



Creating an Affordable Course

Beyond the Podium Podcast

Alexandra

Hello. My name is Alexandra Bitton-Bailey. And welcome to the Beyond the Podium podcast series. This podcast is on teaching and learning. Here our guests offer their best tips, strategies, innovations, and stories about teaching. Our guests today are April Hines and Herbert Lowe. They're going to talk about a subject near and dear to their heart-- student success through textbook affordability.

Textbook costs have risen significantly in the past 10 years. This has made it quite difficult for some students to afford materials in order to be successful in school. But April Hines and other subject specialists librarians and great faculty, like Herbert Lowe, have made it their mission to find affordable alternatives for their students.

Herbert is a new faculty member at UF. He has his students best interest at heart. He's a tough, but caring member of our faculty whose serious nature permeates his demeanor. But when you get to know him, when you hear him talk about his students, his classes, all of a sudden it changes his face and his voice, and the most wonderful smile transforms him. You see that deep down he's that caring instructor we all wish we had and hope our kids have.

Herbert Lowe

I worked 22 years as a reporter for what we once called newspapers. And as a journalist, I've been able to meet a great many people who have been inspiring and have had great successes and great hardships. Eight years ago circumstances led me to becoming a full-time university faculty member. And I went from having no children to maybe 150.

Alexandra

Herbert is always looking for a way to make his classes better to help his students out. So it's not a surprise that meeting April Hines meant some big changes were coming. April happens to be the subject specialist librarian for Herbert's college.

April Hines

My name's April Hines and I'm the journalism and mass comm librarian here at UF. I have been in this position for almost five years now, but I've been a gator for almost 18 years. So I came here in 2000 to go to college. I was a student. Then I was a staff member working in the libraries for a while. I got my degree in journalism, and when I started working in the libraries I found that I was still disseminating information, just in a different way.

And I always really loved the research component of writing anyway. So I ended up getting a master's degree in library and information science. And then I went on to work in the UF library system. And when the journalism librarian position opened, it was the perfect full-circle moment in all of my education and experience over that time period. So yeah, I've been here for a while.

Alexandra

Both April and Herbert are dedicated to students. And this dedication is evident by their passion to provide affordable course materials. But where did this passion come from?

April Hines

So when I first became passionate about textbook affordability-- I think back to my own experience as a student. I was a low income student. I was on financial aid. And I used to get the biggest knot in my stomach when it came time to purchase textbooks, because financial aid only goes so far. And there were some textbooks that were really-- over \$100, that were very expensive. We've all had those classes where you buy an expensive textbook and you maybe use a couple of chapters out of it.

So I had that experience from my college days. And then when I started working at the education library here at UF, one of my job duties was course reserves. And I noticed that for a lot of courses, the textbook we already owned in the library. And the students would check those books out before the first class even started. And I started contacting professors and saying, hey, we have your textbook in the library. Do you want me to put it on course reserve? And their answer was always, oh, my god, you can do that? That would be amazing.

And then the students would come in and use those books on a daily basis. I would see a student come in and know exactly what book they were going to ask me for. So I understood how valuable this was to students and how much they were really craving that assistance. And there have been studies done on students that have said that they have chosen classes based on how affordable the textbook was, or felt like they weren't able to be as successful in a certain class because they were having to share a textbook with a couple of other people because they couldn't afford it.

And I know this happens a lot, probably more than maybe some professors think it does. Because I have students contact me at the beginning of every semester-- can you help me find my textbook? Is it in the library? Is it on course reserve? Do we have an ebook version available? And I get those emails every single semester. And sometimes they're even afraid to reach out to their instructors and ask if there are other options because they're embarrassed. And I've been in that position, as well.

Herbert Lowe

I once had a student who had not taken three quizzes. And I didn't find out until mid-term that she wasn't taking the quizzes. So I called her into my office. She apologized. It was only because another student told me that she didn't have the money for the books and didn't want to tell me. So I handed her a copy of the book and told her to sit up and gave her the treatment, as I like to call it. But it was heartbreaking.

This was the same student who a semester later was told she could not stay in school because her financial aid wasn't coming through. So there are too many students here where day to day financially, they don't know if they'll be able to continue. So I'm not looking to make that burden any heavier. There's another concern for students who do creative work, like journalism, where having the best laptop is helpful, having access to the kinds of equipment that you're using for this podcast would be helpful.

And it can be a challenge to even get what might be considered inexpensive-- \$10. Students will tell you that \$10 is a lot to them. So anything that we can do to help make their education more affordable I think is a worthwhile initiative and we should see as one of our responsibilities.

Alexandra

When April and Herbert joined forces they were able to make dramatic changes that resulted in course materials that cost students nothing. And it may surprise you to hear how easy these changes were to implement.

April Hines

So Herbert was actually developing a new course and he heard me speak at new faculty orientation about my ability to connect faculty with resources they can use in their courses. And I met with him. He showed me a list of textbooks that he already identified and readings that he was interested in. And I was able to say, yeah, we have ebook versions of these, these we don't, but we could put a hard copy on course reserve.

Oh, by the way, did you know that we subscribe to Kanopy, which is a streaming video platform? And I connected him with some documentaries that were related to his course. And, of

course, he was like, all I have to do is link to this? My students can access it for free? I was like, yes. I connected him to some journal articles and some other resources like that. And then I was able to get him set up with our course reserve system. Another thing faculty don't realize is Ares can be embedded right into your Canvas site. So students don't even have to leave Canvas to access these materials. And I was able to get him set up with that. So yeah, and that was just a couple of short meetings and some emails, and he was good to go.

Herbert Lowe

For the race, sports, and culture class, there were a number of research papers, magazine articles. It's just, where would I collect all this? In talking to April Hines, she helped me understand what course reserves was. She said that if I could give her a list of the materials, she and her staff would make that available so that students could download or access or go to the library.

April Hines

So there are a variety of options. A professor can, through the online course reserve systems Ares they can request that the physical copy of the textbook they're using in their class be placed on course reserve behind the circulation desk in the library. So students can come, check out the book. Everyone in the class has access to it. They use it in the library. They can scan pages, email selections to themselves. We have this amazing high-powered KIC scanner in the libraries that makes scanning a lot easier and a lot faster. The students absolutely love it. So that's probably the simplest option.

And I've had professors say to me, how do you expect my entire class to share one textbook in the library? And no one really expects them to do that, but it serves as an option for those cash-strapped students who maybe can't afford the textbook or there is a delay in their financial aid. They want to have an option while they're studying in the library. So you can at least do that if nothing else. Then a lot of people don't realize that the libraries subscribe or have worked with various book vendors that provide multi-user ebook options for a lot of academic books.

So I've had professors who might be using a Routledge Handbook, for example, in one of their classes. And we can provide multi-user ebook access to that title for free through the libraries. So no one in the class has to buy the book unless they want to.

Alexandra

As a faculty member, you don't have to go about this alone. The first place to begin is to get in touch with your subject specialist librarian.

April Hines

When it comes to working with the libraries, it's really easy to just go in the library website, click on the list of subject librarians, find the one that's related to your subject, and then just shoot them an email. And ask for a meeting or you can communicate electronically. Like I said, Herbert and I met a couple of times. And then also, there are some resources that you can look into. You can look in the library catalog for your textbook and see if there is an ebook version available or if there might already be a copy on reserve.

We have up on the Affordable UF Research Guide we have some links where you can look in our ebook platform and see if there are ebooks available in your subject. Or in Kanopy-- in our streaming video platform to see if there are streaming videos that might be related to your class. So you can do some of that searching as well, and then go through course reserves to have it uploaded to your course.

And what I always tell faculty is, if you have identified that the best resource for your class is this expensive Pearson textbook, that is fine. We're not going to tell you, don't use that. But think about how you can make that more affordable for those students who might have some struggles. So like, putting the physical copy on course reserve. But also, our course reserves department can scan up to a certain amount of chapters or selections that can be put on course reserves. So if you know you're only going to use a few chapters, you know you're only going to use a certain selection from a text, then we can help pull that together for you and put that on electronic course reserves for free.

Alexandra

But there are some challenges that faculty face. Namely, the time it takes to change a course and the credibility of available, affordable options. However, these are not insurmountable.

April Hines

Time and resources and not really knowing what all is available to them. I've never had a faculty member say to me after I've presented the options, no, I don't want to even consider that or I don't want to look into that. Usually when I tell faculty, did you know you can do X-Y and Z? The answer is, no, oh, my god, that's amazing. How do I get started? So I think that just awareness is a big barrier.

Alexandra

Surmounting these challenges will yield some incredible results. And you as a librarian or a faculty member can be a hero to your students.

April Hines

Well, one of my favorite stories was when I was looking at some required textbooks for different classes in the College of Journalism and I saw that the law of mass comm was using a book that wasn't a traditional-- like, a McGraw-Hill or a Pearson textbook. Those are the ones that are harder to provide access to. They don't like to necessarily play nice with libraries in terms of offering ebook options that we can purchase. And I knew that that was a large lecture class with over 200 students. So I looked through our ebook vendor and saw that that book was being offered as a multi-user license.

I emailed the instructor, asked if she wanted me to purchase it. And of course her option was like, yes, and 10 exclamation marks after it. So we purchased it, we provided her with a link. And now all 200 students in that class didn't have to buy the book. And I got to be a hero for a few weeks.

Alexandra

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of the Beyond the Podium podcast series. We're happy you joined us. And we hope to see you next time for more tips, strategies, ideas on teaching and learning at the University of Florida.