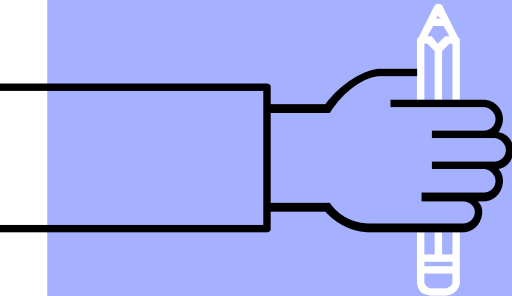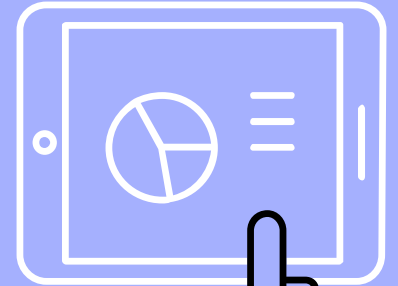# NO ACCESS, NO VALUE:

Advocating for More Equitable Access to Course Materials When Commercial Publishers Fail Us

Meg Ecclestone / meccle@uoguelph.ca
Heather Martin / martin@uoguelph.ca
Ali Versluis / versluis@uoguelph.ca / @aliversluis
#eBookSOS

HELLO!

Meg Ecclestone

Collections Librarian,
Social Science & Business

Heather Martin

Copyright Officer and
Manager, eLearning and
Reserves

Ali Versluis

Research & Scholarship
(OER) Librarian

#eBookSOS

THE ARTICLE

Commercial Textbooks Present Challenges in a Virtual Environment

As we approach the fall 2020 semester, library staff are working hard to provide alternative access to the print course reserves collection. A significant portion of the books on reserve are print copies of required textbooks, and students cannot access them without coming into the library. To support instructors and students over the next several months, we are developing new approaches to how we acquire course textbooks, to ensure that students have access, even in a primarily online, alternative delivery environment.

However, this work is hampered by textbook publishers who do not provide electronic purchasing options for libraries. **Approximately 85% of existing course textbooks are simply unavailable to libraries in any other format than print.** Textbook publishers have built their profit models around selling e-textbooks directly to students. Despite this, we also know that the cost of textbooks and other course materials represent a major financial hurdle for students at the University of Guelph.

Despite the library's commitment to make copies of all required textbooks and course materials available to assist those students who are unable to purchase their own, the following publishers will not allow us to purchase an e-textbook version of their publications:
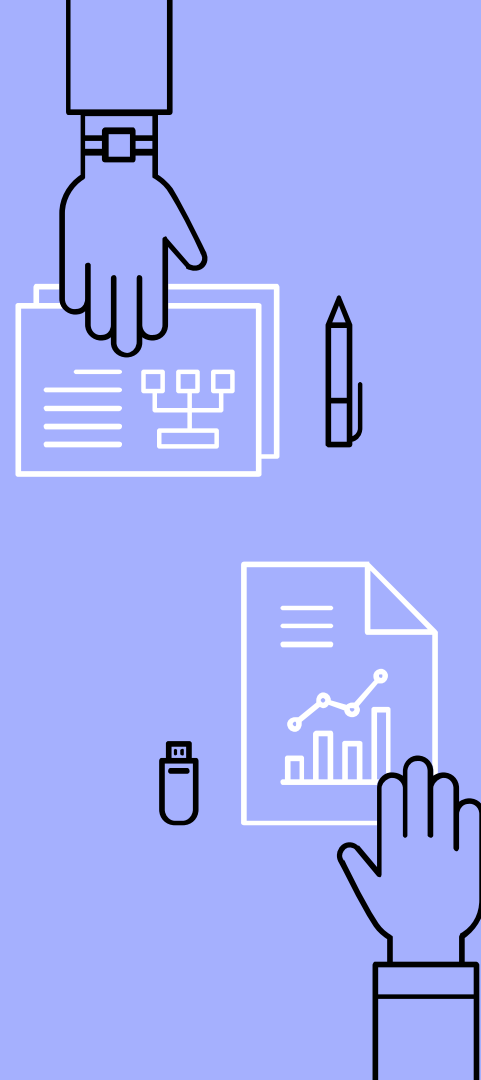
- Pearson
- Cengage

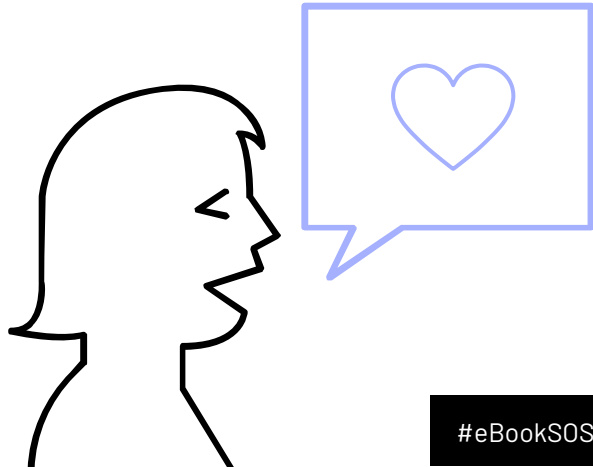Affordable and Accessible Course Materials

WHAT RESONATED

▷ Numbers
- 85% of existing course textbooks are unavailable to libraries in any format other than print

▷ Facts
- Naming names
- Explanation of profit model of commercial publishers

▷ Framing
- Articulating the problem, offering a solution

THE IMPACT

"Thank you @uofg for a brave position on ebooks and publishers."

"I love this post because of the way you all balanced an honest statement about the motivations of textbook publishers with the considerable financial challenges that students face, all without laying blame at the feet of faculty."

"Guelph and GVSU libraries are 🔥🔥🔥 Love that they are unapologetic in identifying for profit companies working to confound equitable student access to core learning resources."

"I have begun incorporating your work into my own outreach efforts...we'll be pulling out sections from your work to frame additional campus conversations."

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

▹ Increasing demand for library to make textbooks available

▹ University bookstore reporting unsold copies

▹ Student advocacy, #textbookbroke campaigns

▹ Library partnership with student association to survey undergraduates
  ▪ What were they buying/not buying?
  ▪ What was the impact of not buying a textbook?
  ▪ Could the library be doing something to help?
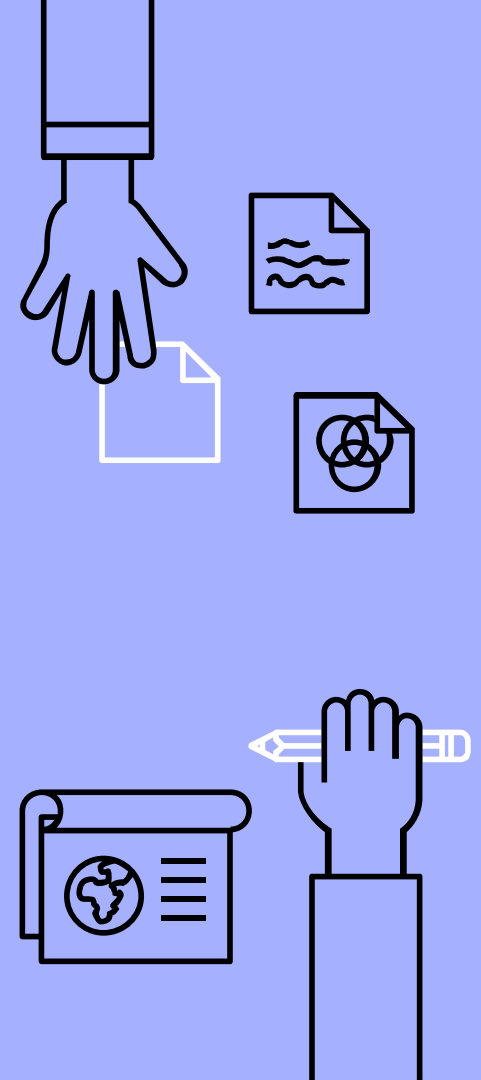
#eBookSOS

UG STUDENT TEXTBOOK SURVEYS (2016 & 2018)
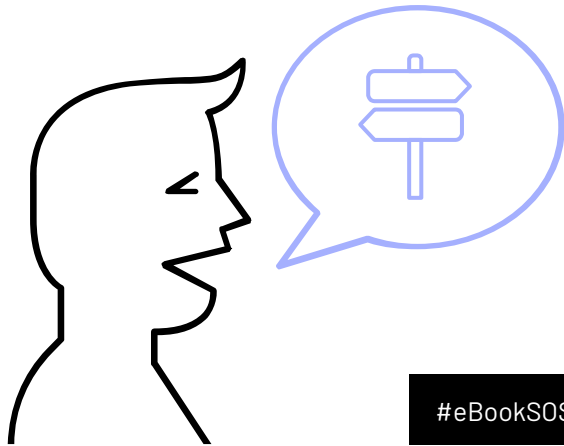
56%
Didn't purchase all their required texts

37%
Used the library's copy instead

24%
Shared or borrowed from a friend

38%
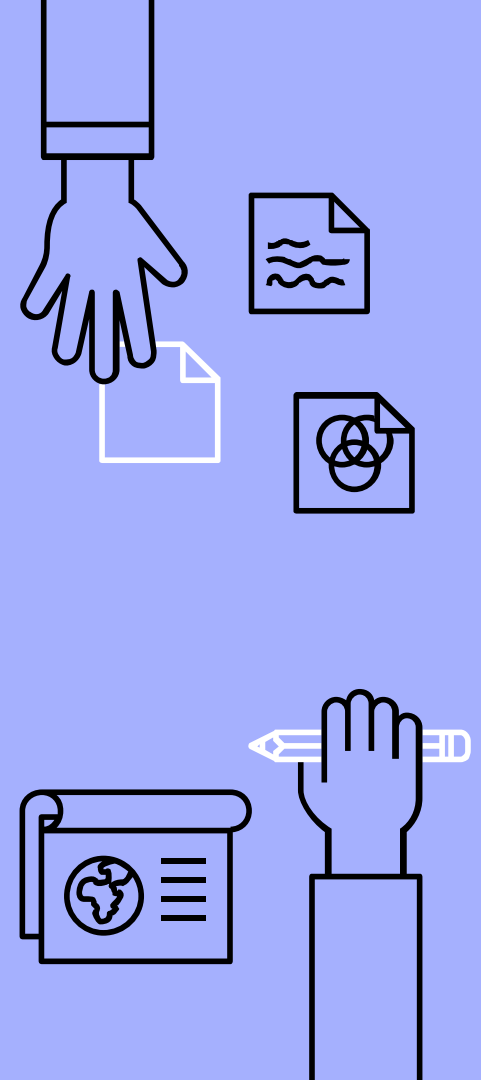Didn't use the textbook at all

#eBookSOS

83%

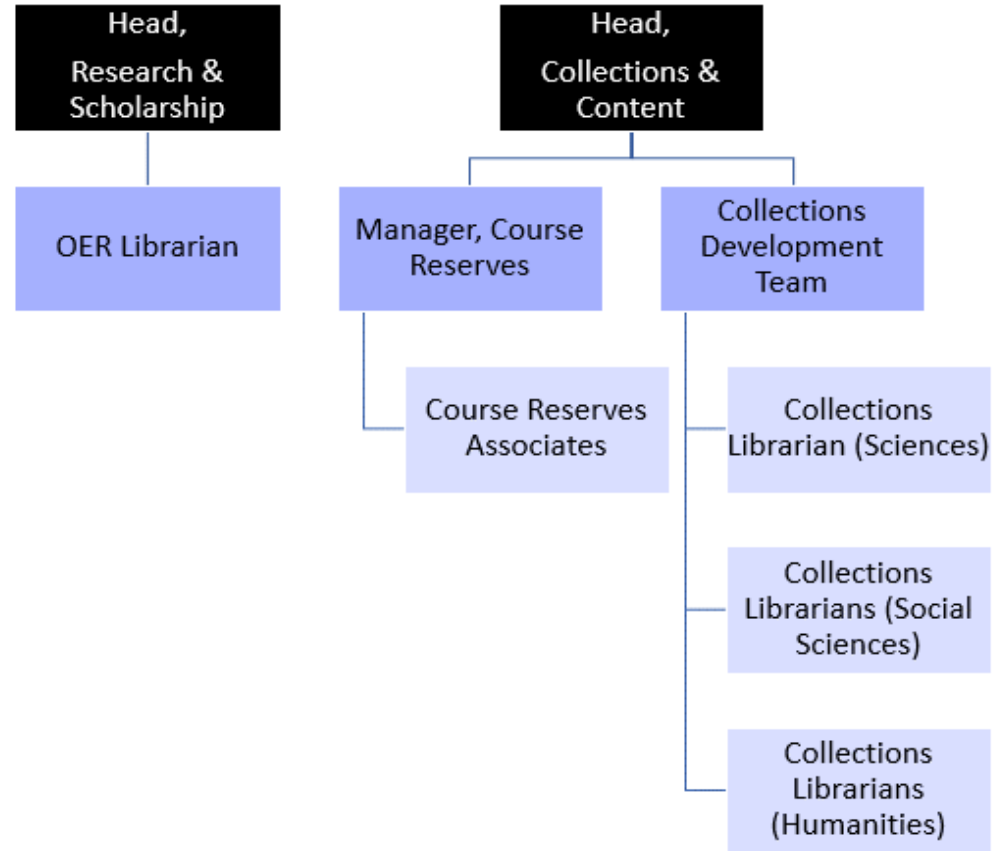reported at least one negative impact of not purchasing textbooks

- missing important information
- falling behind in class
- reduced learning and understanding
- lower marks
- disadvantaged vs peers
- time management issues
- issues using library copies
- problems with downloaded (pirated) copies
- not having a print copy
- accessibility issues
- anxiety/stress
- financial issues
- strained relationships with peers

#eBookSOS

HOW DID THE LIBRARY RESPOND?

- Open and Affordable Course Content Task Force
  - Awareness raising and advocacy
- Textbook Purchasing Program
  - Preemptively acquire and place on reserve the required textbook(s) for most undergraduate courses
  - Stop-gap measure
  - But: created EXPECTATIONS!
- Establishment of OER Librarian position (secondment)

OUR ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Head, Research & Scholarship

- OER Librarian

Head, Collections & Content

- Manager, Course Reserves
  - Course Reserves Associates
- Collections Development Team
  - Collections Librarian (Sciences)
  - Collections Librarians (Social Sciences)
  - Collections Librarians (Humanities)

#eBookSOS

WORKFLOW: BACKGROUNDER

▷ Context
  ▪ OER Librarian secondment ending
  ▪ Sustainable service model required
▷ Cross-team collaboration between Collections & Content and Research & Scholarship
  ▪ Focus on Fall 2020
  ▪ Emphasis on iteration and flexibility
  ▪ Goals
    ○ Acknowledge expertise
    ○ Respect time
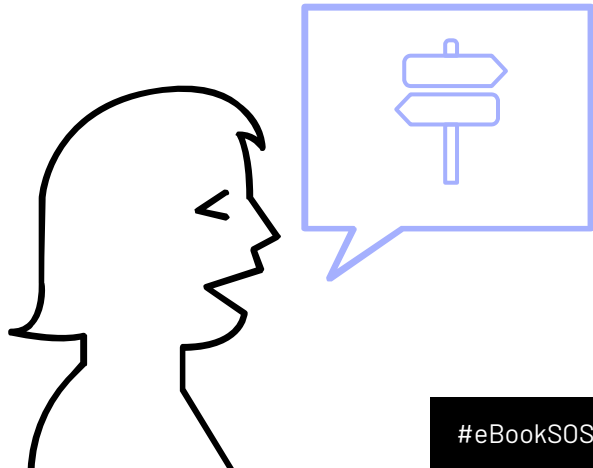   ○ Minimize imposition of new processes

WORKFLOW IN ACTION: COURSE RESERVES (CR) TEAM

➢ Email instructors re: print items on reserve list
  ▪ Warn that e-copy likely not an option, suggest alternatives:
    o Scan relevant chapter(s) within copyright guidelines (CR team)
    o Source relevant e-book that isn't a textbook (Collections Librarian [CL])
    o Link to already licensed or open content (CL or CR team)
    o Consider adopting an OER (CR team and R&S [OER] Librarian)
  ▪ OR: some combination of the above

WORKFLOW IN ACTION: COURSE RESERVES (CR) TEAM, CONTINUED

➤ Instructor's decision to pursue alternatives (and which); CR team makes appropriate referrals

➤ For OER, CR team does initial search, shares with instructor and R&S (OER) Librarian for follow up

INSTRUCTOR RESPONSES TO OUR EMAILS

"If you would scan the textbook and post it on Ares that would be wonderful! The students are asking for it."

"Since students participating in the course are required to read the entire book...I request that you contact the publisher directly regarding how to proceed."

"Thanks for letting me know. I'll have to find some alternative source for the readings...likely using freely available web-based resources."

"Wow. That's terrible...good to know for next semester so that I can avoid selecting a text from these publishers."

"I am sad that most students won't be able to access this fantastic resource from the reserve desk this year – it looks like most will have to purchase it. COVID sucks."

WORKFLOW IN ACTION: COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT (CD) TEAM

What happens when a request comes to the Collection Development Team from the Course Reserves Team?

➢ *2020 Textbook Replacement Recommendations* workflow / checklist

➢ Case study: 3rd year psychology course

➢ Recommended a "buffet" of offerings:
- ▪ OER
- ▪ Library-licensed content
- ▪ Titles available through GOBI or vender-direct (but not yet in our collection)

➢ Working directly with publisher to locate alternative content within existing collection

WORKFLOW IN ACTION: RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP (OER) LIBRARIAN

What happens when a request comes to the Research & Scholarship (OER) Librarian / the library's generic OER email address?

➢ Assumption that instructor is already interested in / committing to OER
➢ Case study: 2nd year sport management course
➢ Recommendations:
  ▪ Mostly OER
  ▪ Some traditional copyrighted monographs – fair dealing exception
  ▪ Some library-licensed content (multimedia)

WORKFLOW IN ACTION: MIX AND MATCH / FLEXIBLE APPROACH

➢ Common response from instructors: can we just scan the textbook?
  ▪ Fair dealing amounts limited
  ▪ Permission for larger amounts unsuccessful

➢ Case study: 2nd year nutrition course (taught by sessional)
  ▪ First choice: "scan the pages I need from the textbook"
    o 300 pages for 200 students: $13,810.89
  ▪ Second choice: "is there an ebook alternative?"
    o Collections Librarian sourced multiple resources (2 e-books + OER)

➢ Instructor created online coursepack using excerpts from all 3 for students who didn't purchase text
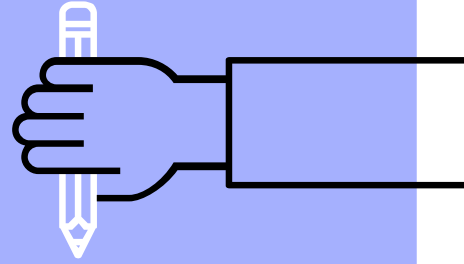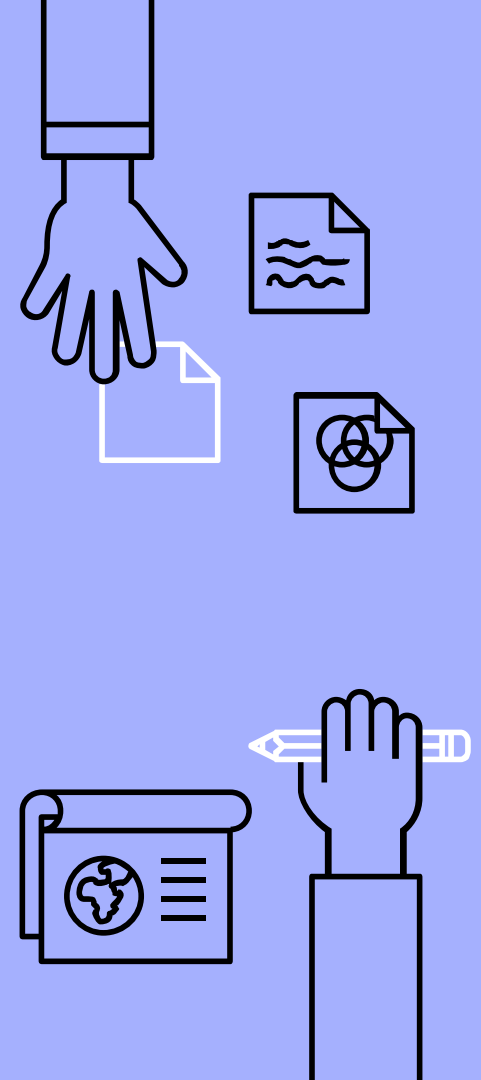
DID IT WORK?
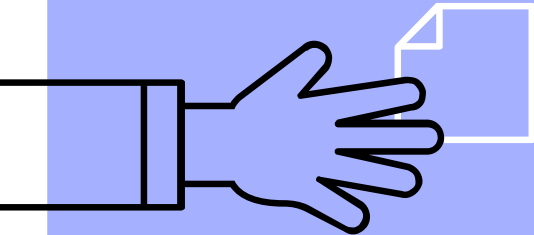
WELL…SORT OF.

➤ We anticipated (and planned for) a major uptick in course reserves requests

➤ Was there a deluge?
  ➤ No
    ➤ Received more responses in the first full week of the Fall 2020 semester (September 14-18) than the whole summer
    ➤ Still, less than 30 responses total

➤ What might be behind this lack of responses?

CHALLENGES: ECOSYSTEMS

▹ Perennial issues: access codes, ancillary resources

▹ Vendors capitalizing on pandemic to develop half-baked models
- "…we can look at creating a custom e-text from the sections you would require, and we could make that saleable for the students at a reduced price."
- Vague promises re: e-texts never materialized

▹ Widespread belief among instructors that publishers will provide a solution
- "I recall that the publisher was supportive regarding student access during spring 2020."
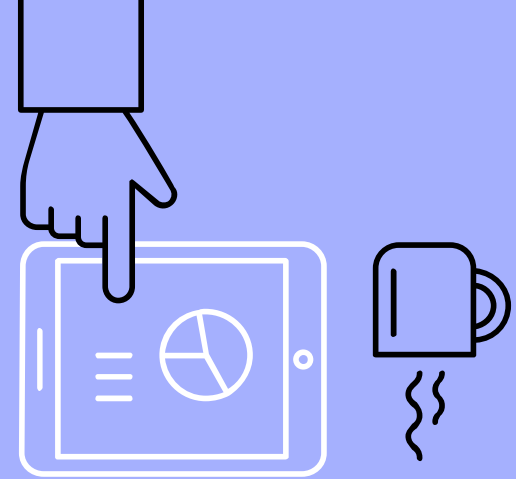
CHALLENGES: MATERIAL CONDITIONS

➤ Decision making structures around course materials

➤ Instructors being courted by vendors / publishers directly

➤ Prioritizing new, "better" options over existing bad options (ex. Perusall)
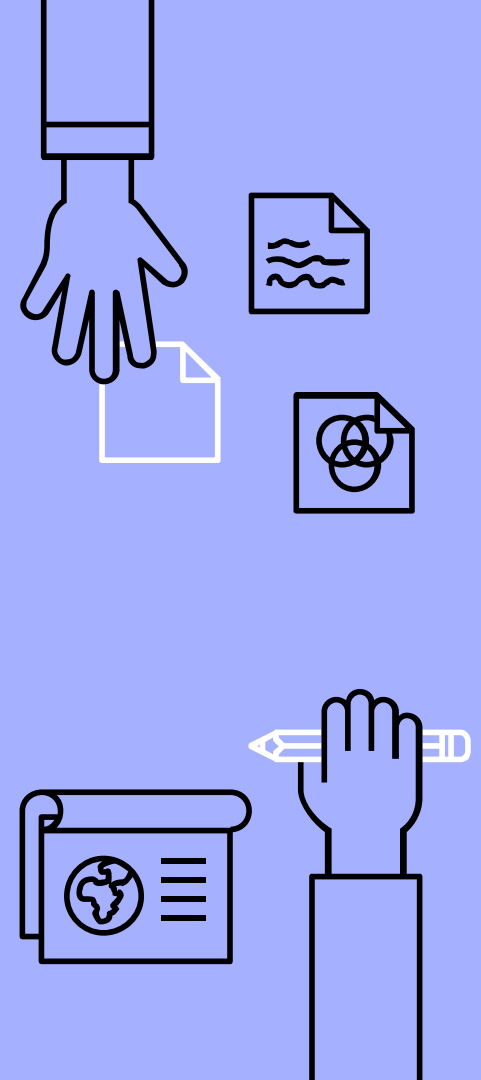
CHALLENGES: E-LICENSING

▸ No e-book options for key titles

▸ No country licensing for Canada

▸ Inconsistent / different licensing options between monograph acquisitions vendors (GOBI vs. OASIS)

▸ Strategic bundling of e-book content

▸ Disappearing content!

▸ Popular publishers unfamiliar with academic monograph acquisitions
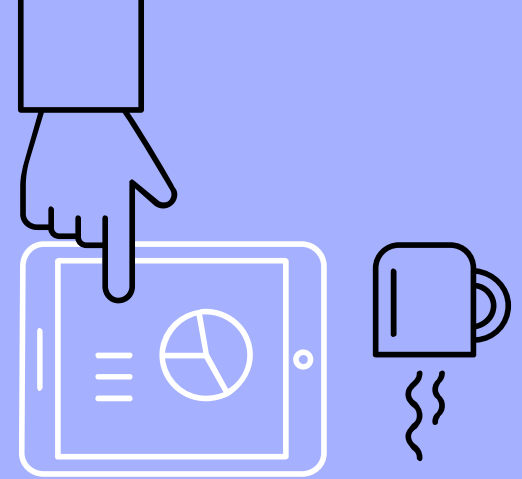
LOOKING
FORWARD

¯_(ツ)_/¯

When you reflect on your library's approach(es) to providing course materials access, have you experienced any successes (however small)?

What about failures?

THANKS!

Any questions?

You can find us at:

meccle@uoguelph.ca

martin@uoguelph.ca

versluis@uoguelph.ca