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Investing in Textbook Affordability Pays Off for Students

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Abstract

Investing in textbook affordability can have a huge payoff for students—just ask Assistant Professors Alice Brawley Newlin and Marta Maras in the Management department. Their open, customized textbook for Statistical Methods (MGT 235) is completely free. It has been used by over 400 students and saved them an estimated \$150,000! The story of how this remarkable outcome was achieved has its origins in Musselman Library. [excerpt]

Keywords

textbook affordability, OER, open educational resources, Gettysburg College

Disciplines

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Comments

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Investing in textbook affordability can have a huge payoff for students—just ask Assistant Professors Alice Brawley Newlin and Marta Maras in the Management department. Their open, customized textbook for Statistical Methods (MGT 235) is completely free. It has been used by over 400 students and saved them an estimated \$150,000!



The story of how this remarkable outcome was achieved has its origins in Musselman Library. In February 2019, Brawley Newlin attended a program titled [Open Textbooks: Access, Affordability, and Academic Success](#). In it, Assistant Dean and Director of Scholarly Communications Janelle Wertzberger shared what Open Educational Resources (OER) are and how they can benefit students and faculty. After the workshop, faculty participants were invited to write a short review of an open textbook they might use in one of their courses (the Friends helped finance review incentives). Brawley Newlin reviewed a book called *Intro Statistics*. In March 2020, Maras attended the same workshop and reviewed OpenStax's *Introductory Business Statistics*. Each received \$200 for their completed reviews.

Together, Brawley Newlin and Mara teach MGT 235 Statistical Methods. This required course is a gateway to the Business, Organizations, and Management major and carries a one-attempt grade requirement to continue. Because it is a high-stakes course for students, faculty carefully consider issues of equity and

fairness that may impact students' ability to succeed. They identified the high cost of commercial textbooks as a barrier to the inclusivity of the course (the books cost \$361.40) and began teaching with OER in fall 2020. That first semester, they lightly edited the OpenStax [Introductory Business Statistics](#) textbook and kept notes about changes they wanted to make in the future.

In spring 2021, Musselman Library and the Johnson Center for Creative Teaching and Learning offered an OER Grant to support instructors who were ready to adopt an OER as-is or remix open texts to support their course content and learning goals. Brawley Newlin and Maras were awarded a “remix” grant and continued to work on their custom book, incorporating student feedback as well as new source material. Their customized book is [published on the LibreTexts platform](#) where anyone can read it!

The professors carefully assessed student learning and experience using the new book. Students who used the newly improved book in fall 2021 reported that the book was “just as easy” or “easier to access in comparison to books in other courses they’d taken.” They also said they thought their grade was either “positively affected” or “not affected by the use of an open book.” No one thought the book had a negative effect! Students shared more about the benefits of using the open book. One wrote “I love the free accessible online version. Takes away from the burden of paying for more material on top of a 70,000 dollar tuition! All classes should be like this for the amount of money we are paying.” Another noted the reduction of cognitive load at the beginning of the semester and appreciated “not having to go through the stress and the process of finding the correct textbook and trying to purchase or rent it for as little money as possible.”

Brawley Newlin and Maras have generously shared their experiences. Brawley Newlin and Scholarly Communications Librarian Mary Elmquist gave a virtual presentation for the Affordable Learning Pennsylvania community titled [Textbook Remix: An Introduction to LibreTexts for OER Editing](#). Brawley Newlin and Maras have each participated in campus panel presentations: *Faculty and Student Perspectives on Open Education at Gettysburg College* in Spring 2021 and *Real Talk about OER: The JCCTL Grantee Experience (so far!)* in Spring 2022.

It’s no surprise that the pair received the Super Saver award as part of Textbook Affordability Week in February 2023! From fall 2020 through fall 2023, their work has impacted 431 students in 22 sections of MGT 235. Brawley Newlin and Maras are truly Textbook Champions. And to think that their incredible impact started with a \$200 book review grant underwritten by Friends of Musselman Library.