Textbook Affordability Workgroup

Report and Recommendations

Last Updated: August 17, 2017

Summary:
In response to student and faculty leadership resolutions, a working group was formed to address the issue of textbook affordability and access to course materials. Representatives of several campus stakeholders met weekly over the course the summer and developed several key strategies and initiatives which are outlined in this report.

Background:

The issue of textbook affordability has had a presence in both institutional and legislative literature. Title 1, Section 133 of the federally enacted Higher Education Opportunity Act (2008)[1] requires institutions receiving federal financial aid to disclose required and recommended textbooks as soon as practicable upon the request of a contractually affiliated college bookstore and not later than the time at which students can first begin to register for a course. U.S. Senate Bill S.2176[2], the Affordable College Textbook Act was introduced in 2015 and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Many states, including Ohio, have considered or are considering guidelines and legislation pursuant to reducing textbook costs and increasing access to affordable course materials. The Ohio Task Force on Affordability and Efficiency, established by Governor Kasich's executive order 2015-01K[3], has recommended that all institutions of higher education in Ohio explore means of reducing the cost of textbooks and report annually on their progress in that area[4].

At the institutional level, many colleges in Ohio have made commitments and undergone measures to address the textbook affordability issue. In February of 2017, the Student Government Association (SGA) of Wright State University (WSU) adopted a resolution[5] that recommended the creation of a Textbook Committee and urged faculty to consider less costly materials. In March, WSU's Faculty Senate was presented with a resolution[6] from the

---

[1] https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-110publ315/pdf/PLAW-110publ315.pdf
[2] https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2176/text
[3] https://www.ohiohighered.org/sites/ohiohighered.org/files/uploads/affordability-efficiency/Executive-Order_2015-01K.pdf
[4] https://www.ohiohighered.org/sites/ohiohighered.org/files/uploads/affordability-efficiency/Action-Steps-to-Reduce-College-Costs_100115.pdf
[5]
https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/uploads/2017/Mar/meeting/EC_Agenda_2017_03_Final_Print_v2_0.pdf
[6]
https://www.wright.edu/sites/www.wright.edu/files/uploads/2017/Mar/meeting/WSUTextbookresolution_2017_03March.pdf

Undergraduate Student Success Committee (USSC) urging the timely adoption of textbooks and the submission of a report concerning the development of additional cost reduction strategies to the Senate at its first meeting of the fall semester of 2017.

Over the summer of 2017, a working group was formed consisting of Wright State University faculty, student leaders, administrators and representatives from the Barnes and Noble campus bookstore. Team members included David Baugham (SGA), Thomas Fenton (English), Jennifer Gebhard (Campus Book Store), Carol Herringer (History), Dan Krane (Biological Sciences), Nova Lasky (Business and Finance), Jamie Norris (Business Services), Austin Rains (SGA), and Craig Woolley (Computer and Technology Services). The group employed a cross functional team approach to develop and consider strategies related to textbook affordability. These strategies were assessed according to their quality and efficiency, and then prioritized based on an effort/impact model.

Textbook Costs

According to a National Association of College Stores (NACS) survey, students spent $579 on 10 required course materials during the 2016-2017 academic year compared to the $602 spent on course materials in the 2015-16 academic year[7]. The reduction in expenditures is reflective of a change in consumer behavior. According to *Student Watch™: Attitudes and Behaviors toward Course Materials: 2016-2017 Report,* "They're not buying less, they're shopping smarter. Students are comparing prices and taking advantage of a number of cost-saving options available at their campus store, such as used books, rentals, and electronic materials." This recent reduction is marginal in comparison to the historical inflation that textbook prices have undergone over the past several decades. Between 1998 and 2014, textbook costs have increased by 164%, more than the cost of medical care and new homes, and since 1978 text books have increased in price by 945%[8].

Wright State university students spend an average textbook cost of $66.40 in comparison to the Ohio average of $74.99.

WSU Estimated Average Book Costs for the 2016-17 Academic Year for Several High-enrollment Majors

College	UG Major	Avg Book Per Credit Hour	Required Course Yearly Total Book Cost
RSCOB	ACC	$97.82	$1,467.28
CEHS	Org Leadership	$31.83	$477.45
CECS	Mec EGR	$40.70	$610.55
COLA	ENG	$28.59	$428.80
CONH	Nursing	$21.84	$283.95
COSM	Bio Sci	$17.84	$285.45

---

[7] http://www.nacs.org/research/studentwatchfindings.aspx
[8] https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/08/04/era-400-college-textbook-affordability-initiatives-take-utilitarian-approach

Textbook Options/Formats

Several options may be available regarding the format for WSU course materials.

Barnes and Noble bookstore offers 4 platforms for course materials:

- Interactive – Digital access codes that contain interactive learning tools and digital versions of text
- Custom - Faculty chose select titles from a book and use a custom print of a book giving it a unique ISBN.
- Coursepack—Faculty created notes. Lab manual or possibly a reprint of an out of print book.
- Bundle-A book/code bundle or a multi-book value package. These are generally new only due to multiple books/or one time use code included.

Textbook and course materials can also be acquired using Yuzu, the bookstore's digital platform. Ebook formats of course content chosen by faculty are automatically provided as an option to students if that format is available. Ebook rentals are the most popular student savings option with savings up to 80%.

Fall 2017 Book Data

	Interactive	Custom	Coursepack	Bundle
titles	46	40	10	129
%	3%	3%	1%	9%
Units	1,800	4,472	789	5,936
%	4%	10%	2%	14%
New Text Equiv.	$192.7K	$335.0K	$10.3K	$790.6K
%	6%	10%	0%	24%

Book Type (row label for above table)

	Rental	Yuzu
titles	46	40
%	3%	3%
Units	1,800	4,472
%	4%	10%
New Text Equiv.	$192.7K	$335.0K
%	6%	10%

Purchase Option Availability (row label for above table)

Textbook Adoptions

The Higher Education Opportunity Act requires course materials to be adopted by the time the course is available for students to register. Timely adoption is a factor to reducing costs for students as it allows for greater rental and used purchasing inventory. For Fall 2016, Wright State's adoption rate at the time at which students could first register for classes (March 24) was 32.9%. By the first day of classes, the rate was 100% (and 65.3% of courses had no textbook). For Fall 2017, the adoption rate at the time when students could first register was 46.8%.

According to recent student survey, 48% of respondents reported that they did not have all of their textbooks and course materials by the first day of class. 58% of those cited the desire to "check with the professor first" as their reason for not purchasing course materials.

FacultyEnlight

Textbook and course materials can be ordered through FacultyEnlight, which is a resource that allows instructors and staff to research and compare costs. WSU has a total of 1,824 FacultyEnlight accounts. Only 28% of these accounts are active, and yet 80% of WSU's textbook adoptions are submitted through FacultyEnlight.

Effort/Impact Prioritization of Strategies:

The following strategies were explored by the working group and are expected to have a **high impact** and require **low to medium effort**:

Encourage use of Inclusive Access model: Under the Inclusive Access delivery model, students pay a set fee (the lowest single price point available, often 50 to 70% off list and less than wholesale) that is negotiated between an institution's bookstore and the publisher. Course materials are delivered to students on or before the first day of the course (depending on format). The materials fee is billed through the Bursar along with tuition and course fees. Striking increases in student success have been seen for courses that participate in Inclusive Access programs.

Auto-adopt textbook adoption policy: Courses that have been taught by the same instructor in the previous two years will automatically adopt the previously used text unless the instructor opts-out or selects a different text before the adoption deadline.

Educational Activities/Initiatives: The bookstore will coordinate and collaborate on activities and initiatives that increase faculty and student awareness of textbook tools, information, and cost savings strategies. These include: Training and information sessions on FacultyEnlight, visits to department meetings to share information and best practices, messaging on use of FacultyEnlight included in department chair course scheduling communications, and print materials outlining cost-saving strategies for faculty, students, and bookstore administration.

The working group concluded that the following strategy would be likely to have a **high impact** and require **medium effort:**

> Encourage use of Open Educational Resources (OER) Courseware for eligible courses: Barnes and Noble offers OER courseware for 10 high-enrollment courses that is low-cost, customizable by the instructor, and includes analytics tools to track student progress. One of the ten BNED OERs is being used for a high-enrollment course (BIO 1120) in the fall of 2017 and the change from the book used the previous years will result in a savings to WSU of at least $100,000. Miami University and Ohio University have incentivized faculty to adopt and adapt OER materials through professional development grants.

The following strategies were explored by the working group and expected to have a **medium impact** and require **low effort:**

> Adoption lunch/event for faculty of highest-enrollment courses/highest-cost course materials: Barnes and Noble hosts a textbook adoption lunch/event aimed at on-time adoption, use FacultyEnlight for textbook comparison/selection, and promotion of format/delivery options. Targeting these faculty impacts to the greatest number of students and allows for more targeted support.

> Barnes and Noble provides incentives to departments for on-time and/or cost reduction targets: An incentive such as store credit, additional discount, or merchandise is offered to departments that achieve a target percentage of on-time adoptions or percent reduction in cost of course materials.

The following strategies were explored by the working group and expected to have a **medium impact** and require **medium effort:**

> Standardized utilization of department coordinator for book orders: The role of department book coordinator will be established and standardized for each academic department. The person assuming this role will serve as the liaison/communication hub between the bookstore and department faculty, will complete textbook selections (when applicable), and will track course material selections to ensure timely adoption.

> Data-sharing of historical cost of materials by course/department: Historical data on course material pricing (all formats) for all department courses will be provided to the department chair and faculty to bring awareness to similarities/differences in cost between course sections and overall costs assumed by students in department programs.

> Student surveys related to satisfaction/use of materials: Student Government will survey students (on an ongoing basis) on the use and satisfaction of course materials. Surveys may be segmented to provide comparison of different formats/delivery models such as

First Day and OER Courseware. This information will be aggregated and presented to faculty.

Encourage Ohio legislators to make textbooks exempt from sales tax: The Ohio Faculty Council will encourage extension of textbook affordability measures to the state level in the form of a sales tax exemption for textbook purchases, saving students 5.75% for every in-state retail purchase.

The following strategies were explored by the working group and expected to have a **low impact** and require **low effort:**

Student Government recognizes departments with high on-time adoption rates: Student Government will select a public format to recognize departments that have aided in textbook affordability efforts by achieving high rates of on-time adoptions.

Encourage faculty to donate unwanted exam copies to University Libraries: Student Government and University Libraries will collaborate to encourage faculty to donate unwanted exam copies of textbooks to the University Libraries for access/use by students rather than selling the materials to textbook buyers.

The working group concluded that the following strategy would be likely to have a **low impact** and require **medium effort:**

WSU-specific textbook information/statistics page: The bookstore will host a web page with Faculty Enlight information, general textbook information, FAQs, and WSU-specific metrics on key data points such as average cost, on-time adoption rates, format purchase breakdowns, etc.

The following strategies were identified as potentially impactful **future efforts**, but not well-suited for implementation at this time**:**

Course transformation grants: Grants are awarded to instructors who significantly transform a course curriculum to adopt lower-cost course materials such as e-books or open-source materials.

Faculty-generated materials: Faculty are incentivized or given grant awards to develop course materials to be used at low- or no-cost to WSU students. These materials could also be commercialized or provided as OER materials to other institutions.

Student book exchange co-op: Students could develop an online forum for book-sharing/exchange.

Addition of course materials language to Essential Teaching Behaviors section of the WSU-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement: Section 11.3.1.1 of the Collective Bargaining

Agreement is amended to include timely adoption of materials and/or engaged use of required course materials in the "essential teaching-related behaviors."

Recommended Strategies:

Inclusive Access Model

General description: A course fee model. Students pay a set fee (the lowest single price point available, often 50 to 70% off list and less than wholesale) for all educational resources associated with a set of courses that are part of the Inclusive Access program. The fee is collected by the institution's bursar and textbooks are waiting for the student in the campus bookstore (or are available digitally through the institution's learning management system) before the first day of class. Striking increases in student success have been seen for courses that participate in Inclusive Access programs.

Faculty perspective: Faculty interested in the Inclusive Access program for their courses would be informed in advance of the textbook adoption deadline what textbooks would be available for them to adopt as part of the program. If they adopt one of the available books before the adoption deadline, students will be provided that book for the negotiated price. They are also free to choose a textbook that is not part of the Inclusive Access program in the same way that they have always chosen books (albeit at a significantly higher cost to students). The convenience and lower cost makes it very much more likely that students will have all educational materials in hand at the very beginning of the course.

Student perspective: By federal law, students may opt-out of an Inclusive Access program for any course (meaning, that they could choose to not pay the set Inclusive Access fee for the course and purchase the textbook in any other way or not purchase the book at all). Purchasing books through an Inclusive Access program brings a number of conveniences to students including: not having to spend time shopping for the lowest priced books, being certain that they will have the editions/formats that they need on the first day of class, being able to budget a fixed cost for books, and facilitating the use of financial aid to pay for instructional materials.

Bookstore perspective: Can be made responsible for negotiating and setting terms with all participating publishers. The more courses participating in the Inclusive Access program (including across institutions as part of a consortium), the better the leverage for negotiating lower textbook costs with individual publishers [e.g. "These five institutions have a combined total of 100 courses with an average of 100 students each for which they are willing to pay $70 per student per class for all required educational materials. What book options (including eBooks, rental, and new) would you be willing to provide at that price for each of these courses?"]. Coordination with the WSU administration (the Bursar, Registrar, Financial Aid, Banner) will be required for implementation.

Publisher perspective: Publishers currently expect to realize less than 40% of sales for courses where faculty require students to purchase a given text. Institutions using an Inclusive Access typically result in 99 to 100% of students purchasing a course's textbook. Facilitates a transition to digital content.

Auto Adopt

General description: Faculty who have taught a specific course within the past two years would be automatically assumed to prefer the same textbook/edition they used the last time they taught that course. Faculty interested in using a different book/edition would need to identify their text of choice prior to the date that students can first begin to register for the course. Notifications are sent by the bookstore at the time that department chairs make teaching assignments and again two weeks prior to the deadline for adopting an alternative textbook.

Faculty perspective: Faculty can continue to choose textbooks as they currently do but would only need to take action if they decide to use a different book/edition than the last time they taught a course within the past two years. No text would be automatically adopted for courses that the faculty member had not taught in the past two years. Changing an adoption after the deadline has passed should be discouraged (even in the absence of an auto-adopt policy) due to significant costs and inconveniences to students and the bookstore/institution.

Student perspective: The timely adoption of textbooks can allow students to purchase textbooks at a significantly lower cost (e.g. by affecting the supply of used textbooks through the purchase of used books or the retention of rentals by their institution's bookstores and time to comparison shop) without compromising quality of instruction. Students would also be in a better position to budget and to choose courses based on anticipated textbook costs.

Bookstore perspective: Title I, Section 133 of the federally enacted Higher Education Opportunity Act (2008) requires institutions receiving federal financial aid to disclose required and recommended textbooks as soon as practicable upon the request of a contractually affiliated college bookstore and not later than the time at which students can first begin to register for a course. Compliance with this federal law significantly improves the ability of the university bookstore to source and procure appropriate inventory and to offer lower costs. Compliance also helps with the assessment of fees by the Bursar at the time a student registers for classes for classes that are part of an Inclusive Access program.

Publisher perspective: On-time adoption of textbooks would provide more lead time for publishers to get textbooks to campus bookstores.

State tax exemption for textbook purchases

General description: Many states (e.g. Arizona, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia) exempt textbook purchases for secondary education from state sales tax. Exempting textbooks required or recommended for courses in Ohio's public Institutions of Higher Education would result in a 5.75% cost savings for Ohio students. HB 308 in the 131st Ohio General Assembly ("Exempts post-secondary textbooks from sales tax"; www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA131-HB-308) received wide support but was not included in the State's budget. Ohio's Legislative Services estimated that the provision would cost approximately $30 million in tax revenues if it was adopted. WSU students paid $312,000 in state tax on textbook sales in the 2016-17 academic year.

Faculty perspective: Faculty would not be directly affected by an exemption of textbooks from state sales tax. Some states that do collect taxes on textbooks specifically use that money to incentivize faculty and institutions to develop programs that reduce textbook costs.

Student perspective: Students at Ohio's public institutions of higher education would realize a 5.75% reduction in their costs associated with textbook that are required or recommended for their courses.

Bookstore perspective: An exemption from state sales tax for textbook sales could result in modest accounting savings for university bookstores that could be further used to reduce textbook costs to students. Some states (Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania) confer a competitive advantage to bookstores that have a contractual relationship with their post-secondary institutions by exempting only their textbook sales.

Publisher perspective: Publishers would not be directly affected by an exemption of textbooks from state sales tax.

Encourage the use of Open Educational Resources

General description: Open Educational Resources (OERs) are openly licensed text, media and other digital assets that can be used for higher education for teaching and assessment purposes. As resources that reside in the public domain they are easily accessed at no cost. Many OER resources have been developed to include course materials, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software and other tools. Some OER texts can be printed for students at low cost (e.g. $15), are carefully aligned with Ohio's Transfer Assurance Guidelines, and can be integrated with sophisticated data analyses of student success. Miami University (see Appendix A) has instituted a low-cost three-tiered grant program that incentivizes instructional faculty to adopt and/or adapt OER content for high enrollment courses. Ohio University (see Appendix B) used small grants to incentivize faculty to switch to OERs over the past two academic years.

Faculty perspective: Faculty embarking on the design of a new course or the redesign of an existing course should consider OERs as an alternative to conventional textbooks – particularly for high-enrollment, gateway courses (courses for which OERs are generally most developed). There are important pedagogical implications associated with the expectation that all students in a course will have access to OERs. Significant work may be required to supplement existing OERs with lecture notes.

Student perspective: While, by definition, the content associated with OERs is free to students, they may still incur modest costs if they choose to have a hard copy of the OER text. Modest costs to students may also be incurred if a faculty member chooses to use certain support materials (such as assessment or data analytic tools) that are associated with an OER. Ease of access to OER materials is an important benefit for students.

Bookstore perspective: Bookstores will experience a decrease in sales revenues as the use of OERs increases. Many bookstores are increasingly interested however, in adding value to content (e.g. providing ancillary materials and data analytics) rather than just selling commercially available textbooks.

Publisher perspective: OERs constitute direct competition for conventional textbook publishers. It is reasonable to expect publishers to respond to faculty consideration of OERs by a combination of increasing the quality of the materials they provide and reducing their cost.

Appendix A – Miami University's OER Grant Program

In February 2017, Miami University formed the Open Educational Resources (OER) Committee with the purpose of creating and implementing grants and other incentives for affordable resource use, providing support to faculty and students to enhance the effectiveness of OERs, and assessing the effectiveness and the use of free and low cost educational resources in the class room.

The committee established a three tier grant program that facilitated the review, adoption, and adaptation of an OER for a particular course.

Tier 1 – a one-time award of $200 for reviewing an existing OER from the Open Textbook Library. Selected faculty members attend a networking workshop.

Tier 2 – Three amounts of $1,000 in professional development funds are transferred upon successful adoption of the OER. Adoptions are tracked over 3 semesters.

Tier 3 – Three amounts of $1,500 in professional development funds are transferred upon successful adaptation of the OER.

Appendix B – Ohio University's Alternative Textbook Initiative

Ohio University began an initiative in the 2015-16 academic year to lower student costs. The initiative involved call and review of applications, interviews, the development and delivery of workshops, survey and data gathering, the awarding of incentives, and implementation.

In AY2015-16, 26 instructors completed the program with incentive costs of $16,000. 2358 Students are projected to have saved $236,213 in AY2016-17.

In AY2016-17, 24 instructors completed the program with incentive costs of $6,000. 1375 students are projected to save $192,415 in AY2017-18.