

# US backs push for open access textbooks in Arabic

February 7 2013, by Sunanda Creagh

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In one of her last acts as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton threw her support behind a project that makes US text books available free to Arabic-speaking students. Credit: EPA/MICHAEL REYNOLDS

The United States has backed a project that aims to translate American textbooks into Arabic and make them available without copyrights restrictions to educators and students in the Middle East.

The Open Book Project, [launched by outgoing Secretary of State Hilary](#)

[Clinton](#) and supported by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, Rice University and Creative Commons, comes as the US is trying to build relationships with new regimes that followed the Arab Spring uprisings.

Clinton, who launched the project in one of her final moves as Secretary of State before being replaced by Senator [John Kerry](#) today, called the Open Book Project "part of our efforts to build friendships and partnerships."

"We live at a time when technology is expanding access to information and learning materials like never before. You can look around the world and see young adults in remote villages and towns huddling around a computer watching videotaped physics lessons by MIT professors. Top universities like Rice University are creating free online textbooks and saving students money in their studies," she [said](#).

"There are other examples, and these are all fruits of [technological progress](#), but also of a commitment to make more learning materials open – free, open licensing for anyone to use, adapt, and share."

The aim of the project was to "lower geographic, economic, and even gender-based barriers to learning," she said.

Colin Steele, Emeritus Fellow at Australian National University and an expert in open access book publishing, said the Open Books Project was "very good and part of the global movement of making knowledge available to the world."

The open access textbooks debate was linked to the global push for free access to publicly funded [scholarly work](#) that is usually locked behind pay walls by academic publishers, he said.

"There's a general movement toward openness of knowledge but there are vast, embedded profit-making bodies in the industry that don't want to see that happen," he said, adding that many university league tables and government assessors gave greater kudos to academics who publish in traditional journals than in [open access](#) journals.

However, many publishers say they already make some publications available at reduced or no cost to the developing world.

Mat Hardy, lecturer in Middle East Studies at Deakin University and an expert on the use of collaborative online tools in education said the Open Books project was a good example of cultural outreach by the US.

"There is scientific literature in Arabic already but English is the dominant language in research and the sheer volume of material in English vastly outweighs the material in Arabic," he said.

"I definitely think the days of publishing houses charging exorbitant rates to provide access to material that is often publicly funded in the first place are numbered," he said.

"The academic publishing industry, just like the newspaper publishing industry and the music industry, is going to have to change and this could be one of the facets of that charge."

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