

All,

The current model of a higher education has not changed for the past 600 years. Since the invention of the printing press, it has been defined by essentially two characteristics: 1) a "lecture" presented to students by a an instructor in a real time classroom setting; and 2) "textbook" readings, assigned by an instructor, in which students buy a hardcopy and assimilate the contents, using it to compliment, and sometimes substitute, for the lecture.

For the past 17 years, since the first online classes appeared in American universities, we have debated, ad nauseam, changes in the first of these characteristics. That is, should in-class lectures be replaced with online versions? When and under what conditions? And, is the replacement sufficiently beneficial to warrant the discussion? Clearly, as faculty, we are all too aware that among classes, course content varies, as does style of learning. Therefore, the virtual lecture (real time or not), as appealing as it may be to students who would otherwise not have access to the classroom, is not the universal cure administrators believe it is. That this is true and continues to divide faculty and administrators alike, only means that the discussion will continue for some time and we must be aware of the arguments if we are to find the proper compromise. To that end, I would offer this point of departure for the topic. It is a relatively balanced commentary, especially with reference to the comments (e.g. see #15), of the pluses and minuses of online teaching/learning. This discussion is taken from the Chronicle of Higher Education, with special reference to the 2010 Sloan Commission National Survey on Online learning in Public Institutions (also linked herein below):

<http://chronicle.com/article/Professors-Embrace-Online/48235>

http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/class_differences

However, that discussion is not the reason for this email. Rather, for as much debate as has raged over changes in the first characteristic (i.e. classroom lectures as the basis of learning), inversely and proportionately less attention has been paid to changes in the second characteristic (i.e. textbooks as the basis of learning). That textbook formats and content have evolved is self-evident. That their price increases have outpaced inflation three to one, for the past two decades, is factual. That their prices have risen proportionately faster than tuition at public universities may be intuitive, but not well known. That the medium has been ineffective as a learning venue is higher education's dirty little secret.

More and more, students are not buying their texts, choosing to ignore them altogether or now renting them on venues like Amazon or even our own Follett Book Store. And if they buy, the proportion returning their textbook is greater than 50%. Clearly, students are looking for "just in time" solutions to their obligation to read textbooks and are increasingly more than willing to return them since they are largely inconsequential to the student and expensive to keep. The secondary market of book buyers, creating shorter cycles for publisher's new editions, (currently three years, down from five, ten years ago), only exacerbates this tendency.

The cause of this syndrome, I believe, lies not in external constraints as much as internal factors, particularly that textbooks have been traditionally "personal" in nature. Let me explain. Each student individually buys one hardcopy of a book and each stores it in their private library (often their library is a

backpack or bedroom), reading and taking notes in a solitary environment (we instructors are complicit in encouraging students to find quiet personal space, devoid of others' distraction, to do this). Moreover, they rarely take the initiative to integrate their reading with their lecture notes or those of friends (I find it fascinating that students will trade lecture notes with other students, but do not trade text notes--if, indeed, they have even created them). Absent having established any compelling personal connection to the written material, the process terminates in the resale of the text for approximately 40% of purchase price, wherein the bookstore holds it until the next semester and then resells it for 80% of the former purchase price, a much higher margin than the bookstore gets in ordering directly from the publisher--hence, the emergence, for example, of Follett's used textbook depositories.

For the past ten years, entities (notably Atomic Dog in the early 2000's), have attempted to mitigate the cost issue, while adapting the online model to textbooks, only to have their efforts squelched by publishers who initially thought they saw the advantage of e-books, but were unable to reconcile the hardcopy cost formula with the e-copy model. For example, while early pioneers in this area were able to demonstrate that an e-book, at 50% of the cost of a hardcopy, actually generates a greater profit margin for publishers, most saw their titles pulled from the online marketplace, because publishers thought the hardcopy profits were being cannibalized. (As a side note, this battle continues, even in cyber-space--witness the lawsuit filed last week against Apple and six publishers, by Amazon, accusing collusion in raising the price of the publishers titles from Amazon's \$9.99 to Apple's \$14.99, while denying Amazon access to those same titles). As egregious as the pricing of textbooks is and as compelling, or not, the move to e-books may be, neither is the paradigm shift to which I refer.

The paradigm shift is not pricing or moving textbooks from shelves to cyber-space. Rather, it is the transformation from the "personal" to the "interpersonal" use of texts, wherein print based learning ceases to be, especially as an individual pursuit, but rather is replaced by, and supported through, online social media in constructing, interpreting and retaining content. In other words, it combines the model of online publishing with the medium of "interactive" social networking. As such, the McGraw-Hills of the world, with warehouses full of traditional hardcopy textbooks or the e-textbooks versions from companies like "Chegg" or "eCampus", or even the vanity e-publishing companies such as "Create Space" or "LuLu" (each of whom simply reproduce the print textbook, digitally online, albeit it with whistles and buzzers like highlighting and note-taking), are being pre-empted by a new mode of engagement. This new interactive model of absorbing reading material is evidenced in venues such as "Kno" and the more encompassing "Google Editions". The former is 100,000 textbook titles strong, and growing exponentially, leveraging its future success through the social medium of Facebook. The latter will sell digital books of all types, including textbooks, while facilitating discussions of same via Google+ (Google Editions, due to begin this fall, has forged agreements with the majority of publishers and have already scanned millions of books).

This is not just another "distribution" strategy. It is a new "consumption" model. Therein is the paradigm shift. Students can form social groups of like minded individuals across diverse rather than local geographies, who are using the same text in their class. In the process, they collaborate in the review, discussion, and ultimately, the definition of the importance of what they are reading. Note taking and outlining are, of course, incorporated as online "text" features, but now they can be

automatically integrated across collaborators. As well, in beta testing (get ready for this) is the syncing of the chapters with recorded class lectures, across multiple classrooms, such that it correlates the important points of those lectures (as defined by the students) with the corresponding points in the online text, all of which can be parsed and made available for the social networking of these "talking points" through Facebook or Google+, a type of collaboration forum for all things having to do with the written material.

You may think this type of reading collaboration is academically marginal. You may also reason it has nothing to do with preserving the in-class lecture format. However, upon reflection, you must conclude it is happening. E-books sales have doubled from 6% to 12% of the market during the past year. Universities, including our own, are initiating in-house e-publishing servers, fueled largely by the universality of e-book formatting that can now be read on all hardware (desktops, laptops, netbooks, tablets and smart phones) and all operating systems (OS, Windows, Linux, Android). However, as pervasive as e-publishing is becoming, social networking participation is exponentially surpassing it. Facebook has doubled its membership every six months, for five years, to its current 750 million members, yet Google+ accomplished membership numbers in its first ten days that took Facebook its first 18 months to achieve. At their respective membership rate increases, Facebook will be the largest "population center" on earth (exceeding India's 1.1 billion and China's 1.3 billion people) by early next year. And, given early memberships (10 million in two weeks), Google+ could surpass those Facebook numbers in two years. In short, the human reference for identity is rapidly becoming the social network, not the nation-state.

Put simply, by combining these two phenomena (i.e. the steady trend toward online publishing and the explosive increase in social communication and networking) the consumption of written knowledge WILL take on new meaning. Not only is the evolution undeniable but, truth be known, it is a process much more akin to the group task experience in venues where students will likely find employment after graduation--in the world of business, service industries and government. Therefore, as informed faculty, I would simply ask you to at least understand the evolution, as it relates to our role in the university, no less than you would want to understand how, in the last six months, social media has instantly spread collective behavior protests, in venues throughout the world. To further that goal, then, put "Kno", "Google Editions" or any other examples into your computer search engine to find out more about this newly emerging paradigm of "publishing". In the meantime, you might be interested in these developments, concerning the future of textbooks, happening on our very own campus:

<http://blogs.csun.edu/news/2009/07/textbooks/>

<http://www.engadget.com/2011/05/24/npg-csu-partner-for-49-dynamic-digital-textbooks/>

Regards,

Jerry