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Textbook Alternatives: Options for Students and Faculty

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Textbook Alternatives: Options for Students and Faculty

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Abstract

The issue of course textbooks continues to be a challenge at WMU as well as in all of higher education. For students the primary concern is textbook prices. Students often spend several hundred dollars per semester for required textbooks, at a time when tuition and other costs of attending college are increasing as well. Faculty are of course sensitive to student concerns and frustrations about textbook prices, but may be unaware of other options to cover the same content. Currently there is a movement toward Open Educational Resources (OER) which is a way to provide open access to high quality materials to satisfy the same learning objectives as a textbook in a given course. This project reports on two Library initiatives to address some of the current concerns about textbooks. First, the Libraries are currently undertaking a pilot project to purchase required textbooks for targeted, high-enrollment, undergraduate classes and placing them on course reserve for students to use. Second, the Libraries are undertaking a campaign of awareness and education for faculty on alternatives to publisher textbooks. These alternatives include both options for open access textbooks, as well as resources and services currently offered in the Libraries to achieve the same learning objectives as a textbook.

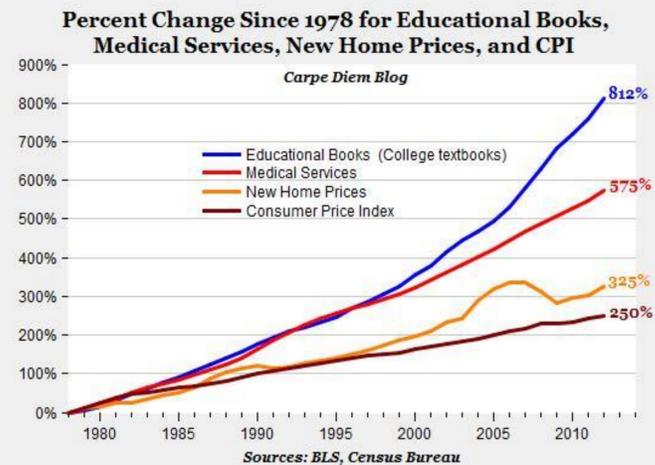### University Libraries
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Skipping the Textbook?

According to a survey of 1,905 undergraduates from 13 campuses in 2011, 70% of respondents reported that they had decided against buying at least one assigned textbook due to cost. While some of these students reported sharing or borrowing instead, 78% still believed they would generally do worse in class without their own copy of the required text.

Student Public Interest Research Groups. (2011, August 11). *High prices prevent college students from buying assigned textbooks* [Press release]. Retrieved from: http://www.studentpirgs.org/news/ap/high-prices-prevent-college-students-buying-assigned-textbooks

The Problem

Percent Change Since 1978 for Educational Books, Medical Services, New Home Prices, and CPI

Carpe Diem Blog

- Educational Books (College textbooks) — 812%
- Medical Services — 575%
- New Home Prices — 325%
- Consumer Price Index — 250%

Sources: BLS, Census Bureau

- College textbook pries have increased 812% since 1978. The Consumer Price Index has increased 250% during this same period. (Perry, 2012)
- The average student in the U.S. spends $1137 annually on textbooks. (College Board, 2013)

Sources:

Perry, M. J. (2012, December 24.) The college textbook bubble and how the open educational resources movement is going up against the textbook cartel [blog post]. Retrieved from http://www.aei-ideas.org/2012/12/the-college-textbook-bubble-and-how-the-open-educational-resources-movement-is-going-up-against-the-textbook-cartel/

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

Higher Education Opportunities Act (HEOA)

In July 2010 Textbook Provisions of the HEOA went into effect in order to "ensure that students have access to affordable course materials by decreasing costs to students and enhancing transparency and disclosure with respect to the selection, purchase, sale, and use of course materials. It is the intent of this section to encourage all of the involved parties …. to work together to identify ways to decrease the cost of college textbooks … while supporting the academic freedom of faculty members to select high quality course materials for students."

Library Course Reserve Pilot Project

- WMU Libraries convened a task force which began meeting in Summer of 2013.
- Textbooks are normally excluded from our Collection Development Policies. However we are sensitive to the concerns and frustrations of students who often find it a hardship to purchase required textbooks for their classes and look for alternative methods to access them.
- A budget of $10,000 was allocated from Library Administration. This would be divided between Fall and Spring semesters.
- The taskforce agreed that in order for the purchased materials to have the biggest impact we would target courses with the highest total of enrolled students across sections. Therefore we considered enrollments for 1000 and 2000 level courses for all departments.
- When possible, identified titles were purchased in e-book format with a multiple user license. When the book was not available in e-book format a physical copy was purchased
- Items were ordered and processed in time for the start of Fall semester.
- Physical books were set up with a 2-hour loan period on course reserve.
- Faculty members teaching targeted courses were notified and sent the call number and other information for the books.
- For the Fall semester a total of 36 books were ordered for 24 different classes.
- The average price of the books ordered was $138.
- We are currently monitoring usage of these materials
- At the end of the Fall 2013 semester the task force will evaluate the success of the project and make further recommendations.

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.

Library Resources and Services

Existing WMU Libraries collections and services can also be used to achieve learning objectives and serve to replace traditional textbooks as well as course packs in many instances. Resources include:

- WMU Library subscription provide access to tens of thousands of **e-books**. E-books are extremely convenient for students since they are accessible at any time and on virtually any device. An entire e-book may be used for a course, or just certain pages or chapters.
- Also available electronically are thousands of encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical sources and all kinds of **reference sources.**
- Multimedia materials such **as images, sound recordings and streaming videos** are available in a wide variety of subjects.
- The **course reserve** service can be used to provide convenient electronic access to all formats of materials for your course.
- Course reserves allows all resources to be organized together in one electronic location
  - The course reserve service includes consultation and verification of **copyright.**