

Textbook Affordability Testimony – HECC Textbook Work Group Public Hearing – 8/23/2012

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Why is textbook affordability important? I'm a non-traditional student. I came back to school at PSU last summer, after taking the last 9 years off to pay my previous student loans of \$18,000. After only a year at PSU, I'm already further in debt than I was when I left college all those years ago.

As a PSU student, I have already run into barriers to purchasing textbooks. Last fall, when I became unemployed I had to ask for a re-evaluation of my financial aid situation, which caused a delay in the disbursement of funds and I couldn't get my texts. This summer, there were no jobs to be had and no financial aid to help pay. I only had my ELSA (Leadership Award) to cover costs, which didn't even cover my tuition.

My experiences with textbook issues have included:

- Instructors refusing to put required texts on reserve in the library.
- Instructors choosing lower costs texts that they aren't happy with. (Thus not providing the excellent information that instructors would rather give.)
- Instructors using out of print texts that are more costly because they are scarce.
- Textbook interlibrary loans cannot be obtained through the PSU Library. Through the Multnomah County Library, ILL texts take weeks to arrive. I usually get mine around week 5 of a term – too late to read it before midterms.
- Some texts are not made available or known to students until the first day or week of classes.
- Prior terms at PSU, I have thoroughly researched and when purchasing books through websites, I spent \$160-\$238 on texts books for the Summer 2011, Fall 2011 and Winter 2012 terms. During the Spring 2012 term, I wasn't able to research and had to purchase books from the PSU bookstore. They cost me over \$380. For Summer Term 2012, I didn't buy any texts for my classes at all, because I couldn't afford them.
- Friends and fellow students who attend PSU as well as myself have stories about being unable to purchase texts in order to pay bills or buy groceries.

That's why ASPSU is working to help resolve the issues.

There are five different points I will be mentioning on the information we have found throughout our research on textbooks. Not only did we review information that we already have here in the state of Oregon, but we also looked at information other states have found in their initiatives to make textbooks affordable. Small changes can make a big difference to make textbooks more affordable. At Portland State we will be trying several initiatives to facilitate textbooks for all students:

Number ONE: For the initial conversation to thrive about affordable textbook initiatives, we must start with our campuses. We need to ask questions like:

- What policies do professors have when deciding what textbook to use?
 - Do they look at the price of the textbook?
 - Do department chairs have a say in the required textbook decision process?
 - Are Federal & State textbook requirements obeyed at PSU, ex: are textbooks not bundled, are students notified in a reasonable amount time for them to purchase their text?
1. PSU is currently working on a big campaign to have *all REQUIRED* textbooks on reserve in the PSU library. Of course this initiative requires financial support, which is one of the barriers in getting this project started and in planning continued implementation. Portland Community College Cascade Campus already has this program going at their library, saving students hundreds, if not thousands of dollars. The conversations for this project at PSU have already been initiated with our Library, and they are committed to provide the space as well as guidance through the proper procedure for this to happen.
 - a. We will certainly be asking department chairs/professors to negotiate with publishers to obtain a FREE copy from them. This will lower the cost for this program.
 - b. We're also going to see if foundation funds can be solicited and/or if other grants/donations are available for this type of project.
 2. Student Government will also facilitate a student to student book exchange. In this book exchange, students will have the opportunity to sell their textbooks for the price they find reasonable, as well as be able to buy used textbooks for their courses. This textbook exchange program also occurs at Portland Community College on all campuses.

Number Two: We must start a campaign to promote student awareness to lower the cost of textbooks. We can educate our students on the options they have on campus if they can't afford a textbook and how can they use the resources available around them to obtain textbooks at a lower cost.

Number Three: There are several rental programs across the country, so we must educate our students about these options. In the Fall 2012 Term, the PSU Bookstore is going to implementing a 100% availability textbook rental program.

Number Four: Oregon Universities should collaborate to create policies and guidelines on the topic of textbook affordability. For example we should have better and more specific guidelines and policies on bookstore contracts and negotiations with publishers.

Number Five: PSU/Oregon higher education institutions should look at more up to date technology to access required textbooks. For example E-books, open source textbooks, and perhaps a STATE WIDE collaborative purchase agreement. We look forward to working with OUS to facilitate textbook collaborations in our state higher education. We're also watching the National Education Technology Plan put forward by the President to see what items we might be able to implement on campus.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak on behalf of myself and PSU students.