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Open Access Week at Gettysburg College

Open Access Week 2017

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# Open Access Week Seeks to Address “Textbook Crisis”

Gauri Mangala  
Gettysburg College

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Mangala, Gauri, "Open Access Week Seeks to Address “Textbook Crisis”" (2017). *Open Access Week at Gettysburg College*. 4.  
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**Description**

Jay Hauser '19 spent \$391.43 for a single course's materials during his first semester at Gettysburg College.

"I had a class where we read classical text of [political] philosophy. But only sections of each text. But we had to buy the books. No one ever tried to bring in open source online copies of them and the professor did not provide them. Instead we spent a lot of money on like twentyish books and only used parts of them."

In fact, a 2016 analysis conducted by College Board found that the price of books and supplies for a full-time student at a private nonprofit 4-year college, like Gettysburg, was \$11,890. Add in the cost of tuition, room and board, and living, and suddenly it is clear why college students so often are finding nutrition in ramen noodles and microwaveable hot dogs. [*excerpt*]

**Disciplines**

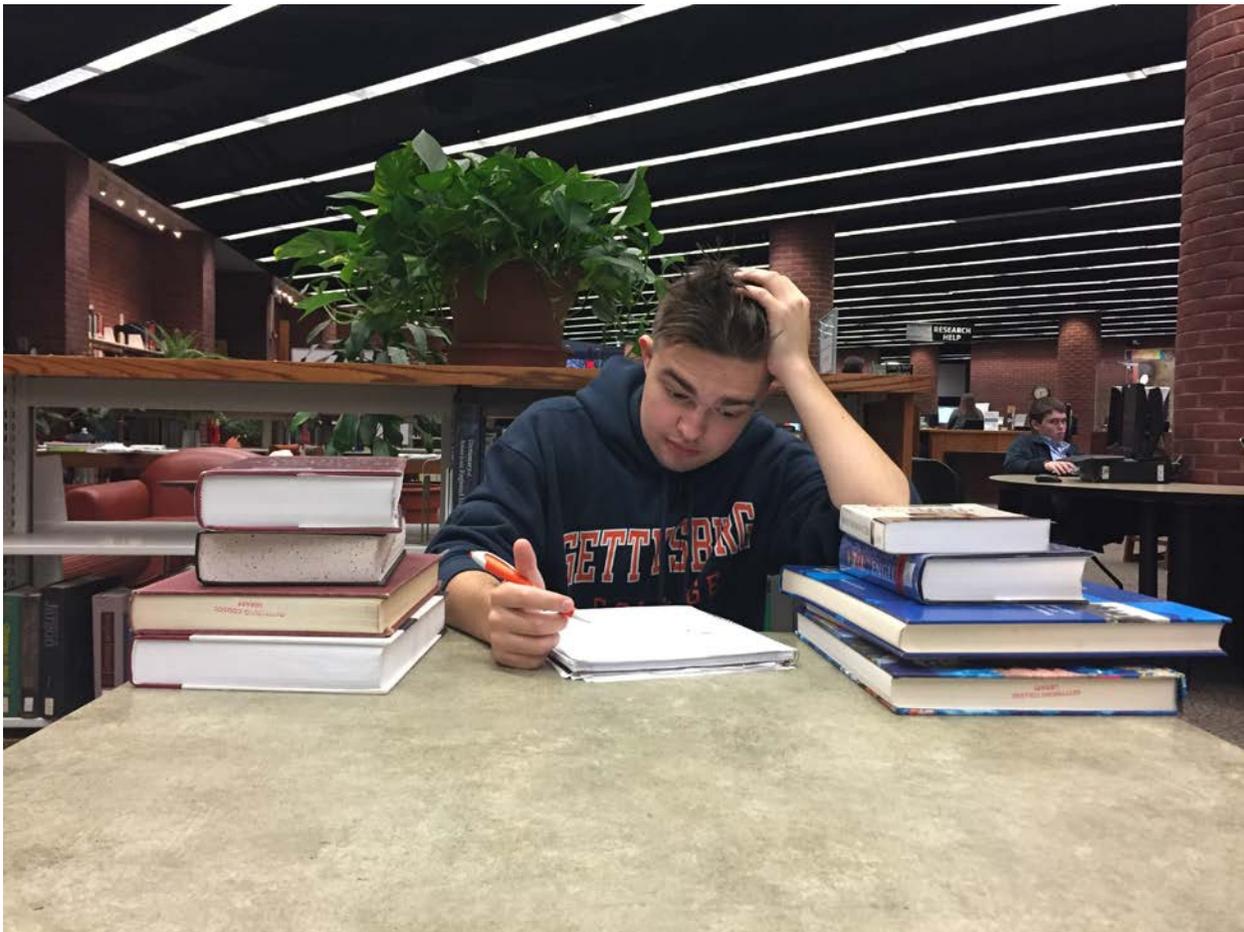
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**Comments**

This article was written for Gettysburg College's student-run newspaper, *The Gettysburgian*, in anticipation of Open Access Week 2017. It details the high cost of textbooks at Gettysburg College and other institutions, as well as ways in which Musselman Library and Gettysburg professors are embracing alternative, open solutions in order to provide affordable materials for Gettysburg students.

## Open Access Week Seeks to Address “Textbook Crisis”

Posted on Oct 19, 2017



Max Glover '21 with a stack of textbooks in Musselman Library (Photo Gauri Mangala / The Gettysburgian)

By Gauri Mangala, Staff Writer

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The headline of a 2015 NBC News article says it all: “College Textbook Prices Have Risen 1041 Percent Since 1977.”

As with many other industries, there have been many mergers and acquisitions in the publishing industry. This has led to a small monopolized industry of large, powerful publishing companies, with few opponents to consider. Because of this, companies can set extremely high prices without having to worry about being outcompeted. Since their main market is students, who are compelled consumers, publishing companies need not worry about having appealing prices: students will have to put up with whatever price they set.

Musselman Library has expressed deep interest in making Open Access (OA) and its many components a real partner in the educational materials for Gettysburg students. Accordingly, Musselman Library’s 2017 OA Week, taking place Oct. 23-27, will orient more towards how students can advocate for change.

Open Access provides readers with free access to published research, while still remaining within the confines of copyright and license restriction. Open Access advocates that education and knowledge are a right, not a privilege, and works to provide information for all, regardless of class.

Janelle Wertzberger, Assistant Dean and Director of Scholarly Communications, and Chris Barnes, Scholarly Communications Librarian, are leading OA Week in order to uncover what students are really paying for textbooks and teach students what they can do to change that.

“I think, sometimes, that faculty assume that everybody gets the book, and that that’s that. And we know from the research that we read, that many students don’t get the book,” explained Wertzberger. “They get a different edition, or they rent it and they can’t write in it. Or the online copy is cheaper than the print copy. There’s all these barriers that actually impact students’ success in the class. There’s some research that shows that if books are too expensive students will drop a class or even change majors because the cost of materials in a discipline is too high to afford.”

Many professors at Gettysburg have already started making changes to their curriculums to include more open access material and lessen the cost of course materials. Ian Clarke, who teaches a first-year writing course “Writing Through Literature,” has successfully created a curriculum with a zero-dollar cost.

“The anthology that I had been using,” Clarke explained, “which was fairly expensive, came out with a new version, and I didn’t like the choices so much. I saw Janelle Wertzberger and she said ‘have you ever thought about open access?’”

Clarke explored open access texts for his course and found that there were many incredible options that did not cost a dime. By utilizing Project Gutenberg, a hub for Open Access, Clarke found works by authors including James Joyce, Mark Twain, and Virginia Woolf.

“English is not necessarily the most expensive field of study,” Clarke asserted. “But it can still get pretty pricey. And the amount of good material out there that is free is kind of staggering. It is just on you to pull some organizational scheme or syllabus from it.”

Clarke is not the only one who has made use of Open Access. Josef Brandauer, Associate Professor of Health Sciences has begun to utilize open access resources in his statistics class.

Remembering his own struggles paying for textbooks in college, Brandauer wanted to ease the burden on his students as much as possible.

“When I do announce that the online version of my statistics textbook is free, and they can order a hardcopy from Amazon at a minimal cost, there is generally a sense of relief,” Brandauer remarked. He noted that while he never experienced a student who asked him to look into cheaper options, he would welcome that conversation.

Darren Glass, Professor of Mathematics and Sciences, has also made good use of the Open Access statistics textbook. “In an upper level math course a few years ago, I was looking for textbooks, and there was a textbook that I absolutely loved. It’s one of the standards in the field and it cost 130 dollars. I happened across another textbook that was free, and I didn’t love it quite as much, but at the same time, I was thinking, how can I ask students to spend 130 dollars on something that is not that much better than something that is free?” Glass posited. “It is important to be aware of the hidden costs of going to college. I think it is important for faculty to be aware of that.”

The concept of free education is extremely idealistic. Janelle Wertzberger is aware of this and does not expect for every course at Gettysburg to be able to reduce its costs to almost nothing as Clarke, Brandauer, and Glass have done.

“We are under no delusion that every course could be taught with a zero-dollar course material fee,” Wertzberger assured. “That’s not realistic. But we do suspect that courses that have 300-dollar textbooks maybe could use a closer look and that there might be an alternative to that. And if there’s not, maybe the professor would want to make one.”

OA Week urges students be more engaged in advocating for change. “If a student is interested in influencing the materials that are assigned in classes, I think they can begin a conversation with their professors about the materials that were chosen and whether the cost of those materials was taken into account,” Wertzberger suggested.

Barnes continued, “Some of the most successful Open Access movements on campus have been student led, have been from students getting together and saying ‘let’s make every faculty member read and sign this pledge that they have looked for alternative options and have very intentionally chosen the books that they have chosen because those really are the best books.’ If professors hear from the students, it is much more powerful than hearing it from the library.”

Among other activities, during Open Access week, students will be invited to contribute to a wall of post-it notes in the library that will show the amount of money individual students at Gettysburg spend on textbooks relative to their peers.

*Editor’s Note: The Gettysburgian has added “[political]” prior to “philosophy” in Jay Hauser’s first quote in this article. We stand behind the quote (and the article) in its original construction and note that, because the professor of the course in question is no longer on the faculty at Gettysburg College and thus would not have had an opportunity to respond, no specific department or course was mentioned. However, because a concern was raised that Hauser referred to a course in the philosophy department, we felt it prudent to add this clarification. (- B. Pontz)*