

A Relationship Analysis: A Professor, 500 Students, and an Assigned Textbook

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APPARENTLY, during his final months alive, Steve Jobs set his sights on revolutionizing the textbook industry. Jobs planned to do for education what he had done for the music, smartphone, and computer industries—shatter the existing paradigms of operations and success. According to Jobs’ biographer Walter Isaacson, Jobs saw the \$8 billion textbook business, dominated by well-entrenched behemoths such as Pearson, McGraw-Hill, and Norton, as “ripe for digital destruction.”¹ Given his track record, Jobs might well have succeeded in upending the status quo had he lived longer. And perhaps still sometime in the near future, college students will carry their iPads to class because they contain required texts (rather than for the many other things iPads are good for during long lectures). Or maybe textbooks will cease to be required purchases for survey courses. Certainly, change is afoot.

This study emphasizes an oft-overlooked avenue of inquiry in the increasingly escalating textbook debate: What is the relationship between the instructor, the students, and the assigned text? And correspondingly, how does one go about analyzing this crucial relationship? Over the past two years, I gathered data from 549 students in my survey courses. I used this data along with the practices of the “self-study of teaching” in order to assess not only the textbooks I assigned, but also my role as an instructor in determining how students used course materials. My primary method

of obtaining student feedback was conducting multiple in-semester surveys in each course I taught. Additionally, I made my textbook optional one semester and required the next, tracking student scores and responses along the way.

I teach at a George Mason University, a large state school. Every semester, in addition to other offerings, I teach history survey courses—particularly a required History of Western Civilization class. In this class, I focus on demonstrating to my students that history is a debate, encouraging students to think critically, and fostering analytical writing skills. My students are diverse, encompassing a wide variety of races, socio-economic classes, and academic backgrounds. They generally work hard and are a pleasure to have in class. They do not, however, like textbooks.

While more than 90% of students reported purchasing the required text in my course, less than 30% of those same students deemed the assigned textbook to be useful for studying for course examinations. When I made the textbook optional during the next semester, about 20% of students bought the book. And whether the textbook was optional or required, more than two-thirds of all students surveyed reported that they used the Internet before the textbook anyhow when looking for material related to the course.² More pointedly for my own pedagogical development, I found that my course design and grading structure actually deemphasized the importance of the very textbook I assigned. Many of my students simply set the textbook aside and forgot about it during the semester. Thus, I was essentially requiring students to purchase a resource that they did not use. Something had to change.

Textbooks, of course, are hardly new. Nor is frustration over their costs, biases, mistakes, and even perceived “tyranny.”³ In 1895, Ethelbert D. Warfield, President of Lafayette College, warned against the pedagogical dangers of using “a single large compendious book.”⁴ In 1941, *The Clearing House* bemoaned the practice of some professors in selling their free review copies of textbooks.⁵ Several decades later in 1970, the Massachusetts Historical Society hosted a speaker on the “Textbook Game,” summarizing that “[t]he very word ‘textbook’ conjures up unflattering adjectives—‘dull,’ ‘uninspired,’ ‘fact-by-fact,’ ‘pussyfooting,’ and (perhaps most frequently) ‘mere.’”⁶

The purpose of this textbook study is two-fold. First, a summary of the recent state of the textbook debate is in order. With the publishing and textbook industries undergoing rapid transformation, teachers and scholars should be up to date on the proposals and predictions surrounding textbooks. Then, after covering this contextual ground, this article will *not* do several things. The article will not offer scads of new data regarding the state of the textbook industry or predictions regarding the timeframe

of digitization. Studies on these topics are already widely available.⁷ Additionally, I will not offer any substantive suggestions about how to make textbooks less “lame” than many students believe them to be.⁸ Instead, this article reports on the processes and results of a textbook-centered pedagogical exercise. At its core, this exercise focused on the previously mentioned simple—yet key—question: How can an instructor analyze how his or her intentions for an assigned textbook compared to the actual student usage of that same text?

In the fall of 2010, I joined a group of fellow faculty members in a Scholars of Studying Teaching Collaborative (SOSTC). Over the course of one academic year, the group met regularly in face-to-face meetings about once per month. We also communicated extensively via e-mail and Blackboard. The dozen SOSTC participants ranged in their disciplines, from astronomy to education to recreation and tourism. All the participants wanted to improve their teaching effectiveness. The group was led by Dr. Anastasia Samaras, an expert in the methodology of teacher self-study.⁹ Self-study of teaching practices, for the purposes of most history professors, is exactly what it sounds like, but with plenty of data and pedagogical nuance to back up its methodology. The most significant aspect of the methodology was what it included. Or, rather, whom it included—me.

Historians study the actions and decisions of others. We analyze why choices went one way or another and search for “tipping point” moments when pent-up change spilled over.¹⁰ Historians study sources. Historians are distinctly other-oriented, at least in terms of their scholarship. So the idea of including oneself, or of focusing on oneself within a study, takes some persuasion. The principles of self-study provide just such a nudge. “Self-study is a methodology that embraces multiple methods of research,” clarifies the edited handbook, *Research Methods for the Self-Study of Practice*. Self-study “generally transforms those methods by taking them into a new context and using them in ways that often depart from the traditional. These transformations highlight the fact that the role of the researcher in self-study and the role of teacher educator are closely intertwined and generally inseparable.”¹¹

Oh, the Debates We Have Had (and Are Having)

Four major topics have garnered the most attention from historians interested in the textbook debate over the past decade. These topics, loosely defined, are: 1) the textbook and digitization, 2) the cost of textbooks, 3) the pedagogy associated with textbooks, and 4) what I have tentatively labeled as “corruption” within the textbook process.

We Will Digitize

Can e-textbooks solve all our problems? Will students suddenly begin reading their assigned chapters if they can do so on their iPad, smartphones, or laptops? Will the hyperlinkization of textbooks allow students to have a less linear, and more natural, reading and thinking experience? Will e-texts drive down costs? To the most optimistic of digital historians, the answer is yes. Yes to all these questions.¹² But for most historians, the prospect of digital textbooks brings at least as many questions as answers.

Certainly, history professors and teachers have benefited from new digital resources. Digital repositories of primary resources especially have given instructors the means to send their students “into the archives” regardless of the actual location of their institutions.¹³ Digitization also makes possible a discussion regarding a departure from the norms of the author-to-editor-to-publisher-to-bookstore textbook paradigm. Truly, new options are on the table. Roy Rosenzweig was among the first to ask, “Could we... write a collaborative U.S. history textbook that would be free to all our students? After all, there is massive overlap in content and interpretation...”¹⁴ This debate is becoming less and less theoretical by the day. In April 2012, three of the largest academic publishers sued a startup company that claimed it could offer just such a free textbook product, tailored to any particular course at any institution.¹⁵

Digital—and possibly free—textbooks not only raise legal questions, they also promise to change the very text-reading experience. The use of hypertext allows the reader to control the available information in radical new ways.¹⁶ Still, challenges confront the professor who assigns the digital textbook. First, as *The New York Times* reported, “In a digital age, students still cling to paper textbooks.”¹⁷ Second, in their efforts to be multi-faceted and experiential, the creators of new digital textbooks, according to some skeptics, have been forced to sacrifice their guiding narratives. Students are given more information with less structure.¹⁸ Finally, the digitization of textbooks, usually operating on a subscription or rental model, renders the textbook—even more than in prior forms—a “disposable product.”¹⁹

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Obviously, the cost of education matters. Over the past decade, the prices of textbooks have been much scrutinized. The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, by way of example, mandated a study on textbook prices in 2006 and issued a follow-up report in 2011. The studies

found a 21.8% increase in the average price of “supplies and textbooks” at Virginia’s four-year institutions from 2005 to 2011. The report also concluded that despite implementing a series of cost-controlling measures recommended by the state, prices continued to rise.²⁰

In 2004, a House of Representatives subcommittee held hearings on the question, “Are College Textbooks Priced Fairly?” After testimony from publishers and scholars, few concrete answers surfaced. Perhaps most tellingly though, the Chair of the Subcommittee, Rep. Howard P. “Buck” McKeon, questioned why history textbooks in particular had to be revised so frequently—or even at all. “How much does U.S. history change?” McKeon asked sardonically.²¹ Still, I suspect that most professors ask, as I do when meeting with a textbook publisher representative, “How much?” at the beginning of the conversation.

How Does a Textbook Affect One’s Teaching?

Does teaching with a textbook make one a negligent, or at the very least behind-the-times, instructor? Surprisingly, some historians writing about pedagogy seem to answer yes to this question. Robert Weir, a historian teaching at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, reflects this hyperbolic, and I believe unhelpful, trend. “There are still some dinosaurs lumbering about who only assign a text and subject their students to drill-and-kill (the spirit) exercises straight out [of] the *McGuffey’s Reader* era,” Weir wrote at *Inside Higher Ed*. He continued, “There’s really not much to say about instructors except to wish them a speedy retirement.”²² Providing significantly more nuance on the issue, David J. Voelker, analyzing his teaching activities at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, linked textbooks to the outdated practices of teaching solely via lectures. “Lectures and textbooks tend to obscure the interpretive nature of historical knowledge by presenting conclusions drawn by historians without revealing much about the research and deliberation that made the conclusions possible.”²³

Undoubtedly, many fine, innovative, and even (gasp) young professors assign textbooks when they teach historical survey courses. Setting aside unfair hyperbole though, textbooks have been rightly linked to several out-of-favor pedagogical approaches. “Teaching as transmission,” defined by the instructor or text providing students with knowledge—i.e., a one-way transmission of knowledge—typically involves the assigning of a textbook.²⁴ This strategy emphasizes memorization, often at the expense of analysis.²⁵ Similarly, textbooks encourage and enable the quest for *coverage*. The desire to at least “touch on” all the important topics of, say, United States history before 1877 can be a driving force.²⁶

And the “Corruption”

I don’t really believe that textbook companies are corrupt. At least not in the same way as bribed politicians or cheating CEOs. But sometimes the existing paradigm leaves me, and I suspect others, feeling a bit compromised and conflicted. The unrest stems from that fact that my goals as an instructor—to help students analyze the past—are inevitably commingled with the goals of publishing companies and textbook salespeople during the process of selecting a text. The “corporatization” of history looms as a threat.²⁷ Textbook representatives stop by my office often. They sell a product they believe in. But there is an inescapable conflict in our meetings: the representative is looking for a sale; I’m supposed to be thinking about what is best for my students.

Textbook companies make billions of dollars annually by selling texts to a rather cashed-strapped group of individuals—college students. As Alan Brinkley described it, textbooks are “force-fed to tens of thousands—or even hundreds of thousands—of undergraduates who didn’t choose the book themselves.”²⁸ The stakes are large and the players noteworthy. In April 2012, Microsoft spent \$300 million to combine forces with Barnes and Noble in the digital textbook market.²⁹ These behemoths (whether new to the textbook game or old) have not always served students or professors well. Bound by “pedagogies of scarcity” (textbooks cannot exceed certain lengths), textbooks have had to pick and choose their topics. As this picking and choosing has happened, the stories left out have often been those of women and minorities.³⁰ Omissions and biases have been hoisted upon students, via textbooks. And then some textbooks have been needlessly revised year after year, seemingly only to raise prices.³¹

Before the Textbook Burning (or Digital Deleting) Begins...

So what should the diligent history instructor do regarding the textbook debate? The day-to-day requirements of teaching and research often limit the amount of time that one can spend on pedagogical arguments such as those just outlined. This has been my experience. In fact, “The bookstore needs your book order” is often the most compelling textbook point to flash across my computer screen. Indeed, as I began this textbook study in the fall 2010, I had very few lofty points or solid sources of data to contribute to the swirling textbook debate. Instead, I had an ill-defined, nagging feeling that I had been doing something wrong in the classroom during my first few semesters of teaching—and that my textbook decision somehow fit into this less than optimal performance. I suspected that

my students were not reading the assigned textbook and articles with the attention or consistency I had intended.

The syllabi for my survey courses always included a standard textbook, along with a monograph or two. I used Blackboard to post shorter primary resources as required supplementary reading. I thought that students would do what I did as a student (or at least the way I like to remember things): attend class, listen to lectures, participate in discussion sections, do the assigned reading, and write compelling papers and essay exam answers. As an instructor, I used discussion days to build upon lectures and provide, I hoped, a good mix of instructor-led explanation and student analysis in my course.

My course evaluations were positive and my department was generally pleased with my performance, but more than one student asked me why I had assigned a textbook. For reference and to supplement, I responded. The students were not persuaded. The first source of hard data that supported my suspicion that my students did not deem the assigned textbook to be particularly pertinent came from the student evaluations at the end of the semester. My lowest marks came in response to the prompt, “The textbook and/or assigned readings helped me understand the material.”³² My scores on this prompt alone ranked consistently below the averages of my department, division, and the university (fortunately, there were not comparisons beyond this—nation, world, universe, etc.).

With this initial data set and students complaints compelling me, I eagerly seized upon the opportunity to join a teaching collaborative at my university. This was a crucial step. Discussing with others how I taught and comparing my trials and successes with theirs completely changed my perspective. The SOSTC group emphasized the practices of self-study. Thus, the instructor—me—would figure prominently into the pedagogical research. Out of a group of a dozen faculty members, we formed smaller “critical friend” teams of three or four faculty members on a more intimate basis.³³ We communicated in person, via e-mail, and through a Blackboard site. Each researcher began the research process by sharing his or her question with the larger group first and then, in more detail, within his or her critical team. Abstract questions like mine—“Should textbooks be replaced with open source, online materials?”—gradually shifted towards more practical and useful inquiries.

Checking in periodically with the SOSTC group, I carried out a two-pronged plan to evaluate not only my textbook, but more specifically how students used the assigned texts based on the course structure I had created. I decided to conduct a trial of relatively controlled variables. While one obviously cannot teach the exact same course two semesters in a row, I crafted my syllabi for the fall and spring semesters (2010/2011) to cover

Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Survey	
<p>1. Did you buy the course's optional textbook?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Rented</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Shared</p>	<p>8. Based on the first exam, I believe the professor should use an assigned textbook.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable</p>
<p>2. I wish that there was an assigned textbook.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable</p>	<p>9. If textbook chapters were assigned, I would read them.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable</p>
<p>3. In preparation for the first exam, I consulted either the optional textbook or another textbook.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>10. I think assigning relevant blogs and reliable Internet sites would be preferable to assigning a traditional textbook</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable</p>
<p>4. In preparation for the first exam, I looked up terms online.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	

Figure 1: Sample questions from the Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Survey.

roughly the same topics. For each section in the fall, students wrote two significant papers and took two exams and a final. The students faced the same assignments in the spring. The only major difference was the textbook. During the fall, I assigned the students a textbook, with daily required readings.³⁴ During the spring, I made the textbook an optional purchase and instead assigned two additional monographs.

In order to gauge student responses to this experiment, I decided to augment end-of-the-semester student evaluations with two in-semester, anonymous surveys (See Figure 1). I announced the surveys as voluntary, but since I used class time to pass out the forms, very few students declined. Students were promised that their surveys (which included no names anyway) would be kept sealed until after the semester ended. Over the course of the trial period, I gathered data from 549 students.³⁵ By doing these three things—joining a self-study of teaching group, creating a case study of textbook versus no textbook, and surveying the students—I learned that I was systematically deemphasizing the very textbook that I assigned and (on a more positive note) that I could expect students to achieve the same knowledge and analytical benchmarks in my courses with or without an assigned textbook.

For the first semester, during which the textbook was required, I found that 90% of my students acquired the textbook. Most bought the book, but 17% rented and a few individuals “shared” with another classmate. Despite the fact that I required a textbook and assigned daily reading, only 33% of the students who required textbooks responded mid-semester that they “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement that the textbook was a “useful and important component” of the course. Even fewer, only 26%, contended that the course papers and exams required students to use the assigned textbook. Ouch. Similarly, 79% of the students indicated that, even though they owned the text, they were more likely to go to the Internet for supplementary information than to the textbook. This proclivity came despite the fact that 65% of students deemed textbooks to be more reliable than Internet sources.³⁶

After the holiday break, I taught the same course, with roughly the same assignments, covering nearly the same times and places, only without an assigned textbook. To further test my optional textbook results, the following semester (Fall 2011), I again taught the survey course without a required textbook. During both optional textbook semesters, I informed students that, as college students, they could decide for themselves whether they wanted to buy the optional textbook. I made clear, however, that I would expect them to learn (and even memorize) some selected key terms, regardless of whether they purchased the text or not. Papers would still be held to high standards of analysis and precision. On the syllabus, I provided the listing of textbook pages to read (in addition to daily primary sources) in accordance with the planned topics, but always with the key qualifier beside the pages: *optional reading*. Not surprisingly, most students did not jump out of their seats and head for the bookstore when I told them that a dozen or so optional textbooks had been ordered. I think I even heard a few snickers at the suggestion of buying an optional text. According to the surveys students filled out at the beginning and end of the non-textbook semester, however, nearly 20% of enrolled students decided to purchase the optional text.³⁷ Almost all these students reported using their text to study for exams, and this group probably accounted for the roughly 20% of students who did not look up terms and get clarifications online as a part of test preparation.

Interestingly enough, more students expressed that they wished there had been an assigned textbook (27%) than the number that purchased the optional text (20%). Perhaps this indicated that some students knew they would have done better with a textbook than without, but did not buy one because it was not required. Several students also responded that they did not initially purchase the optional textbook in order to save money, but after completing the first couple of assignments decided to make the

purchase.³⁸ Additionally, 37% of students indicated that they wished they had a textbook to consult for the final exam.³⁹

In terms of student grades, the class final grade average stayed relatively consistent (within 2% points) regardless of whether the textbook was assigned or optional. Exams scores and paper performances stayed roughly level as well. Also providing an interesting point of note, only 19% of students who possessed the textbook reported highlighting the text or making notes in the margin. Thus, even those students who bought the textbook did not use it the way that I would have predicted.

With a sample size of only 500, conducted at only one institution, the data in this survey does not stand as conclusive regarding student textbook behavior. Rather, its comments reflect most definitively on the instructor—me. This, I believe, makes the exercise more significant rather than less. It is a model that can be easily and individually replicated.⁴⁰ Open-ended student comments on the back of the in-semester surveys also proved to be informative. Taken with a healthy dose of perspective, the comments provided insights into how my course had been received and how the textbook assignments fit. Students had plenty of negative things to say about textbooks generally. “Textbooks are drudgery. Assigning textbook work instantly puts people in the frame that they won’t enjoy what they’re about to read,” surmised one student.⁴¹ Similarly, another student wrote, “The Internet is just more convenient and I always have it with me. Textbooks put me in a frame of mind that what I’m about to do will be boring and tedious.”⁴² Although the data suggested otherwise, a student enrolled in a section when the textbook had been required asserted that “most students don’t even buy the textbook anymore because they’re overpriced and unnecessary to get an A.”⁴³

In the end, I learned several things about my teaching. First, my students search for factual information online. I suspected this would be the case, but still found the confirmation to be significant. Second, not only did the majority of students not want a textbook for themselves, they also recommended that I not assign a textbook to future classes. Less than 25% of enrollees believed that future students should be required to buy a textbook, this despite the fact that each separate section I taught throughout the experiment were resolute in their convictions that textbooks were more reliable than Internet sources. Third, a sizeable minority—nearly 20%—of students elected to buy or rent the optional textbook. This convinced me of the importance of providing a textbook option for those who want it. On a related note, only ten students out of more than 500 thought to share a textbook as a solution. This relative isolation among students reflects both the traditions of book buying among students as being a solitary undertaking and that in the case of

my classes, at a very large state university, students don't know most of their classmates.

Circumstances Matter

The key textbook question for many instructors has little to do with digitization or cost. Rather, inquiry should focus on how a textbook fits into the design of a particular class, taught by a particular instructor, to a unique group of students. My experience of participating in a self-study group, surveying my students, and making the textbook optional made clear that I did not emphasize the textbook to my students. One student more than the rest made it clear that success did not require the optional text: "I've gotta be honest, I know this material very well. The book would have been useless. I'm almost positive I have an A right now."⁴⁴ My intentions had been good. I had hoped (rather naively it now appears) that students would use the textbook to further their learning, even though the exams and papers did not necessarily mandate such activity. Students navigated instead to the Internet and recommended that I abstain from assigning a textbook in the future. After some deliberation, I concluded that I agreed with the students' sentiment. In order to rationalize having students spend \$75 to \$100 for a textbook, I need to be committed to that text. I'm not. I need to require that the students read the textbook for exams and papers. I don't. Understanding this about my teaching and my course provides a substantial and useful piece of information upon which future changes can be made. Conducting similar trials, I believe, may be useful to other professors who are first focused on improving their own teaching performance rather than postulating on pedagogy more broadly.

Notes

1. Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 509.
2. I conducted five anonymous surveys over the course of three semesters. Unless otherwise specified, statistics are from aggregate data. All student quotes come from these surveys. "Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Survey" [145 students] by Ryan Swanson, George Mason University, 3 November 2010; "Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Survey" [144 students] by Ryan Swanson, George Mason University, 3 October 2011; "Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous End-of-Semester Survey" [111 students] by Ryan Swanson, George Mason University, 1 December 2011; "Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Survey" [78 students] by Ryan Swanson, George Mason University, 2 February 2011; "Western Civilization Textbook/

Sources Anonymous End-of-Semester Survey” [71 students] by Ryan Swanson, George Mason University, 25 April 2011.

3. James W. Loewen, *Teaching What Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of Textbooks and Get Students Excited About Doing History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010). Loewen also wrote the popular *Lies My Teaching Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: The New Press, 1995), which focused primarily on high school textbooks, but criticized textbooks in general as portraying the past as a “simple-minded morality play.”

4. Ethelbert D. Warfield, “The Teaching of History,” *The School Review* 3, no. 1 (January 1895): 38.

5. “The Textbook Situation,” *The Clearing House* 15, no. 6 (February 1941): 338.

6. Henry Wilkinson Bragdon, “The Textbook Game,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Third Series, 82 (1970): 82.

7. For a sampling of recent articles, from a variety of disciplines, discussing the textbook industry, see: William D. Chesser, “The E-Textbook Revolution,” *Library Technology Reports* 47, no. 8 (November/December 2011): 28-41; Jun Sun, Javier Flores, and Jesus Tanguma, “E-Textbooks and Students’ Learning Experiences,” *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education* 10, no. 1 (January 2012): 63; Alexandra Rice, “Colleges Take Varied Approaches to iPad Experiments, With Mixed Results,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (18 October 2011), <<http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/colleges-take-varied-approaches-to-ipad-experiments-with-mixed-results/33749>>; Lawrence S. Silver, Robert E. Stevens, and Kenneth E. Clow, “Marketing Professors’ Perspectives on the Cost of College Textbooks: A Pilot Study,” *Journal of Education for Business* 87, no. 1 (2012): 1.

8. Daniel Luzer, “Trying to Make Electronic Textbooks Less Lame,” *Washington Monthly Online* (21 January 2011), <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/blog/trying_to_make_electronic_text.php>.

9. Anne R. Freese and Anastasia P. Samaras, *Self-Study of Teaching Practices Primer* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006); Anastasia P. Samaras, *Self-Study Teacher Research: Improving Your Practice Through Collaborative Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2011).

10. I have found Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002) to be a useful teaching resource, especially for survey courses. Conveying to the non-history major that watershed moments are to be noted as indications of broader phenomena or movements is aided by having students read *The New Yorker* version of Gladwell’s argument during the first stages of a course. See Malcolm Gladwell, “The Tipping Point,” *The New Yorker* (3 June 1996).

11. Deborah L. Tidwell, Melissa L. Heston, and Linda M. Fitzgerald, eds., *Research Methods for the Self-Study of Practice* (New York: Springer Science+Business Media B.V., 2009), xiii. Not surprisingly, the self-study of teaching has been utilized most extensively by educators—and the teachers of educators. The principles, though, apply to historians as well.

12. As an example of the hyperbole sometimes surrounding the digitization question, D. H. Jonassen and Ted Nelson, early experts on hypertext, forecasted that printed books would be obsolete by 1990. See Roy Rosenzweig, *Clio Wired: The Future of the Past in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 85.

13. For example sites, see Edward Ayers’ *The Valley of the Shadow*, <<http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/>>; the Library of Congress’ *American Memory*, <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/>>; and George Mason University’s Center for History and New Media, <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/teaching-and-learning/>>.

14. Roy Rosenzweig, "Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (June 2006): 117-146. See also Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

15. Nick DeSantis, "3 Major Publishers Sue Open-Education Textbook Start-Up," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (5 April 2012), <<http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/3-major-publishers-sue-open-education-textbook-start-up/35994>>.

16. Stephen Robertson, "What's Wrong with Online Readings? Text, Hypertext, and the History Web," *The History Teacher* 39, no. 4 (August 2006): 441-454.

17. Lisa W. Foderaro, "In a Digital Age, Students Still Cling to Paper Textbooks," *The New York Times* (19 October 2010), <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/20/nyregion/20textbooks.html>>; Robertson, 442; James Longhurst, "World History on the World Wide Web: A Student Satisfaction Survey and a Blinding Flash of the Obvious," *The History Teacher* 36, no. 3 (May 2003): 343-356.

18. Michael J. Guasco, "Building the Better Textbook: The Promises and Perils of E-Publication," *Journal of American History* 89, no. 4 (March 2003): 1458-1462.

19. Jie Jenny Zou, "Amazon Announces Digital-Textbook Rentals," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (20 July 2011), <<http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/amazon-announces-digital-textbook-rentals/>>. Frustration over the fleeting nature of e-texts has been expressed regularly in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* forums and articles. "The electronic age could have placed textbooks at our fingertips for the rest of our lives—no matter how high the flood levels," complained one writer to the *The Chronicle of Higher Education* who just so happened to be preparing for the Fargo floods of 2011, "but instead we are losing access." Letter to the Editor, "Digital Textbooks Have a Downside," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (20 February 2011).

20. State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, *Update to the 2006 Report on Textbook Purchasing Practices and Costs in the Commonwealth* (Richmond, VA: Council of Higher Education for Virginia, 2011).

21. U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, "Are College Textbooks Price Fairly?" 108th Congress, Second Session, 20 July 2004. See also United States Government Accountability Office, "College Textbooks: Enhanced Offerings Appear to Drive Recent Price Increases," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2005).

22. Robert Weir, "Teaching Without Textbooks," *Inside Higher Ed* (6 March 2007), <<http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2007/03/06/weir>>.

23. David J. Voelker, "Assessing Student Understanding in Introductory Courses: A Sample Strategy," *The History Teacher* 41, no. 4 (August 2008): 506.

24. Alan Booth, *Teaching History at University: Enhancing Learning and Understanding* (New York: Routledge Press, 2003), 59.

25. For analysis of the relevant pedagogical data, see Daniel J. Cohen, "By the Book: Assessing the Place of Textbooks in U.S. Survey Courses," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1405-1415; Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Booth, 30-66.

26. Perhaps the "coverage" doctrine is in decline. See Lendol Calder, "Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the Historical Survey," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (March 2006): 1359.

27. A recent *American Historical Review* forum considered this tension between higher education and business: "We often hear about the decline of the humanities, especially complaints about their lack of relevance to social problems and the corporatization of

the universities...there are ways for historians to counter this outside pressure, not by isolating scholarship or by remaining in the ivory tower but rather by engaging the public in discourse.” See Elazar Barkan, “Introduction: Historians and Historical Reconciliation,” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 4 (October 2009): 900.

28. Alan Brinkley, “The Challenges and Rewards of Textbook Writing: An Interview with Alan Brinkley,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1394.

29. Cecilia Kang, “Microsoft Buys Stake in Barnes and Noble’s Nook e-Reader,” *The Washington Post* (30 April 2012), <http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-04-30/business/35454148_1_andy-lees-nook-tablet>.

30. John McClymer, *The AHA Guide to Teaching and Learning with New Media* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 2005), 4-5.

31. See Tina M. Clark, “The University of Wyoming Textbook Investigation: From Controversy to Academic Freedom,” *OAH Magazine of History* 4, no. 4, Immigration (Spring 1990): 56-60; James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: The New Press, 1995); and Mary Beth North, “Reflections of a Longtime Textbook Author; or, History Revised, Revised—and Revised Again,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1383-1390.

32. George Mason University, Course Evaluation, 2011.

33. For useful background on the concept of critical friends in pedagogical research, see Sarah W. Nelson’s chapter, “Becoming a Critical Friend,” in *Collaborative Action Research: Developing Professional Learning Communities*, ed. Stephen P. Gordon (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008).

34. Most recently, I have assigned A. Daniel Frankforter and William M. Spellman, *The West: A Narrative History*, combined volume, second ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 2008).

35. I conducted five anonymous surveys over the course of three semesters. Unless otherwise specified, statistics are from aggregate data. All student quotes come from these surveys. “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Survey” [145 students] by Ryan Swanson, George Mason University, 3 November 2010; “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Survey” [144 students] by Ryan Swanson, George Mason University, 3 October 2011; “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous End of Semester Survey” [111 students] by Ryan Swanson, George Mason University, 1 December 2011; “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Survey” [78 students] by Ryan Swanson, George Mason University, 2 February 2011; “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous End-of-Semester Survey” [71 students] by Ryan Swanson, George Mason University, 25 April 2011.

36. “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Survey” [145 students] by Ryan Swanson, George Mason University, 3 November 2010.

37. “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Surveys,” Spring 2011, Fall 2011.

38. “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Surveys,” Fall 2011.

39. “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Surveys,” Spring 2011, Fall 2011.

40. While I participated in a self-study of teaching group that had the good fortune of being led by an expert in the self-study methodology, I do not believe that such oversight is necessary to replicate this exercise.

41. “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Surveys,” Spring 2011.

42. “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Surveys,” Spring 2011.

43. “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Surveys,” Fall 2010.

44. “Western Civilization Textbook/Sources Anonymous Surveys,” Spring 2011.