Classroom Materials Costs Task Force Report

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In February 2019, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Senate passed Senate Resolution RS.19.06, "Resolution in Support of Academic Affordability." The resolution calls for "the University's constituent colleges and departments to implement all appropriate measures that would reduce the classroom material costs for students." The resolution "encourages the Provost to create a task force on the issue of rising classroom materials cost, focusing on developing, detailing, and implementing specific objectives…." In response to this resolution, the Office of the Provost constituted a Classroom Materials Costs Task Force (task force) in October 2019.

This report summarizes the findings of the task force between October 2019 and May 2020. The task force consists of the following members:

    Sara Benson (Assistant Professor, University Library), co-chair
    Brian Farber (Student Affairs), co-chair
    Milind Basole (Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning)
    Eden Brewer (Undergraduate student member)
    Chung-Yi Chiu (Associate Professor, Department of Kinesiology and Community Health)
    Ann Fredricksen (Disability Resources & Educational Services)
    Lori Holmes (Illini Union)
    Josh Heuman (Teaching Assistant Professor, College of Media)
    Tod Petrie (University Bookstore)
    Sihah Reza (Undergraduate student member)
    Rebecca Salzman (Illini Union)
    Shelby Sears (Undergraduate student member)

The task force considered various types of course materials, which can be broadly categorized as **textbooks, Ebooks, eText**, and **Open Educational Resources (OER)**. "Textbooks" refers to both print and electronic materials used by students at the University in their courses. "Ebooks" refers to electronic books (which may also include textbooks) available through multiple platforms for the library to license or for students to license through the Bookstore. "eText" refers to the electronic textbooks (and, when available, print editions) produced by the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning and available specifically to University of Illinois students at a lower price than commercially available textbooks. "Open Educational Resources" (OER) refers to cost-free openly licensed textbooks and other supporting materials available to students in both print and electronic formats through many different locations, including repositories such as OpenStax, SUNY Open Textbooks, and MERLOTx.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The task force report makes a series of recommendations (in no particular order) necessary to bring about sustained institutional change in lowering the cost of course materials.

- **Institutional Priority.** Department chairs can identify Affordability Champions for institutional awards. If the Affordability Champion designation could be included in the Awards or Teaching section of the Dossier for promotion and tenure purposes, it would give the incentive more weight by faculty.
- **Faculty Awareness.** All faculty should be expected to know the real costs that students pay for their recommended and required course materials. Instructors would benefit from a simple list of key dos and don'ts (e.g., the perils of a customized textbook, the benefits of early adoption, etc.), from guidelines for reducing course materials costs, and directions toward available resources/alternatives.
- **Financial Incentives.** A grant program to provide faculty financial incentives to adopt or create free or dramatically less expensive classroom materials has proven very successful with aspirational peers. This centralized campus resource would require hiring a coordinator to administer and promote the grants, between the Provost, the Library and CITL.
- **Faculty Training.** Orientation and training on less expensive course materials must be the responsibility of an office with regular seminars and individualized assistance. The Library and CITL in collaboration with the Illini Union Bookstore seem like natural homes for this effort to focus training and serve as a resource for Affordability Champions, but institutional financial resources are necessary to institutionalize this priority.
- **Student Awareness.** "Course Explorer", a site maintained by the Registrar's office, should include course material information to guide student choices during registration.
- **Book Order Forms.** The sooner that faculty are identified for their teaching assignments, know the materials they will adopt, and communicate that information to the bookstore, the greater the likelihood that the Illini Union Bookstore can find inexpensive options in the marketplace to meet faculty and student needs.
- **Illini Union Bookstore Services.** We must raise faculty awareness of bookstore services like online ordering with free pickup, customized course pack assistance, Amazon partnership and immediate access email-delivered digital codes. The bookstore needs direct access to faculty, as currently they work with book coordinators from each department and not all services are communicated clearly.

I. <u>Landscape at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign</u>

A. *Survey Data—Defining the Problem*

Data collected from students at the Urbana campus in 2019 indicated that 80% of students skipped buying either a textbook or an access code.[1] While student spending on required course materials averaged $150 per semester,[2] over 30% of students reported spending over $300 per semester on textbooks alone.[3] The difficulties of affording textbooks was further demonstrated at an Open Access Week Library event where students responded to the white board question, "How would free, open textbooks help you?" Many students stated that they were not able to afford their textbooks or had to resort to piracy. One commenter noted that free and open materials "would create incentive for me to actually get the textbook."[4] Others expressed financial fears and food insecurities: "[I] wouldn't have to guess if I can make rent," "so I wouldn't starve,F" and "could eat food."[5] Students noted frustrations with access codes that are unnecessarily restrictive, requirements to subscribe to multiple services, and being forced to pay to submit their homework assignments.

One possibility for reducing costs lies in open educational resources (OER), a central focus of this task force and parallel initiatives in peer institutions across the country. Preliminary findings from a 2019 Ithaka S+R survey with a 434 response rate from faculty indicated that 81% of faculty at the Urbana campus are interested in adopting more OER for their courses.[6] Roughly half of the respondents indicated that they had either created or used OER for their courses with response rates of 167 for open textbooks, 181 for open course modules, and 187 for open video lectures. This is bolstered by findings from OpenStax (an OER repository) in 2017 indicating that University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign faculty members have saved students $1.38 million per year by adopting nine OER textbooks including AP Micro Economics, Chemistry, and Astronomy.[7] The OpenStax data reveal the dramatic impact OER adoption has on student savings.

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[1] E-Mail U.S. PIRG Initial Data from Student Survey Conducted in Fall, 2019 at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Appendix C.

[2] "How much did you spend on required course materials?" with a response rate of 225. Data from Student Watch Fall 2017 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Box Folder Document (4).

[3] U.S. PIRG Initial Data, Appendix C.

[4] The Student Watch Fall 2017 Survey found that 20% of students at the Urbana campus did not purchase a textbook due to the cost. Data from Student Watch Fall 2017, Box Folder Document (4).

[5] These comments align with a 2018 survey by Cengage finding that 43% of students saved money by skipping meals to afford course materials. "Today's Learner: Student Views 2018," *Morning Consult,* Cengage, 2018. https://news.cengage.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CengageMC-Affordability-Survey-letter.pdf.

[6] Ithaka S+R Faculty Survey 2019. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2019. https://www.library.illinois.edu/staff/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2019/04/PUBLIC_University-of-Illinois-at-Urbana-Champaign-Faculty-Survey-Report-of-Findings.pdf.

[7] OpenStax Data Analysis from University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (includes the raw data from OpenStax on textbook adoption by institution covering yearly students, savings, and the year of adoption), Box Folder Document (1).

While the data shows strong support for OER among both faculty and students, the preliminary findings of the 2019 Ithaka S+R survey showed a need for greater institutional support. Only 31% of faculty members agreed with the statement "My institution offers excellent training and support for using open educational resources," while nearly half the participants indicated that it was difficult for them to locate OER for their teaching. At 37%, a significant number of faculty members expressed interest in creating or publishing their own open educational resources, but the university does not currently have a system for recognizing or rewarding faculty for taking time to integrate these resources into their curriculum.[8] These results indicate a need for training and assistance in locating, developing, managing, and sustaining OER alongside faculty incentives for its creation, adoption, and updates.

B. Illinois Student Government Resolution

On March 11, 2020, the Illinois Student Government (ISG) voted unanimously to pass ISG Resolution RES.03.76 "Course Registration Transparency" which can be found in Appendix A of this report. The resolution calls for academic and financial transparency, which includes accurate information on Banner about course descriptions and course materials, clear distinctions between required and recommended course materials, and guidance on the acceptability of more affordable formats or editions of course materials. The resolution urges that Banner include out-of-pocket expenses for all course materials, all of which would help students make informed choices. The Illinois student body is clearly concerned about the cost of course materials and is demanding we take aggressive action to provide choice and affordability.

C. Urbana Campus Efforts to Reduce Course Material Cost

1. University Library

The University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign Library (library) is one of the largest public university libraries in the world. The library is largely funded by state and tuition revenue as well as the Library IT student fee and supports the needs of the entire campus research community, including the student population.

Subject specialists in the library have a great deal of discretion over which titles they purchase, and many librarians will purchase a copy of an expensive textbook adopted by a teaching faculty member for students to use. This is rarely an optimal solution, however, as the number of students requesting the textbook is greater than the availability of the book. Moreover, textbooks are so quickly outdated that they do not, generally, serve to build the sort of long-term research collection that the library strives to develop. In 2005, the library, in collaboration with the Illini Union Bookstore, completed a study to explore an option to automatically place on reserve those books designated as required for courses.[9] The study found that the cost to the library in terms of resources and staff is too great to make a book reserve solution optimal. The study also

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[8] Ithaka S+R Faculty Survey 2019.
[9] Laskowski, Mary S. 2007. "The Textbook Problem: Investigating One Possible Solution." Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services 31 (3/4): 161-70. Doi: 10.1016/j.lcats.2007.09.001.

concluded that due to (1) faculty lapse in providing book needs to the bookstore in a timely fashion, (2) recurring placement of books on reserve taking items out of circulation, and (3) the low use of said reserve titles, the library should discontinue the service. The study noted that the library electronic reserves program was a more optimal way for faculty to engage with the library to save students money. However, over time, the library purchased more book and journal backfiles and more content became available already in digital form. Therefore, the e-reserve program was eventually discontinued in 2017, largely due to duplication of content readily available directly to students online through library purchases.

Over the last decade, the shift from print to electronic sales led to significant changes in both library procurement practices and the marketing and sales of textbooks. Many publishers produce and distribute Ebooks (often, although not exclusively, marketed and sold as different items). Ebooks are often sold either individually (i.e., individual titles through a third-party vendor such as YBP) or in packages (i.e., the annual output of a publisher such as Springer). In cases where titles are sold individually, publishers either (1) hold back on electronic distribution of titles to libraries of that are likely to realize widespread sales or course adoption, or (2) only issue those titles with digital rights management (DRM) that limits use to single simultaneous users. In the former situation, the library could not purchase these titles for broader campus use. And, in the latter, the library heard complaints from faculty and students frustrated by the limited numbers of users simultaneously permitted. Over the last decade, the library has gradually moved away from acquiring titles that limit the number of simultaneous users. That notwithstanding, the Ebooks that the library purchases are used as heavily as printed textbooks.

In the case of Ebooks, publishers are similarly savvy, employing sophisticated DRM software in Ebooks that are generally sold. This limits reuse and maximizes sales for publishers. Ideally, the campus could purchase Ebooks for classes where the book is available in that format. Particularly where the Ebook does not include a limiting license (only allowing a certain number of students to check out the book at a given time), this solution could even allow students to forgo purchasing an expensive textbook. Some publishers have been experimenting with such models. However, publishers generally require that a campus license their entire textbook output for the campus, a model that is both financially challenging and raises concerns about academic freedom in textbook adoption. For example, Wiley proposed a one-year pilot for this campus in 2007 that covered sixteen courses for the annual cost of $250,000.

The Scholarly Communication and Publishing Unit of the library has recently begun work on publishing a paywall-free educational book for an adjunct professor with the School of Information Science. The book will be published using PressBooks and will be available to students nationwide. The unit is also engaged in a pilot Open Educational Modules program, funded at $19,173.38 by the Library, which will take place in the summer of 2021 with the goal of converting a multi-section large enrollment course using a traditional textbook to a course with zero material costs.

2. *Illini Union Bookstore*

The Illini Union Bookstore (bookstore) is one of the largest independent college bookstores in the country. It serves as a clearinghouse for course material information for the university so

students can make informed decisions on where to obtain them. As part of the Illini Union, the bookstore is self-funded and receives no student fees for operations. Proceeds after covering operating expenses are used to fund student events and activities of the Illini Union.

The bookstore collects course material information from faculty through departmental book coordinators. Early due dates for coordinators allow the bookstore to search for a variety of material formats that are affordable and promote student choice. However, getting all faculty and coordinators to provide all needed information for all courses in a timely way is a perennial problem. Book information is posted on the bookstore website and shared with the library to obtain copies of the books, if they desire. The bookstore website has a price comparison tool which allows students to make informed decisions based on format and cost. By pursuing various cost-reduction strategies, over the past 5 years the bookstore has saved students millions of dollars over new hardback books.

Specific savings tools include:

- sourcing as many used titles as possible
- offering textbook rentals
- offering a variety of formats (e.g., print [bound and loose-leaf], eText, eBooks, access codes)
- buying back used course materials

A trend in collegiate retailing is Inclusive Access where publishers bill all students with a flat fee and provide all required materials to students. This allows publishers to reduce their prices, and also for bookstores to decrease their margin. Most of the course materials are delivered digitally which increases savings due to reduced printing and shipping/handling costs. Inclusive Access is considered a student success initiative because course materials are usually available a week or more before classes, so all students have all materials before classes begin. Our bookstore has been unable to pursue Inclusive Access because it does require the ability to bill directly to student accounts which is prohibited by university policy and Illinois state law. The bookstore hopes to introduce a hybrid approach where all registered students in a course would get free access to the digital text before classes start and then a digital paywall would open a couple of weeks into the term allowing students to purchase for continued access. This hybrid approach would be a savings for students, however not as much as a full Inclusive Access program. The bookstore is searching for a faculty member who would be willing to test this hybrid approach.

   3. *eText@Illinois*
eText (https://etext.illinois.edu) is a browser-based, multimedia-capable, fully accessible platform to deliver original, instructor-developed course content and previously published textbooks in a cost-efficient manner. Built to take advantage of class roster cohorts, eText allows for two-way communication between students and instructors (both typed and freehand) as well as embedded assessments and practice problems linked from learning management systems on campus. Device neutral, eText uses an HTML5-based flexible page layout that serves as an intuitive, rich interface for both instructors and students. Thanks to rigorously enforced semantic

markup, a comprehensive commitment to accessibility, eText is one of the most truly ADA Section 508 compliant and universally accessible means of delivering electronic course content in the world. In fact, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) at its 2014 annual convention "highly commended" eText@Illinois for its efforts to make electronic book content highly accessible.
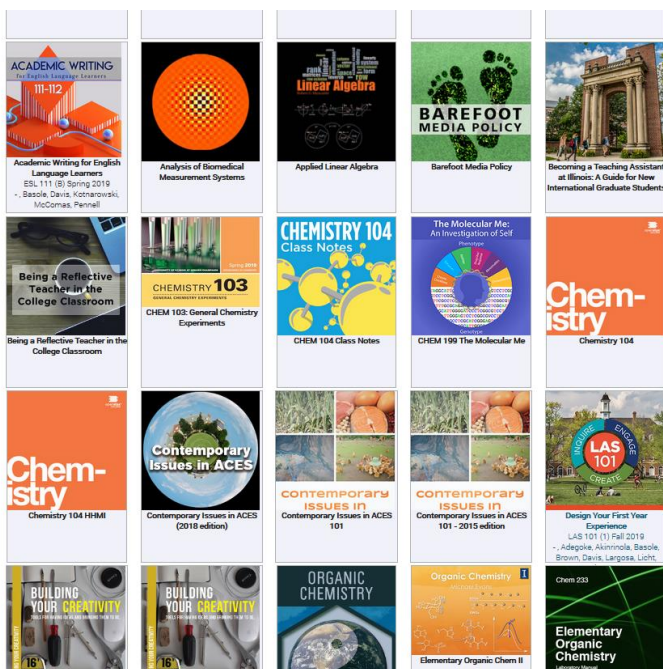

Figure 1: eText@Illinois sample offerings

Due to its unique features and flexibility, myriad courses in all colleges as well as orientation courses (ACES 101 and LAS 101) have chosen eText as vehicle of choice for delivering course content. eText has over 50 unique offerings and has served more than 36,000 unique textbooks to Illinois students since inception. More books are being added each semester.

eText includes the following features:

- Lower costs (students save 50–75% over mainstream published textbooks)[10]
- Multimedia-enriched to accommodate multiple learning styles
- Feature-rich and device-agnostic interface
- Two-way communication between instructors and students
- Built-in interactive self-check engagements to bolster retention
- Ability to embed Learning Management System (Moodle and Compass2g)-based assessments in situ.
- Read-aloud, spoken math, and other adaptations to assist with learning disabilities and dyslexia; new features are under constant development; for even greater accessibility, with a goal of universal accessibility. Universal design is not only an institutional value but a legal necessity[11]

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[10] eText@Illinois strives to keep cost of textbooks to students as low as possible. It is important to note most revenue collected from sales of eTexts flows back to the course/instructor's home Department and is used to enhance teaching and learning.

[11] List of accessibility lawsuits against Higher Ed institutions, https://www.d.umn.edu/~lcarlson/atteam/lawsuits.html accessed on 1/30/2019

Book Title	eText Cost to Students	Alt Book Cost	Differential (plus tax)	Quantity sold	Dollars Saved
RHET 105: I Write: A Writing Guide for the Undergraduate Rhetoric Program at the University of Illinois eText (SECOND EDITION)	$ 26.99	$ 49.99	$ 28.00	2194	$ 61,430
LAS 101: Design Your First Year Experience eText	$ 14.99	$ 35.00	$ 23.51	1464	$ 34,419
CHEM 233: Elementary Organic Chemistry Laboratory Manual eText	$ 12.79	$ 35.00	$ 25.71	744	$ 19,128
ASTR 100 ONL: Introduction to Astronomy eText	$ 24.97	$ 59.99	$ 41.02	426	$ 17,474
MACS 101 Intro to Media Studies 2018 Edition eText	$ 33.55	$ 65.00	$ 37.95	329	$ 12,486
ESL 115: Academic Writing for English Language Learners eText	$ 34.98	$ 65.00	$ 36.52	222	$ 8,107
ESL 111-112: Academic Writing for English Language Learners eText	$ 41.80	$ 65.00	$ 29.70	252	$ 7,484
Becoming a Teaching Assistant at Illinois: A Guide for New International Graduate Students eText	$ -	$ 9.99	$ 10.99	571	$ 6,275
ASTR 330: Extraterrestrial Life eText (2018 edition)	$ 24.97	$ 59.99	$ 41.02	53	$ 2,174
LAS 102: Transfer Advantage eText	$ -	$ 35.00	$ 38.50	42	$ 1,617
PS 224: Politics and Policy in the Greater Yellowstone Area eText	$ 24.97	$ 65.00	$ 46.53	17	$ 791
ITAL 103: Intermediate Italian I eText	$ -	$ 30.00	$ 33.00	22	$ 726
ITAL 104: Intermediate Italian II eText	$ -	$ 30.00	$ 33.00	19	$ 627
ESL 112: Academic Writing for English Language Learners eText	$ 34.98	$ 65.00	$ 36.52	13	$ 475
Using Research to Develop Media Policies eText	$ 11.00	$ 27.00	$ 18.70	9	$ 168
HORT 344: Planting for Biodiversity and Aesthetics eText	$ 19.80	$ 25.00	$ 7.70	14	$ 108
ASTR 499: Telescope Manual eText	$ 27.50	$ 40.00	$ 16.50	4	$ 66
Spanish 141 eText Workbook	$ -	$ 24.99	$ 27.49	2	$ 55
IS 451: A Person-centered Guide to Demystifying Technology eText	$ -	$ -	$ -	5	$ -
LAS 291 and LAS 292: Global Perspectives for Study Abroad eText (2020 edition)	$ -	$ -	$ -	814	$ -
MACS 351: Barefoot Media Policy eText	$ -	$ -	$ -	9	$ -
Sustainability: A Comprehensive Foundation eText	$ -	$ -	$ -	3	$ -
Total				**7228**	**$ 173,610**

Notes

- eTexts purchased on WebStore are tax free. 10% tax rate is applied to alternate book cost.
- Computation accounts for sales data until 1/28/2020.
- Cost of alternate textbooks estimated based on researching online vendors such as VitalSource and Amazon Kindle.

eText is a service of the Center for Innovation in Teaching & Learning (CITL). Over the past few semesters CITL has been actively working on recruiting Illinois faculty who teach large enrollment courses to create eText based material (original and/or adapted from existing OER) for Illinois specific courses. To incentivize faculty, CITL provides for a 1-semester course release or an equivalent stipend or SIE appointments. To counter enticements offered by publishers, CITL also provides additional support in terms of instructional design and classroom material development, in addition to assistance in creating CITL-sponsored eText. Not only are eTexts low-cost and entirely relevant to the courses taught, but they also create a recurring revenue stream for the department. Departments have used revenue generated from eText sales to fund teaching assistants and other pedagogical needs.

II.   Individuals Consulted by the Task Force

The Task Force sought advice and input from professors in four different categories: a professor using a traditional textbook (Dr. Bryan Buckley), a professor using an OER (Dr. Jose Andino), a professor using an eText (Dr. Kristi McDuffie), and finally a professor who has created her own OER (Professor Jasmine Roberts). A summary of our conversation with each of the consultants is included below.

A. *Dr. Bryan Buckley, Teaching Assistant Professor, Economics*
Professor Bryan Buckley has been a teaching associate professor in the department of Economics at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign since 2014. Upon starting his position, he was approached by many publishing companies as he was seen as "a big sales opportunity." His course, Economics 302, had over 400 students registered for the Spring 2020 semester and has over 700 seats available for Fall 2020.

In 2014, Pearson publishing company provided pre-made stock course supplement material available to Professor Buckley with the commitment of using a Pearson text, which appealed to him as a newly hired faculty member. Pearson has helped him create a custom version of a traditional textbook, which they promised would be $30 cheaper for students. However, custom textbooks are actually often more expensive for students in the long run; in this case, the demand for Buckley's custom book in subsequent semesters will exceed the supply, forcing many of next semester's students to buy a new custom book (without the possibility of buying a used general edition). Professor Buckley has concerns about changing his course textbook because it would require major revisions to other course materials, such as daily lecture slides. Professor Buckley is aware of OER and he has considered changing to it. He described time issues as a barrier for him and for other faculty. He thinks he and other faculty would consider adopting OER if there were incentives available, such as a financial reward or recognition from his department or the campus, or a teaching reduction for developing and migrating to OER for courses.

B. *Dr. Jose Andino Martinez, Lecturer, Chemistry*
Dr. Andino joined the teaching faculty for the department of General Chemistry at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign in 2014. One of his courses, Chemistry 104, currently has over 400 students registered for the Spring 2020 semester. In this course, he uses an online textbook

through OpenStax, which is free for students. Dr. Andino agrees that expensive textbooks are a burden to his students. The OpenStax book meets his needs in delivering quality content and he is motivated to continue to use it, partially because it is a free resource and because it provides sufficient knowledge and information to his students. He also appreciated that errors in the textbook could be corrected mid-semester, as they were discovered by reviewers and students. When asked about recognition for professors who make the effort to mitigate course material costs, he said he places more value into helping students lower their financial burden in education. Interestingly, Dr. Andino was not aware that the OpenStax General Chemistry book is ADA accessible to all students, including those using adaptive technology.

C. *Dr. Kristi McDuffie, Interim Director of Rhetoric*

Dr. McDuffie discussed the process of creating and using an accessible eText with the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL) for beginning Rhetoric courses. The Undergraduate Rhetoric Program at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign serves over 3,500 students per year in earning the Composition 1 graduation requirement. In her role as writing program administrator, Dr. McDuffie leads a team of Rhetoric program staff and over seventy writing teachers each semester, including approximately twenty new graduate teaching assistants a year. The department wrote the eText because it was the best fit for their teaching purposes and was cheaper for students. Other textbooks contained information that was unnecessary to the Illinois course design. It took approximately eight months to write the first version of the book; the authors were compensated with small stipends (around $200). The book is $26.99 and includes both the print and electronic formats. Of the purchase price, $10.00 goes back to the Rhetoric department. For cost comparison, Northern Illinois University charges $70.00 for their department-created book and the department only keeps about $1.00 per book. Western Illinois University charges about 2.5 times as much as Illinois for their rhetoric text, but all proceeds go to the external publisher.

The Illinois eText is revised annually and includes student model essays from prior years as well. Annually, Rhetoric 105 is taught in nearly 90 sections to over 3,500 students with 15–25 new instructors teaching the material. With such a large program, it is helpful for the eText to provide consistent material across sections that remains stable from one year to the next. Dr. McDuffie said she was unclear whether Rhetoric's experience could serve as a model for other departments. It works well for them with their multi-section class with the same content to have one cohesive textbook. Dr. McDuffie said that it can be difficult to separate student satisfaction with the course from their satisfaction with the eText (and both can vary), but the department is very happy with their book.

One final note is that e-Text is great for accessibility and ADA compliance, allowing all students, including those with disabilities, equal access to course material at the time of purchase.

D. *Professor Jasmine Roberts, Lecturer, The Ohio State University*

Jasmine Roberts is a lecturer in the School of Communication at Ohio State University, where she has been teaching since 2012. She teaches upper level undergraduate courses and is the

author of *Writing for Strategic Communication Industries*, a free, openly licensed textbook she uses for her own classes that has accessible download options.

Professor Roberts decided to write her own textbook because there was an incentive program through the Affordable Learning Exchange, a cooperative campus endeavor through the Undergraduate Student Government, the University Libraries, the Office of Distance Learning and eLearning, the Office of Academic Affairs, and the University Institute for Teaching and Learning. She used her $7,500 grant to pay herself, an editor, and peer reviewers.

Through her OER, Professor Roberts can keep content fresh and include diverse viewpoints, including those of her students. If a student has a wonderful example in a homework assignment, she will offer to include it (with proper author attribution) in her textbook. Her textbook has been used by other professors nationally and internationally and some have adapted it to fit their own local cultural landscape.

Professor Roberts is an OER advocate because she believes that students should not be charged for expensive textbooks in addition to all of the other costs of attending college. She worries that students will have to choose between purchasing a textbook and purchasing groceries. Her students report they enjoy her textbook because it includes links to YouTube videos that explain concepts and because it is more modern and relevant to their daily lives. And, of course, they are happy to avoid the cost of paying for a textbook as well.

III.   <u>Independent Research Conducted by Task Force Members</u>

Three task force members conducted the same simple survey of their units (the College of Applied Health Sciences, the School of Information Science, and the College of Media) in December 2019 and March 2020. A summary of the survey results is included below.

A. *College of Applied Health Sciences*

In December 2019, all 65 faculty members in AHS were invited to take the survey about the knowledge and attitude about OER. We received 43 complete surveys for a response rate of 66.15%.

1. "*Do you know what open education resources are for your teaching/classroom materials?*" Among 43 responses, 11 answered yes (25.6%).
2. "*Did you know that OER reduces students' study cost?*" Fourteen answered yes (32.6%).
3. "*Would you be willing to use OER for your class if you knew how to use them?*" Forty-two answered yes (97.7%).
4. "*Would you be interested in learning more about OER?*" Forty-one answered yes (95.3%).

B. *The School of Information Science*

In March 2020, all 46 faculty members at the School of Information Science were invited to take the survey about the knowledge and attitude about OER. We received 16 complete surveys for a response rate of 34.78%.

1. "*Do you know what open education resources are for your teaching/classroom materials?*" Among 16 responses, 11 answered yes (68.75%).
2. "*Did you know that OER reduces students' study cost?*" Fifteen answered yes (93.75%).

3. "*Would you be willing to use OER for your class if you knew how to use them?*" Sixteen answered yes (100%).
4. "*Would you be interested in learning more about OER?*" Thirteen answered yes (81.25%).

C. The College of Media

In March 2020, all 50 faculty members in the College of Media were invited to take the survey about the knowledge and attitude about OER. We received 17 complete surveys for a response rate of 34%.

1. "*Do you know what open education resources are for your teaching/classroom materials?*" Among 17 responses, 7 answered yes (41.2%).
2. "*Did you know that OER reduces students' study cost?*" Eleven answered yes (22%).
3. "*Would you be willing to use OER for your class if you knew how to use them?*" Seventeen answered yes (100%).
4. "*Would you be interested in learning more about OER?*" Fifteen answered yes (88.2%).

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

The task force makes the following recommendations for consideration following our study of the issues. They are presented in no particular order. We wish to emphasize that solutions to lowering classroom materials costs must be multi-pronged and constantly updated, as the landscape of the textbook field changes rapidly and there are strong economic motivators for private industry to find creative ways to capture student consumers.

1. **Institutional Priority.** If lowering classroom material costs is to gain any traction at Illinois, it must be seen as an institutional priority at the highest levels of the administration and include a financial commitment to address it. The Provost and Council of Deans should require reports of material expenses for each department and unit and create strategic goals to lower those expenses to students. The appointment of compensated "Affordability Champions" in each unit can create energy and knowledge about how teaching faculty can lower course material costs. Campus, college and unit level recognition of faculty who make substantial efforts to lower student expenses in their course can impact cultural change. We learned that faculty members respond quickly to messages from their department chair. As such, it would be advantageous to train department chairs and have those faculty leaders report progress from their units back to the Provost. Department chairs can also identify Affordability Champions for institutional awards. Similarly, if the Affordability Champion designation could be included in the Awards or Teaching section of the Dossier for promotion and tenure purposes, it would give the incentive more weight by faculty.

2. **Faculty Awareness.** All faculty must know the real costs students pay for their recommended and required course materials. The task force found that many faculty are unaware of these costs and may be more inclined to find ways to save students money if they did. Instructors might benefit from a simple list of key dos and don'ts (e.g., the long-term perils of a customized textbook, the benefits of early adoption in acquiring lower cost options, etc.), guidelines for reducing course materials costs, and directions

toward lower-cost resources/alternatives. Increasing awareness of available low-cost accessible alternatives to traditional textbooks would yield significant savings to students. This initiative could be a combined effort of the Office of the Provost and the bookstore.

3. **Financial Incentives.** A grant program to provide faculty financial incentives to adopt or create free or dramatically less expensive classroom materials has proven very successful with aspirational peers. Grants need not be large but could provide just enough incentive to those faculty needing a nudge. Emphasis should be placed on general education courses with multiple sections and large enrollments. This centralized campus resource would require hiring a coordinator to administer and promote the grants, between the Provost, the Library and CITL.

4. **Faculty Training.** Many faculty are interested in adopting less expensive materials but may be confused about terms of e-materials from publishers or educational resources. Also, some faculty members do not know how to create or retrieve OER, or how CITL can assist in developing lost-cost accessible eText. New faculty are targeted by textbook companies with enticing offers about how they can make an instructor's job simple with slide decks, quiz and test banks, and instructional guides. Illinois will need to meet or exceed that heat and intensity with new faculty about the less expensive options and support available to them before they arrive on campus. Specifically, it may seem advantageous to both the faculty member and students to "customize" a textbook; however, it actually increases costs to students by not allowing them to purchase used versions of the textbook. Orientation and training on less expensive course materials must be the responsibility of an office with regular seminars and individualized assistance. The Library and CITL in collaboration with the Bookstore seem like natural homes for this effort to focus training and serve as a resource for Affordability Champions, but institutional financial resources will be needed to institutionalize this priority.

5. **Student Awareness.** Faculty should post all course material costs in the Banner system to promote consumer awareness at registration. Faculty should be encouraged to post course syllabi at least a week before the start of the term to give students time to shop for needed course materials. Similarly, the Illinois Student Government passed a resolution requiring textbook and course material costs to be listed on the Registrar's website near course registration information. This could be accomplished by linking from the Registrar's website to the Illini Union Bookstore page with course material information.

6. **Book Order Forms.** The sooner that faculty are identified for their teaching assignments, know the materials they will adopt, and communicate that information to the bookstore, the greater the likelihood that the Illini Union Bookstore can find less expensive options in the marketplace to meet faculty and student needs. This also allows time for accessible alternatives to be created so all students can have access to their course material at the start of the semester. More used materials are available in April than August. Delays represent a real cost to the consumer, and any artificial bureaucratic

delays should be eliminated. The Illini Union Bookstore should prepare simple illustrations about how textbook costs rise significantly the later the form is submitted.

7. **Illini Union Bookstore Services.** We must raise faculty awareness of bookstore services like online ordering with free pickup, customized course pack assistance, Amazon partnership and immediate access email-delivered digital codes. The bookstore needs direct access to faculty, as currently they work with book coordinators from each department and not all services are communicated clearly. Options include, but are not limited to, departmental meetings, coordinated faculty webinars, and direct email to all faculty.

INFORMATION ABOUT SUPPORTING MATERIALS:

The Appendices attached to this document include:

> Appendix A—The Illinois Student Government Resolution requiring textbook and course material costs to be listed on the Registrar's website near course registration information;
>
> Appendix B—Data collected regarding course material cost surveys and efforts at our sister University of Illinois campuses; and
>
> Appendix C—E-mail message from U.S. PIRG of student survey conducted at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the fall of 2019. The release of the full report has been delayed and the task force did not wish to further delay the release of our report.

A box folder with additional information related to this report is available with the following additional information: (1) OpenStax Data Analysis from University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (includes the raw data from OpenStax on textbook adoption by institution covering yearly students, savings, and the year of adoption); (3) University of Illinois, Chicago, Student Opinion Survey on Textbook Affordability; (4) Student Watch Data from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign in fall 2017; (5) Fixing the Broken Textbook Market from PIRG; and (6) University of Illinois UC Textbook Survey Data (university specific data as a subset of the report referenced in (5) above). The folder is available at https://uofi.app.box.com/folder/114741699768

APPENDIX A:
Illinois Student Government Resolution

The Illinois Student Government voted 36-0-0 on the resolution below from its own Committee on Academic Affairs.

1 **RES.03.76**   **SENATE OF THE ILLINOIS STUDENT GOVERNMENT**
2 **March 1st, 2020**   3RD ASSEMBLY
3
4   **Course Registration Transparency**
5
6 Passed out of the Committee on Academic Affairs with a recommendation to pass 7-0-1.
7
8 **AUTHOR(S):** Committee on Academic Affairs, Senator Sihah Reza, Dave Stevens
9 **SPONSOR(S):** Senator Sihah Reza, Senator Alexis Perezchica, Senator Alec Navickis, Senator Chris
10   Ackerman, Senator Nikhil Arun, Senator James Kosmopoulos, Senator Sudarshana Rao,
11   Senator Jessica Nicholson, Senator Arnoldo Ayala, Senator Casey Griffin, Senator Cody
12   Bainbridge
13 **ENDORSEMENT(S):**
14
15 **WHEREAS,** University of Illinois students must individually enroll in courses each semester; and
16
17 **WHEREAS,** students primarily must use the Banner Registration system to register for courses; and
18
19 **WHEREAS,** accurate and current sources of information about the content and availability of courses
20 are not consistently available from other sources; and
21
22 **WHEREAS,** students are each responsible for ensuring that they take the appropriate courses in order
23 to meet academic requirements and pursue their individual goals; and
24
25 **WHEREAS,** many courses in the Banner Registration System lack clear and thorough descriptions,
26 making it difficult for students to make informed decisions as to which courses are best
27 for them; and
28
29 **WHEREAS**, many courses at the University of Illinois require students to make significant out-of

30 pocket expenditures in excess of published tuition and fees for materials, subscriptions,
31 and other items; and
32
33 **WHEREAS,** materials, subscriptions, and other items required for a course are usually selected by the
34 professor who teaches it and/or the course director; and
35
36 **WHEREAS,** the approximate, if not exact, cost of such materials, subscriptions, and other items
37 required for each course at the University of Illinois is generally known in advance by the
38 professor who teaches it or by other faculty members and/or administrators in the same
39 school or department; and
40
41 **WHEREAS,** information as to such costs is not generally made available to students at the time of
42 course registration, and is only communicated to them once the semester has begun,
43 preventing students from anticipating and effectively budgeting in advance for such costs;
44 and
45
46 **WHEREAS,** despite the university's ten-day drop period, in many cases the beginning of a semester
47 may be too late for students to select alternative courses (due, for example, to courses
48 being full, or to scheduling issues which are too complicated to deconflict once classes
49 have begun); and
50
51 **WHEREAS,** many materials, subscriptions, and other items that are described in course syllabi or by
52 professors as 'required' are not actually essential for successful fulfillment of course
53 requirements; and
54
55 **WHEREAS,** it is not evident that the content, descriptions, requirements, materials, and other aspects
56 of the vast majority of courses at the University of Illinois are ordinarily altered
57 significantly from one semester to the next; and
58
59 **WHEREAS,** students changing courses once the semester has already begun is inefficient and
60 presents difficulties not only for them, but also for faculty and administrators and
61 potentially for other students in the dropped and added courses; and
62
63 **WHEREAS,** information sufficient to significantly mitigate, if not entirely rectify, the above-stated
64 difficulties (including but not limited to course content and descriptions, required
65 materials and their cost, and the distinctions between similar courses) is known to
66 University staff, administrators, advisors, and faculty members collectively; and

67
68 **WHEREAS,** students at the University of Illinois each pay tens of thousands of dollars to attend, often
69 incurring significant personal debt, and invest years of their lives at the University and in
70 the University Community; and
71
72 **WHEREAS,** students often experience significant difficulty, uncertainty, disadvantage, and potential
73 loss of opportunity and benefit due to the above-stated difficulties and lack of timely and
74 consistent access to information; and
75
76 **WHEREAS,** the University expends significant amounts of money and person-hours each semester in
77 order to facilitate the process of students dropping courses and selecting different ones;
78
79 **LET IT BE RESOLVED,** that the University of Illinois should act to ensure that each course entry in the
80 Banner Registration System is complete and in particular that each entry features
81 a description of the course and its content that is informative, correct,
82 distinguishes the course from other courses, and enables students to make
83 informed choices; and
84
85 **LET IT BE RESOLVED,** that the University of Illinois should act to formally define the term 'required',
86 with regard to course materials, as indicating that the exact item being so
87 described is unequivocally and absolutely essential to successful course
88 completion; and not merely useful or recommended; and
89
90 LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the University of Illinois should act to ensure that materials, subscriptions,
91 and other items to be used during courses are not described as 'required' if they
92 do not meet the above definition; and
93
94 **LET IT BE RESOLVED,** that any materials, subscriptions, or other items which are not required are
95 accurately described (for example as 'recommended', 'strongly recommended',
96 'optional', 'needed for extra credit', etc.) and that it be clearly stated whether
97 similar items, used copies, older editions, or alternate formats, et cetera are
98 acceptable; and
99 **LET IT BE RESOLVED,** that the University of Illinois should ensure that each course entry in the Banner
100 Registration System includes the best available information as to the cost of
101 materials, subscriptions, or other items and that this information be categorized
102 (i.e. 'cost of required materials', 'cost of recommended materials', etc.); and

103
104 **LET IT BE RESOLVED,** that the University of Illinois should establish a university-wide policy that all
105 students have a right to be reimbursed by the university for the entire cost of any
106 material, subscription, or other item purchased for a course which is inaccurately
107 described as being required; and
108
109 **LET IT BE RESOLVED,** that the University of Illinois should require that information as to changes in
110 course content and/or to materials, subscriptions, and other items required for
111 courses and as to the cost of the same be furnished by faculty or other responsible
112 personnel sufficiently in advance that students have access to this information
113 when registering for courses; and
114
115 **LET IT BE RESOLVED,** that the University of Illinois should establish a university-wide policy that all
116 students have a right not to be penalized academically in any way (including but
117 not limited to loss of points or course credit) for not obtaining required materials,
118 subscriptions, or other items for a course which were not disclosed as being
119 required for the course at the time of registration, or which cost $50 or more and
120 for which no cost information or significantly inaccurate cost information was
121 provided at the time of registration; and
122
123 **LET IT BE RESOLVED,** that the University of Illinois should establish a university-wide policy that
124 students who would be unable to complete a course or who would be
125 disadvantaged in a course due to not obtaining required materials, subscriptions,
126 or other items which were not disclosed as being required or which cost
127 significantly more than was disclosed at the time of registration shall have the
128 right to purchase such items using their student account and to be afforded a
129 minimum of one full semester per $300 to pay for them and not to have
130 graduation, diplomas, transcripts, or other documentation or benefits withheld
131 as a result of such debt; and
132
133 **LET IT BE RESOLVED,** that it is the judgment of both the Committee on Academic Affairs and the Senate
134 that for an internationally-renowned Tier-One research university which is the
135 flagship institution of higher learning in the State of Illinois, a top 60 school for
136 computer science, a top 10 school in computer engineering and which has a 2020
137 operating budget of over three billion dollars; to suggest that it is not feasible for
138 it to maintain complete, useful, and up-to-date course information on its
139 registration website ought not to be regarded as remotely acceptable; and
140

141 **LET IT BE RESOLVED,** That the Senate requests the President direct the Executive to take any action

142 necessary and proper to carry out the provisions of this resolution including

143 putting it on the floor of the UC Senate.

1https://www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/search?country=united-states&subject=computer-science&page=2

2 https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/university-of-illinois-urbanachampaign-1775/overall-rankings

3 https://www.obfs.uillinois.edu/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=1293594 - Pages 2 & 13

APPENDIX B:
University of Illinois Sister Universities

University of Illinois Chicago

1. Survey Data

At the University of Illinois at Chicago, student spending is even higher than at the Urbana campus, with 58% of students spending over $300 on textbooks according to a student opinion survey on textbook affordability. The most expensive courses cited by students were the Natural Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics) at 42%, followed by the Social Sciences (Economics, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology) at 18%.[12] Data from the 2019 Faculty Watch survey at the University of Illinois at Chicago indicates that the majority of the time, the required materials for courses are in fact necessary to pass the class and complete the homework, beginning the first week of class.[13] While the burden for textbook costs on students remains high, OER awareness and adoption at the Chicago campus is considerably lower. OpenStax data from 2017 indicates an adoption of only two e-textbooks, Conceptual Biology and Biology, for a total savings of $28,000 per year to students who would otherwise have purchased a traditional textbook. Data from the 2019 Faculty Watch survey indicates a slightly higher adoption of materials from PubMed and other sources, however there does not appear to be widespread adoption of OER.[14] This is partly explained by a general lack of awareness indicated in the Faculty Watch survey. With a 118 response rate, 35% of faculty said they were not aware of OER with another 25% stating that while they were aware, they did not know much about it.[15] When asked why they were not currently using OER, 41% of faculty responded that it was because they "did not know enough about OERs."[16]

Overwhelmingly, faculty indicated a need for more instruction on finding and using OER including finding content they want, need, and can trust; understanding rules and laws; and personalizing content for their own needs. Though majority of faculty placed priority on textbook affordability, many did not know where to start or what to do (37%) or thought their efforts might not make a difference (9%). More support for OER could play a significant role in reducing financial barriers to receiving an education at the Chicago campus.

2. Open Educational Resources Initiative

In response to survey findings, the Chicago Provost began funding the review, adoption and creation of OER in 2018 at an amount of $20,000 per year through the University Library. The "Faculty OER Incentive Program" funds reviews of OER textbooks in the Open Textbook Library (at $200 per review); faculty adoption of OER textbooks (at $500 per faculty member or multi-course teams at $1,000); and faculty modification/creation of OER textbooks at $2,000 per

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[12] Ryan Chiu and Sun Choi, Student Opinion Survey: Textbook Affordability, Student Survey conducted at University of Illinois at Chicago in 2016. Box Folder Document (2).

[13] 2019 Faculty Watch Survey University of Illinois at Chicago. Box Folder Document (3)..

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid. In response to Q32, "How familiar are you with open educational resources (OER)?

[16] Ibid.

course. The information relating to the Chicago Campus OER program is available at
https://researchguides.uic.edu/opentextbooks/incentiveprogram.

University of Illinois Springfield

In the spring of 2018, the Springfield campus began an OER Fellows program for faculty. The initiative seeks to reduce or eliminate textbooks costs by increasing adoption and use of OERs. This one-year program supported faculty in evaluating OER materials, receiving training in OER creation tools, mentoring support and assistance for presentation and publication, travel support to discuss their OER adoption, and a $2,500 stipend after the OER materials have been adopted in their two designated courses. Eight faculty members have been awarded the fellowship to date, adopting OER for classes in Business, Accounting, Biology, and more.[17]

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[17] "Open Educational Resources (OER) Fellows Program," University of Illinois Springfield, Accessed 9 December 2019, https://www.uis.edu/colrs/teaching/colrs-open-educational-resources-oer-fellows-program-for-individual-faculty/.

From: **Cailyn Nagle** <cnagle@pirg.org>
Date: Tue, Oct 15, 2019 at 6:44 PM
Subject: Survey Progress Report
To: ISG President <ISG-President@illinois.edu>

Total So far: 224

Year:

Freshman 34%

Sohpmore 26%

Junior 18%

Senior 19%

Major:

STEM: 103

Humanities/Social Science: 64

Pre Professional: 27

Other:26

Interesting finding so far: Over 30% of students spent over $300 this semester on textbooks alone, with 14 students spending over $500. 80% of students report skipping buying either a book or an access code.

Some short answer responses:

-"Access Codes have become ridiculously expensive to the point of being unnecessary especially when a student is forced to pay for access to their homework. Also, most of the time, we pay for textbooks that are almost never used in class or out of class for that matter."

-"Although I haven't spent much on textbooks, it is because I have been able to get PDFs from friends. I really hate doing this, as it is against my moral code. The people who worked hard to create the textbook should gain credit. However, this was the only way I could get the material without having to compromise my budget significantly. The cost of textbooks force me to go against my morals. Although I know I can borrow the textbooks I need from Grainger, they only allow rentals of two hours and I am not always able to go when I want to study. Not having a physical copy of the book with me has definitely hurt my potential to do as well as I can in my classes."

-"I'm a military veteran and for various reasons don't have a lot of savings and I've had to pull money out of savings making my account balance negative due to textbook costs associated with online access codes."

-"Why do we need so many different things from so many different publishers. I have subscriptions to a bunch of them. It's hella expensive"

Notes:

Y'all really killed it! We have everything we need for the survey!

When we release the report I'll be able to send you the raw numbers from your school so you can do your own numbers crunch and compare how y'all fair in comparison to schools of a similar size nationally.

Some things I noticed off the bat- more students form U of Illinois are openly talking about pirating books which I think is interesting. This may be because of the number of STEM students means maybe they're more tech literate and comfortable with navigating that "marketplace."

It also seems like access codes in particular are on a lot of students concerns.

Follow up:

I'd love to find some time to talk about what your next steps are to bring down textbook and course materials costs. I have time Tuesday-Thursday next week. Let me know if there's a time in there that work for y'all.

Best,

Cailyn Nagle

U.S. PIRG

Affordable Textbooks Campaign Director

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