

# Executive Summary

From 2015 – 2021, the Oregon Legislature passed three bills to advance textbook affordability in higher education.

- **HB 2871** passed in 2015 requires Oregon’s public universities and community colleges to explicitly label courses that use no cost or low-cost course materials in the course schedule.
- **HB 2213** passed in 2019 requires each public institution to establish a textbook affordability plan.
- **HB 2919** passed in 2021 requires the on-time adoption and displaying of course materials for at least 75 percent of for-credit courses before registration opens.

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission contracted with the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement at the University of Oregon to conduct an implementation evaluation of these textbook affordability bills. Through a student survey, a review of course schedule, a review of textbook affordability plans, two focus groups and interviews with various stakeholders, we provide a picture of how Oregon public universities and community colleges are implementing the bills, as well as how students are experiencing the effects of it, and provide a set of recommendations for advancing textbook affordability in Oregon.

## Cost Designations

This section summarizes the status and challenges of implementing HB 2871 and HB 2919. We drew our findings from the student survey, our course schedule review, and the focus groups.

### Displaying cost designations

Based on our survey of 479 students from 19 public community colleges and universities, eight years since HB 2871 (2015) was first enacted, 61% of students do not know where to find information about courses with no-cost and low-cost materials. Additionally, 88% of students do not understand what “low-cost” means. While institutions set the low-cost threshold at \$40 or \$50, students indicate a median desired low-cost threshold of \$35 or less per course. Based on our review of course schedules, we provide a checklist

#### EFFECTIVELY DISPLAYING DESIGNATIONS

- ✓ **Clearly define “No-cost” and “Low-cost”:** Provide definitions on the course listing website
- ✓ **Use of a clear indicator:** Use short, straightforward phrases rather than symbols or codes
- ✓ **Display designations wherever possible:** On the search result page and on the course detail page
- ✓ **Allow filter by cost:** Use separate filters for no-cost and low-cost
- ✓ **Provide detailed cost information:** Give the textbook title and specific cost amount

for effectively displaying course designations to students.

## Challenges in implementation

All universities and community colleges encountered challenges collecting cost information from faculty and displaying it on-time due to:

- Lack of faculty awareness of state policies
- Lack of accountability in reporting course materials
- Labor and hiring practices not aligned with reporting timeline
- Reporting being manual and time-intensive

## Textbook Affordability Plans

This section summarizes our findings from reviewing institutions' textbook affordability plans, as well as successes and challenges in creating and implementing these plans that institution representatives shared in our interviews and focus groups.

### Textbook Affordability Plan Review

There are common key themes from textbook affordability plans that spread across institutions, no matter their size or location. Two most important themes are:

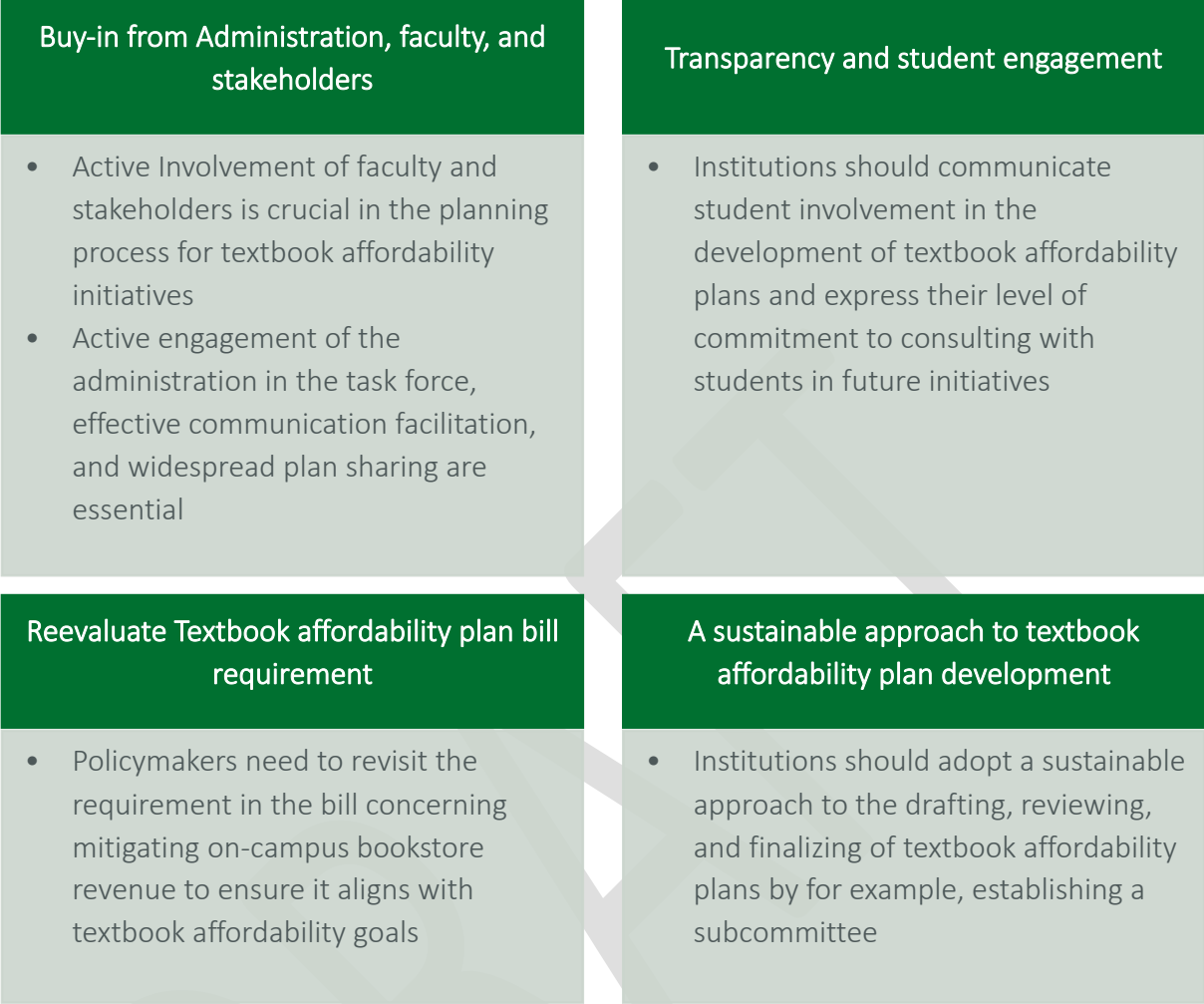
- First, institutions have created measurable goals for increasing textbook affordability on their campuses but face barriers when it comes to collecting and analyzing data to measure progress.
- Second, though institutions are creating resources to help instructors in their transition to no-cost and low-cost materials, the buy-in from instructors often varies as there is no legal requirement to use affordable materials.

### Textbook Affordability Plan Creation

Institutions took a variety of approaches to develop their textbook affordability plans. Some plans are being implemented; some are "sitting on the shelf"<sup>1</sup>. Our focus groups discussed critical elements that contributed to the meaningful development and implementation of their plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Focus group participant



# Recommendations

The passing of the three textbook affordability bills introduced preliminary steps institutions can take to make education more accessible for their students. However, many institutions are struggling to fully comply or leverage these state requirements to advance textbook affordability.

In this chapter, we provide a set of recommendations for the HECC and institutions to improve the implementation of Oregon’s textbook affordability bills. Our recommendations cover two domains:

- Process recommendations: Suggestions for improving the process of creating goals, implementing strategies, and tracking progresses to advance textbook affordability; and
- Strategy recommendations: Specific strategies to increase the availability and visibility of affordable course offers.

RECOMMENDATION	PROCESS	STRATEGY
<b>State-level recommendations for Open Oregon and the HECC</b>		
Increase engagement and establish relationships with institutional leadership that are rooted in student values	☑	☑
Facilitate cross-institution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Among staff and implementors</li> <li>• Among institution leaders</li> </ul>	☑	☑
Develop a statewide database that covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library of no-cost and low-cost materials</li> <li>• Instructions, guides, and resources for transitioning to no-cost and low-cost materials</li> </ul>		
<b>Institution-level recommendations for institutions' textbook affordability taskforces</b>		
Engage students in the creation of textbook affordability goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate student perspectives on affordability</li> <li>• Design systems that work for students</li> </ul>	☑	
Engage faculty in the creation of textbook affordability strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand faculty's challenges</li> <li>• Allow them to set their own schedule for adopting and reporting materials</li> </ul>	☑	
Improve progress tracking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop trackable goals given institution's access to data</li> </ul>	☑	
Establish accountability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign responsibility to specific person or department</li> <li>• Introduce carrots and/or sticks</li> </ul>	☑	
Communicate and support faculty in creating more affordable course offers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve faculty awareness and build relationship</li> <li>• Provide support for adopting existing and creating new no-cost and low-cost materials</li> </ul>		☑
Develop a comprehensive plan for communicating with students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve student awareness through multi-channel communication</li> <li>• Improve system's accessibility</li> <li>• Specifically communicate to low-income and students of color</li> </ul>		☑