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4-12-2016

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#### Recommended Citation

Dixon, Jennifer. "Brown's FLIP Library Lends Textbooks to Low-Income Students." *Library Journal* 12 Apr. 2016: n.pag. Online.

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# Brown's FLIP Library Lends Textbooks to Low-Income Students

by [Jennifer A. Dixon](#)

Apr 12, 2016 | Filed in

Since the spring of 2015, Brown University's John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library has been home to a new lending service—the First Generation Low Income Partnership (FLIP) Library. The FLIP Library makes textbooks available, free of charge, to students who may otherwise find it challenging to cover the high cost of texts required for their coursework. The idea for the Library came about following 1vyG 2015, a conference for first-generation college students at Ivy League schools hosted at Brown. According to Jonathan Jaramillo, a Brown sophomore who spearheaded the FLIP Library project, there was an “incredible amount of momentum due to the conversations that happened during the conference,” and students were enthusiastic about finding productive ways to harness that energy. Jaramillo was inspired by a panelist from Columbia University who spoke about that school's FLIP textbook borrowing service. Jaramillo realized that many low-income students at Brown were selecting their classes based on the price of required textbooks, rather than on academic interests, and felt that book prices should not be a primary factor steering course selection. Students “shouldn't have to take out loans to take certain classes,” such as science classes that are required for medical school admissions, Jaramillo said. In late March and early April 2015, students from the Brown First Generation College Student Initiative contacted the University's administration with a proposal for the FLIP Library, explaining the need for this service and the way in which it could be successfully realized. Following receipt of approval and support from the Brown administration, the student organization moved forward with implementation of the project. According to Ricky Gresh, Brown's Director for Campus Life Projects and an advisor for the FLIP Library, “when this idea came to the library I think the students were very pleased to be met with enthusiastic support” from the library's staff. The FLIP Library shelves are centrally located in a well-trafficked area of the Rockefeller Library. This visibility, according to Jaramillo, has helped promote student awareness about the availability of the lending library. The textbooks in the FLIP collection are all donated through a book drive at the end of each semester, which is advertised across campus during the pre-exam reading week. FLIP organizers may reach out to professors for certain courses with in-demand text books, and have tried to target some book collection efforts to in-demand courses with expensive textbooks. The books are loaned out for extended, semester-long intervals. The FLIP Library is currently home to between 700 and 800 books. In its first semester, the Library saved students about \$2,000 on textbooks. In the Fall 2015 semester, those savings increased to over \$6,000, and organizers are strategizing how to continue increasing the impact of the lending library.



## TRUST SYSTEM

The FLIP books are not included in the Brown library's catalog or officially checked out. Instead, the books are simply set up on shelves in five categories marked by signs: STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), Social Sciences, Humanities, Language, and Arts. Books are marked with paper slips and FLIP labels. All of the books are listed on an online spreadsheet and color coded. Students sign out books using a binder placed on top of the collection shelves, with the borrower's name and email address entered beside the book being borrowed. Jaramillo described this as "a trust system" and noted that, two semesters into the project, "books are not being stolen." The project is student-run, with students taking the lead on collecting donations, recording and distributing the contents of the collection, and otherwise maintaining the FLIP Library shelves. As Gresh told *LJ*, the students have "done all the heavy lifting" for the project, including developing the concept, organizing it, and advocating for its implementation. His role, as a representative from Brown's Office of Campus Life, has been to assist the students in working through logistical challenges, such as book storage and donation of out-of-date texts that are no longer useful for the FLIP Library. One ongoing concern, Gresh said, is "how to make the project sustainable" for the foreseeable future. Student organizers are seeking additional ways to communicate with their fellow students about the availability of the FLIP Library. Information about the Library is currently posted on a Facebook page, but students are working on a website, to launch later in 2016, with a list of titles and instructions about

checking out and returning textbooks. It is hoped that the information on the new site will simplify the lending process and raise awareness.

## **ROOM TO GROW**

According to Haley De La Rosa, a Brown junior who works as Special Projects Coordinator for the First Generation Initiative at Brown, the FLIP Library “is growing,” and this will be helped along by the opening this summer of Brown’s First-Generation College Student Center. The Center will provide a space to store the Library’s steadily growing collection of books, which presented an ongoing challenge as the the volume of FLIP Library holdings steadily increased over the past year. The FLIP Library organizers are also exploring partnerships with other organizations to donate books that are no longer needed for Brown coursework. The FLIP Library team is also considering advocacy initiatives related to the project, such as increasing student understanding about methods of purchasing textbooks at a discount and working with the university’s administration to ensure that the the costs of courses are transparent, with faculty being “conscientious about the economic diversity of the student population,” said Gresh. Students from other colleges and universities have reached out to Jaramillo expressing interest in setting up comparable initiatives on their own campuses, and he emphasized that the FLIP Library concept is one that can be adapted to work at any school. At Columbia, for example, books are not offered through an open library setup; instead, books are requested and distributed through a form on a first come, first serve basis. The implementation of this project at Columbia and Brown is “proof that [this type of] library can happen anywhere” and “can spread to different schools,” Jaramillo said.

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first generation students

textbooks

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