

11-1-2019

## William & Mary Faculty Listening Tour Executive Summary

Marian Taliaferro

*William & Mary*, marian.taliaferro@gmail.com

Asia Randolph

*William & Mary*, arrandolph@email.wm.edu

Jessica Ramey

*William & Mary*, jmramey01@wm.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/librariespubs>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Taliaferro, M.G., Randolph, A.R., & Ramey, J. W&M Faculty Listening Tour Executive Summary. (2019). Williamsburg, VA: William & Mary. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/librariespubs/89>.

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the William & Mary Libraries at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in W&M Libraries Publications by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@wm.edu](mailto:scholarworks@wm.edu).

# W&M Faculty Listening Tour Executive Summary November, 2019

Marian Taliaferro  
Asia R. Randolph  
Jessica Ramey

William & Mary Libraries



**WILLIAM & MARY**

CHARTERED 1693

In fall 2019, William & Mary Libraries embarked on a concerted effort to learn more about course materials adopted on its campus. In order to perform an environmental scan, staff from the libraries participated in several activities: administering a student survey, conducting a series of faculty focus groups and running a cross-campus task force on textbook affordability. This document explains the faculty focus group activity known as the “textbook listening tour.”

The listening tour was structured largely based on an earlier effort that took place at Temple University Libraries. Bell & Johnson (2019) used the tour as an opportunity to gain insight into challenges and issues around faculty selection of course materials. The “tour” at W&M offered faculty a forum to inform library staff on their views on and approaches to course materials adoption, including awareness of Open Educational Resources (OER), where to find them and perceived barriers to their adoption. It should be noted that while the effort was sometimes referred to as “textbook adoption” since that is the terminology faculty are more familiar with, we were clear to indicate from the outset of each session that our scope included the broader “course materials adoption.”

In total, 18 faculty met with us as part of the listening tour. While they were predominantly from Arts & Sciences, we had two faculty from the School of Education. The Mason School of Business, Virginia Institute of Marine Science and the law school were not represented. Sessions had been promoted repeatedly through the daily *W&M Digest* email. Faculty were also recruited by library liaisons and the Digital Scholarship Librarian. Departments represented included: Economics, Education, English, Linguistics, Government, Biology, Psychological Sciences, Chemistry, Math, History and Physics.

Several themes, as bolded and described below, emerged through the sessions.

Faculty with which we spoke were **very concerned about textbook costs for their students** and aside from introductory-level courses, they had structured their courses around the learning goals rather than around the content. They frequently reported continually refining their courses when new scholarship was identified, and prioritized affordable course materials (articles and eBooks) which were sometimes obtained through library subscriptions, or that they personally considered to be affordable. Many also reported telling their students that earlier editions of texts were acceptable to use in order to keep costs down.

**For intro-level courses, textbooks are much more commonly used than they are in upper-level courses and responses to commercial textbook packages were varied.** In these as well as upper-level courses, some faculty appreciated incorporating diverse perspectives via article readings, which they indicated they wouldn’t have been able to do if using strictly a textbook. Other faculty wanted to offer students a foundational text as a reference that they could refer back to as needed. Some STEM faculty indicated appreciation for having access to graded problem sets or other homework services (Web Assign or Sapling) to accompany their lectures, whereas others in STEM said they didn’t need all the “bells and whistles” in the commercial textbook packages.

**Faculty generally reported being satisfied with their course materials after reviewing them extensively and changing things up over time.** In some cases, they had developed lecture slides and other ancillary materials, particularly problem sets, to compensate for what they saw as shortcomings or gaps in textbooks. With regard to course materials formats, faculty sometimes mentioned others’ policies against using laptops and mobile devices in class which could be a barrier for adoption and use of

ebooks. Faculty format preference also appeared to be more specific in classes involving textual analysis, such as in the English department.

**Most faculty selected materials independently but there were some cases where the decisions were made collectively.** For example, some reported that they used the same text as the last person who taught the class, or that the instructor assignments were regularly rotated among faculty in the department. In courses which need to be taken consecutively (such as in Modern Languages & Literatures), there was a good degree of coordination needed between faculty teaching those courses to ensure the learning would be continuous for the students and there was a strong desire to come up with something more affordable than what is on the commercial textbook market.

Despite having a strong desire to save their students money and thinking a lot about them, most faculty we spoke with **weren't gathering feedback on their course materials.** Reportedly, the standard course evaluation forms for both Arts & Sciences and the School of Education don't ask specifically on this topic. There were, however, one or two faculty who indicated that they would ask verbally in class for student feedback on the readings.

**Almost without exception, faculty knew to individually report adoptions through Faculty Enlight.** (The faculty which expressed interest in the tour, however, were strictly from the School of Education and Arts & Sciences. Reportedly, law school professors work with administrative staff to communicate their adoptions.) Respondents indicated that they knew to report adoptions through Faculty Enlight from having participated in faculty orientations through their school. In some cases, faculty didn't report any adoptions because they were using course materials which were free-to-use (either OER or library subscriptions) and they weren't aware of any guidance on reporting them. One faculty indicated that they didn't report any adoptions to the bookstore because their students had bad experiences and the faculty didn't want the business to go to them. (The procedure is that the adoptions are reported to the bookstore but students can purchase most materials- aside from custom coursepacks- anywhere.)

**Typically, faculty did not put books or other print course materials on reserve but many did use e-reserves.** Many said that they forgot that they could do that, while some reported that they only have one copy of the material from which to work. Some faculty indicated that they didn't think it would be terribly useful to put the more extensive readings on reserve since they felt students need to have "the books at hand" to write their papers or to go over assignments or they felt that the 2-hour circulation period was too short. On the other hand, many faculty indicated that they employed linking to articles in the library collection and to other digital content via Blackboard.

Most faculty were able to identify OER as "free online textbooks" and some were savvy to their being licensed to share. There were, however, a few areas of need. The first was faculty reported **not knowing where to find OER and other low-cost materials.** Another is that they **weren't aware of the VIVA grants** to fund adoption, adaptation or authoring of OER. Generally speaking, **time** to find OER and to redesign courses around low-cost materials was by far the biggest barrier to faculty incorporating OER. Another barrier reported was the **lack of suitable OER** for the level of course or for a "high quality" text.

**Those who did use OER said that they were generally happy with them** in that the students had free access on the first day of class and that as faculty, they could better customize how the course unfolded in the semester, by switching around the order that topics were presented and creating links in Blackboard to the precise sections or articles needed. They also appreciated that the students could

access their OER anywhere, and that they (faculty) have the ability to communicate specific edits to OER and have their feedback be readily incorporated. Another positive aspect of OER reported was that online materials can lend to making the content more engaging and helpful toward effective learning.

**Cultural factors and other barriers** were also mentioned as highly relevant to adoption of reduced-cost course materials. For example, a “fear factor” in junior faculty was described as potentially being problematic in switching those high-enrollment courses to OER. According to the participants who mentioned it, this is because a lot of the intro-level courses are taught by non-tenured faculty. Another barrier is a lack of incentives to create these materials.

**William & Mary Bookstore opportunities for improved collaboration** were reported throughout the process though faculty weren’t queried specifically about working with the bookstore. (The questionnaire appears as Appendix A to this report.) Faculty reports included: problems with the bookstore obtaining earlier editions of books; not having enough books for courses; communication gaps; customer service; and a lack of confirmation for bookstore orders received. A few faculty indicated that their students couldn’t cancel backorders. Subsequent follow-up with the bookstore on these points indicated that in at least one instance, faculty from all courses or sections requiring a text hadn’t submitted their adoptions. Overall, faculty expressed a need for improving bookstore-campus community relations.

With regard to the recent incarnation of the **Studio for Teaching & Learning Innovation** (STLI), potential support for course materials was discussed. Specifically, faculty reported being interested to learn about case studies, workshops and course materials discussions and support for OER available from STLI. For example, some thought the STLI could be helpful to advise on weaving in selection of course materials, including multimedia, when teaching a new course. Further, several respondents reported that they would be more involved in working on OER if there was compensation for their time in adapting OER or identifying and creating new content in areas where gaps (in the market) exist. It may be that W&M could identify some funding beyond the VIVA funding to operationalize course materials investigations in connection with W&M Libraries and STLI.

The takeaways from this activity, in conjunction with the [Fall 2019 student textbook survey](#), will be used as a background to the upcoming recommendations for W&M leadership on ways to address better textbook affordability at W&M.

Source cited:

Bell, Steven J.; Johnson, Annie. We’re listening: Try a textbook listening tour to advance an OER initiative. *College & Research Libraries News*, v. 80, n. 6, p. 317, June 2019. Available at: <https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/17780/19598>>. Date accessed: 25 Oct. 2019. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.80.6.317>.

**Appendix A**  
**Faculty Listening Tour Questionnaire**  
**W&M Libraries**  
**Fall, 2019**

**Introduction**

This academic year, the university is embarking on an initiative related to textbook affordability. In order to inform our understanding of how faculty approach textbook adoption, my colleagues and I would like to meet with a few faculty in your department to get your feedback on what factors regarding textbooks are important to you, how you approach their selection and your views on course materials generally.

**Questions**

- Tell us about the textbooks that you use in your courses.
- When you select course materials, do you decide first on your course content and learning goals and then look for course materials to support the content and goals, or do you choose course materials first and then build the structure of your course and its content around them?

If they say they do NOT use a textbook

- Why have you chosen not to use a textbook?
- What do you use as an alternative?
- How did you find or develop the alternatives you use? (For example, through colleagues, at a conference, with the support of W&M Libraries, etc.)

If they say they DO use a textbook

- What is the textbook adoption process like in your department?
- What do you like best about your current textbooks?
- What concerns do you have about your textbooks?
- How do you find out about the latest textbook offerings in your field?
- Do you solicit formal feedback, such as through a course evaluation, from your students on the required course materials?
- Do you routinely put a copy of your textbook on reserve in the library? Why or why not?
- What do you know about alternatives to textbooks? If you know about alternatives, have you sought them out? If yes, how have you sought them out (e.g., by visiting a librarian, exploring online, etc.)?
- What resources would facilitate you transitioning from a textbook to an alternative source?

### Questions for everyone

- Can you describe what an Open Educational Resource (OER) is?

- Do you know where to find them?

- If you have ever used an OER in a course, can you tell us the resource you used and how you used it, e.g., as a primary or supplementary text.

- Have you ever considered using an OER, but then decided against it? If so, why did you decide against it?

- Are you aware that VIVA offers grants of up to \$30,000 to faculty to adopt alternatives to textbooks?

- If you knew but did not apply, why not?

- What could the Studio for Teaching, Learning and Innovation offer you that could assist you in the selection of or creation of course materials?

- Would you like to make any additional comments about this topic that we haven't yet discussed?