
MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Credit for Prior Learning Update
TO: Student Success and Institutional Collaboration Subcommittee
FROM: HECC Textbook Affordability Workgroup: Commissioner Lee Ayers-Preboski,
Donna Lewelling, Academic & Student Affairs Policy Specialist; and Jeff Dense,
Interinstitutional Faculty Senate President
DATE: March 11, 2015

BACKGROUND:

In response to HB 4058 (2012), the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) convened a workgroup to examine the issue of textbook affordability and submit a report to the Oregon State Legislature on its findings.¹ The 2012 Workgroup issued a series of recommendations, including:

- Alter the tuition and fee schedule at OUS schools to include instructional materials.
- Create an Open Education Resource website archive, wiki or portal.
- Promote use with Creative Commons and traditional copyright/licensing rights.
- Negotiate statewide licenses for full access to a publisher's library.
- Investigate the possible use of "custom editions" by faculty and publishers.

As part of HECC's strategic planning process, over the last year the Textbook Workgroup has been engaged in conducting a follow-up study to the 2012 Textbook Affordability report. In an attempt to isolate promising practices in textbook affordability, the Workgroup has conducted a review of the current literature on the subject, a statewide student survey with over 9,000 responses and a series of regional forums attended by students, faculty, bookstore representatives and student services personnel. As a result of these efforts, several textbook affordability promising practices were identified, including:

- Book Buying Consortia
- Used Books/Rental Programs
- Student Book Exchange
- Fixed Fees
- OERs

¹ HECC Textbook Affordability Workgroup. (2012) HB 4058 Textbook Affordability Report to the Oregon State Legislature: Executive Summary. <http://www.oregonedccc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/ExecutiveSummary-4058report-11-1-12.pdf>

To further exam these promising practices, a statewide regional forum was recently held. Working in a facilitated focus group format, attendees conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis for each of the above promising practices. This memorandum highlights the findings of this SWOT analysis.

Book Buying Consortiums

Book buying consortiums have identified strengths in that they provide institutions the potential for “purchasing power” and allow for a common purchasing authority. They may allow for a reduced cost to students and may increase the likelihood of textbook availability on the first day of class. The opportunities within these consortiums include the leveraging of publishers, the development of communication networks that will increase the knowledge of choice between campuses and an increased dialogue with faculty which may in fact assist with the issue of transferability of courses.

Some of the weaknesses associated with book buying consortiums include the inability to address the “bundling issue”, the decrease in faculty choices for textbooks and possibility of increased shipping costs if publisher will not allow multiple drop sites. In addition, there is not a guarantee that there will be savings to students as the numbers required to leverage large publisher discounts may be unrealistic for this model.

Threats to be considered include reliance by institutions on adjunct faculty who may be hired at the “last minute”, privately owned bookstores and a potential threat to academic freedom. Publisher backlash is also an identified threat as a result of exclusive relationships with one publisher.

After review of the existing literature and consultation with stakeholders, the Work Group has tentatively identified the following to be considered in relation to the development of book buying consortiums:

- Early faculty engagement/communication is key to the success of book buying consortiums;
- Multiple-institutional partnerships should be leveraged as appropriate/possible;
- Conversations with publishers regarding shipping options should be identified in the beginning stages of planning and implementation.
- Privately-owned/independent bookstores should be engaged as possible to help leverage consortium membership and buying power.

Used Books/Rental Programs

Although used books and rental programs are different in terms of their implementation, they are both known and recognized as a way to save students money. Rental programs allow students access beyond the book-buyback date, while used books often come “pre-highlighted” giving students a studying edge.

Opportunities exist for both used and rental book programs. Both may assist in developing a “book recycle culture” and may lead to an increased knowledge within faculty related to the effect of early adoption of textbooks and its correlation with textbook costs. There is an opportunity for students to be educated on the dynamics related to textbook buy-back including the associated drivers with new editions, offering of courses from term to term and textbook conditions upon return.

Weaknesses within this promising practice include bundled access codes by publishers, lack of early faculty adoption of textbooks, customized textbooks and books not being retained from year to year due to frequency of course offerings. Threats include the lack of knowledge regarding textbook buy-back and the associated dynamics, custom editions which decrease ability for students to share books inter-institutionally and competition with online vendors for used book buyback.

After review of the existing literature and consultation with stakeholders, the Work Group has tentatively identified the following to be considered within used book buyback and/or rental programs:

- Buying used textbooks and purchasing new online access codes may be cheaper for students;
- Institutions may consider setting textbook cost goals such as “students should pay no more than \$XX for textbooks per term/year”;
- Institutional messaging campaigns regarding textbook buy-back policies and cost drivers;
- The effect of privatization of bookstores on the flexibility of book buy-back programs.

Student Book Exchange Programs

Student book exchange programs are identified as a way for students to be engaged in the marketplace of textbooks. These programs allow students to gain confidence in the cost and re-selling price of their purchased textbooks. The reduction of student costs and student body and student government engagement are seen as the primary strengths of this promising practice. Opportunities exist within this promising practice at institutions of all sizes, however smaller institutions may experience the most success with these programs; however any institution may seize these programs as an opportunity to increase student participation and interactions between students and bookstores.

Some of the weaknesses identified within this promising practice include the reliance on timely notification of faculty regarding which textbooks will be used for upcoming terms. The late hiring of adjunct faculty exacerbates the challenge. In addition, centralized online programs are a weakness for student/bookstore interactions and their setup along with webpage development likely will require institutional investment and maintenance.

Threats to the success of student book exchange programs include the availability of other markets such as Amazon®, Craigslist® and other online forums. In addition the ongoing practice of bundling creates a threat to such programs.

After review of the existing literature and consultation with stakeholders, the Work Group has tentatively identified the following to be considered in relation to student textbook exchange programs:

- Institutional adjunct faculty hiring practices;
- Institutional investment or support of student exchange programs;
- Active engagement of students and student government in the development and operation of such programs; and
- Bookstore partnership with the exchange program.

Fixed Fees

There are growing examples of fixed fees for textbooks, whether the fees are included as a part of tuition and fees or a set fee is charged per class/term for textbooks. This practice boasts strengths such as “truth in advertising” and compliance with federal laws. Another identified strength includes the possibility of students having books by the first week of turn and in many cases the first day.

The opportunities associated with the practices of fixed fees include the partnering with publishers to set lower, stable prices, faculty engagement/insight into the process and the ability to provide information to the financial aid office regarding “real costs” for textbooks.

Weaknesses related to fixed fees include the implementation including the identification of how the cost-basis is determined and timelines associated with faculty adoption and bookstore notification. Also, the practice reduces student options and may eliminate student “buy-back” programs. In addition to these weaknesses, the threat of publishers monopolizing the market because they are “guaranteed” a book order is concerning. The threat of reducing the “bottom line” of bookstores and/or the campus must also be considered.

After review of the existing literature and consultation with stakeholders, the Work Group has tentatively identified the following to be considered for fixed fee models:

- Clear policies and procedures should be outlined to encourage and strengthen faculty engagement;
- Students should be consulted before this model is implemented; and
- The overall effect on bookstore/campus budgets should be reviewed and addressed to avoid unintended ripple effects which may result in other fees/increased tuition costs to students.

OERS

The primary strength identified included the low-cost of OERs to students. Additional strengths included customization of texts and the ability for OERs to inform pedagogy. Opportunities that were identified include faculty participation in OER development, faculty using their own books, library/faculty interactions and creating an institutional culture for OER use.

While OERs provide many opportunities for textbook cost reduction, they are not without associated weaknesses and threats. Identified weaknesses include that they are not always “free”, students encounter barriers to access without the availability of high-speed internet. Investment of faculty time is needed to gain knowledge of the resources or develop them. In addition, high numbers of part-time faculty make the use of OERs difficult and delivery platforms often pose barriers to OER use. Threats to the use of OERs include the quality of the content and/or the perception of the rigor associated with the materials. The lack of availability of funds to develop and/or research OER content is also a challenge. Many bookstores also contribute to the general fund of an institution, making OER development a form a competition. Alternative formats for students with disabilities were also identified as a potential barrier to their use.

After review of the existing literature and consultation with stakeholders, the Work Group has tentatively identified the following to be considered as part of 'best practices' related to the future utilization of OERs:

- A focus on statewide general education courses (such as those contained in the Oregon Transfer Module² should be considered as the starting area for Statewide OER development.
- Cross-institutional faculty engagement should be encouraged to support the increased use of Oregon OERs.
- Quality peer review should be included in the process associated with the development of OERs
- Copyright issues should be addressed to ensure “free access”
- Ensuring American with Disability Act compliance will be vital to the ability for institutions to use OERs
- Technology barriers such as access to high-speed internet should be considered and addressed.

² The Oregon Transfer Module is an approved 45 unit subset of general education courses (foundational skills and introduction to discipline courses) that are common among Oregon's colleges and universities.