TIPs as Texts: Community College Students' Perceptions of Open Educational Resources

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Textbook prices have increased exponentially in recent years, prompting educators to investigate the usefulness of alternative sources for course readings. This is particularly important for community college students who are more likely to be low-income and less likely to complete their educational credentials. Despite this need, there is a dearth of literature investigating community college students' experiences with open educational resources. Therefore, we deployed a primarily open-prompt survey to current community college students who were using Treatment Improvement Protocols (TIPs) as alternative textbooks or textbook supplements to gather their perceptions of this specific type of open educational resource. Students primarily viewed TIPs as better than traditional textbooks with the most common themes including relevance, free access, and ease of use. Students' responses additionally revealed knowledge acquisition from the readings and the potential for a long-term connection to the professional resource.

One of the primary roles of U.S. community colleges is to provide access to higher education. Two major efforts toward this goal are their open-door admissions policy and low tuition rates (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Additional costs can pose an insurmountable barrier for community college students, including the cost of textbooks (Cochrane & Szabo-Kubitz, 2016). The College Board (2016) estimates that students who attend public two-year colleges in their hometowns will spend $1,390 annually on books and supplies. That cost is *higher* than the $1,250 estimate for university students. To minimize this cost for students and increase their access to textbooks, libraries acquire textbook copies, whether print or digital, and place them on reserve for students (Ferguson, 2016). Despite this creative way to avoid high cost textbooks, new challenges arise, for instance, requiring students to purchase access codes in order to complete course requirements (Walsh, 2012).

Textbook costs are more pronounced for community college students who are classified as academically underprepared and who are more likely to receive financial aid (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). There is a delicate "tipping point" for low-income community college students who have a tenuous threshold for obstacles in already overwhelmed lives (Ocean, 2015, p. 190). As textbook prices and the online access codes often associated with them increase, community college educators need to be creative to minimize barriers for students (Walsh, 2012). However, similar to community college students, employees often do not have access to enough resources (Ocean, 2015). Therefore, we investigated using existing, freely available resources, Treatment Improvement Protocols, to avoid an excessive burden being placed on either group.

The Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series was first developed in 2008 and continues to be disseminated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a division of the broader U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The TIP Series encourages practitioners to engage in an evidence-based practice. It includes four types of publications: Concise Desk Reference Guides, Knowledge Application Program Keys, Quick Guides, and Treatment Improvement Protocols (TIPs) (SAMHSA, n.d.). The goal of the writings is to enhance clinical services in the field of substance abuse. There is an implicit commitment to continue to create TIPs with updated information; however, this is ultimately dependent on the federal administration.

TIPs are organized similarly to a textbook, including an introduction to the volume, chapters, appendices, and an index. They range from 150 to over 200 pages. Despite these similarities, TIPs were not developed to be used as textbooks; they were not written specifically with students in mind and do not have characteristics like bolded definitions or broad overviews of topics. Instead, TIPs are specific and focus on substance use and mental health, and they were developed for substance abuse professionals practicing in the field. TIPs include best practices based on the most recent research, administrative practice, and clinical expertise (SAMHSA, 2015). They are written in clear language that can easily be understood by individuals who are new to the concepts. Their readership has expanded to health professionals and the general public as substance abuse is acknowledged as a public health concern. Community college students fit both the originally intended and expanded audiences with their diverse student populations, including both first-time college students and returning professionals. TIPs are freely available in electronic versions (PDF and HTML), as well as print

copies that can be ordered for no cost when available. TIPs are a cost effective, research-based, and pragmatic alternative textbook to use in an addiction studies program at a community college.

The research on students' perceptions of textbooks and alternative textbooks is limited (Gurung & Landrum, 2012), though students can serve as important collaborators in developing the course experience (Mihans, Long, & Felten, 2008). It is critical that educators understand student perceptions and engagement with textbooks, textbook alternatives, and open educational resources (OERs) (Prasad & Usagawa, 2014). Within this article, we review the existing literature on this topic and then present our own our research on using TIPs as alternative textbooks and textbook supplements at a community college.

Literature Review

State and federal legislatures have debated textbook affordability as institutions of higher education simultaneously grapple with the rising supplemental costs for their students. Within this section, we provide an overview of legislative efforts; OERs generally; and the research in this area including student, faculty, and librarian perceptions and experiences with OERs.

Legislative Efforts

State and federal governments have turned their attention to textbook costs and transparency for the past decade. Many state and federal guidelines now require faculty to consider the financial impact of their selected textbooks and publish textbook costs for their courses publicly. At least 39 states have enacted textbook affordability legislation (Morris-Babb & Henderson, 2012). In 2008, the U.S. Congress passed the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which reenacted the Higher Education Act of 1965 and included new language that specifically addressed textbook transparency and affordability. Most recently, the Affordable College Textbook Act was introduced in 2015 to address the increasing costs of textbooks. This piece of federal legislation was intended was to encourage the development of OERs via grant funding, but the bill did not successfully advance (Affordable College Textbook Act, 2015). All of these legislative efforts, regardless of success, highlight the cost of textbooks as a problem for students in higher education.

Open Educational Resources

Open educational resources (OERs) are educational materials that are license-free and available to the public. OERs appear to be more commonly developed at universities, where they have the resources to offer grants to faculty to compensate them for the additional work (Ferguson, 2016). A minority of community colleges are developing their own OERs. For instance, Tacoma Community College (TCC) funded a full-time staff member to coordinate an OER Project. The staff member assisted faculty members in the development and adoption of OERs for their courses (Senack, 2015). Places like Tidewater Community College have also added Z-Degrees, degrees attained without from textbook costs (Wiley, Williams, DeMarte, & Hilton, 2016). Additionally, the Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources (CCCOER) (n.d.), a specialized group within the Open Education Consortium, advocates for community and technical colleges use of OERs. CCCOER provides a central location for community and technical college faculty to learn about and search for OERs. OERs can serve as primary textbooks, or they can function as supplements to traditional textbooks (Islim, Gurel Koybasi, & Cagiltay, 2016).

Despite these efforts to create OERs, change in this area likely requires additional training for faculty and staff (Elhers, 2011). This is a new area of development, and many faculty and staff are just beginning to become aware and make use of additional tools that can be associated with OERs, such as learning analytics. If educators took full advantage of the available resources and software, they could identify how frequently and in what ways students engage with these resources, if at all (Prasad et al., 2016).

Students' Perceptions and Experiences

According to existing OER research on community college students, students perceive OERs as the same or better than traditional textbooks for introductory courses (Cooney, 2017; Hilton, Gaudet, Clark, Robinson, & Wiley, 2013; Illowsky, Hilton, Whiting, & Ackerman, 2016). Students specifically noted the cost effectiveness and the user-friendly nature of accessing the readings virtually anywhere as top reasons for the positive ratings (Cooney, 2017).

These findings are consistent with research conducted generally with post-secondary students who report a preference for OERs over traditional textbooks (Delimonta, Turtleb, Bennettc, Adhikarid, & Lindshielda, 2016). During the Fall 2010 semester, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium investigated student opinions of textbooks. Over 14,000 university and college students completed the survey. The researchers concluded, "What students want in a text is unlimited accessibility for multiple devices, an affordable print edition, self-print access to the entire book, and online study aids" (Morris-Babb & Henderson, 2012, p. 149). Students preferring access to printed copies of texts

is a reoccurring theme in the research; students explain that they often take notes as they read or make annotations on the actual readings to increase their learning and retention of the materials (Foasberg, 2014; Gressley, 2013; Spencer, 2006). When students are required to use an online textbook, they frequently do not take advantage of the electronic tools, including note-taking features, highlighting options, and searching functions; however, the students who understand and use these features perceive them as helpful (Johnson, Berg, Pillon, & Williams, 2015). It is still unclear if students do not use the online tools because they are uninterested or simply unfamiliar with the resources.

Beyond OERs, students describe the ideal textbook as inexpensive, well written (stating the pertinent information clearly once), and visually appealing (Starcher & Proffitt, 2011). Students report not reading textbooks due to lack of time or because they perceive the material as boring, unnecessary, or unrelated to the course requirements (Starcher & Proffitt, 2011). Students who classify themselves as "unprepared" are also less likely to endorse traditional teaching tools, such as textbooks, as helpful to their knowledge acquisition compared to their self-classified "prepared" counterparts (Henriques & Kusse, 2011). A study by the Florida Virtual Campus (2016) found a correlation between students who do not purchase required textbooks and students who fail courses.

Professional Experiences and Perceptions

Within this broader conversation, it is also important to consider postsecondary faculty and staff experiences and perceptions of OERs and other free, alternative textbook options. Professors report alternative textbooks are easier to use and believe OERs may increase student learning compared to traditional textbooks (Delimonta et al., 2016). Faculty are indeed a diverse group, leaving a single solution to the problem of textbook affordability unlikely (Harley, Lawrence, Acord, & Dixson, 2010). Klymkowsky (2007) acknowledges the uniqueness of the vast array of disciplines taught at the post-secondary level. He encourages professors to be thoughtful when considering whether or not a textbook truly is required for the students' acquisition of knowledge.

There are other innovative ways to circumvent the high cost of text books without sacrificing content. Instructional faculty can work collaboratively with librarians to find subscription e-books that can serve as course texts; additionally, hyperlinks, linked directly to the e-book readings, can be embedded into a learning management system, like BlackBoard (Ocean, Allen, Thompson, & Lyman, 2016; Ratto & Lynch, 2012). Librarians, as advocates for access to information, have also developed easily accessible OER collections as

resources for faculty (Okamoto, 2013). Drawing on existing resources is likely a requirement at community colleges that do not have a surplus of employees, money, or time.

Purpose of Research

Our goal with this research is to add to the literature on students' perceptions and experiences with alternative textbooks, and more specifically, to investigate using TIPs as an alternative textbook or textbook supplement at a community college. We sought to answer the following research question: *What are community college students' perceptions of and experiences with Treatment Improvement Protocols as alternative textbooks or textbook supplements for addiction studies courses?*

Methods

Qualitative research is the method of choice to investigate new phenomena with understudied populations (Rose et al., 2014) and to gather the "expert knowledge" of those directly impacted by policy and practice (Hopf, 2004, p. 203). Therefore, we surveyed current community college students using a primarily open-prompt survey to investigate their perceptions and experiences with TIPs. In an effort to create transparency with our research, we will briefly detail our site and participants, data collection, analysis, and trustworthiness in this section.

Site and Participants

We conducted the research at a community college in the southeast region of the U.S. The institution, like others in the region, offers a variety of certificates and degrees, including a Certificate in Addiction Studies and an Associate in Science Degree in Human Services with a concentration in Addiction Studies. The institution was large, consisting of five campuses with over 40,000 students. This study was conducted at the institution's largest campus, with over 20,000 students. During the Spring 2014 and Fall 2015 semesters, all of the students (N=120) enrolled in the addiction studies courses that used TIPs as alterative textbooks or textbook supplements were invited to participate in the survey. The majority of students completed the survey (n=100).

Students were recruited from four addiction studies courses. In two of the courses, Assessment and Family Counseling, a singular TIP was used as the main textbook throughout the semester with occasional journal articles supplementing the TIP. In the Individual Counseling course, chapters from multiple TIPs were used as weekly readings throughout the semester. In the Group Counseling course, the TIP was used as a supplement to a traditional textbook for the first half of

Table 1
Courses and OERs

Course	OER
Assessment	TIP 35: Enhancing Motivation for Change in Substance Abuse Treatment
Family Counseling	TIP 39: Substance Abuse Treatment and Family Therapy
Group Counseling (TIP used as supplement to traditional textbook)	TIP 41: Substance Abuse Treatment: Group Therapy
Individual Counseling (chapters used from multiple TIPs)	TIP 27: Comprehensive Case Management for Substance Abuse Treatment TIP 34: Brief Interventions and Brief Therapies for Substance Abuse TIP 37: Substance Abuse Treatment for Persons With HIV/AIDS TIP 45: Detoxification and Substance Abuse Treatment TIP 47: Substance Abuse: Clinical Issues in Intensive Outpatient Treatment TIP 50: Addressing Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors in Substance Abuse Treatment

the semester, and a traditional textbook was singularly used for the second half of the semester (Table 1). Note: Because the number of addiction studies programs is relatively small in the southeast region of the U.S., we have changed the names of the courses to their general topic area. All were specific to addictions.

Data Collection

Extra credit was offered as an incentive for students to complete the survey. To avoid coercion, more than one extra credit opportunity was offered to students. For instance, students could earn extra credit by either (a) completing the survey and emailing the professor to inform her it was complete (this was via the honor system since the survey was anonymous) or (b) completing a self-care activity and emailing a classroom appropriate selfie of the activity to the professor. Students were not eligible to complete both activities for twice the amount of extra credit. An email was sent to students explaining their options and including a link for the survey.

We created our 10-item survey using SurveyMonkey software. We used the National Union of Students' (2014) questionnaire on student perceptions and experiences with OERs to develop the survey, adjusting for the specific nature of our research on TIPs. One closed question began the survey, followed by nine open-ended prompts (Appendix). The surveys were anonymous, and we removed any identifying information as needed before saving the de-identified responses in a Word document to analyze.

Analysis

A team of three researchers completed the analysis (all but the lead author). The team consisted of a librarian, a tutoring center manager, and an individual who was both an online learning specialist and a recent community college graduate. Individuals from these three areas were intentionally chosen to create a cross-section of perspectives and decrease bias. The tutoring center manager brought her perspective both as an administrator and as a previous tutor, understanding some of the reading roadblocks students encounter in their studies. The librarian possessed expertise with academic resources, student issues with accessing resources, and OERs. The last team member brought his expertise in accessing online resources, student barriers to accessing online resources, and the students' perspectives. The team had no vested interest in a positive outcome for the study.

The team individually read through the de-identified student responses multiple times noting their reactions and identifying preliminary themes. Next, the team revisited the data, independently coding the responses and searching for themes for each question. They sought overarching themes across question responses to address the broader research question. Then they met as a team to share their observations and discuss commonalities among their coding. They assigned questions to each team member and re-read through the data to enhance the trustworthiness of the results (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Connor, 2003). Each team member created conceptually clustered matrices, grouping similar student perceptions into visual categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, they used tables to categorize responses that viewed

TIPs positively, negatively, or in the areas between or outside of these categories. Excel spreadsheets were also created to categorize and count student responses, which assisted in moving the data from abstract perceptions into concrete feedback. Additionally, the team used color coding to categorize responses into like groups, double and embedded coding responses as appropriate (Saldaña, 2011).

The team then condensed the students' perceptions into overarching themes. To assist in moving the data from categories into themes, each team member created an outline of the major themes while combining the categories within umbrella themes that assisted in answering our research question. The team met again to compare and contrast outlines. The team also discussed differences and moved towards a comprehensive answer to the research question. Then, they began to write the results as a team, rotating between writing and consulting. They refined the findings and revisited the coded and raw data as needed to ensure the students' experiences and perspectives were accurately reported. The team met regularly to discuss the preliminary findings and to document the shared and divergent perceptions which helped to increase the collaboration and trustworthiness of the final product (Fernald & Duclos, 2005).

Trustworthiness

Multiple steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness of our results. First, using a diverse team served as a checkpoint in the analysis (Saldaña, 2011). The multiple perspectives ensured that the analysis did not overly veer in one direction or the other, and the team members brought their own expertise and unique perspectives to analyze the data. Additionally, our analysis team was chosen because the members did not have a direct vested interest in the outcome of the research (the first author, who was also the professor of the courses, did not participate directly in the analysis). The team revisited the data consistently throughout the analysis to ensure the analysts' views were not overshadowing the perceptions and experiences of the students (Spencer et al., 2003). Lastly, the data were processed through many stages of methodical analysis guided by the recommendations in the literature. The analysis team filtered the data multiple times—moving from raw data to codes to categories to themes and back—to ensure important information was captured and not lost in the process.

Findings

Student responses were overwhelmingly positive about TIPs. The vast majority of students responding to the survey preferred TIPs over textbooks. A minority of students did not use TIPs or would have preferred to use a traditional textbook. Students' acquisition of content from TIPs was evidenced in the data in addition to the connection students formed to TIPs as career-long professional development resources. We will detail each of these themes in this section.

Positive Perceptions

Most of the students' responses were positive (76%-81% varying only slightly on each question). We developed three themes for students' positive perceptions and experiences with TIPs: relevant, economically accessible, and user-friendly.

Relevant. More than half (59%) of positive responses included remarks about the relevancy of TIPs. For the study, relevancy was broken into three major categories: (1) Students noted that TIPs were practical since they included specific cases and examples that students would eventually encounter in the field, (2) TIPs were current and included the latest research surrounding the field, and (3) TIPs adequately prepared students for state exams and other necessary tests. The following quote is representative of students who found TIPs relevant to their education and ultimately their profession:

> They are best practice guidelines for the treatment of substance abuse disorders. They are current and professionally written with the goal of making the reader aware of the latest research which can be used out in the field for practicing substance abuse counselors.

In this case, the student pointed to a specific subject area: treatment of substance abuse. Other students included specific areas that they found especially relevant in TIPs. Some topics brought up were motivational interviewing, family therapy, substance abuse, cultural awareness, stages of change, group dynamics, and intervention strategies. One student explained:

> The TIP presents the models, techniques, and principles of family therapy, with special attention to the stages of motivation, as well as to treatment and recovery. Discussion also focuses on clinical decision making and training, supervision, cultural considerations, specific populations, funding and research.

Many students referred to TIPs as current and therefore more relevant to field: "The TIP books contain information that is actually being used in the field of substance abuse and is practical now and in the future." Finally, students pointed to how practical and relevant TIPs were when studying for specific exams needed to attain degrees in their field: "Again, it is also

a study tool for the state exam & something that I will keep for my personal reference library."

Economically accessible. The second most common positive perception cited by students was that TIPs were free. Students did not have to purchase TIPs unlike traditional, and commonly expensive, textbooks. Many responses (44%) mentioned that TIPs were free as a positive at least once in the survey. A typical response is reflected in the following quote: "I personally liked using the TIPs for my classes. They are a great resource of well researched information. It's also free and makes classes more affordable."

User-friendly. Ease of use was the third most common reason students viewed TIPs favorably. Students' responses can be categorized in two different areas for ease of use: (1) easy to read and (2) easy to access. Students responded that TIPs were easy to read because they are concise, specific, and "to the point." One student responded, "Since I happen to love the field that I'm in, reading TIP is especially enjoyable because it does not beleaguer the facts and information. It defines, states, gives back-up information, and you're done." Students also explained that TIPs were easy to access due to their online format. Students found TIPs particularly convenient because they could access them anywhere at any time:

> The TIP is more of a professional article which is accessed online only and can be printed as needed. When a class requires discussion and reading around a specific chapter of the TIP, it can be accessed online or downloaded to be accessed offline. It can also be printed and placed into a binder to be kept by the student.

The findings suggested that most students who used TIPs preferred them over textbooks. Students surveyed largely agreed that they would rather use TIPs than textbooks in similar courses:

> Textbooks generally encompass several chapters of reading material that is relevant to the course you are taking. This information can be very general, and because textbooks are not necessarily written by practitioners, and they are expensive to produce, their information may not always be accurate or current. TIPs are produced under stringent circumstances and updated often. They are written for practitioners so they are the same material used by professionals; a class textbook would not be used in this same way.

Negative Perceptions

Despite the overwhelmingly positive feedback on TIPs, a minority of students found that there was a learning curve with the alternative texts and would have preferred a traditional textbook. Some students stated that TIPs did not have adequate background information. One student stated that other students "would not understand all of the terminology." Another commented that a "traditional text offers a more concise tool." These types of comments show the expectations students have for textbooks, especially in introductory classes. It is worth considering student awareness at the introductory level of these courses, even if these comments came from a small minority of students.

Some of the students who made negative comments (fewer than 3% of responses) felt strongly that they would not recommend using TIPs in future classes due to the electronic format: "No I wouldn't it. Because I didn't like it. Maybe people who are familiar with taking online classes." This sentiment was echoed by another student who was concerned that the new format would pose a barrier for students: "I recommend it [TIP] to a student who's familiar with our system, but for someone who is just getting back into school I would recommend the [text] book." One student remarked that students are socialized to use textbooks in primary and secondary schools, which can make a sudden change in college a challenge: "A textbook I was used to utilizing my whole life; I wish it was formatted different or there was more structure to how it is presented." Another student explained:

> I guess what I'm trying to say is when I read a book online I can flip through the chapters as if a printed copy was right in front of me I could highlight what I wanted to leave notes in a way that I wanted if the TIPs looked more like for example the reader/ebook and less like a series of PDF files I would be more comfortable with it.

Other students similarly seemed unclear about how to access TIPs in their electronic form, noting, "…[Y]ou cannot open within your cellphone or iPad." (This is not accurate. TIPs can be accessed on mobile devices.) To some, the issues these students highlight may seem insignificant, but if a student cannot successfully access the course materials, it could be a matter of passing or failing a class.

As found in previous research on college textbooks, some study respondents found the required readings unnecessary: "I honestly never read any of them... I'm just lazy. But I feel they would have helped me more if I did read them." Additionally, a small number of the respondents did not have a clear positive or negative experience with TIPs: "I think it works out ok, No strong feelings one way or another."

Other Themes of Significance

In addition to students' perceptions of TIPs as positive or negative, respondents' comments reflected student learning and evidenced specific content gathered from TIPs. The responses indicated a connection between using TIPs and the transfer of knowledge to students' professional and personal lives. Students also directly addressed the use of TIPs in either their current or future professional lives, thus designating an importance and practicality to TIPs that is not commonly associated with textbooks.

Students' responses evidenced understanding of the TIPs content and application. A student described TIPs as a "resource for agencies to create programs specific to client needs" and something that could be used on a personal basis for those who know people dealing with mental health issues to "benefit in understanding the different types of theories and approaches to helping their loved ones." One comment from a student reflected that they will continue using TIPs "because I use the motivational techniques." Several responses discussed how TIPs moved beyond the theoretical and into practical use as a guide or reference in the field.

Students explained their connection to TIPs as a professional tool that they planned to maintain throughout their careers: "I can't tell you how many textbooks I have or had that I've never opened up again after the class was over. I still reference the TIPs from classes from yesteryear." Another student added that they would not only use the ones from class but pointed out, "[O]nce you sign up, you get notifications for new publications as they come out," continuing, "God knows that in this field, there is always something new being discovered." Again, these are not isolated quotes but reoccurring themes in the survey results.

Discussion

We found that the overwhelming majority of community college students who completed the survey on using TIPs as textbook alternatives and textbook supplements preferred them to traditional textbooks. Students described TIPs as relevant, economically accessible, and user-friendly. This both confirms the previous research and provides new information. Students found TIPs particularly relevant for their professions, which has not been addressed in previous research. As noted, students are likely to skip purchasing textbooks at some point during their college careers, and when they do, they are likely to fail courses (Florida Virtual Campus, 2016). To counteract this troubling trend, colleges should continue exploring ways to make texts more engaging and affordable to students. This is particularly true at the community college level, as many community college students are non-traditional and economically challenged. TIPs provide examples of free and professionally relevant materials that students use and appreciate.

We also discovered the importance of providing adequate training to students to minimize any learning curve they may face with using alternative and electronic textbooks. Using TIPs requires students to learn new technological skills that are critical to professional success, such as how to access online information and read electronic files. This added benefit is embedded within the course but requires instructor attention. Drawing on the campus-wide expertise and working proactively will help alleviate some of the students' frustration with using TIPs. Partnerships inside and outside of the classroom are essential to success in this area. Within the class, it could be helpful for a professor to ask students who are familiar with the alternative textbooks and who are willing to help their peers to identify themselves. Then students who are unfamiliar and interested in assistance could link with the experienced students. These informal mentoring matches have the added benefit of creating an environment of collaborative learning. Collaborations can also be created across the campus. Often librarians can provide in-person training for students on how to successfully access and engage with alternative textbooks. Additionally, many online learning departments can create short video tutorials or step by step PDF instructions with screenshots to educate students on how to access the readings through various devices, as well as how to use the features to highlight, make notations, bookmark pages, and search the document.

Despite the technological challenges that some students experienced, we discovered a unique finding in our research. It is uncommon for students to seek out new editions to textbooks once they have completed a course successfully, but many students stated they continue to read new TIPs as they are released, even if they are not connected to a course. This directly relates to the most prevalent response about TIPs: their practical relevancy to the field. The students included in this research were seeking practical educational training and credentials; consequently, this finding is not unexpected, yet previously it was unknown how community college students would view TIPs when incorporated into their studies. We found that students understand there is a professional utility to these resources, and their comments reflect their desire to use these resources in the field. Once students recognize the relevancy of a subject, they are more likely to engage with the learning materials and therefore more likely to retain the information. TIPs are catalysts for critical thinking, as they cause students to make connections to other concepts. It is evident that TIPs promoted these critical learning outcomes for the courses based on the survey responses. We found TIPs

encourage students to develop a relationship to a professional resource that students plan to continue as they progress into their professions.

Our findings add important information to this area, yet additional research is needed. Future research could focus more specifically on student learning and student grades. For instance, students in the same course with the same instructor could be divided by section with one section using a traditional textbook and one section using TIPs. Researchers could examine the course success rates, as well as specific student learning outcomes, to tease out the nuances of the use of TIPs compared to textbooks from additional perspectives. Moreover, students could be tracked who take courses that use traditional textbooks and compared with students who take courses that use TIPs to contrast outcomes. The research in this area has begun, to some degree, with our work, but there are many future avenues to pursue.

Limitations

Our study was focused on the perceptions and experiences of community college students who were enrolled in an addiction studies class where TIPs were used as alternative textbooks. This provided focused data for this subgroup of students, but it limited our results for other groups and OERs. TIPs are specific publications and focused on a limited number of subjects. Therefore, professors of subjects outside of the behavioral sciences will have limited application for our findings. Conversely, our results are helpful for other community colleges, in particular for behavioral sciences, human services, and addiction studies programs. Additionally, our research adds important information on the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders in the challenge to find and provide equivalent, affordable textbooks at the post-secondary level.

Conclusion

Textbook affordability will continue to be an issue for the foreseeable future and will continue to disproportionately impact community college students. Educators will therefore need to continue to seek creative workarounds in order to reduce additional burdens for low and modest income students. Within this research, we found that community college students in an addiction studies program had overwhelmingly positive experiences with existing and freely available resources, TIPs, as alternative textbooks and textbook supplements. Using TIPs in the classroom appeared to encourage learning and to create a link to a professional resource for students that will likely last beyond the courses at the community college. We encourage others to consider using TIPs as texts for their courses where appropriate. We also encourage educators to continue seeking, utilizing, and evaluating existing resources as course readings to minimize the economic barriers to educational attainment for students.

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Acknowledgements

Appendix

Survey

1. Were you familiar with TIPs prior to taking courses at [institution]? Response options: Yes, No, or Other (with a comment field)

2. What do you think about using the TIP or TIPs generally for courses in the Addictions program? Is it a good idea or bad idea? Why? Please use specific examples.

3. What were some benefits of using the TIP for this course? What did you like about the TIP? Please use specific examples.

4. What were some disadvantages to using the TIP instead of a textbook? What did you not like about the TIP? Please use specific examples.

5. How would you describe using a TIP to a student who has never used one before? Please use specific examples.

6. Would you recommend a TIP to someone even if they are not a current student? Why or why not? Who specifically do you think might find TIPs helpful or unhelpful?

7. Would you read other TIPs even if they were not assigned to a course? Why or why not? If you have please include some of the specific titles or subjects.

8. How would you compare using a TIP to using a textbook to someone who was not familiar with either one? Please use specific examples.

9. Do you think you will use TIPs as a resource during your career? Would you look to these to assist you in your practice?

10. Please include any other relevant comments to using TIPs as course materials or otherwise here.