

No Textbook Can Keep Up with Me

Abstract:

The cost of textbooks is higher than ever and students can't stand it. The textbook content also does not adequately satisfy faculty's increasingly diverse teaching needs. This symposium brings together numerous faculty who teach one or more courses without a traditional textbook. We will discuss our different approaches to teaching off-book, our rationale for doing so, and the student response. After demonstrating the pros and cons of our own methods, we will engage in a rigorous debate of best practices and do our best to answer any audience's burning questions.

Keywords: Textbook, Current Events, Diversity, Novel Approaches

Introduction

This session was motivated by a conversation at a former MOBTC about a course that one facilitator teaches on Current Topics in Management. The instructor did not use a textbook because the course focuses on issues that are happening in real-time. Anything that has already been put into a textbook would be outdated by the time this class wanted to discuss it. It turns out other faculty who teach courses without a textbook do so for a variety of reasons, ranging from the staggeringly high cost of books, an ongoing interest in flexibility, a distaste for extant published materials, to the desire to curate very specific subject matter. In addition, teaching without a textbook may decrease the instances of rampant plagiarism and cheating when students use unauthorized resources related to publisher materials.

Finally, business schools are seeking ways to provide evidence-based knowledge and resources to practitioners. Working directly with existing organizations, for example, allows schools to build strong relationships and disseminate relevant research in a format that is more digestible than a journal article written for an academic audience. Teaching without a textbook can enhance the student experience and marketability of the academic program when students demonstrate the ability to engage with practitioners in a professional setting to propose solutions that address current workplace challenges (e.g., engagement, retention). This symposium will debate the pros and cons of teaching without a textbook, as well as how that decision is received by administrators and students alike.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

Through most of modern education, learning has been facilitated by a textbook (Ansary, 2004). In 1952, educational researchers (Buckingham et al., 1952) made the unfounded contention that “the book is the chief source of indirect experience” (p. 240) and that “textbooks are an indispensable aid” (p.242). Seventy years have passed and virtually no quantitative or qualitative studies have been conducted to support or challenge this assumption (c.f. Errington & Bubna-Litic, 2005). Management scholars have even devoted time to researching the differences between similar textbooks to identify the ideal book to use in a given class, without offering the possibility that the best option could be “none of the above”.

Nevertheless, students rarely report high satisfaction levels with any textbooks, and course evaluations typically point to lectures, activities, or non-reading assignments as being the most beneficial part of any course (Snyder, 2013). Moreover, the rising cost of textbooks (over 1000% since 1977) has left students feeling like they are overpaying for the least valuable part of their learning experience (Hanson, 2021). For all of these reasons, some avant-garde faculty have decided to teach courses without the use of textbooks (Weir, 2007). Little research has been done on whether such an idea is advisable, and we hope to begin a conversation on that controversial topic.

Panel Overview

Specifically, we aim to answer the following questions.

1. What different classes can be taught in a bookless format?
 - a. Organizational Behavior
 - b. Strategy

- c. Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
 - d. Employee Engagement
 - e. Controversial Management Topics
 - f. Current Topics in Management
 - g. Entrepreneurship (creativity, innovation)
2. How do we curate materials that are most appropriate for a given class without a compendium text?
- a. Academic journal articles/other sources available in university library
 - b. Work written by professor
 - c. Popular Press/online articles
 - d. Case studies--official (paid for by students) or made up to fit the topic
 - e. Storytelling/Journaling/Experiential exercises with at-home prep
 - f. Classroom generated discussion
 - g. Group Projects
 - h. "Client"-driven problem-solving/consulting reports
 - i. Youtube, Amazon Prime Videos, Movies, Netflix Documentaries
3. How do we help students best study from a collection of materials that don't include the benefits of a textbook, such as review chapters, a glossary, practice quizzes, or an index?
- a. Journaling
 - b. Exercises

- c. Debates
 - d. Presentations
 - e. Consulting Reports/Recommendations
 - f. Weekly roadmaps connecting all the materials together
4. How do we convince deans/department chairs that teaching can be done without a textbook?

Most colleges and Universities have some type of assessment program to determine whether the course work itself meets student learning goals. Initial assessment scores would give tremendous insight as well as in-class observations. An alternative assessment could be to compare between sections of a course: textbook vs. no-textbook?

5. What are the challenges with these approaches to teaching without a textbook?

Symposium participants will share practical strategies associated with each of these questions in both plenary sessions and at breakout roundtables. We will also solicit ideas from those attending and compile as many ideas as possible for how to teach without a textbook on a variety of management topics.

One intended outcome is that participants will learn strategies for textbook-free teaching that are rooted in experiential learning and positive pedagogy. Another intended outcome is enhanced curiosity, willingness, or enthusiasm for teaching a course in a novel manner appreciated by budget-minded students. Additional intended outcomes include opportunities to engage in practical problem-solving and respond to a critical need of existing organizations.

Session Description

All of the discussants in this symposium have taught at least one course without using a traditional textbook. We will share our approaches to course content, assignments, and teaching techniques to make our courses engaging and relevant. We will also share syllabi with complete assignment descriptions, either in the form of paper copies (at the session) or via e-mail (by collecting e-mails and sending after the session).

Timeline:

1. Solicitation of audience names and emails for later distribution of materials, including the session summary. (3 minutes)
2. Introduction of theme and participants. (6 minutes)
3. Each facilitator summarizing relevant experience (5 minutes x 7 = 35 minutes)
4. Interactive discussion of questions 1-4 above (15 minutes)
5. Breakout groups to discuss facilitation of courses of interest to specific audience cohorts (15 minutes)
6. Plenary audience Q&A (10 minutes)
7. Wrap up, including next steps (6 minutes)

Total: 90 minutes. We are willing to abridge the session to 60 minutes if deemed necessary, though with 7 facilitators, additional time is greatly appreciated.

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