

TO: Daniel J. Bernardo, Interim President

FROM: Rebecca Van de Vord, Committee Lead 

SUBJECT: Course Materials Cost Reduction Presidential Task Force

DATE: May 11, 2016

Course Materials Cost Reduction Presidential Task Force Final Report

In collaboration with the Associated Students of Washington State University, President Bernardo convened a task force to explore the issue of rising costs of course materials, potential solutions and alternatives, as well as challenges (appendix A).

Washington State University is committed to addressing the rising cost of an education. Financial hardship is the number one reason students do not persist through to their four year degree. As public financial support has declined, forcing a rise in tuition over the past decade, so has the cost of textbooks and course materials.

Current efforts in place at WSU include earlier disbursement of financial aid beginning fall 2016, allowing for earlier purchase of course materials and school supplies. In addition, there is a plan for an initiative that will place \$650.00 of a student's financial aid award, on credit at the Bookie, allowing for purchase of texts and supplies as soon as the student is notified that they will be receiving financial aid.

These are positive steps but we can and need to do more. Our students, via ASWSU, recently sparked this conversation on the WSU campus with their "Course Materials Cost Reduction Initiative" (appendix B). In the student's words "The proliferation of textbook prices, course fees, access codes, iClickers and other BYOD instructional formats have become a problem for the current generation of students, This is heightened by the inability to sell back textbooks and other materials."

Students suffer when...

- they attend class on the first day and are told that a textbook listed as required by the Bookie, and subsequently purchased by the student, is in fact only recommended.
- the edition listed as required is the newest, requiring them to purchase a new rather than used book, and then are told on the first day of class that any recent edition will do.
- the sell back price for their book is \$1.00 because the faculty teaching the course for the next term has yet to get his/her book order in, or has specified a newer edition, devaluing the current edition.

- they are required to purchase a book that is not used in class or used minimally, or where the required chapters are found freely available online.
- they pay for a textbook when there are equivalent free, quality online resources available.
- there is not standard Quick Response, or Polling tool adopted so that students pay for multiple formats over time.

This is not a conversation unique to Washington State University. The ASWSU report cites the following:

- According to NBC's review of Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data, textbook prices have risen 3 times the inflation rate from January 1977 to June 2015, more than 1,000%.
- According to College Board, the average estimated cost of books and supplies is \$1,290, with "other" expenses estimated at \$2,106 (College Board.com).
- A 2014 PIRGs study found that 65% of students had skipped buying or renting a textbook because it was too expensive, and 94% of those students felt doing so would hurt their grade in the course.

While issues of cost are important, the implications for student success are even more significant. According to a 2012 student survey by Florida Virtual Campus (appendix C) there is a direct relationship between textbook costs and standard metrics of student retention and progress toward degree. A considerable number of students make course selections based on textbook cost, or opt to complete the course without purchasing the textbook at all. Recent research suggests that students in courses that use freely available materials do better on a variety of standard performance measures as well (Fischer et al., 2015), and that reducing the cost of course materials may result in better grades and increased enrollment intensity. Supporting the reduction of the cost of course materials serves, therefore, to support retention efforts across the WSU system.

In addition to student success concerns, it is important to note that Washington State regulation, RCW 28B.10.590 requires;

- "Faculty and staff members consider the least costly practices in assigning course materials, such as adopting the least expensive edition available, adopting free, open textbooks when available, and working with college librarians to put together collections of free online web and library resources, when educational content is comparable as determined by the faculty."

Task Force Members

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Executive Summary and Recommendations:

The task force first and foremost, recommends establishment of a standing committee, under the Office of the President or Provost, to address ongoing concerns related to selection and cost of required course materials, bringing together student and faculty representatives to ensure decisions are made in accordance with what is best for the WSU system. Student need and financial concern must be balanced with faculty's academic freedom. This committee will:

- Maintain open communication with Faculty, the Bookie, Provost and Presidents Office and Students.
- Review and potentially renegotiate Bookie/Barns & Noble policies to improve collaboration and student success.
- Continue to identify new issues, investigate new approaches and develop programs, plans and communication around the issues related to the selection, delivery and cost of supporting course material and textbooks.
- Ensure, that as alternatives to costly materials are considered, the need for course resources to be accessible to all students is prioritized.

In addition the task force has identified five areas of primary concern to students, and recommends next steps to address each area. The standing committee would oversee the work of the recommended subcommittees, and members of the standing committee would serve on individual subcommittees.

1. Communication to faculty:

The task force suggests that there is potential for significant positive impact through simply ensuring that faculty understand the full weight of their decisions on students. Therefore we propose that an active, and ongoing communication campaign be implemented via the Provost's Office.

a. Potential topics for Faculty communication:

- i. *Leverage with Publishers:* Faculty can encourage publishers to unbundle support materials from the required text so that the two can be purchased separately.
- ii. *Buyback prices:* If the Bookie knows at buyback time that the book will be used the next semester, then students will receive a large percentage of the original cost, rather than a small percentage.
- iii. *Student purchases:* Students do not wait until the class starts to purchase their materials so the materials identified by the faculty member and communicated to the Bookie (or Global Campus) should not change. If it does change, faculty should email students to ensure they are aware of the changes.
- iv. *Editions:* Faculty should carefully consider which edition(s) are required and allow for older editions if at all possible. Requiring the newest edition limits student access to lower priced copies.
- v. *Required vs Recommended:* Faculty should communicate clearly to students why they have required the text and how they expect students to use the resource through the semester.
- vi. *Accurate communication with the Bookie:* Faculty should communicate accurately to the Bookie what they will tell the students on the first day about the required/recommended course materials.

b. Potential avenues of communication:

- i. Faculty-led workshops
- ii. Bagels and Brainstorming
- iii. Meetings with Chairs and Directors to ensure all understand the requirements for selecting low cost materials, and to promote awareness of availability and support for use of open educational resources.

2. Support increased use of free, Open Educational Resources (OERs).

Replacing expensive textbooks, proprietary software and other course materials with freely available online resources can significantly reduce the cost of education to students. There is growing evidence that use of OER may increase student success as well. While some faculty are moving to open materials on their own, there is currently little institutional support for faculty who wish to move in this direction. We believe there is more WSU can do to support to faculty and programs that wish to access, utilize, customize or create these resources:

- Faculty need a clearly identified support system in place, as one of the largest barriers to adoption of OERs is lack of support for identifying and customizing existing resources.
- Faculty need to be incentivized and rewarded as redesigning a course around open educational resources is a time consuming process.
- Faculty need clarity on policies related to copyright and ownership of materials they create, and the university needs to provide this through policy.

Other universities are moving in this direction, and availability of free and open resources is growing. For example;

- In 2001, MIT initiated the MIT Open Courseware Project, making roughly two thousand courses available freely online. (Bliss)
- Rice University, through the [OpenStax College](#) project, has “successfully developed high-quality, openly licensed textbooks for the 16 highest-enrolled college courses. These books have been adopted by faculty in 20% of all U.S. colleges and universities.” (Bliss)
- [Creative Commons](#) has moved heavily into education, developing and promoting the use of freely licensed material for higher education. (Bliss)
- In 2015, the University of Maryland University College replaced 100 percent of its undergraduate publisher textbooks with no-cost-to-students digital resources. (Klein)

WSU has been moving in this direction as well. Over the past three years, WSU Vancouver has been using the openly licensed MyOpenMath homework tool in its developmental sequence, initially as part of the Gates Foundation-funded Kaleidoscope project (appendix D). While the sample sizes in those classes are too small to draw firm conclusions, data from the larger project indicates students are more likely to sign up for a course that uses OERs and more likely to enroll in a larger number of credits, thereby reducing time to graduation (appendix C). These findings are supported by external research (Fischer, Hilton & Wiley, 2015), and by polls done by ASWSUV polls of Vancouver students (appendix E).

In addition to textbooks, many courses require purchase of a proprietary software, for which there may be an open source equivalent. For example, Many production courses in the Murrow College have adopted free open digital editing software, Audacity, in lieu of the more costly Adobe Audition, and Vancouver Math faculty have moved to R, Octave, the free version of Wolfram Alpha from the proprietary equivalent.

The task force would like to see WSU build on these and other successes. We would like to see WSU explore developing an entire degree program built around OERs (a Global Campus degree might be a good fit for this, as students are already steeped in the online environment). We would like to better support individual faculty, courses, and programs looking at using open materials, through better design and deployment of policy, processes, resources, and incentives. We have both the need and the will to do this; what is missing is the institutional intentionality.

That last part is key; in many cases, WSU already has the resources needed to support faculty in this work, through Academic Outreach and Innovation’s Instructional Designers and Media Developers, as well through Library personnel experienced in searching out course resources. While seed and grant funding can help jumpstart the effort, better alignment of resources and policy could provide much of the impact. Even students may have a role in identifying, customizing or building open course resources, as part of their coursework or research efforts.

- a) *Action Item:* Convene a working group, coordinated by the Provost’s Office to:

- i) Identify, create and deliver educational materials and structure to support faculty in the adoption of OERs.
- ii) Promote recognition of the creation and use of these materials (teaching innovation) as part of the annual review, and promotion and tenure processes.
- iii) Develop a working group to consist of faculty leadership, Provost's Office, college and campus leadership.
- b) *Action item:* identify a funding model to support, review, adopt, customize and redesign courses around OERs.
 - i) Potential funding sources:
 - (1) New student fee per course or credit for courses utilizing 100% OERs. (Fee/credit would be significantly less than current cost of course materials).
 - (2) Identify a portion of the student tech fee that could be committed to OER adoption.
 - (3) Student Corporation Bookie revenue
- c) *Action item:* Through the Provost's Office, explore funding the redesign of large introductory courses, to utilize OERs exclusively. (see appendix F)
 - i) For the purpose of this report, seven high enrollment, high cost courses, which lend themselves to available free and open textbooks, have been identified. Average textbook cost for these seven courses is \$175.00-\$204.00 per course (appendix G). Instead, students might pay a small fee for each of these courses which could then be reinvested in supporting OER adoption and course redesign. A \$10.00/student/course fee would net approximately \$55,140.00/term, based on fall 2016 enrollments, to reinvest in OER adoption efforts while saving students \$165.00-\$194.00 per course (about \$1200.00 total savings for a student who enrolls in all seven during their time at WSU).
 - ii) Create a mechanism for students to identify existing courses and course sections using OER as a textbook replacement at time of registration.
- d) *Action Item:* Develop a support plan leveraging the expertise of library and Academic Outreach and Innovation staff and faculty currently utilizing OERs to support faculty in the adoption and customization of these resources.
- e) *Action item:* Global Campus could offer an entire online degree utilizing OERs exclusively as a lower cost opportunity for students. The online environment is an easy and obvious choice for delivering courses employing OERs as all students in online courses have the tools available to access the online environment.

3. Quick Response Systems:

Student groups have raised concerns that the number of different quick response systems currently in use on campus currently results in an unfair financial burden on students. Students currently incur costs when these different systems are used, both through monthly fees and hardware purchases. The task force understands that the selection of a system is impacted by the faculty member's pedagogical approach and that standardizing across the university would be a challenge, but believes more can be done.

First, this is another area where educating faculty about the total student expense over four years could be of help. Faculty may not be aware of the variety of purchases students are required to make in their time here. Even small amounts of coordination could be beneficial.

Further, we suggest that a working group be convened to determine if the majority of faculty can be encouraged to adopt a single system. As an example, Oregon State University is using Turning Point as a single option across campus, which suggests some amount of standardization is possible, even at a large institution.

- a) Action Item: Convene a working group to identify and recommend adoption of a single quick response tool for WSU.
 - i) Working group should consist of Faculty leadership, Provost's Office, IT personnel, campus representation.
- b) Action Item: Communicate to faculty the amount of money students spend purchasing multiple required systems and replacing lost devices.

4. Inclusion of required course materials and textbooks as a part of tuition and fees

In the long run, it is the preference of the students to pay for course materials along with tuition and fees. Currently students perceive the additional purchase of course material and textbooks as discretionary and often opt out of purchasing required support materials, potentially negatively impacting their own success.

Research indicates that student access to course materials on day one of class is a contributor to student success (Fischer et al., 2015), and students feel that receiving materials as part of tuition and fees is ultimately more fair than the current out-of-pocket system. Consequently, this task force supports pursuing a model through which all course materials are paid for as part of tuition and fees and available to all students on the first day of class.

The task force recommends the formation of a working group to explore options with internal and/or external partners that would allow course materials to become embedded in the courses in a way that students cannot opt out.

- a. Action item: Create a working group to explore funding texts and course materials through a course fee, rather than students purchasing separately.

5. Textbook bundles which include homework assignments and assessment tools

Many textbook publishers bundle support resources with the textbook, such as online homework assignments, assessments, and lecture slides, for an additional fee. Our students have observed that these resources seem fairly general, rather than specific to their course, and question whether instructors could create their own resources, with the appropriate incentives and funding.

Washington State RCW 28B.10.590 recognizes this concern, requiring publishers and faculty to provide students the option of purchasing materials that are unbundled when possible. Further, the regulation states "Often the bundling of texts, workbooks, CD-ROMs, and other

course related materials is unnecessary since many students do not use all of the materials included and may realize cost savings if materials are also offered independently one from the other.”

This task force believes the law and student preference are both quite clear here, and suggests that we use our influence to “de-bundle” texts when possible, and our resources to seek open alternatives when available.

- a. *Action item:* encourage faculty to leverage influence with publishers negotiate the lowest cost for students.
- b. *Action item:* Support faculty in identifying free OERs that can replace support materials. (e.g. Vancouver use of MyOpenMath)

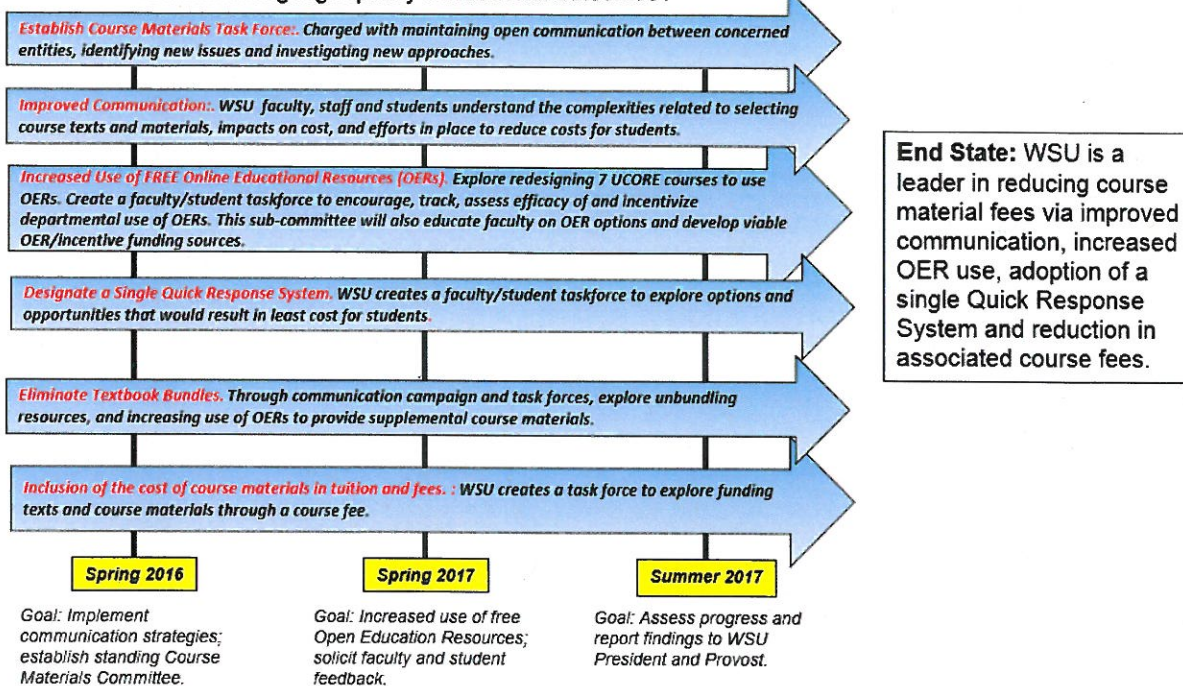
In Sum, the Task Force recommends:

1. Establish a Course Materials Cost Reduction standing committee representing administrative, faculty and student interests.
2. Develop and deliver faculty communication plan beginning immediately.
3. President and Provost to support and promote adoption of OERs for seven high enrollment, high cost courses. Summer, Fall 2016
 - o Meet with Dean’s, Chairs and instructors of the identified courses and create a plan to convert to OERs for Spring 2017.
 - o Leverage AOI and Library staff to identify and customize additional free and open resources as required.
 - o Examine methods of identifying OER-based courses in MyWSU, to be implemented for Spring 2017 registration.
4. Convene two working groups: Fall 2016
 - o Faculty and administrative leadership to explore barriers to, and means of incentivizing faculty to increase adoption of OERs, including exploring recognition through annual review, and Tenure & Promotion processes
 - o Faculty, administrative leadership and technical staff to identify and promote a single Quick Response system.
5. As a longer term conversation, explore options for adopting an entirely new model of providing all course resources as a part of the course, included in the cost of tuition and fees.



WSU Course Materials Task Force – Lines of Effort

Problem Statement: How does Washington State University (WSU) address the rising cost of course material in a way that balances student needs, expectations and concerns of parents and legislators, instructor academic freedom while maintaining high quality educational outcomes?



References

1. Bliss, T. What colleges should be doing with open educational resources, at scale! Retrieved May 5, 2016 from <https://wcetblog.wordpress.com/2016/02/26/oer-at-scale/>
2. Fisher, L, Hilton, J. Robinson, J. & Wiley, D. (2015). A multi-institutional study of the impact of open textbook adoption on the learning outcomes of post-secondary students. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 27,(3), 159-172. <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12528-015-9101-x>
3. Klein, G. Embedded digital resources are in, Traditional text books are out at UMUC. Retrieved May 5, 2016 from <https://wcetblog.wordpress.com/2016/02/18/oer-at-umuc/>

Additional Resources

- WCET Open Educational Resources <http://wcet.wiche.edu/focus-areas/managing-elearning/OER>
- Kansas State Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative <http://www.lib.k-state.edu/open-textbooks-resources>
- OpenStax College <https://openstaxcollege.org/>
- MIT Open CourseWare Project <http://www.oec consortium.org/>
- Open Education Consortium <http://www.oec consortium.org/>

- University of British Columbia, BCcampus OpenEd <https://open.bccampus.ca/about-2/>
- Washington State RCW 28B.10.590 Course materials-Cost savings regulation <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28B.10.590>