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This issue is dedicated to Dr. Sheryl Murphy-Manley

The American Music Wiki Cohort:

Purging Textbooks from the Academy One Entry at a Time

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Abstract

I recently assumed the role of coordinating musicological studies as a small, semi-rural institution which serves a high percentage of first-generation, low-income, and non-traditional students. Being the first trained musicologist to teach the music history surveys, American music, and other musicological courses, I inherited fairly generic curricula based on each field's predominant textbooks. Unfortunately, it became clear to me quickly that the gratuitous cost of textbooks and textbook packages adversely affected academic performance and advancement, particularly among the most vulnerable students whom the institution seeks to promote.

More than financial barriers to academic and professional success, traditional textbooks seemingly *disengage* students from a course – an observation substantiated quantifiably and qualitatively in the secondary literature – and usurp from them the process of acquiring and practicing disciplinary and universal skills. In American music classes, these skills include field and archival research, score analysis, textual close-reading and analysis, active and deductive listening, social and political awareness, and the construction of historical narrative.

Whereas all too often, textbooks can dictate the content of a course, the content of my textbook-liberated American music course becomes merely the medium by which students cultivate critical thinking skills, acquire intellectual autonomy, and grow personally. *Sans* textbook, the course employs a Wiki through which students track archetypes of the American experience, build timelines, construct varying historical narratives, and explore American music non-chronologically by uncovering and documenting historical threads. The class becomes a cohort in which the students gain agency over course content and their own professional goals.