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TEAMing Up with Faculty: A New Tactic in the Textbook Battle

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In 2015, the California State Legislature passed the ***College Textbook Affordability Act***,[1] also known as AB 798. AB 798 encouraged faculty to adopt high quality, open educational resources (OER) in place of traditional textbooks to help make college more affordable for students. The funding provided by AB 798 is managed by the **California State University (CSU)** Chancellor's Office and is designed for the **CSU** and **California Community Colleges (CCC)** systems. Institutions could apply for up to $50,000 in the first round of funding.

The **CSU** had already been providing students with relief from textbook costs for a number of years. In 2011, the **CSU** Chancellor's Office established the Affordable Learning $olutions (AL$) program. That same year, **San José State University (SJSU)** established its own AL$ campus initiative under the broader **CSU** AL$ program. According to **CSU** AL$, "By reducing **CSU** student course material expenses, more students acquire the course materials they need to succeed and benefit from their **CSU** learning experience."[2] Over the past seven years, the **CSU** AL$ program has continued to make progress in easing student textbook expenses with AB 798.

In 2016, **SJSU** AL$ coordinators applied for and were awarded $49,000. This funding was earmarked to assist faculty in converting 49 course sections from traditional textbooks to OER textbooks or materials. There were several stipulations to the grant funds. First, faculty had to replace their primary required textbook with OER materials. Second, all courses were required to achieve a 30% or more savings from previous textbooks costs. Finally, all courses were required to implement new syllabi that reflected the adoption of OER by Spring 2020.

At the start of the 2016-2017 academic year, **SJSU** AL$ co-coordinators began working on a strategy to recruit faculty to adopt OER course materials. In order to distinguish this opportunity from previous Affordable Learning $olutions initiatives, the acronym TEAM (Teaching with Engaging and Affordable Materials) was developed and promoted. The decision was made that $1,500 in professional development funds would be awarded to faculty as an incentive to switch their course materials to open educational resources. To reach the campus goal of 49 sections without exhausting grant funds, targeted courses had to have multiple course sections taught by the same instructor.

In Fall 2016, program coordinators worked with the Center for Faculty Development to recruit faculty for the TEAM grant program. An email message invited all faculty to apply for the program. The message focused on one benefit: student engagement. Other opportunities to recruit faculty included: the new faculty orientation, library resource presentations, and word of mouth. Faculty had to meet the following requirements to participate in the program:

- Submit an online application and
- Commit to attending two 1-hour workshops during the course of the fall semester

Prior to the first workshop, faculty needed to identify which class they wished to convert to open educational materials. Once a course was identified, participants had to submit an old syllabus that included the name and cost of the required textbook that was being replaced. Faculty new to the university were allowed to submit the syllabus from the last instructor who taught the class at the university.

Table 1: Faculty recruitment numbers Fall 2016 - Fall 2017

Cohort Number	Enrollment Date	Total Enrollment
1	Fall 2016	20
2	Spring 2017	6
3	Fall 2017	14

Faculty attended the first hour-long, in-person workshop where coordinators went over the grant requirements, including explaining OER, stressing copyright issues, and introducing **Creative Commons** license policies. In the second hour-long, in-person workshop, past AL$ grant participants were invited to serve as mentors and share their experiences of adopting open resources with incoming participants. Both workshops provided coordinators an opportunity to work one-on-one with participants. It also allowed participants to share their experiences with one another.

Challenges

As program coordinators, we were faced with several challenges. Recruiting additional faculty for future cohorts while simultaneously supporting faculty already in the program, it became clear that scalability was going to be an issue. The original vision for the TEAM program was to operate using a high-touch approach. Significant time was spent planning, organizing, and conducting workshops to introduce faculty to the grant program, grant stipulations, and use of OER materials. High-touch was possible when the number of participants in the program was low; as the numbers increased, the demand on coordinators' time also increased. It was difficult to maintain regular contact with faculty working on different phases of course conversion, which led to faculty feeling as if support was available only at the beginning of the process. Table 2 below shows the distribution of faculty and where they were in the conversion process during the fall 2017 semester. Some faculty were working to develop an understanding of OER materials, while others were searching for OER, and some were implementing their revised syllabus.

Table 2: TEAM participants progress, Fall 2017

Cohort Number	Learning about OER	Searching for OER	Implementation of OER	Program Completion	Departed Program
1 (20)	1	3	3	9	4
2 (6)		3	3		
3 (14)	4	4	1		5
Total	5	10	7	9	9

Attrition rates due to changes in assigned faculty teaching assignments, inability to locate appropriate resources, and departures to teach at other institutions affected course conversion rates. Not all TEAM participants were able to locate an OER that met their teaching needs. Rather than sacrifice course quality, these participants ultimately decided to leave the program, though several were interested in reapplying to the program with a different course later.

It was often discovered that faculty members' definitions and understanding of OER, copyright, and **Creative Commons** licenses widely varied from participant to participant even after attending the workshops.

Table 3: Adoption of OER Resources

Library Resources	OER Platforms	Other
65.21%	17.39%	13.04%

The decision was made to leverage existing technologies; specifically, the use of research guides and the university's learning management system, Canvas, to scale and redistribute work efforts, while increasing faculty engagement and understanding of OER. Workshops no longer needed to be conducted in person; all content was moved into Canvas, including past participant/mentor videos. Hopefully, this new format will provide resources for faculty to refer to continually in order to eliminate any misunderstanding of OER or copyright issues during the phases of adopting new open educational resources.

Fund distribution also proved to be a challenge. As grant administrators, we were responsible for transferring grant funds to multiple individual departments. The initial plan was to transfer professional development funds to departments in the participating faculty member's name. However, due to grant restrictions, funds had to be placed into a special trust fund and this process was not possible. In the end, the decision was made to use a reimbursement process instead. This process, ultimately, did not allow faculty to receive their funds as quickly as anticipated.

Finally, as liaison librarians and coordinators for this grant, the greatest challenge of all was lack of time. Coordinating the campus Affordable Learning $olutions initiative on top of regular assignments as liaison librarians meant providing instruction, reference, and collection development support to two to five departments for each coordinator in addition to managing the day-to-day efforts of the AL$ initiative at **SJSU**.

Successes

The success of the TEAM grant to date has been in great part due to the key partnerships that were formed with the Center for Faculty Development (CFD) and their instructional designers. The CFD provided many training sessions and workshops that focused on active learning and redesigning courses to better fit the needs of the students. In this process, they informed faculty about the TEAM grant opportunity. Having a designated instructional designer was also very helpful. She taught TEAM grant participants about Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which made them aware of accessibility issues when searching for course content across the different OER repositories.

A continuous partnership with the campus bookstore has allowed us to publish and maintain an updated list of "Textbooks Available as eBooks in the Library" for the past five years. This list, "is created by matching the list of textbooks ordered by faculty (provided by campus partner, the **Spartan Bookstore**, a **Barnes & Noble** outlet) with the library's collection of multiple-use eBooks, which are freely available to students."[3]

At the conclusion of their conversion semester, faculty were required to submit several pieces of information:

- a copy of their revised syllabus
- class enrollment numbers
- reflections on the teaching experience
- titles of the primary OER resources used in place of traditional textbooks

Data gathered (see Table 3) indicates that the majority of faculty chose to adopt materials available through the library. Some examples of materials instructors used included eBooks with multi-user licenses, journal articles, and the library's streaming video subscription service. The grant permitted the use of library resources as acceptable replacements for traditional textbooks. There is no direct cost for library materials and all students in a course can access electronic resources at any given time.

Faculty reflections yielded interesting responses. Asked at the beginning of the program why they wanted to join TEAM, many stated that they were concerned with students' access to course readings. This was a sobering insight for those faculty that discovered that not all students were able to purchase required textbooks for their courses. By the end of the program, they discovered that it was more than just saving students money. As **Nidhi Mahendra**, a faculty member in Communicative Disorders and Sciences stated,

I was able to free myself much more to include topics on ableism/disability culture, LGBTQ issues, [the] role of any professional provider/ educator in preventing bullying and discrimination and being an ally — these are not topics that are commonly included in textbook chapters on cultural linguistic diversity issues so I think I've studied and grown much more as an instructor.[4]

Faculty who have completed the program have received $1,500 in professional development funds, which are designed to support faculty in their teaching. Faculty typically use these funds for conference registration and travel. Other faculty used their funds to hire student assistants to support them in their teaching, and some purchased materials to be used in the classroom.

Program Assessment

At the end of the first round of funding, which is two years into the grant, a final report (see Table 4) was submitted to the **CSU** Chancellor's office, AB 798 Final Report Round 1. The report included a list of courses with the estimated savings and the actual savings for each course.

- Estimated cost savings was calculated using the following formula: Estimated Number of students (or enrollment cap) X The Total Cost of Course Materials in a Previous Term (Bookstore List Price)
- Actual Savings was calculated using the following formula: Total Cost of Course Materials in Previous Term - Actual Total Cost of Course Materials X Actual Number of Enrolled students

Table 4: SJSU Final Numbers for first round (Fall 2016 - Spring 2018) of TEAM

Students Impacted	Sections Converted	Savings
777	25	$117,739.

Next Steps

Encouraged by the University President, program coordinators applied for a bonus round of AB 798 grant funding in June 2018. The amount requested totaled $50,000. In order to make sure that an additional 50 course conversions are met by Spring 2020, TEAM coordinators plan to reach out to curriculum coordinators and departments that have multiple course sections.

After two years, the TEAM program has gained momentum at **SJSU** as faculty participants continue sharing their experiences with their colleagues. It is the hope that through sustained evaluation, modification, and improvement, greater numbers of TEAM participants will be reached and it will be possible to develop and promote a culture of affordable learning solutions on our campus.

Endnotes

1. **California State Assembly**. "AB-798 College Textbook Affordability Act of 2015." (October 8, 2015). *https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB798* (Accessed July 20, 2018).

2. **California State University Affordable Learning Solutions**. "Welcome to Affordable Learning Solutions (AL$)." *https://als.csuprojects.org/* (Accessed August 17, 2018).

3. **Bailey, Christa** and **Agee, Ann**. "High Textbook Costs: The Battle Continues." (November, 2016). *Against the Grain*, v.28#5, page 18.

4. **Bailey, Christa** and **Poo, Adriana**. "Affordable Learning Solutions: Aiding Students One Textbook at a Time," (2017) Academic Gateway: Fall 2017 Newsletter, *http://library.sjsu.edu/files/documents/academic_news_2017_Fall.pdf* (Accessed July 20, 2018).