



Strategies for Reducing Text Book Costs

Courtesy of the Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2008

Campus Strategies for Students, Faculty & Staff

Books are an essential part of higher education. High-quality reading materials are behind every great college course when they are thoughtfully selected to enhance student learning. Textbooks can guide discussions, frame issues, illustrate processes, identify critical questions and generally enrich the classroom experience in important ways. Yet in recent years, the price of college textbooks has become a growing concern for students and others who care about keeping college costs affordable.

Nationally, colleges report an increase in textbook costs of about 19 percent over three years, from academic year 2003-04 to 2006-07.¹ Full-time students pay an average of \$898 per academic year for textbooks,² and are often surprised by the required expense, which is often the last and least anticipated expense encountered after they enroll. As policymakers and higher education systems explore the issue further, there are actions that can be taken immediately on college campuses to reduce the cost of textbooks.

Early planning and communication on campus are important components of any plan to reduce textbook costs for students. Establishment of a campus-wide Textbook Affordability Committee that includes input from multiple sources (faculty, university librarians, academic administrators, students, and others) is strongly recommended. This committee can aid in monitoring compliance with guidelines and information sharing as new strategies and recommended practices emerge.

The strategies listed below were produced with input from a group of stakeholders committed to identifying strategies for keeping textbooks and other course materials affordable for students. Use these strategies as a starting point for discussions on campus and with other partnering institutions.

¹ College Board's annual survey of colleges (2007)

² Federal Government Accounting Office (2005)

Strategies for Students

- Meet with faculty and bookstore managers to identify opportunities for reducing textbook costs. Consider programs such as book exchanges or textbook rental programs.
- Consider options such as used textbooks and e-textbooks.
- Obtain the list of required books in advance of the start of the course to allow time to locate the required textbooks at the best prices. Comparison shop online.
- Understand the return policy before buying, especially the deadline for refunds. Save sales receipts and keep new books in pristine condition.
- Be certain that a textbook purchased online is an acceptable version for class, and review the online store's return policy.
- Sell back books at the end of the term, by the designated deadline.
- Check the campus or public library for copies of books, especially supplemental books that are not textbooks.

Strategies for Faculty

(Not all strategies are applicable to all academic fields.)

- Provide textbook information, including the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) to students as early as possible to allow them time to comparison shop.
- Include in the course syllabus a statement of the book costs in the bookstore or online. Describe the books and indicate which, if any, might be appropriate for students to share.
- Ask textbook company sales representatives for retail price information. Make it clear that price is an important consideration for you.
- Submit textbook orders to the bookstore well in advance. When possible, place textbook orders before the bookstore's book buyback date. Placing orders before the bookstore's scheduled shipment also lowers costs.
- If supplemental material is sold with the textbook (a practice commonly called bundling), make sure all parts of the bundle are used for the course. If all pieces are not needed, work with the bookstore or publisher to order only what is needed.
- Avoid requiring any book that is not going to be used in its entirety. Reconsider requiring supplemental materials such as course packets, which often have steep costs.
- Evaluate new editions carefully before adopting them to be sure that changes are significant.
- If your field generally builds a course around a single textbook, identify multiple acceptable textbooks and ask the bookstore to invite bids from publishers for reduced retail prices. Select the least expensive.
- Consider using high-quality, newly published and reasonably priced paperback trade books from the field, rather than textbooks. Compensate by devoting more class time to the overview of content that a textbook would provide.

- When possible, consider using electronic library access to recent scholarly journals to make the course content more current and reduce book costs. Libraries typically have electronic subscriptions that make materials available at no cost to enrolled students.
- When practical, allow multiple editions to be used for a course. Faculty may need to make adjustments in reading and homework assignments to accommodate multiple editions.
- Work with the bookstore early to learn about potential textbook changes so it can order adequate supplies of books and try to get as many used books as possible.
- Participate in the campus bookstore advisory committee.
- Explain to students why specific textbooks are chosen for each class. Discuss how the text fits within the course.
- Obtain feedback from students at the end of the course on how the required material aided their learning.
- Consider putting copies of recommended books as well as supplemental materials on reserve in the campus library.
- University faculty should collaborate when possible with other institutions to create their own learning supplements or make them available online to students in an effort to eliminate textbooks entirely.

Strategies for Bookstores & Department Heads

- Develop automated, online and easily accessible textbook information for faculty.
- Enable faculty to place orders online and provide clear deadlines.
- Provide retail price information to faculty.
- Assist faculty in planning negotiations with publishers for reduced prices.
- Determine the availability of less expensive editions of textbooks (e.g., printed on less expensive paper or without color) and provide this information to faculty.
- Explore ways that departmental coordination could reduce costs for students.
- Departments could consider using a standard book for all sections of introductory level courses so that used books will have more resale value.
- Allow the creation of a departmental faculty selection committee to better align class requirements and further avoid multiple authors or editions.
- Consider the use of textbook rental programs either in house or through a third party.

Emerging Options

- Utilize various digital technologies that will create lower costs for distributing information to students. Technological enhancements can include:
 - Open Educational Resources that provide an interactive, collaborative effort which creates a variety of different learning materials. Such materials are freely available through licenses (e.g., Creative Commons, and GNU).
 - Digital content repositories that help manage learning material and provide an expedient method in the implementation of promoting educational creations.

- Textbook Alternatives.
 - University presses collaborate with digital content repositories to create custom textbooks typically in low-cost black & white format.

Source: Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2008, with full permission to use, revise, change format, and distribute in print or digitally.