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:

Khan Academy SmartHistory: Art History

License:

Find it: eTextbook Website

Textbook Authors:

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Reviewed by:

Alice Taylor

Institution:

West Los Angeles College

Title/Position:
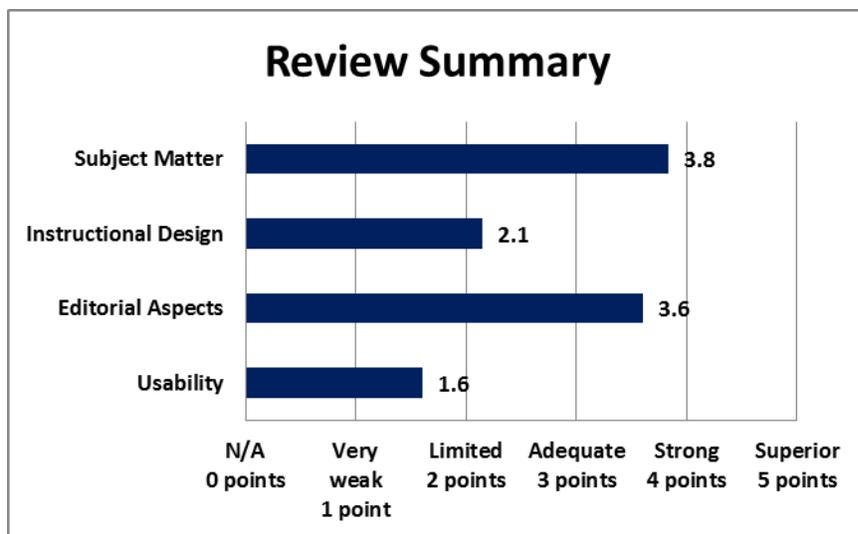
Professor

Format Reviewed:

Online

A small fee may be associated with various formats.

Review Summary

Category	Score
Subject Matter	3.8
Instructional Design	2.1
Editorial Aspects	3.6
Usability	1.6

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

Date Reviewed:

March 2015

California OER Council eTextbook Evaluation Rubric

CA Course ID: ARTH 120

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		

	N/A (0 pts)	Very Weak (1pt)	Limited (2 pts)	Adequate (3pts)	Strong (4 pts)	Superior (5 pts)
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: 23 out of 30

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

- Smarthistory presents the basic cannon of Western art, and goes beyond it in some areas. It is group-written and began as a volunteer project. This may account for some inaccuracies. As the site has progressed, it has become more reliable. It has a simple interface for suggesting corrections, and in my experience, corrections are often made.

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: 15 out of 35

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

- Since the search includes all of the Khan Academy, it is sometimes hard to find an appropriate reference. Smarthistory has a table of contents with links to major sections, but as a student finishes a section there is no indication of how to get back to the table of contents or to go to the next section.

- The mix of videos and texts would serve various students, though it might be a challenge to find alternatives to each video in the texts.

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 videos are a little mixed in quality, but most make good use of labeling and panning to guide the student to the element being discussed and to clarify problematic vocabulary. Most videos are competently captioned. There are a few interactive features, such as linear perspective, which could explain a lot to a student motivated to interact with it. The texts are uneven in tone, some using "I" or "we" and others avoiding the first person.

Usability (30 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: 8 out of 30

Please provide comments on any aspect of access concerning this textbook.
- Since Smarthistory has so much content and little explicit help with navigation, an online course management system or instructor website would probably be necessary in a course using it as a textbook.

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: 8 out of 10

Overall Comments

If you were to recommend this textbook to colleagues, what merits of the textbook would you highlight?
- There is a great deal of well-presented material in videos and in texts. Each piece has a unique URL, so directing your students to read what you've selected is simple. Links for further exploration accompany most sections.

- While using one of the surveys in print has the advantage of allowing students to annotate the text, for my students this is far outweighed by the price of art history textbooks.

What areas of this textbook require improvement in order for it to be used in your courses?
- I could use Smarthistory next time I teach a Renaissance to Contemporary survey. I do use it, along with other free materials from the web, in my caves through Medieval survey; it comprises about 25% of my course.

- Robust, password-protected question banks would be very helpful, if the questions were well-designed. The current quizzes are not.

> 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.