

## News Release

# Research Collaboration Explores the Future of eBooks

By *Itollefs on Tuesday, June 18, 2013* Faculty inquiry often leads to innovative solutions in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Technology has changed the classroom in many ways. For University of Minnesota Crookston faculty members Sharon Neet and Sue Brorson, these changes are at the heart of some ongoing research on the role of eBooks in education at the university.

Their research provided them an opportunity to collaborate with Anders Berggren, an information technology professional at the U of M Twin Cities and an online instructor for the Crookston campus in software engineering.

The investigation began when Neet and Berggren began discussing the possibility of preserving and distributing old, out-of-print books that are no longer constrained by copyright.

With Berggren's help on the technology side, Neet, who teaches history on the Crookston campus, made available as an eBook, *Leaves of Life*, a work originally published in 1912 by J. A. Wayland. It was the first foray into e-publishing for Neet, and it has fueled her curiosity.

Interestingly, the University of Minnesota Crookston initiated a project exploring the use of tablet computers by faculty in spring 2012. This opportunity to use eBooks in the classroom together with Neet's interest in e-publishing was well-timed.

Brorson has a significant interest in eBooks particularly as head of the Business Department and as a longtime faculty member. Her department is also a leader in the effort to maintain the highest standard of quality for students learning online.

"In fall 2012 according to our survey, the campus had 54 eBooks across 22 courses available to students on campus and online," Brorson said. "Cost for textbooks is more than \$700 per semester and changes in the eBook world made offering textbooks as eBooks make sense. They are low cost and sometimes are available at no cost for students."

Early research shows that tablets or readers, i.e. iPad, Kindle, etc., are best suited for electronic textbook users. Students without a tablet were less like to enjoy the eBook experience. However, online students found them more desirable probably because they expect to access the information they need electronically.

Berggren and Brorson joined Neet at a history conference in Omaha in March 2012 to present their respective work in the publishing and use of eBooks at the Missouri Valley History Conference. Interest in their presentation, "Books and eBooks: the future of textbooks and research materials," proved popular and that popularity will continue as publishers move toward more electronic access of textbooks.

"The world of eBooks is changing things," Neet says. "This is a whole new paradigm for textbook use." It also opens the door for anyone to publish as Neet explains, "Families can share a family cookbook or a family history in a whole new way. They are no longer restricted by printing costs or by having to learn to use publishing software. They can develop a Word® document, include photos if they want to, and publish it as an eBook. It is easy and anyone can do it."

The publishing tools are available free and are limited only by the available support for the device being used. Works that were once only part of a special collection and not available for interlibrary loan could become accessible to anyone through eBooks publishing.

The Neet, Brorson, and Berggren collaboration represents interdisciplinarity and intercampus cooperation to move forward shared research and instructional material developments.

Neet is working publishing her fifth book this summer--a 1920s marketing book. She combines her interest in history and eBooks to provide access to the very old books in a whole new way. Today's students will have the opportunity to read from an original text if it is available, and having them available makes them an exciting option for both instructor and student.

Today the University of Minnesota Crookston delivers 28 bachelor's degree programs, 20 minors, and 39 concentrations on campus--as well as 11 degrees online--in the areas of agriculture and natural resources; business; liberal arts and education; and math, science and technology. With an enrollment of 1,800 undergraduates from 25 countries and 40 states, the Crookston campus offers a supportive, close-knit atmosphere that leads to a prestigious University of Minnesota degree. "Small Campus. Big Degree." To learn more, visit [www.umcrookston.edu](http://www.umcrookston.edu).



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