Faculty Review of Open eTextbooks

The California Open Educational Resources Council has designed and implemented a faculty review process of the free and open etextbooks showcased within the California Open Online Library for Education (www.cool4ed.org). Faculty from the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California were invited to review the selected no/low cost and open etextboks using a rubric. Faculty received a stipend for their efforts and funding was provided by the State of California, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Textbook Name:

History in the Making:
A History of the People of the United States of America to 1877
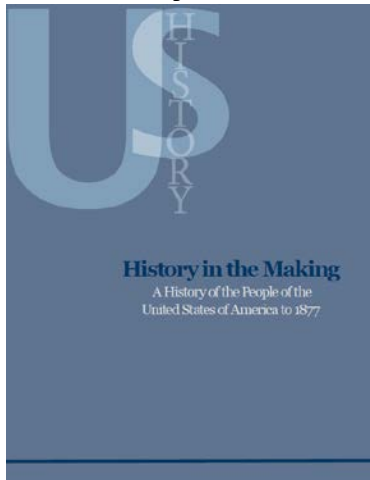
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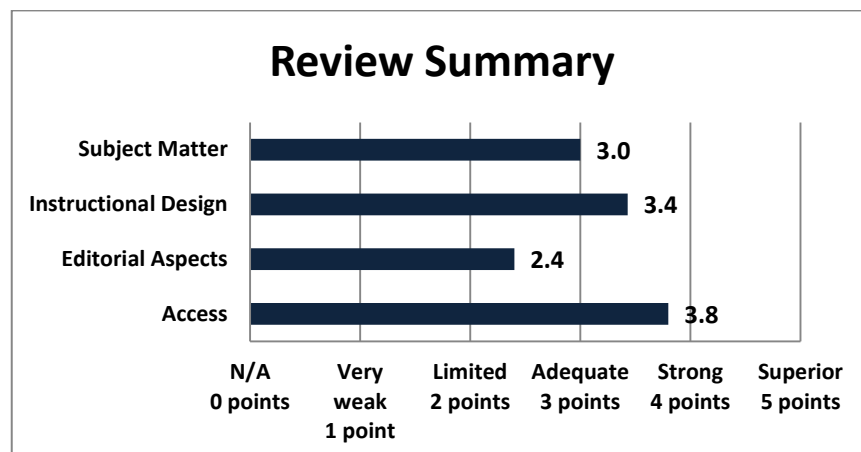
Title/Position:

Instructor History

Format Reviewed:

PDF and Online

A small fee may be associated with various formats.

Date Reviewed:

August, 2014.

Review Summary

	N/A 0 points	Very weak 1 point	Limited 2 points	Adequate 3 points	Strong 4 points	Superior 5 points
Subject Matter				3.0		
Instructional Design				3.4		
Editorial Aspects		2.4				
Access					3.8	

California OER Council eTextbook Evaluation Rubric

CA Course ID: HIST 130

Subject Matter (30 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Is the content accurate, error-free, and unbiased?				X		

Subject Matter (30 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Does the text adequately cover the designated course with a sufficient degree of depth and scope?				X		
Does the textbook use sufficient and relevant examples to present its subject matter?				X		
Does the textbook use a clear, consistent terminology to present its subject matter?				X		
Does the textbook reflect current knowledge of the subject matter?				X		
Does the textbook present its subject matter in a culturally sensitive manner? (e.g. Is the textbook free of offensive and insensitive examples? Does it include examples that are inclusive of a variety of races, ethnicities, and backgrounds?)				X		

Total points: 18 out of 30

Please provide comments on any aspect of the subject matter of this textbook:

- The quantity of the critical thinking exercises is variable. For example, some chapters have seven questions (like Chapter 4) but there is only one critical thinking question for all of Chapter 13. Perhaps future versions will contain additional exercises that instructors could use to get students to deeply engage with the material.
- Curiously, some complex terms are not defined such as "socialism," as in "The first Spanish to meet the Incas of Peru were impressed by their social and economic system, which some historians describe as an early form of socialism" (section 3.3.1 or page 83). Because these terms are currently politically fraught, I think it would be helpful if the authors offered brief, in-text definition of difficult terms.

Instructional Design (35 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Does the textbook present its subject materials at appropriate reading levels for undergrad use?				X		
Does the textbook reflect a consideration of different learning styles? (e.g. visual, textual?)			X			
Does the textbook present explicit learning outcomes aligned with the course and curriculum?					X	
Is a coherent organization of the textbook evident to the reader/student?					X	
Does the textbook reflect best practices in the instruction of the designated course?				X		
Does the textbook contain sufficient effective ancillary materials? (e.g. test banks, individual and/or group activities or exercises, pedagogical apparatus, etc.)					X	
Is the textbook searchable?					X	

Total points: 24 out of 35 points

Please provide comments on any aspect of the subject matter of this textbook:

- While this textbook contains some images, it seems like there were opportunities to be more visually engaging. Some of the visuals are difficult to see (many appear to be drawn from online sources with low resolution).

Editorial Aspects (25 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Is the language of the textbook free of grammatical, spelling, usage, and typographical errors?			X			
Is the textbook written in a clear, engaging style?				X		
Does the textbook adhere to effective principles of design? (e.g. are pages latid0out and organized to be clear and visually engaging and effective? Are colors, font, and typography consistent and unified?)				X		
Does the textbook include conventional editorial features? (e.g. a table of contents, glossary, citations					X	

Editorial Aspects (25 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
and further references)						
How effective are multimedia elements of the textbook? (e.g. graphics, animations, audio)	X					

Total points: 12 out of 25 points

Please provide comments on any aspect of the subject matter of this textbook:

- "Patronado" should be spelled "Patronato" in section 2.2.2 ("The Spanish in the Age of Discovery") on page 33 in the PDF version. "Grenada" should be "Granada" in the same section and page as stated in the previous sentence. Other issues include:
  - It is standard practice to refer to Bartolomé de las Casas by his Spanish name rather than the anglicized version "Bartholomew de las Casas" (see pages 79 and 89). The same holds true for José de Anchieta, which is spelled as Joseph de Anchieta on page 89 (section 3.4.2).
  - "Hernán do de Soto" should be "Hernándo de Soto" on page 83 (sections 3.3).
  - In the phrase "However, The Jesuit experience in Canada," the "t" in "the" should be lower-case (page 94).
  - I believe that "foordways" should be "foodways" (page 99 or section 3.6).
  - In section 7.6 (page 321 of the PDF version), the "g" in "General" should be capitalized ("In April of 1775, general Gage…").
  - The phrase "in the hand of too few" should read "in the hands of too few" in section 12.3.5 (page 555 in PDF version).
  - The phrase "Church of Later-Day Saints" should be "Church of Latter-Day Saints" in the final sentence of the first full paragraph (see section 13.2.1 or page 592).
  - The first letters of "Tejanos" and "Californios" should be capitalized (see section 14.3 and 14.3.1 and pages 632 and 634).
  - The question "One, did Scott have the right to sue in federal court" should be followed by a question mark in both the online and PDF versions (section 15.4.2 or page 676).

Access (25 possible points)	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
Is the textbook compatible with standard and commonly available hardware/software in college/university campus student computer labs?					X	
Is the textbook accessible in a variety of different electronic formats? (e.g. .txt, .pdf, .epub, etc.)					X	
Can the textbook be printed easily?				X		
Does the user interface implicitly inform the reader how to interact with and navigate the textbook?					X	
How easily can the textbook be annotated by students and instructors?					X	

Total points: 19 out of 25 points

Please provide comments on any aspect of the subject matter of this textbook:

- The links from the table of contents headings to the book's content worked inconsistently. For example, the links to content on the table of contents pages for Chapters 12 through 17 (pages 525, 583, 617, 646, 701-702, and 780, respectively) failed. The link on page 92 does also not work.

Overall Ratings						
	Not at all (0 pts)	Very Weak (1 pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3 pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
What is your overall impression of the textbook?				X		
	Not at all (0 pts)	Strong reservations (1 pt)	Limited willingness (2 pts)	Willing (3 pts)	Strongly willing (4 pts)	Enthusiastically willing (5 pts)
How willing would you be to adopt this book?			X			

Total points: 5 out of 10 points

Overall Comments

If you were to recommend this textbook to colleagues, what merits of the textbook would you highlight?
- Like its online counterpart (available at https://lumen.instructure.com/courses/202929), the prose is straightforward and easy to grasp. Overall, the length of the sections was reasonable and appropriate for undergraduate students. Certain sections (such as the one on the Civil War) contain strong content. Its strongest features are clear language, affordability, and accessibility.

What areas of this textbook require improvement in order for it to be used in your courses?
- While there is much to recommend about this textbook, its sections have an encyclopedic quality. In other words, the text efficiently narrates historical events but lacks a unifying theme (such as "freedom" or "struggle") or at times utilizes a repetitive tone. If this issue were addressed, I might be more willing to adopt the text.
- While the text contains some excerpts of primary sources, it seems as if there were missed opportunities to incorporate or link to more in-depth primary sources. Perhaps the authors would consider using more primary sources in their critical thinking questions. In a similar vein, the visual resources are limited. I would be more willing to adopt this text if it contained additional (or hyperlinks to) maps, images, and primary sources.

We invite you to add your feedback on the textbook or the review to the textbook site in MERLOT.
(Please register in MERLOT to post your feedback.)

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For questions or more information, contact the CA Open Educational Resources Council