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 free 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:

Smart History

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Find it: eTextbook Website

Textbook Authors:
Khan Academy

Reviewed by:
Roland Betancourt

Institution:
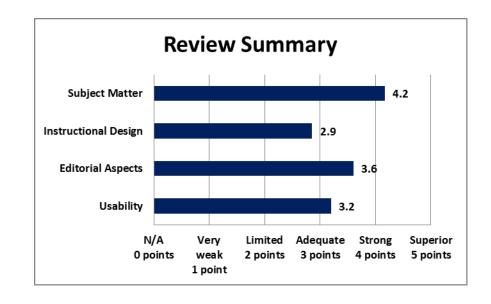University of California, Irvine

Title/Position:
Professor

Format Reviewed:
Online

A small fee may be associated with various formats.

Review Summary

Category	Score
Subject Matter	4.2
Instructional Design	2.9
Editorial Aspects	3.6
Usability	3.2

N/A 0 points | Very weak 1 point | Limited 2 points | Adequate 3 points | Strong 4 points | Superior 5 points

Date Reviewed:
August 2015

California OER Council eTextbook Evaluation Rubric

CA Course ID: ARTH 110

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	

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: 25 out of 30

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

- Khan Academy's Art History is a solid introduction to the material with essays written by experts in the field and videos that are readily accessible to students. One of the particular strengths of the content is that not only does it deploy extensive images from open content sources, but that it also brings in primary texts into the discussion to support the points being made through formal analysis and broader historical context. There is also a desire to engage current art historical discourse on works of art without overburdening the viewer/reader with citations, though bibliographies supplement the essays (with some variations in breadth and length). This actively communicates to students that history is always changing and developing as an ongoing conversation, which effectively demonstrates the dynamism of even the most ancient history. The essays are also good to address the modern afterlives of monuments, such as the Richard Meier museum for the Ara Pacis and the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque and then museum in responsible and effective manners.

- The informality of the videos in particular are a strength since they communicate a dialogue about art between two interlocutors and thus encourage close looking that is then supported by the research discussed and also the essays appended. This should be seen as a strength rather than a weakness since it communicates with students, shows them how to spend time looking closely, and also put these observations in contexts beyond mere formalism, but also socio-political contexts and reception. The Ara Pacis video for example is good at doing this, even discussing potential reconstructions of painting and color.

- There are instances, however, that some images are used that are not quite appropriate and should be labelled more clearly (i.e. the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus is a plaster cast and this is acknowledged in some places but should be highlighted and discussed in captions since it is clearly a problem of getting open source rights). The quizzes are also quite poorly done, often giving students vague answers and questions based on broad historical facts or vague formal/stylistic concerns. These should be more focused on images and getting students to learn how to look at the images, identify iconographies and review identifications, dates, and so on -- not because these should be the primary content of the course, but rather because this would enable students to learn the basic materials in this platform which cannot really do much to harness critical thinking skills. Therefore, the quizzes should be oriented around laying out the groundwork more on which one can build in class through writing assignments. The comments section is also somewhat distracting given that the quality of the conversation can vary and it would be best to have more clear disclaimers so as to not muddle student's understanding, though it does seem to be well moderated and attended to.

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		

	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
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: 20 out of 35

Please provide comments on any aspect of the instructional design of this textbook:

- The instructional design is sleek but also quite basic, and this simplicity is ideal given that Khan Academy's goal is to reach not only students but a variety of learners.
- Overall, it adheres well to comparable standards for similar massive online open courses.

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 and further references)				X		
How effective are multimedia elements of the textbook? (e.g. graphics, animations, audio)					X	

Total Points: 18 out of 25

Please provide comments on any editorial aspect of this textbook.

- The text is written by a variety of authors, but clearly there has been a good adherence to consistency and editing to make sure that the content is fairly seamless. On this front perhaps the greatest flaw is that the combination of site-/work-specific modules vs more general modules can be uneven in how the material is being covered, so at times one is looking closely at several works of art or a building over time, and then suddenly looking at a particular medium or period. This is a worthwhile approach, but could be improved upon in terms of standardization.

Usability (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: 16 out of 25

Please provide comments on any aspect of access concerning this textbook.

- It is a very user-friendly setup, but oriented more for educational-entertainment and therefore expects a fairly passive user who might use quizzes, but other than that is not engaging actively with the texts. The points system used to encourage users works well for both the edu-entertainment and educational model.

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	

<div align="right">Total Points: 8 out of 10</div>

Overall Comments

If you were to recommend this textbook to colleagues, what merits of the textbook would you highlight?

- The text offers a solid and comprehensive discussion of the material produced by experts from a variety of backgrounds with good research skills in art history.
- There is a good use of videos within the context of the course that are particularly useful for guiding students through detailed and complicated iconographic programs, which is particularly important for the study of the ancient and medieval worlds.
- The global content also would allow instructors to expand their Pre-Renaissance survey into non-western areas and expose students to a more comprehensive survey of the material.

What areas of this textbook require improvement in order for it to be used in your courses?

- The quizzes should be improved so as to not lead students into thinking that they are an accurate reflection of the field or class expectations since they are often quite basic and idiosyncratic. Perhaps sample writing prompts could be added and grading rubrics could be used as "answer sheets" to help students think more critically about works of art, particularly beyond true/false, multiple choice questions and get them to think about writing in prose about art history. Better study tools could also be generated from this content.
- The biggest challenge for Khan Academy is that as an educational project rooted on entertainment learning it makes less effort to respond to in-classroom needs or market itself as an academic text book.
- A stronger image bank could also be created, at least with potential interfaces with sources like ArtStor that within a college setting would broaden the student's access to materials.

> 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.