already using OER, while smaller numbers were familiar with OER but had never used them (27.3%) or were unfamiliar (18.2%). When asked about their perceptions of the quality of OER in their discipline, respondents seemed largely ambivalent, with a full third selecting “I don’t know” (33.3%) and the rest of the responses split between excellent, good, adequate, and poor. Fig. 6 shows the results of a follow-up question.

Table 1

| Campus       |        |
|--------------|--------|
| Camden       | 11     |
| New Brunswick| 12     |
| Newark       | 4      |
| RBHS         | 0      |

| Teaching status         |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Full time               | 23     |
| Part time               | 3      |

| Tenure status/eligibility |        |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Tenure track              | 3      |
| Tenured                   | 8      |
| Non tenure track          | 14     |
| Other                     | 1      |

| Time in current position |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Less than 1 year         | 2      |
| 1–3 years                | 7      |
| 4–6 years                | 9      |
| 7–9 years                | 4      |
| 10 or more years         | 4      |
asking respondents to include whether or not a variety of factors were deterrents to their adoption of OER. The three factors that emerged as major deterrents were the lack of a comprehensive catalog of OER, the difficulty of finding OER that meets a specific need, the lack of resources in their specific subject area, and, to a lesser degree, not knowing other faculty who use OER.

Respondents were asked whether they would be interested in authoring an open textbook. The survey defined an open textbook as follows: “Open textbooks are free online textbooks published under an open copyright license.” Although most selected “no” (40.9%), 31.8% were interested, and 27.3% said they might be interested. All respondents, regardless of their answer to that question, were asked what support they would want to have if they did decide to author an open textbook. Fig. 7 demonstrates the desired support, with editorial assistance (10) and copyright assistance (7) emerging as the most-commonly selected choices, followed by research fund or stipend, course release, and technology-related support.

Those who selected “research fund or stipend” were invited to submit a desired monetary amount; five responses were received and they varied greatly, ranging from $4500 to $30,000.

Respondents seemed to be very comfortable with pedagogical experimentation. When asked about their tendencies to experiment with different types of course materials, technologies, or pedagogical methods, 59.1% said that they “frequently” tried something new, 40.9% said they “occasionally” try something new, and none indicated that they preferred to keep their courses consistent. In addition to their personal comfort with experimentation, they were asked to indicate the degree to which their academic department encouraged them to “explore OER and alternate course materials,” “to experiment with [their] teaching,” and “to take advantage of professional development opportunities.” Respondents largely found their departments to be supportive in their areas of pedagogical experimentation (61.9% agree or strongly agree) and professional development (61.9% agree or strongly agree), but less so related to the exploration of OER (28.6% agree or strongly agree).

Discussion

The survey responses indicate that the program is well-received by the faculty who have participated. Overall, faculty felt that, compared to previous instructional experiences, students were more prepared, more engaged, and achieved better learning outcomes. In optional open-text responses, respondents spoke very highly of the OAT program and felt that their students benefited from the redesigned materials. Some of these responses are reproduced below (with permission):

- “Students like the fact that the materials are current - within the same month as our lessons. They feel like they are on the cutting edge of the field.”
- “Students literally clapped when I announced that I do not use paid course materials.”
- “This program encouraged me to take some time to re-think how I
teach. My students are better off with the new model I’m using because they’re engaging with more complex materials and learning how to read and use these materials. My biggest problem now is explaining to textbook publishers why I don’t want complimentary review copies of their revised textbooks.”

• “It seems to me that the cost of instructional materials (together with the cost of tuition and fees) is among the most pressing issues facing college students today. Open-access initiatives like this one are invaluable in ensuring our students’ future success. It is up to us as faculty members to help our students overcome this obstacle. I am grateful to the visionaries of the OAT program for their leadership in this area.”

In addition, faculty respondents were satisfied with the provided monetary award, indicating an appropriate level of financial investment from the Libraries. These results demonstrate the efficacy of the OAT program and highlight its impact, which goes beyond student savings.

The OAT program does not require the adoption of OER, opting instead to encourage faculty to investigate any course materials (including library-licensed content or course reserves) that meet their needs and reduce student costs. However, the Libraries do consider OER to be a core component of the OAT program. The survey results reveal that most but not all OAT recipients are aware of OER, and that many are already using OER in their courses. While in many ways these results are encouraging, the fact that any of the faculty who are participating in an affordability initiative like OAT would describe themselves as unfamiliar with OER – as they did in this survey – is concerning and points to the need for more education and training. When faculty were asked what kind of materials they adopted for their OAT course, the highest number of respondents selected websites and other free internet resources. While it is possible that faculty are turning to materials on the free web that are not necessarily openly licensed, they may also be confused about the differences between OER and other free (but not open) resources. This finding may also reflect a limitation of the survey instrument, as respondents were provided with a shared definition of OER later in the survey.

Faculty responses to the question about major deterrents to the use of OER echoed other studies on OER adoption: many faculty cannot easily find OER and appropriate ancillary materials that meet their needs in the classroom. Because they may not be able to turn to their usual professional networks for assistance, locating relevant OER may seem quite difficult even for those faculty who perceive themselves as knowledgeable. An additional challenge for faculty is that there may simply be no OER that adequately covers their discipline or subfield.

Even when OER can be easily adopted for introductory or survey courses, for example, the specificity of higher-level courses may not be well served by the available offerings. Although OER are increasing in prominence and proliferation, the overall number of available OER is...
It is clear that the only way to address gaps in the coverage of existing OER is to encourage faculty to pursue OER creation and the authoring new open textbooks. Many textbook affordability initiatives include OER authorship among their stated goals, but the OAT program has not yet expressly moved into this area. Rutgers University Libraries recently purchased Pressbooks, which can be used for publishing open textbooks, but the platform is not yet fully available to all faculty across Rutgers University. Additionally, one of the findings of this survey is that faculty are divided in terms of their interest in OER creation. Only about 60% of respondents said they were or might be interested in authoring an open textbook. Faculty indicated specific needs for editorial and copyright assistance, a larger stipend, and/or a course release in order to successfully author an open textbook. Clearly more support and infrastructure is needed in order to motivate faculty to take on OER creation, and such support would need to come from both the Libraries and from other units on campus. A future direction for programs like OAT might be to identify faculty interested in OER authoring and provide them with customized incentives as well as a suite of publishing services, in collaboration with campus partners.

Technical incentives and even higher monetary stipends, however, are not enough. Another theme that emerged from the results of this survey is the need for more overt departmental and administrator support for OAT and, specifically, for OER adoption and creation. While the faculty surveyed feel that their departments encourage them to innovate in their teaching and take advantage of professional development opportunities, they do not feel that they are adequately encouraged to explore OER specifically. The faculty at Rutgers University are not alone. A recent survey of faculty conducted by Ithaka S + R found that only 14% of respondents agreed that their institution provides “excellent” support for using OER and that it rewards faculty who use OER (Blankstein & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2019). With this in mind, the OAT program could benefit from future conversations with academic deans and department chairs across the university. While marketing for the OAT initiative is, fortunately, very visible to faculty, it is unclear to what extent campus administrators are aware of the effort and want to become more involved. So far, only one Rutgers campus has had a visible partnership with campus administration. In 2017, the Dean of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers-Camden pledged supplementary financial support after hearing about the high number of OAT applicants from the campus. This financial support took the form of an additional eight awards that were given to Camden faculty whose applications were of

Fig. 3. Student preparation, engagement, and performance (compared to traditional textbooks).
Fig. 4. Faculty's use of award funds.

Fig. 5. How faculty learn about course materials.
high caliber but could not be initially selected for budgetary reasons. Thus far, this sort of financial investment in OAT has not been replicated, but there is certainly opportunity to find new ways for campus and university administrators to endorse the program and recognize faculty who participate.

The rank and tenure status of individual faculty may also play a role in their willingness to explore, adopt, and author OER. This survey received a comparatively high number of responses from non-tenure-track faculty, raising questions about the interplay between tenure status and pedagogical experimentation. Few responses were received from tenure-track but untenured faculty, perhaps indicating that they are focusing on activities valued more highly by the tenure and promotion system. The interplay between these demographic characteristics and interest in affordability, OER adoption, and OER creation needs more examination in the literature on higher education and library and information science. The Ithaka S + R survey, for example, found that younger faculty were more interested in using and creating OER, but that older faculty were more likely to have created OER. This led the authors to conclude that “more support or guidance may be needed to help [younger faculty] achieve the creation of these resources for their and others’ instructional practices” (Blankstein & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2019). Accordingly, programs like OAT may need to consider the need for different incentives for different types of faculty and activities (adoption versus creation). For many tenure-track faculty, in particular, small monetary awards may not be as motivating as tenure and promotion guidelines that explicitly award the creation of OER and participation in textbook affordability initiatives.

**Conclusion**

Faculty who participated in the OAT program at Rutgers University are generally satisfied with the program and the financial incentive they received. They also report a perceived positive impact on their students, although a clear avenue for future research would be to examine actual student performance in courses that adopt affordable course materials. Respondents turned to a variety of course materials,
including free internet resources, OER, and library-licensed resources. When asked specifically about OER, they reported that the main deterrent to their use of OER was an inability to find materials that met their needs, echoing findings from previous studies and further highlighting the need for programs like OAT to invest in both OER adoption and OER creation. However, only just over half the respondents to this survey reported even a potential interest in OER creation, indicating that it would be premature to shift the program too far toward authorship. Future directions for OAT might include increased promotion of OER alongside other affordable course materials and the development of a plan for adequately supporting those faculty who want to create OER. The reported lack of departmental and institutional support among participating faculty also suggest that the Libraries need to work with campus administration to explicitly encourage, celebrate, and promote the adoption of more affordable course materials in general as well as, specifically, the adoption and authorship of OER.

This survey was conducted after the successful launch of the OAT program and responses were sought only from faculty who participated in the first two rounds. While the OAT project team designed this study primarily as assessment of the OAT program, this kind of survey might have been particularly useful if administered to a larger, more representative sample of faculty prior to the creation of the program. For example, survey results indicate faculty who participated in the program have less fluency with OER as might have been expected, display limited interest in OER creation, and are potentially confused about the distinction between OER and other free internet resources. Had this information been available at the start, the program might have been designed with an even greater emphasis on training and education around different kinds of affordable resources, such as OER and open textbooks. Centering the program on “open and affordable” course materials was intended to provide faculty with as much flexibility as possible but may also have increased confusion. Recent changes to the OAT website have tried to address this, such as by providing clear definitions of OER and “affordable course materials” in the program FAQs. Additionally, the results of this study suggest that there may not be a “one size fits all” approach to incentivizing the use and creation of affordable course materials. While the OAT program followed contemporary best practices in offering a modest monetary award that is given out in equal amounts to all awardees, the awards could have been structured differently based on factors such as the complexity of the course redesign project, the type of applicant, or the desired type of incentive. These structural changes are harder to make once a program has been established, especially if it has proven to be popular.

Overall, academic libraries can use the type of demographic assessment conducted by this survey to evaluate their potential or existing textbook affordability programs and offer opportunities carefully tailored to their campus communities. It is undeniable that libraries have an important role to play in promoting affordability and OER. In this, they build on their long history as trusted institutions that ensure access to information, curate course materials, and offer faculty the tools they need to effectively conduct their research and teaching duties. Administering textbook affordability programs, whether alone or in concert with other divisions of the university, provides opportunities for libraries to fill a void on their campuses, promote student success, and work closely with faculty who are innovating their teaching. Work in this area will likely become even more vital in light of the COVID-19
pandemic and its still-unfolding economic ramifications. The staggering unemployment statistics that have accompanied the pandemic will position affordability as increasingly central to enrollment and retention efforts at colleges and universities. At the same time, financial constraints at these institutions may threaten the financial viability of programs such as OAT, perhaps necessitating a reduction in incentive awards or further investigation of non-monetary incentives. As reduced budgets emphasize the need to focus resources where they can have the most impact, however, textbook affordability programs can offer academic libraries a return on investment that directly benefits students, faculty, and the entire university.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Lily Todorinova: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. Zara T. Wilkinson: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.

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