



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 etextbooks 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:

U. S. History



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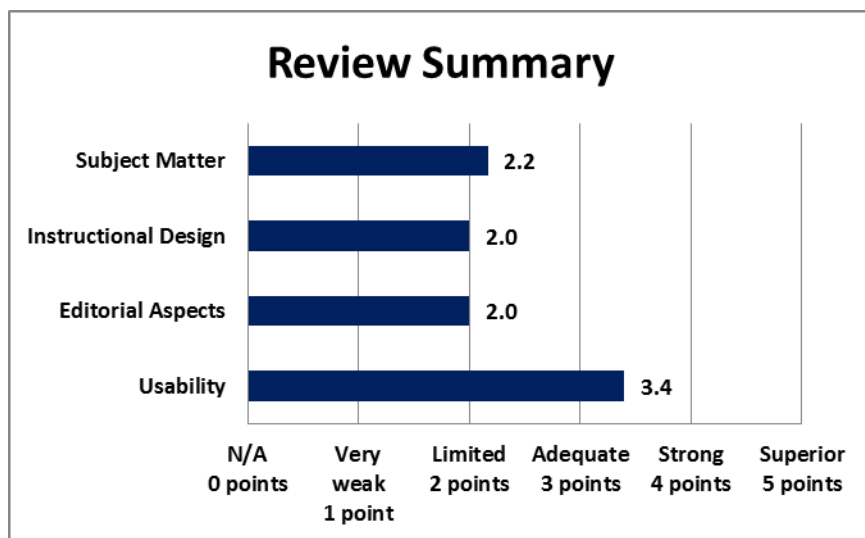
Professor

Format

Reviewed:

[Online](#)

A small fee may be associated with various formats.



Date Reviewed:

August 2015

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: 13 out of 30

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

- This is very traditional presidential synthesis history, not significantly different in approach from the U.S. history I took in the 1960s. There is some new information, and it does get all the way to the first Obama term. Does not reflect any of the recent social history on intersections of race, class, gender. Separate sections on "women," "African Americans," Chinese, "Hispanics," etc., assumes anyone not a woman or racial minority has neither gender nor race. Thus: "People faced hardships [in the Depression] . . . and "women's lives, too, were profoundly affected." The logic of this framing is that women were not part of the "people." Similar examples applied to women and racial minorities appear throughout the text. Also, use of the term "Hispanics" referring to those with Latin American roots is ahistorical before the late 20th century, as this was a term coined recently by the Federal Government, and is seen as offensive by many. There is a significant number of factual claims that are either just wrong, or a matter of interpretation, but not presented as such. For example, the description of the Selective Service System during World War I is both confused and factually wrong on some details. Similarly, the dates for the Filipino-American War are as given in most U.S. history textbooks (1899-1902), but Filipino textbooks give the dates as 1899-1913, as many major battles occurred after Aguinaldo surrendered in 1902. The account of the Truman Administration's role in returning the French to Vietnam is in disagreement with a number of accounts by scholars. Similarly, it suggests Diem was installed by the French, when in fact, he was selected for Prime Minister of South Vietnam by the U.S. It also states that the NLF (Viet Cong) was created by North Vietnam, which is simply incorrect.

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: 14 out of 35

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

- I found the writing, while technically excellent, to be one of the worst examples of textbook-ese I have seen. It is intensely boring, and I am one who loves history. This writing is guaranteed to turn off many students. The omnipotent anonymous author(s) provide accounts that do not invite students to question or challenge the way the story is told. There is much passive voice, and even more use of vague abstractions, rather than people, as actors. Examples: "Questions swirled about the constitutionality of . . . "Sharecropping spread. . . ." "Laws intended. . . ." "Worker productivity benefited. . . ." "Urbanization

occurred rapidly. . . ." The "Critical Thinking" questions at the end of most sections do not stimulate what I think of as critical thinking. Most simply ask students to regurgitate what the text has told them. Two other types ask: 1. Counter-factuals (e.g., what if. . . ?); 2. What would you have done? (e.g., role playing). In neither case is it clear what the learning outcome is. There are no attempts to have students think about how any of this might help us understand ourselves or the world we live in.

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 laid out 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: 10 out of 25

Please provide comments on any editorial aspect of this textbook.

- I addressed the editorial style in comments above. But to repeat here, this is decidedly not written in an engaging style. Students, or any readers, need to know from the beginning of each section why what they are being told is important, and by what criteria the authors deem it important for them. This is a basic rule of good expository writing. As a reader, I always need to know why you are telling me this. If the students are reading only because the textbook, or the instructor, or the state says they need to know these things, they will not be engaged, and whatever learning occurs will be shallow and temporary. Further, the layout is terrible. The text is spread wide across most of the screen--too wide for comfortable reading. Otherwise, it just looks like they digitized an existing print textbook, added a few links, and posted it online. There is nothing about the online aspect of this text other than a few links, that makes it especially appropriate for an online course. In other words, the online aspect seems an afterthought, not a central element of design.

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: 17 out of 25

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

- Perhaps the only strong aspect of this textbook, in my view, is the ease of navigation through the text. However, the dead links somewhat defeat this.

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					

Overall Comments

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

- Ease of navigation

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

- A complete revision of the writing style, reformatting for easier reading on screen, correction of factual errors, or interpretations parading as facts, more social history, especially reflecting recent work showing persistent but changing intersections of race, class, gender.

We invite you to add your feedback on the textbook or the review to the [textbook site in MERLOT](#)
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