

Transfer Student Expectations for Affordable Course Materials

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This qualitative study examines transfer-related course material affordability challenges faced by undergraduate students at our four-year university. Due to their diverse educational backgrounds and previous exposure to low-cost course materials, transfer students from community colleges have different needs than traditional first-year students. Through focus groups, student surveys, and outreach, we determine that academic librarians at four-year institutions can help ease students' transition through flexible, targeted outreach and by partnering with other units on campus. We conclude with a discussion of actions librarians have taken at our institution and recommendations for librarians at other institutions.

Introduction

Undergraduate transfer students are an underserved population on many university campuses, partially because their demographic is resistant to generalization. Despite their prior experiences with higher education, transfer students often miss social-academic activities designed to connect first-year students with institutional knowledge and social support networks. Inconsistency of information, support, and processes across colleges impedes transfer students from navigating courses (Robison et al., 2020). The transition to a four-year institution often results in transfer shock, a widely noted decrease in students' GPAs the semester following transfer to a four-year college or university (Cedja, 2006; Wang et al., 2021). This article uses the expanded definition of transfer shock employed by Rhine et al. (2010), which also includes other academic and social factors that limit transfer students' likelihood of attaining a bachelor's degree.

Affordability-related transfer shock is especially concerning at Oregon State University, where only about 30% of the classes in the spring 2024 course catalog were low- or no-cost. Statewide adoption of the low- and no-cost course designation stems from Oregon HB 2871 "Relating to higher education; and declaring an emergency," which mandates every public university and community college indicate in its course catalog which courses' "materials exclusively consist of open or free textbooks or other low-cost or no-cost course materials." The house bill also established a statewide OER grant program (2015). By 2023 the grant program saved Oregon students \$24,352,296—or about \$12 in student savings per program dollar spent.

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(Hofer, 2023). Oregon students have legislative support for low- and no-cost materials, but the availability of these materials varies across institutions. While students at many Oregon community colleges benefit from active, well-funded OER programs, their four-year colleges have greater course material costs. Addressing the challenges faced by transfer students is an important step in establishing campus-wide equity. The fall 2016 cohort of first-time college students in the United States had a six-year transfer rate of 31.2% (Shapiro et al., 2024). In 2022, 31% of our university's new undergraduate students transferred from community colleges within Oregon alone (Oregon State University Office of Institutional Research, 2022).

The academic library can help ease transfer shock. Libraries have implemented many solutions to promote transfer student success, including hiring a transfer student librarian, teaching information literacy courses for transfer students, and partnering with other units on campus for transfer student outreach (Coats & Pemberton, 2017; Roberts et al., 2019; Fawley et al., 2021). Libraries also help by supporting affordability initiatives and providing access to course materials.

In this study, we explore what undergraduate students who transferred to our university from other Oregon institutions know about acquiring affordable course materials and how this process impacts their academic success. We employed structured focus groups to examine student familiarity with library services and whether they expected course materials to be free or low-cost based on their experiences at previous institutions. We also explore the institutional and financial needs of transfer students on our campus and how academic libraries and campus partners can support these needs in their own institutions through strategic approaches to messaging, program development, and engagement in affordability initiatives.

Literature Review

Transfer Student Success and Library Services

Transfer students are a complex group, different from one another in many ways—from major to age—with one commonality: having transferred from another college. Many articles exist about transfer students, but there are far fewer on their experiences in the library, most of which were collected in the double issue of *Reference Services Review* edited by Ivins in 2017 and *Transfer Student Success* in 2021, edited by Fawley et al. Ivins' guest-edited double issue covers university-wide initiatives with library participation, unique services by libraries, information literacy needs for transfer students, and several extensive literature reviews. The book, edited by Fawley et al., covers orientation and outreach engagements, classroom and cocurricular efforts, and increasing transfer student capital.

Laanan et al. (2010) define transfer student capital as the experiences and knowledge that community college students use to navigate the transition to four-year institutions. This knowledge can be leveraged by schools that promote a "relentless welcome," building connections for transfer students across campus, and working toward more transparent systems and structures (Wang et al., 2021).

The University of Washington Libraries approached the promotion of transfer student capital with a design thinking method in a year-long project focusing on the needs and challenges of transfer students to their Seattle campus (Whang et al., 2021). Whang et al. found transfer students differ from their traditional counterparts in that they tended to be older, had more commitments to work and family, as well as greater pressure to complete their degrees within a shortened timeline. Heinbach et al. (2019) agreed, identifying the three key challenges

for transfer students: institutional barriers, feelings of not belonging, and external demands. With these challenges in mind, transfer students often have less time to devote to figuring out or participating in events to understand the often large, decentralized campus resources.

A study at University of Colorado Boulder Libraries uncovered that most transfer students had strong emotional memories of K-12 and public libraries from their youth, including nostalgia for the spaces and specific librarians. They felt the libraries helped foster a feeling of connectedness to others on campus (Roberts et al., 2021). In addition to the positive feeling from past library experiences, and their self-sufficiency and resourcefulness, transfer students often have the perception they *should* know more about academic libraries (and broader campus life) because of their prior experience in college. Paradoxically, they might not seek out necessary help (Whang et al., 2017).

Educational barriers common to adult learners (i.e., students 23 or older) often overlap with transfer students' experiences with higher education. Osam et al. identified impediments to adult learners' educations, including institutional barriers created by schools' focus on traditional students and situational barriers including family and financial responsibilities (2017). Furthermore, like transfer students, adult learners contextualize college education within previous experiences. However, while all transfer students have prior higher education to draw upon, theories of adult learning tend to focus on adult learners' life and employment experience (Chen 2017). As our data suggests, many transfer students are not adult learners. Likewise, not all adult learners are transfer students.

Transfer students are not simply older first-year students, as their previous experiences inform their present. Students who transfer are as likely to graduate as direct-entry students (Xu, 2018) and are among the most motivated and resilient college students. They are used to working through structural barriers. However, they are also negatively impacted by transfer shock and targeted by deficient thinking from universities. Vincent Tinto, a prominent researcher of student retention and learning communities, puts forth two factors for transfer students to successfully recover from this shock: 1) academic integration and 2) social integration (1975). Academic integration includes structural issues like confusing or weak transfer and articulation policies, inaccurate advising or lack of transfer advisors, lack of academic preparedness, and student unfamiliarity with the expectations of their new institution (Laanan et al., 2010; Rhine et al., 2010). Libraries are especially well situated to address social integration issues, which provide transfer students with peer support networks, through actions like transfer-student-only orientations and tours, campus event partnerships, and other welcoming initiatives.

Undergraduate Course Material Affordability

College affordability is a continual, pressing issue for U.S. students (Correa & Bozarth, 2023). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) reports the cost of higher education, including tuition, living expenses, and course materials, rose by 31% between 2007 and 2017. This increase has forced students to make choices between their educational needs and basic living needs. In some cases, this choice has led students to not acquire course materials they need (Correa & Bozarth, 2023).

For at least a decade, researchers, especially early advocates of open educational resources (OER), have examined the impact of the rising cost of course materials on student success and students' ability to afford college. They have done this at both the community college level and four-year college level. Large-scale studies have shown that students—in some cases

up to 65%—regularly report not purchasing textbooks because of the cost, causing them to: receive a lower grade; drop, fail, or withdraw from a course (DFW); or choose not to register for a certain course because of the cost of the course materials (Donaldson et al., 2019; Nagle & Vitez, 2020). Students also report needing to work more hours to afford their course materials, thus taking time away from their studies. In their ground-breaking research study, “Textbook Broke: Textbook Affordability as a Social Justice Issue,” Jenkins et al. note that “regardless of race/ethnicity, income or first-generation status, students consistently reported textbook pricing to negatively impact their stress levels, purchasing habits, first-day access, academic performance, and time-to graduation rates” (2020, p. 8).

The impact of the high cost of learning materials seems to be felt more strongly by certain students, including historically underserved populations, first-generation students and non-traditional students (Jenkins et al., 2020). One of the earliest studies (Colvard et al., 2018) to disaggregate their student data by categories found that, when replacing a commercial textbook with an OER, “while end of course grades increased for all groups considered, DFW rates decreased dramatically for student populations we hypothesized would benefit the most from free textbooks (for example, Pell eligible students, underserved populations, and part-time students)” (p. 272). Spica and Biddex (2021) disaggregated their research data by student demographics such as race and income levels, and found similar results, although further research is necessary.

Some studies have examined the high cost of textbooks on community college students (Spica & Biddex, 2021; Becker et al., 2023). Other studies have focused on four-year institutions. However, very few studies have looked at the impact of college textbook prices on transfer students, whether they are community college students or from another four-year institution. One such study was conducted at Old Dominion University in Virginia (Wittkower & Lo, 2020), which reported having a large number of transfer students coming from Tidewater Community College. Like other studies, the researchers at Old Dominion concluded that “student demographics have an effect on how students perceive the cost of course materials” (p. 124). Regarding transfer students specifically, they found that “more of our transfer students worked 31 or more hours per week than our non-transfer students” (p. 124). They also posit that students transferring in from Tidewater Community College, which has a strong z-degree program (i.e., courses that use only openly licensed materials) may be “the most affected by the cost of textbooks” once they transfer to Old Dominion (p. 124).

Methodology

This IRB-approved qualitative study was conducted using a combination of focus groups and a brief survey. The target population was undergraduate transfer students who had attended at least one Oregon community college within the previous five years before transferring to our university.

Identification and Recruitment of Participants

We recruited potential focus group members with posters, flyers, and email sent to a comprehensive list of transfer students at our university generated by the Office of Institutional Analytics and Reporting. Flyers were distributed at start-of-the-year campus gatherings and transfer-student-specific events. Once the researchers had identified eligible participants, they were invited to attend one of three in-person focus groups. Based on the success of the

initial three focus groups, the authors held two additional sessions: a group held at a transfer student dorm and an online group held via Zoom.

At the focus group meetings, each participant was assigned a number to help preserve their anonymity. Participants signed a consent form to ensure that they understood the parameters of the study and what would be asked. Each participant was also given a survey with demographic questions (e.g., ethnicity, gender, age, financial status) and questions about their experience using library resources and services, which they completed during the discussion break (see Appendix A). Each focus group lasted approximately two hours with a break between the third and fourth questions. One PI acted as a moderator, while the other two authors took notes. All the focus groups were audio recorded with permission of the participants. Student participants were asked to respond to the following six open-ended questions:

Section 1: Affordable Course Materials

- 1. What strategies do you use to get your required course materials?
- 2. Are you facing barriers to getting course materials now that you didn't face at your previous institution?
- 3. Compared to your previous institution, how often have your current instructors or departments kept course material costs under \$40?

Section 2: Library Use

- 1. What is your favorite service at our library? It may be from the checklist (e.g., course reserves, laptops, headphones, lockers, etc.) or not.
- 2. What has been your experience using the library to get course materials?
- 3. How does the library where this focus group is taking place compare to your previous library?

During the focus group, participants were provided food and drink. Participants who stayed until the end received a \$25 gift card.

Participant Demographics

The participants consisted of a diverse pool of 23 students from seven of our institution's 13 colleges. Based on survey information, 11 participants were Pell-eligible, 10 were first-generation college students, and 16 were on financial aid.

TABLE 1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants	
Characteristics	n* (%)
Gender	
Female	17 (74%)
Male	2 (9%)
Non-binary or prefer not to respond	3 (13%)
Not reported	1 (4%)
Ethnicity	
White	12 (52%)
Hispanic	3 (13%)
Asian	3 (13%)
African American	2 (9%)
Multi-racial	3 (13%)

TABLE 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	n* (%)
Enrollment Status	
Full-time	21 (91%)
Part-time	2 (9%)
First-generation	
Yes	10 (44%)
No	13 (56%)
Pell Grant recipients	11 (48%)
Received financial aid this term	16 (70%)
*n = 23 participants.	

TABLE 2
Age, Status, Time at Current School, College of Participants

Age	Status	Time at Current School
19-21 (11)	1st Year (0)	1 term or Less (10)
22-25 (4)	2nd Year (5)	2-3 Terms (1)
30-40 (3)	3rd Year (8)	4-5 Terms (5)
Not Reported (2)	4th Year (7)	6+ terms (4)

Transcription, Coding, and Code-Checking

Once the focus groups ended, the authors transcribed the recordings into Google Sheets. The authors used a thematic approach to code the data. They individually brainstormed themes to code, determining five categories: access, affordability, attitudes toward course materials, modality, and service and product awareness. Next, they refined these themes as a group before beginning the coding process. To check for intercoder agreement, the results of the first focus group were coded individually by each of the authors. The authors then reviewed the results and adjusted for ambiguity. If a sentence included more than one concept, it was duplicated so that it could be coded multiple times. Definitions for each of the codes and their subcategories, were added to a coding sheet to ensure consistency (see Appendix A).

Each author then coded the results of three of the focus groups so that every focus group would have multiple coders but keep the workload manageable. After coding all five focus groups, the authors met again to review the results of each group, reviewing the applied codes for consistency. The authors found a high degree of agreement in coding.

Findings

Student comments about course materials fell into five categories: access, affordability, attitudes toward course materials, modality, and service and product awareness. Each of these categories includes two to five subcategories, which arose from patterns the authors identified within student responses.

Course materials are part of a complex financial calculus made by each student, which has a major impact on material affordability and access. “It’s not that I can’t pay for the course materials, but the costs have impacts,” explains one participant. Students have finite resources

and no guarantee that any given education cost will help attain their goals. While they employ a variety of strategies to balance affordability with access to materials, they are beset by institutional barriers and patchwork knowledge about opportunities for campus assistance.

Our transfer students often experience culture shock and disappointment regarding college materials and modalities, which is exacerbated by limited awareness of library services and products. Instructors who explicitly connected specific course materials to learning goals and worked with students to navigate material costs were seen as higher-quality educators. Common pain points include course materials that aren't open or free, mandatory course materials that aren't referenced in class, and required software and digital textbooks that require codes which limit how students access and share materials. Most participants were unaware of library resources that could alleviate costs across multiple categories.

As anticipated, students in our study who attended community colleges that provided most or all of their course materials had higher expectations for their four-year institution regarding OER availability. They expect the same or greater use of OER than at community colleges, especially since they were transferring within-state. Our participants are also less likely to know about their options for acquiring course materials than traditional students: our university, like many institutions, presents its most robust orientation materials at the start of the fall term, with special attention given to incoming freshmen. Our focus group participants report lacking a similar peer group to glean information from, which is often compounded by limited orientation services. These students often come from smaller institutions and can be overwhelmed by the vastness of a large university and library and often did not have any library instruction previously. Our participants described seeking information but often shy from asking for assistance since they feel like they're already expected to know the answers.

Access

Student comments on course material access fell into three subcategories: barriers, strategies, and knowledge gaps directly related to the transfer process.

Our participants found the cost of university textbooks and assignment platforms a key barrier to acquiring the needed course materials or registering for a course. Some chose a course or a specific instructor due to the open, free, or less expensive course materials. Some students benefited from their instructors sharing non-textbook materials like novels or PDFs in the course learning management system (LMS). But other students, especially in STEM disciplines, had to pay high costs. Students were unhappy with having to pay full price for a textbook bundle, when their course only used a portion of it, such as a model kit or an access code for taking an online test. Having to pay for extras seems unreasonable to them when they see free technologies or cheaper options.

Our participants use a variety of strategies to acquire needed course resources. Many waited until the first week of the term to see if their course seemed like it would use its mandatory materials. Other students waited until course material was actively referenced in class. The perceived future value of the course material was a factor in its purchase. Students perceive a course text that is referenced once in a class as less valuable than one that may serve as a future reference within their major. Google is the most common search tool for course materials. One student explains their multi-step process: "So I have a super tight budget and I always like, I'm already checking [...] for book lists. So I can see, 'Where am I going to get the material?' Is it gonna be county library, [our university] library, eBay? I literally will just

Google every single place you can get the book. Will I rent it? Will I purchase it?" Other common sources for course materials include piracy, renting from Amazon or other websites, and borrowing from a friend, classmate, or affiliate group. A few students also mentioned working from screenshots and other low-quality copies provided by classmates.

Study participants frequently expressed concern that they had missed a vital piece of campus orientation that would have reduced the stress of accessing course materials. For example, many participants expressed concern about not receiving a full orientation tour or a librarian visit as part of an entry-level course. Participants who were familiar with the library prior to the focus group meetings mentioned coming with a friend or for a fun event like a game night, which helped them feel more comfortable using the library for coursework.

Affordability

Our participants' comments on course material affordability map to four subcategories: instructor engagement, their experience with low-cost/no-cost courses, their expectations regarding material costs, and the impact of material costs on their lives. Unsurprisingly, students appreciated receiving high quality materials for low prices. They also tended to believe their previous community colleges provided more affordable, quality materials than their current institution.

While affordability was central to our participants' college experience, they often expressed shame and uncertainty at addressing it. When asked if they ever approached an instructor to ask about affordable materials, several students had visceral reactions. One student explained, "I wouldn't want to draw that negative attention to myself. [I'm] trying to make as good of an impression as I can because I'm going to be in the college for a while." Another student explained they would never tell a faculty member they couldn't afford textbooks: "They would laugh at me!" Participants shared that few instructors explicitly indicated why they chose specific course materials, and only when the material was open or free. Many of our participants were aware of courses marked low-cost or no-cost in the course catalog but could not depend on their availability.

All our participants shared impacts from the high cost of their required course materials, but some students also had to make sacrifices to purchase them: "I have made my decisions on which instructors to take based on the list of materials, like this book is going to be \$60 cheaper, that's the one I'm signing up for." Another student explained, "I told my professor that I couldn't afford the books. They told me to get a free subscription, but that only lasted three weeks so I sold my car to afford the books."

Attitudes Toward Course Materials

Our participants' attitudes toward course materials fell into two subcategories: course materials as a reflection on the quality of university faculty and the relevance of their course materials to their goals. Often, these attitudes linked the cost of education to its perceived quality: "I'm paying a lot more here, shouldn't it be better?"

Students value instructors' efforts to lower costs though instructors do not always successfully communicate the value or relevance of course texts. Students shared many stories about instructors who wrote their own books or sought materials that were open while at the community college. This practice was less frequent at our university. In many cases, participants view our university as more impersonal than their previous institutions. One student summarized this view: "My professors this term have not really gone into specific

details why they chose these textbooks, it's more like 'This is what you need. Go get it.'" One surprising belief that several students mentioned was that instructors who required fewer material purchases were generally more helpful and flexible in their pedagogy. One student explained, "In my experience, professors willing to compromise [to help with costs] don't require a textbook at all." Another student explained, "professors who require less material are often better instructors."

Participants are most frustrated when they purchase required texts their instructors do not use. However, even in cases when instructors demonstrate the value of their course materials, students feel they should be more flexible regarding the materials' format, preferring those that are open or free "like at most community colleges." Participants specifically praised one community college, which provided primarily free, open course materials.

Modality

Our participants had strong, diverse opinions on course materials' ideal medium. The authors categorized comments related to student preferences between digital or print course material, as well as participants' feelings toward ancillary materials and required platforms.

Participants shared that cost often overrules their preferences when choosing between physical or digital formats: low-cost options tend to be ebooks provided by the library, scanned copies, cell phone images shared by classmates, or pirated PDFs. Many students agreed on the benefits of digital course materials—even if they ultimately preferred physical—because of the ease of transport, keyword searching, digital annotation, and pasting into other documents. Specific, proprietary platforms strongly limited students' preferences for digital materials.

Though students have different preferences on print and digital modalities, they strongly dislike ancillary software and time-sensitive access to homework software. Having to buy a whole textbook package to pay for a code to access online homework, take tests, or in-class participation was frustrating: "It's like I'm paying to do my homework essentially, I'm not paying for the book because you never reference the book you pay to do the homework." Other common complaints for specific digital platforms included cost, awkward user interface, the inability to download course materials, and lack of useful features.

Service and Product Awareness

The focus group participants' awareness of library and other campus resources fell into five subcategories: 1. library course reserves, 2. other course materials, 3. library materials, 4. library services, and 5. marketing. Many additional comments fell outside of the affordability focus of this article but were nevertheless important in identifying student perceptions of library services and spaces.

Surveyed students showed mixed awareness of library services for obtaining course materials. At least half of the surveyed students did not know about the library's reservable course materials. Those who were familiar with the course reserve process found it confusing and unreliable. Specifically, students were unhappy that items on course reserve were not always available: high demand physical texts were often unavailable in the limited time students could visit the library, and limited ebook licenses put a cap on online research. Variations on the statement, "Why can't they just give us the PDF in our course module or share a free textbook like we had at [community college]?" were common. Several participants mentioned the campus Basic Needs Center, a student support center that partners with the library, as one option for obtaining

course materials for the entire term, sharing their positive experiences with their focus groups.

Unlike the uncertainty surrounding obtaining course materials, our participants were more confident using the library to obtain articles and supplementary course material. Most participants considered Ex Libris' Primo, our main discovery system, and our databases both accessible and easy to use. Most participants were aware of similar tools from past institutions. However, some students attributed knowledge of these systems to course visits from a librarian focused on finding "three scholarly sources" or other assignment-based searches. Despite the participants' positive view of librarians during course visits, they generally viewed librarians as helpful but distant. One participant highlighted the value of librarians while also identifying their distance from the everyday experience: "a person you can physically talk to and that's always been very helpful even if you don't utilize it."

Discussion

After reviewing the findings from the focus groups and user surveys, the authors discussed the results through the lens of the five main categories: access, affordability, attitudes toward course materials, modality, and service and product awareness. Within every coding category and subcategory, participants expressed initial disagreements and variations in opinion. This lack of immediate consensus lends support to the truism that transfer students are a heterogeneous group. Successful efforts to appeal to transfer students must be flexible to account for this variety.

After the authors reached a high degree of agreement coding focus group results, they noted the themes arising from the most common subcategory within each major category. These themes suggested a composite transfer student persona. While this persona cannot represent the experiences of all transfer students, their experiences provide one model of our participants' experiences. This persona experiences transfer shock as a result of course material affordability; their community college was more responsive to their financial need. Post-transfer, they use many strategies to evaluate the value of purchasing required course materials, weighing the expected value of the material's cost versus their budget, ease of acquiring alternate materials, and the cost of other materials. Although the composite student does not have a strong preference between print and digital course materials, they loathe DRM and other artificial barriers to prevent the re-use, re-sale, and transferability of information. They feel as if traditional students are more connected to campus life and social networks, partially due to first-year experience activities, which they can leverage to navigate access barriers and benefit from campus resources such as the library.

One major coding cluster crosses subcategories to indicate lack of institutional knowledge among transfer students. Frequent comments in the access: knowledge gaps, affordability: low-cost/no-cost courses, and service and product awareness: library course reserves sub-categories support claims of transfer shock, institutional awe, and the sheer difficulty of adapting to the norms of a new institution.

Likewise, the vigorous discussion surrounding the cross-subcategory cluster of access: barriers, affordability: instructor engagement, modality: required programs, and attitudes toward course materials: university faculty suggests the importance of instructor involvement in addressing transfer student concerns. Many focus group participants praised teachers who aided them with course material affordability issues, but they more readily identified faculty who created educational barriers.

Local Change

The authors and their peers have promoted change at their own institution based on the results of the focus groups. We share our actions recognizing that they may not be generalizable to all academic library contexts and are likely most applicable to libraries with a similar size and focus on serving the entire campus.

Access

One strategy we've already implemented is sharing a handout on accessing affordable course materials through our collections and partners across campus. Many of our participants expressed concerns about not receiving a full orientation tour or librarian visit as part of an entry-level course. Our library is following the advice of Whang et al. (2017) and working with campus partners to target transfer students for outreach along other avenues. We are participating in events like National Transfer Week and other opportunities to share library spaces and services. Even simple activities like attending a transfer meet-and-greet have allowed us to listen and share more about library support.

Affordability

As a library, we have been building our capability for course reserves, especially digitally, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the last several years, our university's Basic Needs Center has developed a robust circulating collection of course materials, which is discoverable in our library catalog. We have also continued to work with our campus partners, including upper administration, to advocate for more open, low-cost course materials.

Attitudes Toward Course Materials

We are exploring entry points for discussing affordable course material options as part of new instructor training, professional development, and other campus events. Sharing our students' stories and educating campus decision-makers on methods to reduce course material costs is necessary if we wish to change the campus culture.

Modality

Although campus-wide adoption of ancillary software and course material with restrictive DRM is largely outside of our control, we are strong proponents of work being done in other parts of the library to increase the size and availability of our course reserves. Many of these items are available as ebooks, which provide students with the most immediate access to necessary course materials.

Service and Product Awareness

Student suggestions from the focus groups have encouraged us to rethink elements of many student outreach initiatives. We have updated promotion materials, including our social media accounts, newsletters, and handouts. Iterating to catch student interest among the panoply of visual stimuli on campus is an evergreen issue. Recently, we have started using more QR codes on library advertising, as most focus groups suggested them unprompted.

We are also sharing these findings with internal, campus-wide, and professional groups dedicated to improving the student experience. Presenting on transfer student experiences invites discussion and keeps the issues relevant to educators with the capability to improve

the student experience. Meeting students and advisors at transfer-student-specific events has also become an increased priority. We have attended several transfer student-focused events and provided direct outreach.

Recommendations

Every university is different, and transfer students are notoriously difficult to classify. In adapting these recommendations, it is important to communicate with transfer students and related departments. One case study (Vinyard 2020) presents the example of a library that taught a welcome course for every incoming first-year student. Transfer students indicated this course was not necessary. Instead, the library supported them through specific database training, outreach from subject librarians, and focused tours. With these caveats, we recommend:

- Avoid generalizing about transfer students. They are unique, yet similar in facing challenges that typical first-year students do not face. Many of them identify as transfer students, but many do not.
- Build on their transfer capital. Recognize the education they've already received. For example, library support, metacognitive reflections, and online library research refresher activities for upper-level students can employ learner-centered pedagogy to support all students (Fawley et al., 2021).
- Consider a librarian liaison specifically for transfer students, a transfer student services librarian (Coats & Pemberton, 2017), or a personal librarian program for transfer students (Clement, 2021; Fountaine & Hallman, 2021) if your campus has a high percentage of transfer students.

Limitations and Future Directions

Conversations with students are a regular part of life in an academic library. These conversations are great sources of feedback that inform our work. They are also a constant reminder that our focus group students don't speak for the entire student body, let alone all transfer students at our university. In future iterations of this study, we are interested in working with a control group to more directly compare traditional student experiences with those of transfer students. Additionally, now that we've established a basic understanding of transfer student issues, we would like to apply more nuance to future inquiry. Specifically, the notion of how affordability impacts students' lives grew as our conversations progressed. Most students did not present material affordability as a binary can/can't afford decision, but one shaded by time, ownership rights, and competing priorities.

This study was also limited by time and participants. The students who volunteered were a self-selected group. If they felt like they didn't have strong opinions or dissatisfaction with the status quo, it is likely they would not be as interested in attending. Moreover, most of these students attended their initial college-level courses during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Every facet of life on campus was disrupted by the monumental public health crisis, which could account for some participants' feelings of disorientation and being overlooked.

Conclusion

Our focus groups and subsequent discussions have taught us a great deal about our transfer students' expectations and needs regarding affordable course materials. While many of them have adapted strategies for accessing course materials and other campus services from their

previous academic experiences, this knowledge is often imperfect. Libraries can help address transfer shock and improve transfer student success through focused outreach and partnership with other campus groups that work with historically underserved populations like transfer students. Since transfer students are notoriously diverse with regards to educational, financial, and other demographic backgrounds, flexible assistance is necessary. Nevertheless, the introduction of our singular transfer student persona to departmental and campus-wide discussions on library resources and low-cost and OER course materials has already had a positive impact on outreach.

We also recognize how much four-year institutions can learn about affordability from community colleges. As part of the continued research that will grow from this article, we intend to learn more about effective course material affordability measures used by our community college peers. The library is not powerless to alleviate course material costs, but campus-wide attention and regular student feedback are the keys to sustainable, meaningful change.

Appendix A

Demographic Survey Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your status at your current university?
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Other
3. How long have you been at your current university?
 - a. 1 term or less
 - b. 2-3 terms
 - c. 4-5 terms
 - d. 6+ terms
4. What is your enrollment status this term?
 - a. Full-time
 - b. Part-time
5. With which gender do you identify?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Non-binary
 - d. Prefer not to respond
6. Ethnicity
 - a. African American/Black
 - b. American Indian/Alaska Native
 - c. Asian
 - d. Hispanic/Latino
 - e. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - f. White/Caucasian
 - g. Multi-racial/Ethnic
 - h. Prefer not to respond
7. Are you a first-generation college student?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Are you eligible for a Pell Grant or other need-based financial aid?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Did you receive financial aid this term?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. What is your major?
11. When do you anticipate graduating from your current university?
12. Is there anything you'd like us to know about the library and/or acquiring affordable learning materials?

13. The library offers these services. Please check whether you have used, are aware, or unaware of the following services.
- Desktops in the Learning Commons
 - Laptops/Hotspots
 - Course reserves/course materials, physical
 - Course reserves/course materials, electronic
 - Headphones
 - Study rooms
 - Calculators
 - Books/articles from our university's collection
 - Books/articles from other libraries (ILL/Summit)
 - Printing/scanning
 - Lockers
 - Charging cords for phones and laptops
 - Therapy light lamps
 - Board games
 - Maker kits (e.g., Rapberry Pi, Makey Makey, GoPro camera)
 - Adaptive technology (e.g., ergonomic mouse & keyboard, low vision keyboard and calculator, magnifying lamp).
14. What does the term "OER" mean to you?

Affordability Code Book

1. Access
 - a. Strategies: Do you share used books? Go to Amazon? Pirate books? Wait until the second week?
 - b. Barriers: What gets in your way?
 - c. Transfer Student-Specific Issues: Did you get a campus tour? Miss out on common student experiences or classes?
2. Affordability
 - a. Expectations: Compared to previous institutions or what you've heard about college.
 - b. Instructor Interaction: Did you approach the instructor about costs or affordability options?
 - c. Low-Cost/No-Cost: Our campus bookstore defines low-cost as under \$40.
 - d. Impacts: How do material costs impact your life? Use code 2e for clear, identifiable losses.
 - e. Sacrifices: Did the cost force you to miss something important? Work extra hours?
3. Attitudes Toward Course Materials
 - a. Faculty: How do you feel about your instructors? Do they seem to care about educational costs? Do they explain their material selection?
 - b. Textbooks: Are your course materials worth the cost? How often do you reference course materials?
 - c. Library: How do you feel about the library? Is it cozy? Loud?
4. Modality
 - a. Physical/Digital: Do you prefer physical or digital textbooks? Which do you use

- in ideal circumstances?
- b. Ancillary Materials: How do you feel about homework platforms, digital test systems, kits, and other non-book course materials?
- 5. Service & Product Awareness
 - a. Course Reserves: Include physical and digital course reserves.
 - b. Other Course Materials: For example, books, articles, our discovery layer, and LibGuides
 - c. Library Materials: Loanable items in our Library of Things
 - d. Library Services: Lockers, study rooms, printing, and other services provided by the library. Includes spaces.
 - e. Marketing: What is the best way to let transfer students know about these services?

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