



Adopting Best Practices for Textbook Affordability

A Report to the
Higher Education Coordinating Commission

By the Textbook Affordability Workgroup

June 2014

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Background and History

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) submitted a report on Textbook Affordability (HB 4058) to the Oregon Legislature on December 13, 2012. Several recommendations for future study were outlined. All centered on using the Oregon University System (OUS) as a vehicle for collecting, analyzing and driving the textbook research and cost-saving initiatives. Overarching support was given to realignment and incentive-based institutional budgeting for identifying and implementing best practices. Suggestions included open resources, wiki and archive usage, portals, indexing, reviewing policies, a cost-benefit analysis of libraries and reserves, promoting the production of instructional materials beyond textbooks, negotiating statewide licenses with publishers, and limiting custom editions. With limited resources to carry forward the work of the 2012 HECC report recommendations, the following approach was implemented by the 2014 HECC workgroup.

During the November 2013 full HECC meeting the Commission was reminded by the Oregon Student Association that the cost of textbooks ranked number two amongst the top concerns of students and higher education affordability. A textbook affordability report driven by a HECC taskforce in 2012 revealed several ideas for next steps and identified that further research was needed. For this Report, Adopting Best Practice for Textbook Affordability, the Workgroup consisted of Lee Ayers-Preboski, a faculty representative of the HECC; Jeffrey Dense, the President of the Inter-institutional Faculty Senate (IFS); Donna Lewelling, HECC Operations and Policy Analyst and included consultation from the Oregon Student Association (OSA). As part of the investigation several people identified as key to finding solutions were consulted to include: the Inter-institutional Faculty Senate campus senators, campus bookstore managers, administrators, program and department faculty, and students across the Oregon public higher education system.

The Workgroup met via email and through phone conference calls as a cost reduction strategy for creating this report. Email sharing dominated the meeting schedule until the first phone conference held April 7th, 2014. A timeline and plan for next steps was developed. Collection and sharing of the gathered data occurred on May 15, 2014 and a second conference call occurred on May 19, 2014. The final report from the Workgroup was delivered to the full HECC on June 12th, 2014.

The initial phone conference provided an opportunity for workgroup members to share their diverse perspectives on this complex issue, structure a timeline and assign tasks. The May 19th meeting focused on refining the first draft of the report for the HECC June meeting, sharing new information from viewing all the pieces collected on the 15th of May, and determining structure for the final report and recommendations for next steps. In addition to the phone conferences the

IFS collected campus-level data. The Workgroup communicated by phone and/or via email to produce the final report. The informed work of the Workgroup is reflected in final recommendations contained within this report.

Status of Recommendations from 2012 Report

In the 2012 report, the Textbook Affordability Workgroup identified several issues that required additional study. Many of these recommendations include cost analysis of existing practices or the analysis of the effectiveness of current processes. The following is a recap of the recommendations from the first report:

- Alter the tuition and fee formula at OUS schools so that fees include the instructional materials for the course.
- Creation of Open Educational Resource web archive or wiki or portal.
- Create a cost of instructional materials index.
- Review and strengthen existing textbook affordability policies created by OUS and the Board of Higher Education.
- Perform a cost-benefit analysis of the use of library reserves of required texts.
- Explore cost savings from promoting the production of instructional materials, not just textbooks, with both Creative Commons and traditional copyright and licensing rights.
- Negotiate statewide licenses, not for individual textbooks, but for full access to a publisher's library.
- Investigate the possible abuse of "custom editions" by faculty and publishers.

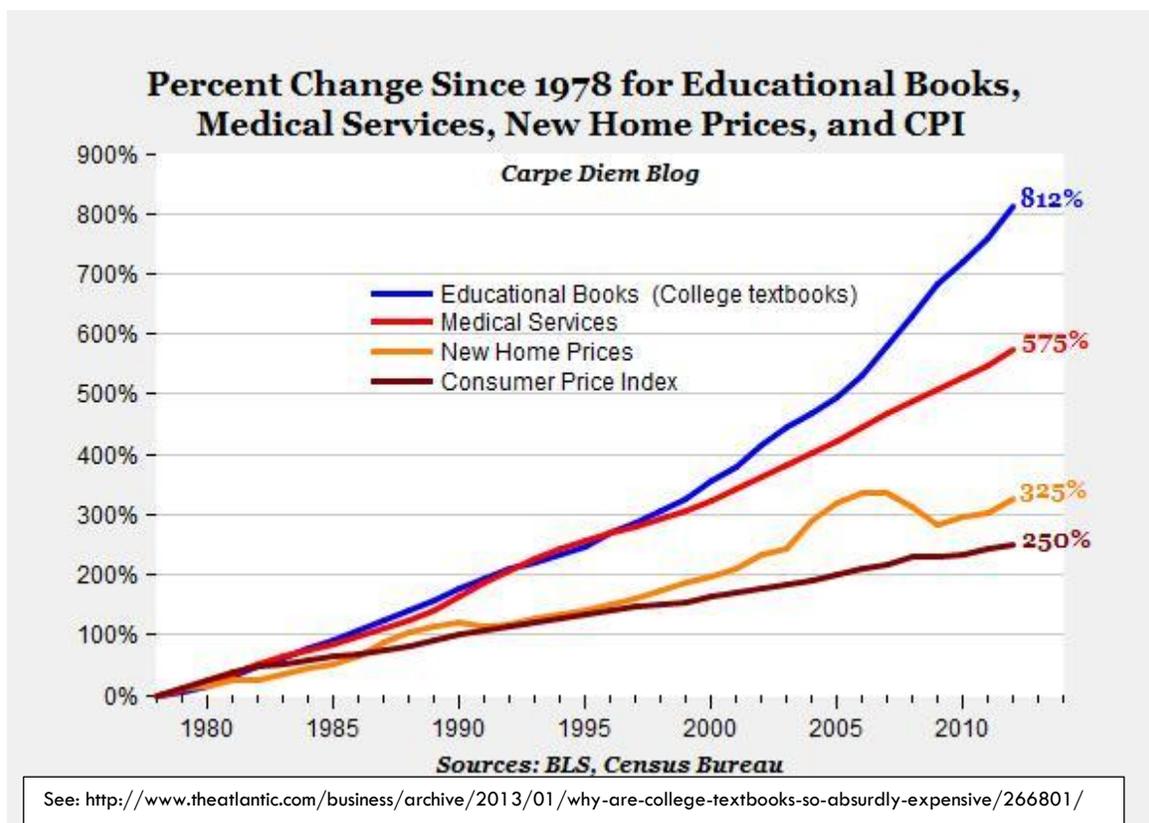
The 2014 Workgroup used the 2012 report as a starting point and springboard for the continued work. Because there has been movement and some advancement in the area of textbook affordability since 2012, the Workgroup identified five key areas to focus on for 2014:

- Review of the HECC 2012 report.
- Review of the literature on textbook affordability: Where are we?
- Identify what each of the former Oregon University System schools are doing through faculty reports from each IFS campus.
- Identify what the OSA data revealed about student concerns around this issue.
- Recommendations for HECC next steps and legislative approaches to reducing textbook cost.

The Current Landscape

Rising cost of textbooks, students not purchasing

In spite of efforts being made to reduce the cost of textbooks, prices of textbooks and barriers to affordability continue to rise. In a 2011 survey, 7 out of 10 college students surveyed stated that they had skipped buying a textbook due to the cost (Chew, 2011, p. 1). In addition, 78% of students thought not owning the textbook would ultimately hurt their final grade in the class. According to the Atlantic Monthly (Jan, 2013), the cost of textbooks rose faster than medical services, new home prices, and the consumer price index (Weissmann, p. 1).



Expanding on this graph, from 2000-2010 the price of textbooks rose by an average of 8.2% per year (Vedder, 2010, p. 3). Rising cost of textbooks still represent a major barrier to higher education, in spite of many efforts being made to slow the margins. Through a robust research effort, Student PIRGs (public interest research group) found that the price of textbooks has increased by four times the rate of inflation over the past 20 years (Student PIRGs, 2013, p. 4). In this review of the literature, we discuss methods being explored to reduce the costs of textbooks, in addition to work that still needs to be done to improve textbook affordability. In short, there is no simple answer to the problem.

Ebooks

Often suggested as a solution is stop the printing! Textbook prices can be reduced as eBook titles expand, which are becoming increasingly popular. Purchases of eBooks rose by 11% between 2011 and 2013 (Hanover Research, 2013, p. 5). However, this increase in purchases does not indicate an increase in preference. In a study conducted in 33 courses at 5 state university campuses, Baek and Monaghan (2013) found that overall, the students who tested the eBooks in their courses were unlikely to purchase an eBook again or recommend one to a fellow student (p. 8). The authors also found that only 16.7% of the students who participated were willing to take a course in the future where the professor required the purchase of an eBook (p. 8). Noting that the experience and perception of the 662 students who participated in, "...the study implies that the eTextbook must be a high-quality, easy-to-use resource to serve as a viable textbook option for student learning" (p. 1).

Downfalls

One of the biggest problems with eBooks is that unlike physical textbooks, they cannot be sold back. In addition, there are factors which hinder the progress of eBooks which are beyond a publisher's control. For instance, one study demonstrated that reading from an e-text produces more eyestrain than a physical text (Hanover Research, 2013, p. 5). In a 2011 study of students on eBooks, 75% of respondents stated they prefer print books to digital books due to the physical feel of paper, the option to own books permanently, and the option to resell (Baek & Monaghan, 2013, p. 3). Due to the constraints imposed by publishers on eBooks, and the loss of the option to resell, one survey found that currently students who choose eBooks over physical books only save a dollar on average (as cited in Massis, 2012, p. 179). While eBooks have great potential to ease the rising costs of textbooks, overall students do not prefer them, and publishers will have to make a number of changes to make eBooks more affordable than print books.

More purchases of used texts

Another rising trend to save money on textbooks is the purchase and resale of used texts. The Center for College Affordability and Productivity notes that online booksellers are allowing for more resale of used texts at lower prices than local bookstores (CCAP, 2010, p. 30).

Furthermore, many of these online resale sites allow for the students to sell back their books directly to buyers, allowing them to recoup more of the resale value. However, publishers have introduced barriers to reselling textbooks. One ongoing barrier to reselling textbooks is the practice of bundling. Publishers bundle by including a CD or other item with the textbook that when lost, eliminates the possibility of selling back the book (Student PIRGs, 2013, p. 4). In addition, many publishers release new editions of textbooks every three to four years by including minor changes to the content (Student PIRGs). This practice forces students to buy new editions of textbooks, and removes the possibility of selling the textbook back. While

publishers do need to have methods to remain profitable, at present, practices such as bundling and frequent updates to the text create barriers to reselling textbooks.

Course reserves for libraries

One strategy employed by libraries is requesting review copies of textbooks for their reserve shelves (Massis, 2012, p. 180). While Massis reports some publishers have refused these requests, others have been willing to work with the library, given the knowledge they will ultimately sell more copies in the bookstore. The upside of this system is it allows some students who cannot afford to purchase the textbook the chance not to miss out on the content, and it also gives students more time to seek a cheaper copy of a textbook than what is available in the bookstore. Massis notes that libraries can work with professors to find which textbooks are commonly needed in core classes, and request review copies of these textbooks from publishers. Furthermore, older editions can be sold through Friends of the Library organizations at low cost, and provide students with a potential cheaper source of textbooks when a newer edition is not needed.

Custom textbooks

Another solution some professors are adopting is the process of creating custom textbooks. Creating these custom texts involves combining original materials and material from various sources (Massis, 2012, p. 180). These custom textbooks are typically produced electronically, but are available by print in some school bookstores. In addition, because these custom textbooks are produced for a specific class, libraries can easily acquire reserve copies for students who cannot afford to purchase the text. The largest difficulty in creating custom textbooks lies in seeking copyright clearance and permission, and paying royalties where necessary (Massis, p. 181). In addition, some publishing houses require a minimum of one hundred copies, which can be a barrier to creation when a professor designs a text for a small class.

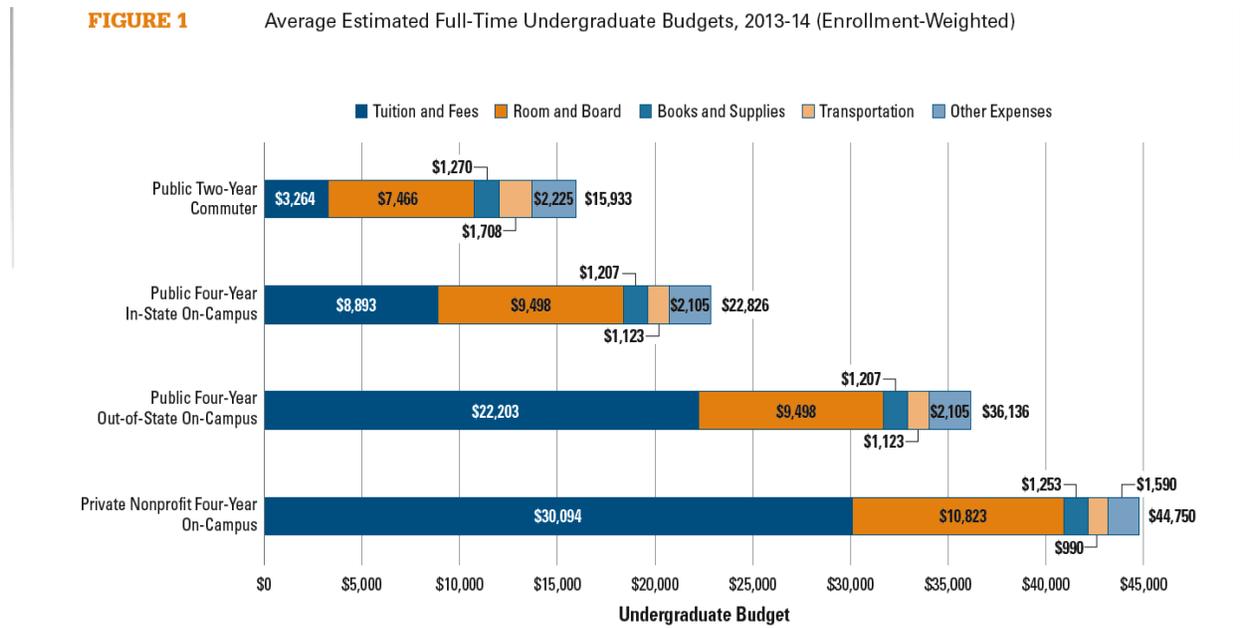
Open Textbooks

Another option, advocated for by Student PIRGs in addition to Baek and Monaghan, is open textbooks. Open textbooks are textbooks that can be free online, available to download for little no cost, or purchasable at the campus bookstore (Student PIRGs, 2013, p. 5). Open textbooks are separated from traditional print textbooks by an open copyright license, which allows them to be shared by a large number of people. Student PIRGs notes that open textbooks have already been adopted by over 2000 professors nationwide, with another 3000 professors considering adopting the technology (p. 5). Open textbooks are the most promising avenue for textbook affordability, but making it happen will involve advocating for publishing houses to get on board. In an article published by Grush in *Campus Technology* (2013), faculty incentives and support were needed for open education resources (OER) to be effective. Outstanding WOW

Award winner Lane Community College reported that it was student investment using tuition reimbursement that lead to the development and implementation of the program now almost 5 years strong.

Saving Money

Berger (2013) notes that there are 8 ways students can save money on college textbooks. The most expensive way to buy books is to get them at the bookstore. Students should consider this as their last resort. Buy used and shop online, notes the author. Share options work for students and arranging schedules and needs can decrease spending. Students can also check the library for a copy that is on reserve or on the shelf, or rent books from the campus book store or in an e-format online. Purchasing an older version of a text can yield exceptional savings. If a student does purchase new, they must consider how the textbook will factor into their major long-term. When the average student is spending \$655 per year on books, according to the National Association of College Stores, this is not a matter to be taken lightly.



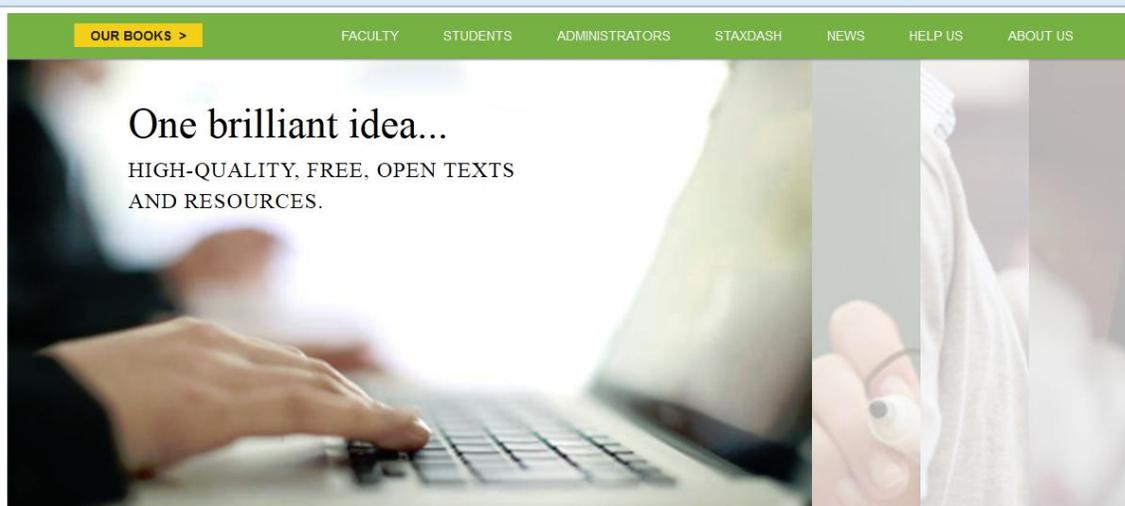
NOTE: Expense categories are based on institutional budgets for students as reported by colleges and universities in the Annual Survey of Colleges. Figures for tuition and fees and room and board mirror those reported in Table 1A. Other expense categories are the average amounts allotted in determining total cost of attendance and do not necessarily reflect actual student expenditures.

SOURCE: The College Board, Annual Survey of Colleges.

(see: <http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/college-pricing-2013-full-report.pdf>).

Although there have been several positive changes in the past few years to assist students with the growing movement for affordable textbooks (Student PIRGs, 2013). Things worth noting include: open educational resources (OER), which are textbooks and other materials published online under a license allowing their free and open use. In the last year, both California and the

Canadian province of British Columbia have created programs to develop a total of 90 open textbooks (para. 4). All are free online but would cost about \$30-40 in print. Washington State has adopted a program called Open Course Library, which has already developed free online resources for 81 courses, saving students \$5.5 million since 2011. OpenStax College, a project out of Rice University, is developing open textbooks for the 25 largest enrollment courses. The estimated students' savings is \$750 million. As students continue to struggle to afford textbooks, there are now several promising alternatives to this expensive-traditional textbooks approach. For more on OpenStax see: <http://openstaxcollege.org/>



GOAL:

PROVIDE FREE TEXTBOOKS TO 10,000,000 STUDENTS.

[CLICK HERE](#) to see the schools that are helping students reach this goal.

It's innovation in education. And the time is right. OpenStax College offers students free textbooks that meet scope and sequence requirements for most courses. These are peer-reviewed texts written by professional content developers. Adopt a book today for a turnkey classroom solution or modify it to suit your teaching approach. Free online and low-cost in print, OpenStax College books are built for today's student budgets. Stay informed through our [newsletter](#), [like us on Facebook](#), or [tweet about @openstaxcollege](#).

Best Practices in Oregon

A review of ‘best practices’ at Oregon public universities revealed a number of innovative ideas that hold considerable promise in alleviating the virulent fiscal stress confronting students, thereby enhancing the access and affordability that is key to the future of higher education in Oregon.

The range of ‘best practices’ adopted by individual campuses are the result of a wide range of variables, including but not limited to, campus climate, sensitizing faculty to the issue, the presence of institutional and external funding mechanisms, and bookstore business practices. While the review did not reveal a single solution capable of extinguishing the textbook affordability ‘fire’, it did highlight a range of potential policy options, which if bundled together and underwritten by funding incentives, hold considerable promise in addressing this key issue.

The following is an overview of the best practices identified by each institution:

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

The University of Oregon is pursuing a number of measures to reduce its students’ textbook costs. The following list indicates the principle measures to date, but it is not comprehensive. A university-wide survey would illuminate additional practices.

- **Pricing comparisons for textbook purchases.** Many students purchase their textbooks at the Duck Store – a local nonprofit bookstore that has served the University of Oregon for nearly a century. The Duck Store offers an online system that enables students to compare textbook prices from various online retailers (Comparing Prices). Many faculty members consider price as a factor when they decide which textbooks to assign for their courses.
- **Purchasing and selling used textbooks.** Several UO-area retailers, including the Duck Store and Smith Family Bookstore, sell used textbooks, as do many online retailers. It is common practice for instructors to permit students to use older editions of textbooks, when those editions are not significantly outdated. Students may sell their books back for cash to the Duck Store and Smith Family Bookstore, among others. The Duck Store offers an online look-up system so that students can determine the value of their used textbooks (Online Buyback Tools). The Smith Family Bookstore has used textbooks for sale and stock them at their CAMPUS store near the UO (Textbooks).
- **Textbook rentals.** Students are increasingly renting textbooks, rather than purchasing them. Rentals are available from many online retailers and in-store from the Duck Store (Textbook Rentals).

- **Library reserves and loans.** The UO Libraries have extensive course reserves that are available to students through an online, searchable database (Course Reserves). These reserves enable many students to avoid purchasing or renting textbooks. Faculty members donate books to library reserves, as does the Duck Store (Library Reserves). Some faculty members also loan books directly to students.
- **E-books.** Electronic media are, of course, much more widely available now, and some publishers of electronic books permit students to purchase individual chapters. This enables faculty to assign only those chapters that are essential, so that students are not required to purchase an entire book.

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Oregon State University has aggressively sought answers to the textbook affordability issue, focusing on open source textbooks and providing faculty development opportunities.

- **Open Textbook Initiative Pilot,** Oregon State University is helping its faculty members develop textbooks in their fields that will be freely accessible online to any student in the world. The open textbook initiative is collaboration between OSU Libraries, OSU Press and OSU Extended Campus that provides financial, technical and editorial support for faculty members to create “open” texts that aim to reduce costs for students and further position Oregon State as a leader in research and teaching.
- **Faculty Workshop.** OSU held a workshop May 21 to describe the Open Textbook initiative so faculty members could learn how open textbooks can benefit students. The workshop described open textbooks, encouraged exploration of an appropriate one for classes faculty teach, and faculty were to receive one open textbook after the workshop and receive a \$200 stipend if they review the textbook. There was a call for proposals in the fall of 2013 for development of an open textbook and four proposals were chosen for development from faculty in a variety of academic disciplines.

PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Portland State University is attempting to find a collaborative solution to the textbook affordability issue. The composition and charge of the Reduce Student Costs Task Force should be contemplated by HECC as a model to emulate.

- **Reduce Student Costs Task Force.** At PSU, the ASPSU President, Provost, and Faculty Senate Presiding Officer are now forming a student-faculty partnership to find ways to lower the costs of textbooks. The partnership will extend work begun in 2013 when the

Provost's Challenge fund awarded a grant to support the PDX OPEN initiative directed by librarian Sarah Beasley.¹

- **PDX Open Initiative.** The PDX Open initiative gives grants to PSU faculty who use public domain and Creative Commons materials for support of their work to assemble, organize, and originate new learning activities. Unlike course packs, PDX Open materials are hosted on the Library's PDX Scholar platform which is open access. Beasley writes: "The Library can help with reducing costs of course packs for students through our e-reserves service and through linking to our subscribed journals" (PDX Open).

OREGON INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

The Tech Nest Bookstore at Oregon Tech (which is contractually operated by Follett Higher Education Group) offers a variety of cost savings options for students.

- **Textbook Rentals.** As of the Spring 2014 Term, 75% of all reported textbook titles (312 out of 413) were available in the form of a rental, which can save students up to 50% off the retail price.
- **Alternative Formats.** In addition to the rental program, the bookstore also offers alternative format titles (such as loose leaf or black and white versions) where available that can save students up to 25% off retail pricing.
- **Digital Textbooks.** As a final option for cost savings, the bookstore also offers a variety of digital textbook formats (through providers like CafeScribe, Connect & Connect+, and VitalSource) which can sometime save student up to 75% off the cost of a new book.

EASTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

Eastern Oregon University has explored a number of options to address the textbook affordability issue.

- **Textbook Rental.** A limited number of textbook titles are available through the EOU Bookstore.
- **Textbook Exchange.** A student led initiative to facilitate student-to-student exchange of textbooks. The initiative has yet to be formalized.
- **Text on Reserve.** A recent perusal of the Pierce Library website revealed 186 textbooks on reserve.

¹ **The PSU Reduce Student Costs Task Force Charge:** The cost of textbooks and other course materials is a major concern and financial barrier for students. The College Board estimates a 2013-14 cost of \$1207 for textbooks and supplies for the average undergraduate. The Reduce Student Costs task force will review models and strategies and make recommendations for lowering course materials costs for PSU students.

- **E-Books.** EOU’s library website allows access to the EBL, Ebrary and EBSCO databases where a number of potential textbook options can be explored by faculty. A search for “Constitutional Law” revealed 356 e-books, including several recently printed textbooks that could be adopted for classroom use.

SOUTHERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

Southern Oregon University utilizes a variety of tools to enhance textbook affordability for students.

- **Textbook Price Compare.** The Textbook Price Compare on the SOU Bookstore website lets students compare prices between new, used, and rental textbooks, as well as other book vendors.
- **SOU Student Marketplace.** Students can sell back their textbooks to other students.
- **Textbook Share (TextShare) program.** Started in 2003 by Associated Students of Southern Oregon University, the TextShare program buys and puts certain textbooks in the Hannon Library for students to check out. All books over \$100 are included in the program, although graduate textbooks are not included. ASSOU has put over 100 books in the library, which are available on a 2-hour reserve basis.
- **OpenStax College.** A free, peer-reviewed, nonprofit collection of Rice University, written by faculty anywhere, most of it now for basic, required courses.

WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

Western Oregon University has been able to leverage federal funding, alongside traditional approaches, to address textbook affordability

- **Website.** WOU’s Hamersly Library has a website that provides a quick guide to getting textbooks, including course reserves, borrowing the textbook from the library and a list of websites for acquiring/renting textbooks (Hamersly).
- **Case Study.** A student generated document examining textbook options for an introductory level Accounting class highlights the ingenuity of students at addressing this vexing problem (Shirley).
- **Textbook Rental Program.** This 2010 program was funded by a \$999,973 grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, and \$102,500 from the university. WOU was one of only two four-year institutions in the country to receive a grant.. The rental program gave students the option of renting or buying a textbook for a number of the most popular classes on campus. This initiative highlights the potential of federal grants in addressing the textbook affordability issue.

Recommendation for Future Steps

The preceding review of ‘best practices’ in effective textbook affordability strategies reveals a number of potential solutions to this vexing issue. In particular, open source textbooks and other low cost or free educational resources were identified as holding significant promise to alleviate the virulent fiscal strain confronting Oregon higher education students. In order to more fully explore the range of potential strategies, and the subsequent development and implementation of state-wide policies, the Textbook Affordability Workgroup recommends:

- **Utilization of campus-based focus groups to discuss textbook affordability.** In order to inform the development of policies related to textbook affordability, focus groups should be facilitated on public university and community college campuses. A standardized set of questions, developed in consultation with HECC, should be utilized in these campus-based focus groups and subsequent statewide gatherings to ensure comparability of best practices and future challenges.² The focus groups should consist of a wide range of stakeholders, including faculty, students and bookstore representatives, and will allow each campus to contribute to a broader discussion of the textbook affordability issue in Oregon.
- **A one day gathering of statewide stakeholder groups.** HECC should leverage its role as a coordinating body to gather representatives from throughout the higher education community to further discuss ‘best practices’ that hold significant promise to address the textbook affordability issue in Oregon. The proposed one-day gathering should include a wide range of stakeholder groups, including faculty, students and bookstore representatives. Members of the gathering should be drawn from both public universities and community colleges in order to enhance degree pathways for students, an essential component of the accessibility and affordability aspects of the state’s 40/40/20 goals.
- **Development of a rubric of textbook affordability best practices.** Members of the one-day gathering should be charged with developing a rubric of best practices that will serve as the basis for discussion by HECC regarding funding incentives related to

² These questions should include (1) What textbook affordability ‘best practices’ are currently being utilized on campus? How can these ‘best practices’ be more fully implemented? (2) What open and low-cost textbook and other educational resource strategies would be effective in reducing student costs? (3) What textbook adoption strategies and policies can be used to reduce student costs? (4) How can enhanced access to open and low-cost textbooks and course materials be facilitated? (5) What are the technical and policy barriers to implementation of textbook affordability best practices? (6) How can existing textbook affordability initiatives contribute to a statewide culture of textbook affordability? And (7) In what ways can collaboration with external partners including other Oregon public universities and community colleges enhance textbook affordability?

implementation of textbook affordability ‘best practices’ at higher education institutions in Oregon. The rubric should focus on isolating methods to create, host, collaborate and provide enhanced access to open and low-cost textbooks and course materials for students. Development of the rubric should be based on the assumption that a ‘one-size fits all’ approach does not adequately address the particular challenges on higher education institutions in Oregon. Hence, the rubric should leave room for development of institution-specific approaches to textbook affordability.

In order to facilitate the timely development of textbook affordability policies, the following timeline is proposed:

| Month (and date if known) | Task |
|----------------------------------|---|
| June 12, 2014 | Presentation to HECC of draft report |
| Week of June 17 or 24 | Conference call to develop timeline for Policy Conversations and to update timeline |
| Fall 2014 | Campus-based Focus Groups held |
| Mid October 2014 | Collection and publication of Focus Group proceedings |
| Mid November 2014 | One – Day Convening of Statewide stakeholder groups |
| Late December 2014 | Recommendations/Final Report |

The development and implementation of textbook affordability policies in Oregon will require a collaborative effort on the part of a number of stakeholder groups. Moreover, it is incumbent for HECC to acknowledge the important role campus culture plays which may inhibit a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to the textbook affordability issue. Large versus small campuses, four-year versus community college institutions, public versus private provision of textbooks, and other related issues should be contemplated by HECC as it develops a workable and sustainable solution to the textbook affordability issue. In the end, the development of textbook affordability policy must be driven by the best interests of our most valuable resource: our students.

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