

**Report on Textbook Affordability**  
**The University of Toledo**  
**Office of the Provost**  
December 1, 2011

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The University of Toledo recognizes that the costs associated with higher education are rising more quickly than many students are able to accommodate, and that these costs are easier to bear when students and families perceive the economic and social value of an advanced degree. The question of value is more acute in the context of fees and ancillary charges, since these are sometimes not covered by financial aid packages and are therefore more difficult for students to afford. Textbook costs are particularly vexing, not only because the costs of traditional textbooks are rising, but because this is an area of student experience that is controlled by the faculty. An individual faculty member or department chair has the power to select course materials that are either free-of-charge or prohibitively expensive, and the choice is not subject to institutional oversight.

Though the selection of course materials is controlled by faculty and departments, our discussions at UT indicate that the costs of course materials is rarely discussed at the department level. The faculty members who reported this did not understand this as a criticism or an indictment of themselves or their colleagues. It is simply the case that textbook costs are not typically addressed in departmental or college meetings. Few faculty are aware of the financial consequences of their choices. For example, students in a professionally oriented college at UT spend between \$700 and \$1,000 per semester at our bookstore (between \$500 and \$700 if they use other online sources for books). And yet, a faculty member from that college reports that “faculty members do not generally pay attention to the cost of the books assigned for their courses. They focus on the book that is the best or the one that they are most familiar with.”

Our report will thus address three major contributors to the affordability of textbooks and course materials at UT: bookstore policy and innovation; faculty development; and deep educational innovation. In each case, we will address cost reductions (when we can quantify them), strategies, and mechanisms through which we will achieve our goals, as called for in the request for a plan. The first section of our report contains a most complete attempt to address each element of the preferred format. The others are heavier on strategy, but because we believe that truly sustainable efforts to reduce costs are a consequence of deep changes in our learning environment, specific numbers would be entirely speculative.

The report is derived from discussions with faculty conducted over a two-week period and includes material from a report prepared by Colleen Strayer, the General Manager of our UT Bookstore as well as from occasional discussions and round-tables that have addressed the issue of affordability in the last four years. The report summarizes the University of Toledo's strategies for the enhancement of the affordability of course materials.

### **I. Bookstore Policy and Innovation: Textbook/E-Book Model (UT/Barnes and Noble Bookstore)**

The University of Toledo is in a contractual arrangement with Barnes and Noble to handle the sale of textbooks in our physical bookstore and online. Barnes and Noble's UT Bookstore is centrally located in our student union on UT's main campus, within thirty yards of the entrance to our main library. They also operate a bookstore near the library on the Health Science Campus. An additional store combining popular books with textbooks will open next year in the University's new "Gateway" complex, a retail center at the corner of Dorr Street and Secor Street on the south side of campus. There is also an independent bookstore that sells discounted and used texts located on a block adjacent to the main campus at the north end.

Online students may order textbooks through Barnes and Noble's online store. The bookstore has worked successfully with our financial offices to enable the online purchase of textbooks using student accounts rather than a credit card. This is of crucial importance to students who receive grants to offset the costs of books.

Barnes and Noble is working with our Finance department to implement an integrated system that will allow students to order books from within Banner (our student information system) at the time of registration. This module will eventually allow students to conduct comparisons so that they are confident that they are paying a fair price. This module will make affordable textbooks more available to students.

#### **a. Cost Reduction Goals**

Barnes and Noble is continually innovating with new approaches to affordable textbooks. One approach is a "rental" option. The UT Bookstore projects that over the next two years nearly 50% of required titles will be available with a rental option and 25% of required titles will be available with a digital option. Students choosing to rent a textbook save up to 50% off the new print version. Students choosing to purchase or rent an eTextbook can save up to 60% off the new print price. These savings are in addition to the 25% savings students receive when purchasing used textbooks. The Bookstore also helps students keep track of their rentals, reminding them of upcoming rental return deadlines via email. 35% of all required titles are currently available for rental in the UT Bookstore.

The bookstore reports that during the Fall 2011 start of the semester the bookstore saved students 12.9% off the cost of new textbooks. That is more than double last fall when savings were 5.9%.

b. Strategies:

UT Bookstore enhances value to our students by offering a campus-specific selection of textbooks in a wide variety of formats – printed (new, used, rental) digital, digital rental, loose-leaf or custom books – to help UT students save on the cost of textbooks. The UT Bookstore reports that it will further expand the ability of students to save money by increasing the number of titles available in digital format. Barnes & Noble emphasizes the availability of digital titles and reports strong partnerships with publishers that help control costs. They do not quantify savings attributable to these partnerships. The “Nook Study” platform is increasingly advertised and the provost’s office is working to encourage the use of eTexts. The “Nook Study” platform is also being integrated with UT’s Blackboard 9.2 learning management system. See section III below.

In addition to the outstanding efforts of the bookstore, various departments and faculty members have pursued arrangements with publishers and in collaboration with the bookstore that produce significant savings on traditional textbooks (digital or printed). Our departments of Chemistry and Economics, for example, have negotiated with publishers to achieve significant savings. In Chemistry, a faculty committee agreed on a single text for all sections of an introductory chemistry course. This guaranteed the publisher a certain volume and in return, the publisher agreed to a steep discount with no price change for five years. For one text, this amounted to a discount of \$60 over the list price of the new volume. The publisher (McGraw-Hill) has also agreed to customize texts for the department by dividing books into “volumes” and allowing faculty to include tables, notes, and even the course syllabus in printed texts. The bookstore has encouraged these negotiations and is committed to passing savings along to students. They are willing participants in departmental attempts to hold costs down.

It is worth noting that the question of price and value is complex in relation to the bookstore. While prices might be high in absolute terms, the ability to order texts on site, the availability of pricing and ordering information at registration, the ability to sell texts back at the end of the semester, to return a text for a full refund if a course is dropped by a certain date, and to have a local representative available to ensure availability of texts and supplementary materials are all extremely valuable to students and necessary to sustain some programs and large-enrollment courses. The presence of an active, engaged, student-centered bookstore generates value for the student, even if its primary motivation is profit. They understand their market and sustain profits through attention to institutional needs.

c. Compliance and Monitoring:

Progress toward the bookstore's goals of enhanced affordability will be carefully monitored by bookstore management. Total adoption numbers and a breakdown of availability by purchase option (rental, and digital) will be tracked by the UT Bookstore and will be provided to the University contract administrator and to the Office of the Provost as part of the semi-annual review process. Textbook sales information and the equivalent savings will be part of this reporting.

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While the bookstore can and should work to hold costs down, the value of a text is also a function of how it is used in the classroom and of the degree to which it is necessary to achieve student learning outcomes. A textbook with fifteen chapters from which a faculty member only uses eight might not be worth the expense, and students often question the value of that textbook. A textbook that aggregates material and knowledge that is available at no cost on the web is also of dubious value to the student, particularly if the student is not of means. That is why the University of Toledo understands the issue of affordability to be directly related to faculty development and educational innovation.

## **II. Faculty Development**

In our discussions with faculty, it became clear that the question of affordability for textbooks and learning materials is closely tied to faculty habits and practices, and therefore the most effective strategy to enhance affordability is faculty development. Faculty who discussed the issue for this report were unanimous in their view that awareness is the first step to change. Therefore this report will be distributed as a first step in creating a campus-wide conversation about affordability.

### **a. Cost Reduction Goals:**

In many ways, it is possible to achieve zero costs for students. However, a more practical goal would be best described as a "large reduction" in costs to the student. In order to even approach large reductions, faculty argue that departments and colleges must create awareness of some important issues. Of what should faculty be aware? The following observations emerged from our conversations:

- Students do not read textbooks, even when we assign them. This is because high-schools are increasingly likely to use alternatives to textbook presentation, and because student literacy may be shifting to audio-visual modes. Whether this constitutes an epochal shift or a deep change in student consciousness is up for debate.
- Materials once restricted to textbooks are now available widely on the web. Without encouraging illegal activity, students can be expected to search for and find information that would have been out of reach a generation ago.

- New online course materials at MIT, Khan Academy, iTunes U, and other free resources provide alternatives to costly printed or electronic resources available from publishers.
- The library remains an integral part of student learning and can be an active partner in faculty strategies to avoid high-cost materials. As scholarly conventions change and as reliable information becomes both more ubiquitous and trickier to access, skilled librarians (understood as information specialists) are an increasingly valuable and necessary part of a successful learning environment.
- Not many departments take advantage of their purchasing power in negotiating better rates for key textbooks. Some aren't aware that it is possible, others are not as effective at getting all faculty teaching a course with multiple sections to teach from the same text.
- Publicity is key to awareness, and arrangements can be publicized more effectively. The most effective tool is getting faculty to talk to each other, both intra- and inter-departmentally. Faculty report little to no discussion about this issue at the college level.
- Faculty should at least be aware of the cost of a textbook--not the net price, but the cost to the student--before the text is ordered. Some suggested including the list price on the syllabus.
- Faculty should be encouraged to ask fundamental questions in course planning: is a textbook necessary in light of stated learning objectives? Can learning outcomes be achieved through alternative means? Can students develop research skills and information literacy by discovering texts and original sources rather than being given texts already assembled? Is this less expensive? Is it more valuable, educationally speaking?
- Some faculty went so far as to ask whether textbook-based instruction serves the students at all, suggesting that it serves primarily faculty in saving time and labor. That does not mean that textbooks are bad, deficient, or a shortcut in every case (in some cases, the latest editions of expensive textbooks are indispensable), but the question points to a balance that might be more effectively struck in favor of student interests without compromising learning outcomes.
- In light of that consideration, faculty pointed out that in departments where there is little incentive to focus on teaching to the exclusion of other demands, there is a corresponding indifference to textbook selection and cost. There are few faculty incentives to focus on student savings, particularly when those savings require extensive course redesign.
- Some faculty saw the issue as less acute in smaller classes at the advanced level, in which expenses are often high but fewer students are paying them. But while the economic impact of high costs in these classes is smaller overall, the impact to the individual student is no less significant. Yet since the faculty teaching these classes are more likely to be highly research intensive, the incentive to engage in deep course redesign is even smaller.
- Students are more likely to accept high prices if the faculty member justifies the use of a text. Students feel ripped off when faculty teach from only a portion of an expensive textbook or when a text is called into question by the faculty member.

b. Strategies:

In light of these observations, The Office of the Provost is committed to the following strategies:

1. Transformative approaches to technology and teaching (see section III below).
2. College-level meetings on the issue of textbook and course material affordability. Deans, associate deans, and chairs need to understand the issues and possible approaches to amelioration. These meetings will commence in the early spring of 2012 in preparation for the fall of 2012. Each college will be asked to establish a baseline and steps toward enhanced affordability.
3. Mandated early adoption and ordering of textbooks (when used) in all classes. This allows the bookstore to arrange for the best prices, it allows students to shop for the best available discount online while ensuring the text will arrive prior to the start of the semester, and it allows our office of Accessibility to render texts accessible for students with disabilities, a high priority at UT. It also advances the faculty conversation about the issue of affordability.
4. Syllabus Workshops: Learning Ventures (responsible for university faculty development) has sponsored syllabus workshops to advance the assessment of learning outcomes. These workshops will also include strategies for affordability.
5. "Course Transformation" Grants: a series of "course transformation" grants have emphasized enhanced use of technology in college classrooms. Future grants for course development (from the provost's office and in relation to online learning) will include affordability as one of the goals of the transformed course. In one instance, a textbook-based course in "Critical Thinking" was transformed into a text-free course (all materials online), saving each student approximately \$80 with few additional costs to the institution. The course usually enrolls more than 300 first-year students--many of whom are students on federal aid --for an overall impact to the entering class of \$24,000.
6. The provost's office will focus development and incentives on large-enrollment courses offered as part of our "general education" core or as introductory courses to popular majors.

c. Compliance and Monitoring:

The provost's office will request annual reports on affordability efforts from each campus dean, and deans will be asked to measure progress toward their stated affordability goals.

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When the discussion among faculty turned to the relationship between textbook affordability and faculty labor, we began to ask far-reaching questions about educational innovation. It is clear to some of us that developments in technology can make a real difference in student learning by breaking resolutely with the centrality of textbooks for teaching in favor of challenge-based, outcomes-oriented learning. Educational

innovation in connection with technology is the single most important and defining aspect of higher education today, and UT's commitment to innovation is apparent in its new structure and its long-standing commitment to online learning. This innovation must be faculty driven and must meet students "where they are" in terms of technologies that are affordable, effective, and transformative. UT's provost is committed to affordability because a student who is truly prepared for the 21st century will graduate with the skills necessary to teach herself anything for the rest of her life without spending a penny.

### **III. Educational Innovation**

UT is pursuing a number of initiatives, some in advanced stages of discussion, that will make information available to UT's learners at little or no cost.

- **Flatworld Knowledge:** UT is pursuing aggressively a relationship with Flatworld Knowledge whose innovative online platform offering free, editable texts in multiple formats. These texts are often supplemented with inexpensive learning objects and supporting materials. Because there is evidence that students often prefer a printed text to an online version, UT and Flatworld are in discussion about a reduced price for printed texts in courses that require the printed version, further reducing costs to the student. Our College of Business Innovation under the leadership of Dean Tom Gutteridge and Associate Dean Terribeth Gordon-Moore is leading the way in the adoption of Flatworld titles college-wide.
- **Mobile Computing and Web-Based Learning:** Learning Ventures in collaboration with our office of Instructional Research Technology is promoting the development of and access to web-based resources on mobile devices, freeing students from a laptop or desktop computer and integrating static materials (notes, texts) with other technologies for communication to promote not only student engagement but thoughtful integration of new forms of data and presentation with traditional modes of teaching. This is too often understood as a change in modality of a familiar resource when in fact it leads to the creation of new resources and new approaches to learning and thinking. The primary force for these developments is HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory). Another is EduCause. Both organizations provide support for our university's strategic plan, of which a primary element is technological innovation in teaching and learning.
- **Accessibility:** UT is committed to accessibility for students with disability. It is increasingly clear that our commitment to accessibility enhances learning for all students through technologies that address individual or idiosyncratic approaches to learning. A student who might have stumbled in reading textbooks might find technologies that render texts machine-readable give the student a new form of access. This may not enhance affordability, but it enhances value and promotes learning, all of which contribute to academic success and eventually to economic enhancement.
- **Standardization of Technology:** In partnership with IT, the Provost's office will promote the standardization of technologies when doing so enhances affordability. For

example, “response devices” (aka “Clickers”) are purchased by students at the bookstore. Commitment to a single vendor will allow students to use the same device across sections, to register the device number in our student information systems, and to share faculty and student knowledge about technical issues associated with use.

- Online Courses and Instructional Materials: Faculty have a new opportunity to make use of online materials offered by major universities (MIT, Stanford), services such as iTunes, free universities (Khan Academy, Peer-2-Peer U), and on YouTube or other sites with user-generated, crowd-sourced content. The Provost in collaboration with the College of Innovative Learning is actively pursuing institutional strategies that will leverage what is freely available in order to reduce or even eliminate costs to students, enhance learning, and decrease the time-to-degree for many students. Online tools are an important part of that strategy.

Each of these innovations yields significant savings to students, but they require significant faculty buy-in and a new approach to educational innovation that is part of UT’s strategic plan. On the one hand, small innovations and better relationships with traditional publishers mediated by the bookstore will save dollars. But beyond that, faculty, department chairs, and college deans must develop practices and policies that will improve affordability while also enhancing faculty communication and working conditions. Faculty working together can encourage greater flexibility and a more effective weighing of student needs and educational priorities while mitigating strong faculty biases in favor of business as usual. As one faculty member put it, “We need to be sure we are doing our due diligence.” Due diligence can amount to enhanced communication about departmental and college-wide efforts designed to enhance affordability. It can also be expressed as a willingness to experiment and innovate in how we understand teaching and learning, particularly given the availability of technologies that will affect profoundly the way students relate to each other and the world after graduation. Given that many important technologies can be used or accessed freely and without cost, UT is committed to transformation of our learning environment to match 21st century expectations.