Science and Math Brown Bag

Meeting Notes

March 10, 2016

Present: Dave Berque, Sharon Crary, Bridget Gourley, Jacob Hale, Brian Howard, Mamunur Rashid, Selma Poturovic, Pam Propsom, Jackie Roberts, Dan Rusu, Khadija Stewart, Zhixin Wu

Guests: Kathryn Millis, Rick Provine

Rick began by providing some context about libraries and textbooks. Philosophy has been that libraries do not collect textbooks: expectations that students should have them, the editions change so frequently that it’s not reasonable to keep them in the collection, etc. First-year students spend more on textbooks than other students (less savvy than upperclass students about other options). Three options that have been considered:

--University provides textbooks for all students. Students did not respond positively to this because they thought they could still find books more cheaply and the money to finance this would have to come from somewhere (higher college fees or costs?). Also concern from faculty that if these were rental books, students wouldn’t be able to keep them and build their reference materials, especially in their major.

--Open textbook movement. Can find lots of examples of these free, online books if you Google “open textbooks”. They tend to be in the physical sciences, economics. They come in a variety of formats.

--Putting textbooks on reserve in the library. This would give students with financial challenges access to the textbooks. Some concerns about which books the library would buy, how many copies, for all classes? Does this discourage students who can actually afford textbooks from buying them? Rental costs are still very high.

Two handouts were shared: one from Rick on Textbook Programs at Oberlin Group Libraries and another from Dave Berque’s notes on a book rental model from SLAAC/SAL meetings.

Dan shared an example of Dover Publications, which offers much cheaper textbooks that, although older, don’t differ all that much from more expensive, recent textbooks. This seems to be an issue of raising consciousness among faculty that this topic is relevant to equity and access for all students, especially those who are economically disadvantaged. Is the most recent $300 edition of a textbook really six times better than a $50 textbook? Carrie Klaus emails the faculty twice a year reminding them to order textbooks and it would probably be possible for her suggest that people consider cost as one issue in selecting books. This could be something that needs to be discussed in departments when considering diversity, inclusiveness, and equity issues. Could this be a faculty development issue?

Is there any orientation for students about cost effective textbook purchasing and use? Dave said there were a few sentences on the portal for incoming students, but Student Academic Life is careful in what they say because they don’t want to imply to students that they don’t really need to purchase textbooks.

Some things online are free to use. Others are copyrighted. Depends on who makes the copy: if the student, usually no problem. If it’s the faculty member making copies for all students, then it’s problematic. “What happens at the copy machine, stays at the copy machine.” Individuals can copy for their own use.