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Textbook Alternatives: Library Supported Options for Students and Faculty

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Textbook Alternatives: Library Supported Options for Students and Faculty

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Abstract

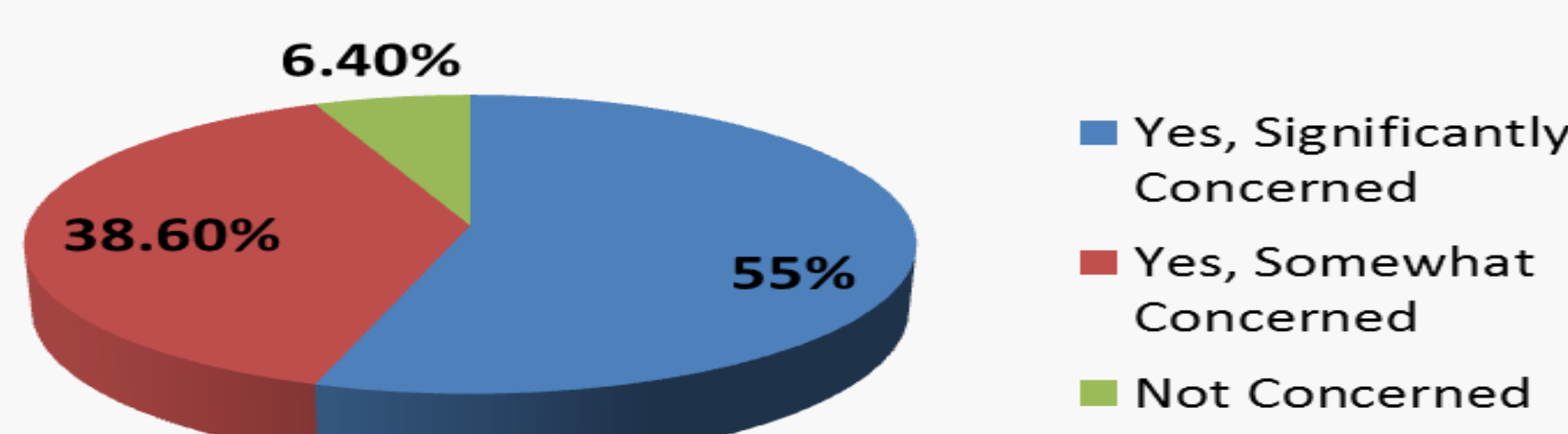
The issue of course textbooks continues to be a challenge in higher education. For students the primary concern is the skyrocketing costs: spending several hundred dollars for required textbooks per semester at a time when tuition and fees continue to rise. Consequently, students are borrowing, renting or simply forgoing purchasing textbooks to alleviate some of the financial burden. For those students who are unable to purchase textbooks, are they still receiving the same high quality education? Although faculty members empathize with students' frustrations concerning textbook prices, they may not be aware of the alternative resources and services offered by the library that can assist them in meeting the same learning objectives as publisher textbooks.

The University Libraries at Western Michigan University launched two Library initiatives in the Fall of 2013. First, the Libraries formed a Textbook Pilot Project Task Force that recommended purchasing textbooks for targeted high enrollment courses at the 1000 and 2000 undergraduate level and place them on library course reserves for students. Usage data and faculty responses up to this point indicate this project has been successful and continues for the Spring 2014 semester. Secondly, it became apparent that the Libraries must go beyond purchasing textbooks and began initiating an awareness campaign to educate the faculty about alternatives to textbooks. Alternatives include both University Libraries resources such as course reserves and e-books, as well as the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement of providing access to open source high quality educational materials. Library liaisons and staff are encouraged to work with faculty to utilize these library tools and services to provide students with similar content that meet the curriculum objectives. Ultimately, our goal is to help students succeed and make college more affordable by maximizing the resources and services of the University Libraries.

Skipping the Textbook?

According to a Fall 2013 survey of 2,039 students representing 150 universities, 65% of students had to forego purchasing at least one assigned textbook due to cost. Additionally, an overwhelming majority of students believed that by not having the textbook, it would negatively impact their grades and influence the number of classes they could take.

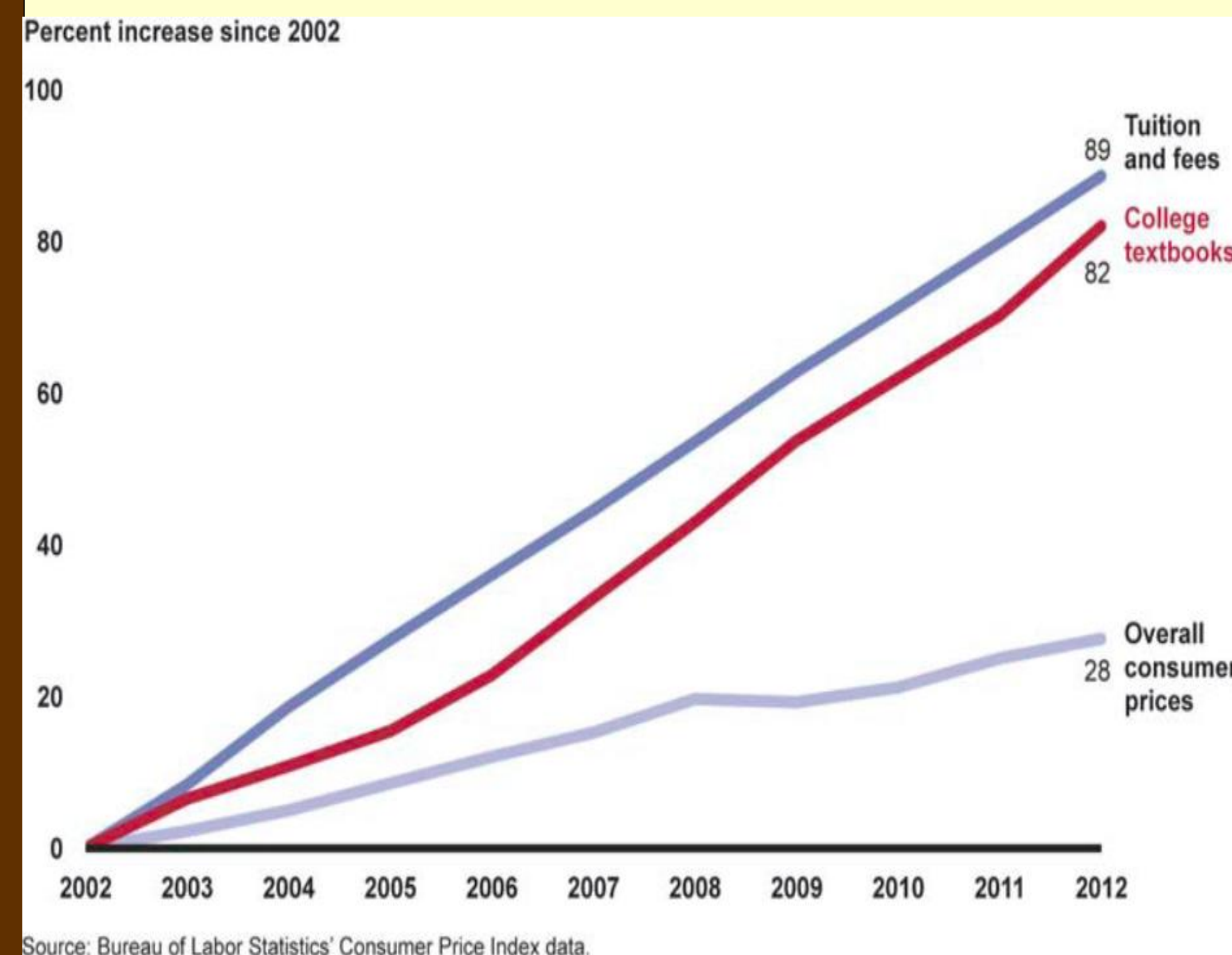
Student Concern of Impact on Grades



Student Public Interest Research Groups. (2014, January 27). Fixing the broken textbook market. [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.studentpirgs.org/textbooks>

The Problem

Estimated increase in new college textbook prices, college tuition and fees, and overall Consumer Price Inflation, 2002-2012



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index data.

- As reflected in this graph, new textbook prices increased by a total of 82% in this 10 year period, while tuition and fees increased by 89%, and overall consumer prices grew by 28%. (GAO, 2013)
- The average student in the U.S. spends \$1137 annually on textbooks. (College Board, 2013)

Sources:

U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2013). *College textbooks: Students have greater access to textbook information* (GAO-13-368). Retrieved from <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-13-368>

College Board. (2013). *Quick guide: college costs*. Retrieved from <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/college-costs/quick-guide-college-costs>

Library Resources and Services

- Library liaisons collaborating with teaching faculty to identify WMU Libraries' resources and services that can be used to achieve course learning objectives, i.e. e-books, streaming videos, reference resources, etc.
- Offering workshops such as *Cool Tools for Teaching* that focus on textbook alternatives.
- Create Library Guides about textbook alternatives; or for specific courses that provides links to licensed content.
- Library Course Reserves
- Educating the faculty and university administration about open source textbook initiatives.

Library Course Reserves Pilot Project

- In Summer 2013, the WMU Libraries convened a task force to address the concerns and frustrations of students, faculty and library staff regarding textbooks.
- Despite textbooks being excluded from collection development policies at WMU, the task force recommended purchasing textbooks; targeting courses that would impact the most students.
- A budget of **\$10,000** was allocated from Library Administration for the 2013-2014 academic year.
- Guidelines for purchasing textbooks included undergraduate courses at the 1000 and 2000 level with high enrollments (minimum of 100 students).
- Multi-user e-books were the recommended format, however for this pilot project only physical copies were acquired.
- When the textbooks arrived, faculty members were notified via email with call number and location information and they were asked to notify their students.
- Books were placed on 2 hour course reserve at their respective circulation desk for the entire academic year.
- Any textbooks that the University Libraries owned were pulled from the stacks and placed on course reserve as well.
- For Fall 2013 semester **30** textbooks were purchased, with the average cost of **\$131.50** per book.
- A total of **32** textbooks were placed on reserve for Fall semester circulating **561** times; the average circulation being **17.53** times per book.
- During Spring 2014, the taskforce purchased **26** textbooks, with the average cost of **\$118.88** per book.
- A total of **52** books (32 books from Fall 2013 remained on reserve whether they were being used for a class or not) were on reserve for the Spring 2014 semester circulating **495** times; the average circulation being **9.52** times per book.
- Based on the circulation data and survey feedback, the task force has deemed the project to be a success and will continue indefinitely.

Survey says...

In March 2014, a short survey was sent to the faculty whose classes were targeted for the textbook pilot project.

Comments from faculty:

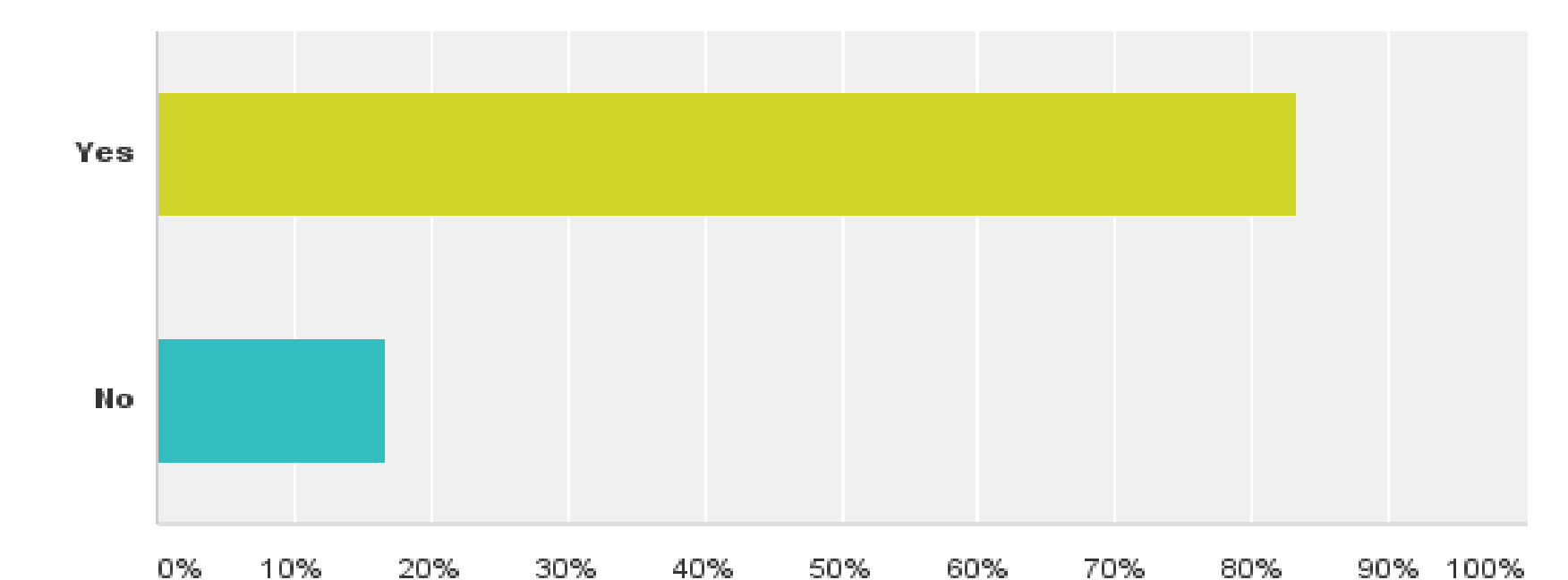
"The students appreciate this resource. Many students have difficulty buying expensive textbooks, so a free resource is very useful."

Survey Results

"A significant number could not afford to purchase the textbook, so this service was invaluable for their success in the course."

Q1 Was purchasing a textbook and placing it on library course reserves for your 1000 or 2000 level class useful for your students?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 3



Alternative Approaches

The Open Educational Resources (OER) movement has arisen as a way to provide high quality resources for low or no cost. Open textbooks are distributed, normally for free, under an open license. These are electronic publications that may be authored by an individual, or a group of individuals working collaboratively. Typically these works are issued under a Creative Commons License which allows the authors to hold the copyright while still making it possible for others to use their works. WMU Libraries has developed a guide to provide links to many of these collections of electronic textbooks and resources as well as assistance with selecting and using them.

<http://libguides.wmich.edu/textbooks>

The screenshot shows the website interface with a navigation bar at the top, a search bar, and several content sections including 'Open Textbooks', 'Locating open access textbooks', and 'Off-Campus Services'. A sidebar on the right features a photo of Michele Behr and contact information for the library.