

DePaul University Library

Alternate Assessment Project Report

Collections

Academic Year: 2023-2024

Date of Report Submission: 9/5/2024

Name of Department/Unit/Program: DePaul University Library

Name of Contact Person: Jennifer Schwartz

Names of Assessment Committee Members: Jennifer Schwartz, Ashley McMullin, Kelly Hallisy

Please submit reports on this template and not in a separate document. Please type responses below prompts for each item in this word document. Attach all supporting materials as appendices.

Part I: Follow-Up on Last Year's Assessment Report Recommendations

Based on the recommendations and planned actions from the last assessment report you submitted, please discuss actions you took and/or follow-up, as well as their results.

The Library's FY23 Assessment Report focused on the Learning Outcome: *Students ... will be able to articulate the value of information inquiry*. We evaluated a segment of our student employees who work at our research help desks, our Peer Research Tutors. At the time of our assessment, the library employed 8 Peer Research Tutors.

We found that while our Peer Research Tutors are largely meeting the learning outcome, their facility with the concept of breaking down complex research questions into smaller discrete steps could be improved. With this in mind, we have updated our training materials to emphasize this skill for incoming Peer Research Tutors for Fall 2024.

Additionally, we found that this learning outcome is very difficult to assess as written. The assessment committee has met with the Instructional Services Librarian, as well as the Reference, Instruction, and Academic Engagement Coordinator to consider revising this

outcome. Discussions are ongoing this year, but the library should be able to update this learning outcome before FY26.

Part II: Report on This Year's Project

Type of Project

What type of Project did you conduct? *all alternate projects need to be approved by your college or division*

Other

Abstract

Provide a short abstract (no more than 250 words) briefly highlighting major sections of this report (project description, methodology, evaluation of information, results, interpretation, and recommendations).

In Fall of 2023, DePaul University participated in the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) statewide student survey concerning affordable course materials. The survey asked students how they are affected by the cost of course materials, how much they spend on course materials, what their experiences with free options have been, and what features of course materials are preferred. 275 DePaul students, and 4,617 students statewide, participated in the survey. Answering questions about the effects of high-cost materials, students reported that they often don't purchase the required course materials, and have, as a result, earned poor grades. Concerning the amount spent on textbooks, 76% of students reported spending between \$1- \$400 that quarter for course materials. Students rated the ability to access materials from anywhere and the ability to obtain a print copy of those readings as two of the most helpful features for course materials.

The Library's course reserves service is an essential way to ensure that students have equitable, no-cost access to course readings by acquiring and/or licensing the required content for all students in a class. The library should continue to develop, expand, and promote our course reserves service, along with the results of this survey, to stakeholders across the University.

Project Description

Please describe the project you conducted.

- **How will this project help you better understand student learning in your program?**

The high cost of textbooks is a known barrier to student success in higher education. Studies have found that a significant number of students will withdraw from classes if the cost of course

materials is too high.¹ Other researchers have shown that students who remain in a class, but don't purchase costly materials, suffer poor grades. It has also been documented that first generation and BIPOC students in particular are affected more profoundly than other students, elevating the issue of textbook cost to a question of equity and social justice.²

While we know that these are general truths for college students across the country, it is important to document the effect of textbook cost for our own student body. With this knowledge, we can tailor solutions to our community and improve student learning and success at DePaul.

Data Collection and/or Methodology

How did you collect information about student learning for this project?

- **How did you evaluate the information you collected?**

The Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) developed a survey to identify Illinois student needs pertaining to affordable and freely available course material options. The survey was approved by the University of Illinois' Office for the Protection of Research Subjects for students attending not-for-profit institutions of higher education in Illinois. 4,617 eligible students from 52 Illinois institutions of higher education participated in the statewide survey. These students represented 22 community colleges, 21 private colleges and universities, and 9 public universities. DePaul promoted the survey via email to a sample of 8000 students from Nov 6 through December 31, 2023. 275 DePaul students participated for a response rate of 3.4%. CARLI analyzed and shared the results of the statewide data.³ DePaul data was analyzed by our library assessment team.

The survey consists of 21 questions (Appendix A). Responses to the multiple choice and matrix questions have been analyzed descriptively, and answers to open text questions have been mined for insight into the challenges students face due to expensive course materials.

Results

- **What were the results of this project?**

¹ Clinton, V., & Khan, S. (2019). Efficacy of Open Textbook Adoption on Learning Performance and Course Withdrawal Rates: A Meta-Analysis. *AERA Open*, 5(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858419872212>

² Clinton-Lisell, V. & Kelly, A. E. (2024). The cost of doing homework: Online homework systems with access codes from a social justice perspective. *International Journal of Technology in Education and Science (IJTES)*, 8(2), 296-310. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijtes.547>

³ Statewide results of the larger CARLI survey can be found here: https://www.carli.illinois.edu/sites/files/coll_man/2023IllinoisStudentCourseMaterialsSurveyReport.pdf

DePaul students provided feedback on the cost of course materials, the effects of that cost, experiences with free course materials, and which features of course materials were considered to be most important. The survey also collected demographic information, including race, ethnicity, gender, degree seeking status, and primary area of study.

Who answered the survey?

275 DePaul students participated in the survey. Most answers were optional, and some students didn't answer all of the questions. Of students providing information about the degree being pursued (n=200), 55% were undergraduates, and 45% were Master's or Doctoral Students.⁴ 218 students provided their majors. Most were in Liberal Arts, Social Sciences, and Communication (25%). See Table 1 for a more complete breakdown of majors.

Major	%
LASS & Communication	25.23%
Business	20.64%
Fine Arts & Applied Arts	11.47%
Health Sciences	9.63%
Computer Science	9.17%
Education	8.72%
Sciences	7.80%
Law	7.34%

Table 1. Responding students' majors

While Liberal Arts, Social Sciences, and Communications students represented 25% of respondents in the survey, they are only about 16% of the population at DePaul.⁵ This over-representation of Liberal Arts and Communications students may have affected overall answers for several questions, since these areas often have comparatively less expensive textbooks and other required course materials than other fields.

What do students spend on course materials?

At DePaul, 76% of the responding students reported spending between \$1-\$400 during the Fall 2023 Academic Term. This aligns with the most recent estimate that Depaul publishes on its website as the cost of course materials for undergraduate students (\$368 per quarter).⁶

⁴ These totals include DePaul Law students.

⁵ See 23-24 Fall Enrollment by College: <https://irma.depaul.edu/FFPlus.asp?cont=FE>

⁶ Cost of Attendance:

<https://www.depaul.edu/admission-and-aid/financial-aid/basics/Pages/understand-cost-of-attendance.aspx>.

Accessed June 2024.

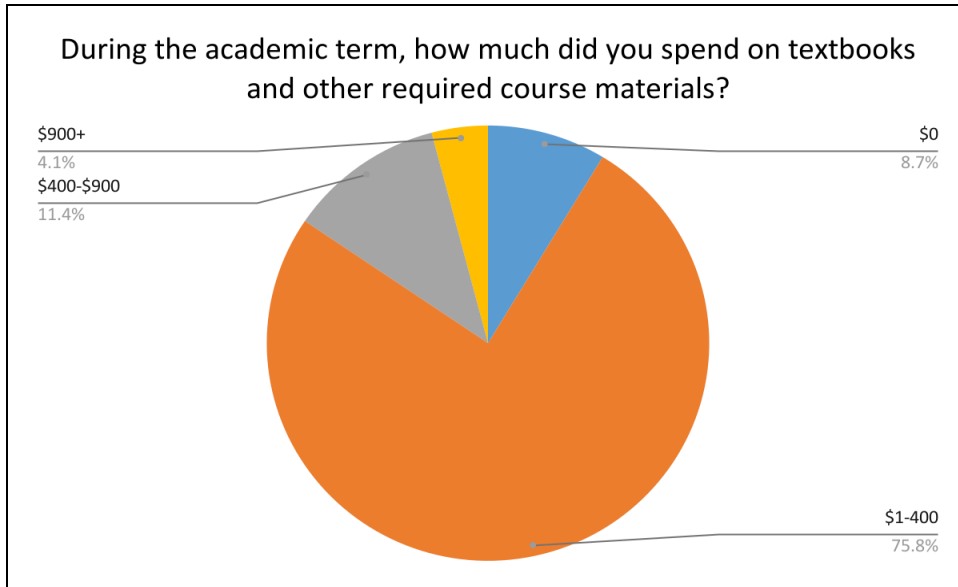


Figure 1. Amount spent on course materials

16% of students reported spending more than the estimated \$400 per quarter. Of those students who provided their major, half (n=14) were law students. Law students reported spending significantly more than \$400, but the published estimated cost of their course materials on DePaul's website is also higher (\$1650/year or \$825 per semester).⁷

Of those who spent more than \$900 dollars, (9 students), almost all (n=8) were graduate students. All reported studying either Law, Health Sciences, or Computer Science.

Comparing DePaul's responses to the larger survey across the state of Illinois reveals similar results. Statewide, students spent \$297.71 on average for course materials during one term, which is close, but slightly lower than, the DePaul estimate of \$368. 11.66% of Illinois students noted that they spent \$0 for course materials, while 8.7% of DePaul students reported spending \$0.

How does the cost of course materials affect students?

Students provided feedback about the effects of expensive course materials. Most DePaul students (66%) reported that they did not purchase the required material if it was too costly. 22% answered that they had earned a poor grade because they hadn't bought the materials. See Figure 2 for a complete summary of the effects of purchasing course materials.

⁷ Cost of Attendance:

<<https://www.depaul.edu/admission-and-aid/financial-aid/basics/Pages/understand-cost-of-attendance.aspx>>

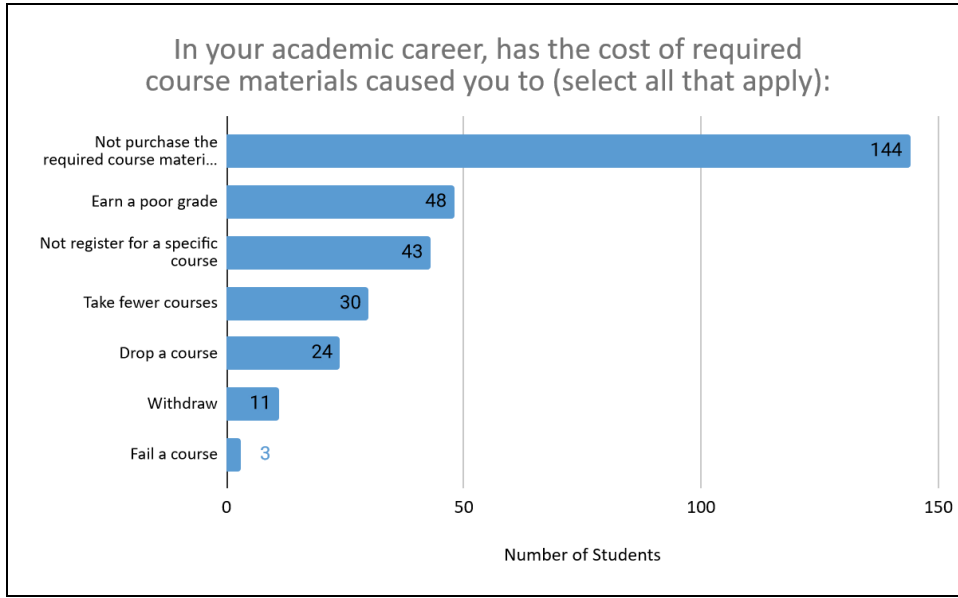


Figure 2. Effects of the cost of required course materials

Statewide results were similar, with the largest number of students reporting that they did not purchase the materials if they were too expensive. More students statewide (41%) reported taking fewer courses, while only 14% of DePaul students included this in their answers

Students also had the opportunity to write their own comments about the effects of textbook costs. The following are a few examples of their responses.

If they're too expensive, I don't buy them, and then I don't learn as much as I could have.

I didn't do the reading required because the textbook was too much money.

They have resulted in [...] lower test scores due to [...] having to work more hours to cover the cost of textbooks and tuition.

It has discouraged me from taking certain courses.

What are student experiences with free course materials?

The survey also asked if students had ever taken a course with class materials that were completely free. 64% (n=176) of students responded that they had. Most were in liberal arts, social sciences, communication, business, fine arts, and applied arts.

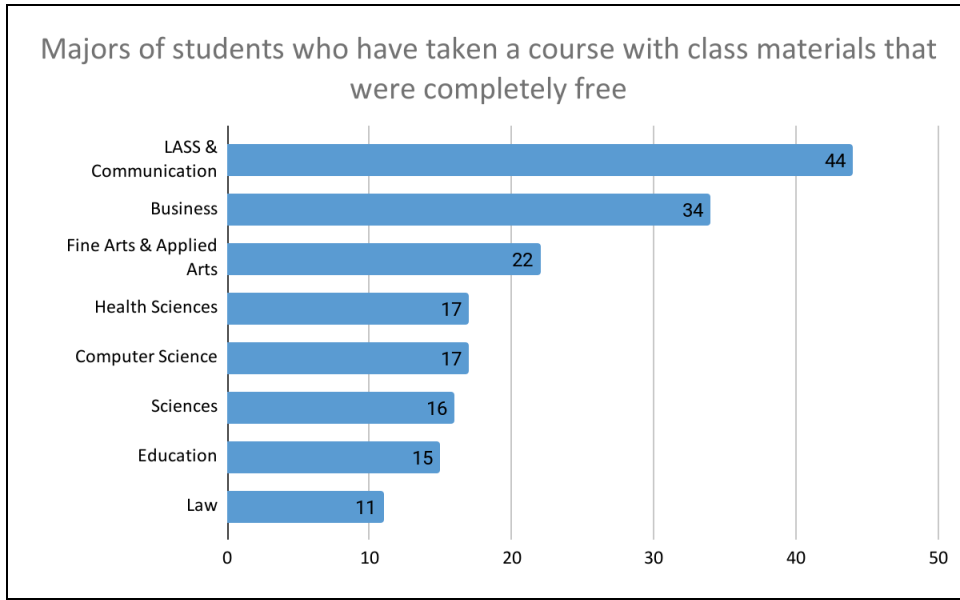


Figure 3.

Majors of students who have taken a class with free course materials

When looking at individual majors, the highest percentage of students using free materials were in the sciences, while the lowest percentage of students using free materials were in Law.

Major	% of reported major using free material
LASS & Communication	80.00%
Business	75.56%
Fine Arts & Applied Arts	88.00%
Health Sciences	80.95%
Computer Science	85.00%
Education	78.95%
Sciences	94.12%
Law	68.75%

Table 2. % of majors using free course materials while at DePaul

The following quotes provide some examples of how students described the experience of not having to pay for textbooks or other course materials:

One class required a textbook that was offered for free by the school library. That is exactly how it should be ...

My experience with those materials was wonderful. They were just as helpful as the ones that I would actually have to pay for.

Some instructors provided pdf materials or reserved copies in the school library. this made it cost effective and easy to access. Those materials are then available for other students ...

Great! No issues accessing the material and relieved stress about acquiring textbooks

I enjoyed having free access to pdfs and readings and it was practical and easy to access from anywhere

Amazing! It is very useful when professors keep financial burdens in mind and plan accordingly.

When asked which features of course materials are the most helpful for learning, The largest percentage of students (88%) responded that the ability to access them from anywhere was “Helpful” or “Very Helpful.” “Interactive technology and exercises” was rated “Not Helpful” more than any other feature (12%).

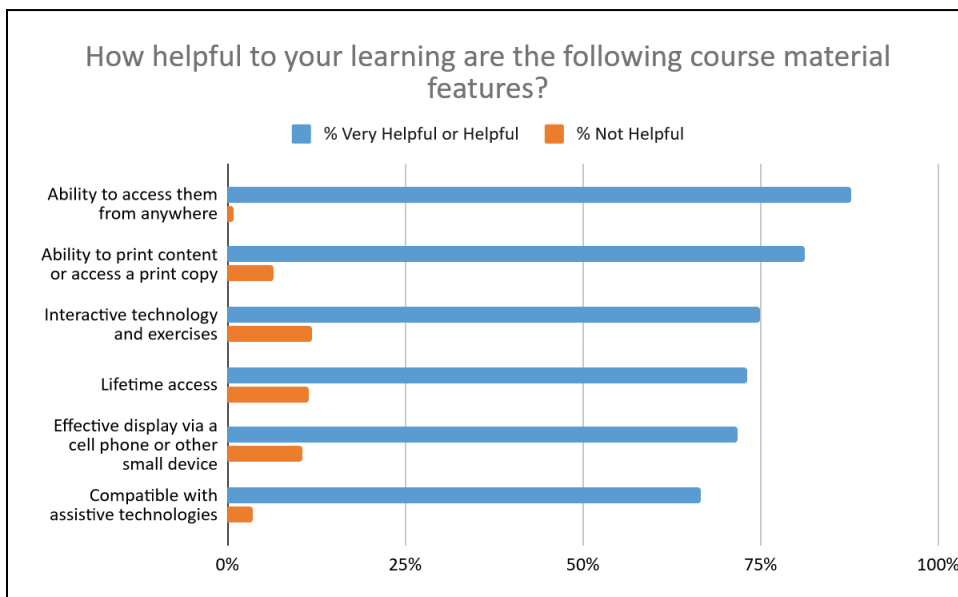


Figure 4. Features of course materials rated very helpful or helpful and not helpful.

Statewide results partially mirrored our findings. 96% ranked access from anywhere as helpful or very helpful, with the ability to print content or access a print copy with the second highest ranking. There was a difference in how helpful interactive technology and exercises were, with the statewide results putting this third, with 87%. This finding might be the result of how many liberal arts and social sciences students were represented in the DePaul sample, where these features of course materials are not always as relevant or as preponderant.

Interpretation of Results

Based on your evaluation of the information you collected, what did you learn about your program that will assist with improving student learning?

Describe your program's satisfaction with the results.

Overall, students studying the liberal arts, social sciences, and communications spent the least amount on textbooks. Law students reported spending the most on textbooks, and graduate students overall spent more than undergraduates.

More than half of the students surveyed reported not purchasing course materials if they were too expensive. Other negative effects most often included earning poor grades or not registering for specific classes. These results indicate that the cost of course materials can have a significant impact on student success and retention.

Students were most interested in using course materials that are available from anywhere, but additionally wanted the option to obtain a print copy. DePaul students were least interested in the interactive technology and exercises that often accompany online textbooks from major publishers. This suggests [Inclusive Access Models](#), which are being actively promoted by campus bookstores and book vendors nationwide, might not meet the priorities of most students.

The Library is uniquely positioned in the university to advocate for making affordable or free course materials available across all of the disciplines. We can promote our course reserves services, through which the library purchases materials that are required reading for classes, and makes them available to all students. With course reserves, no students are required to pay for course materials above and beyond standard university tuition and fees.

In addition to course reserves, the library is also available to provide assistance for faculty with locating Open Educational Resources (OERs) that are high quality and relevant to their courses. OERs are freely available to everyone, which would also benefit the library's collections budget.

All of the information gleaned from this survey points to the importance of providing free course materials directly for the students through the library. Students have reported having to borrow extra money, work longer hours, and avoid taking specific courses in order to offset the cost of textbooks and course materials.

Recommendations and Plans for Action

Based on the results of your assessment project, what recommendations do you have to improve student learning in your program in the future?

Our recommendations include:

1. Provide ongoing support for course reserves in the library
2. Continue to promote course reserves for students at DePaul
3. Expand outreach and training for faculty with using course reserves
4. Promote open educational resources for courses at DePaul

Based on your recommendations for improvement, please describe your plans for implementing your recommendations. Please include:

- **A timeline for each of these actions.**
- **Names of individuals and/or groups responsible for these actions.**
- **Requests for additional resources you will need to take these actions (ex. budget, training, hardware/software). Please note that resource requests will be directed through the normal budgeting process.**
- **Any potential barriers you see to implementing these actions.**
- **How you will share the results of your assessment**
- **Your stakeholders and how you will share the results of your assessment with them.**

The Library will pursue the following steps to implement our recommendations:

1. Provide Ongoing Support for Course Reserves in the Library

During Summer 2024, the library implemented Leganto, an improved, more user-friendly system for course reserves. One of the benefits of this system is a more seamless integration with D2L, the University's learning management system. This will enable easier access to course reserves by both faculty and students.

Additional recommendations include:

- Create a feedback option in the system from students, staff and faculty to make necessary adjustments and improvements to Leganto
 - Group Responsible: Library Staff, Digital Services staff
 - Timeline: During FY25
- Monitor growth and faculty adoption of course reserves and establish trend lines going forward.
 - Group Responsible: Library Staff, Assessment Librarian, Digital Services Staff
 - Timeline: Starting in Fall 2024 and continuing each quarter

2. Continue to Promote Course Reserves for Students

- Implement Leganto dashboard that provides statistics on the benefits and cost savings of course reserves for students
 - Group Responsible: Library Staff, Digital Services Staff, Assessment Librarian
 - Timeline: Implement by June 2025
- Increase marketing of the services by broadening our use of digital screens, posters, and social media channels
 - Group Responsible: Library Staff, Marketing Librarian
 - Timeline: Starting in January 2025
- Leverage quotes and success stories collected in this survey to share with incoming and returning students
 - Group Responsible: Library Staff
 - Timeline: Starting in January 2025

3. Expand Outreach and Training for Faculty on Using Course Reserves

The library is currently providing drop-in office hours to support faculty use and adoption. In addition, our liaison program is poised to offer personalized support and consultations for faculty needing extra help. We have also created guides and video tutorials on our library's website for those who would rather learn on their own.

Future recommendations include:

- Attending faculty department meetings to promote our course reserves service and gather feedback
 - Group Responsible: Library Staff, Library Liaisons
 - Timeline: Starting in Fall 2024
- Continuing our partnership with SGA for Open Education Week, cross-promoting OER and course reserves as an alternative to high-cost course materials
 - Group Responsible: Library Staff, Scholarly Communications and Social Sciences Librarian
 - Timeline: Starting in January 2025
- Targeted marketing campaigns in FY25 to promote course reserves and OER
 - Group Responsible: Library Staff, Scholarly Communications and Social Sciences Librarian, Marketing Librarian
 - Timeline: Starting in January 2025

4. Promote Open Educational Resources (OER) for Courses at DePaul

In June, DePaul University Library received a \$150,000 grant from the Illinois State Library to support the creation and adoption of open educational resources at DePaul. The grant will fund three projects from the Theatre School, the College of Communication, and the Department of History. The projects will produce three open textbooks and some ancillary materials. The total cost savings to students for all courses over a one year period is approximately \$78,160.

The library also provides access to and support for an open publishing platform, LibreText. Introductory workshops on getting started with OER are available for faculty.

Future recommendations include:

- Adding more DePaul produced open content in the institutional repository, Digital Commons@DePaul.
 - Group Responsible: Library Staff, Scholarly Communications and Social Sciences Librarian
 - Timeline: Starting in Fall 2024
- Continuing to seek out grant funded opportunities for affordable course materials and collaborating with CARLI to support OER at DePaul.
 - Group Responsible: Library Staff, Scholarly Communications and Social Sciences Librarian
 - Timeline: Ongoing

These implementation plans aim to ensure the successful integration and promotion of course reserves and OER, ultimately enhancing the academic experience for students and faculty at DePaul University.

Appendix A - Survey Instrument

Survey Instrument is Available Here:

https://www.carli.illinois.edu/sites/files/coll_man/Questionnaire_230912_CC_BY_4.0.pdf