Reducing the Cost of Textbooks

New Policies & Future Strategies
The rising cost of textbooks affects tens of thousands of Mississippians each year. Concern over the increased costs is shared by students, parents, faculty, university leaders, state policymakers, and the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL).

Reducing the cost of textbooks is one of twelve Efficiency Strategies initiated by the Board of Trustees in 2009. The work of this efficiency was conducted by a system-wide task force (Task Force) consisting of representatives from each institution of higher learning.

By investigating ways to cut textbook costs, the Board hopes to provide some financial relief to students without affecting the quality of the texts used in the classroom.

At the same time, the Task Force hopes to further investigate the impact of changes in the way course materials are being made available.

Two themes emerged from this work: First, course materials are evolving. The Task Force found the trend of course material is digital – both in format and delivery, but most publishers will continue to include printed material. The digital trend will have consequences affecting the role of the university-affiliated bookstore, the campus IT backbone, the adoption of new technology such as e-readers, and pricing.

Printed course materials are also evolving from the traditional published-and-bound textbook to new formats, such as open source textbooks and eBook textbooks with a “print on demand” feature. These changes will also include the continued development of new printed delivery methods, such as textbooks using customized content.

The second theme is that policy measures are needed to reduce the cost of textbooks by encouraging students to become savvy consumers as well as immediately strengthening the used textbook market. Such policies reduce the overall cost of textbooks to students and create the opportunity to implement successful textbook rental programs. These policy goals can be accomplished by putting information about assigned textbooks (e.g. International Standard Book Numbers and early textbook adoption deadlines) directly in the hands of students and parents, as well as establishing minimum adoption standards to strengthen the used textbook market and enable the development of textbook rental programs.

INTRODUCTION

The Task Force organized its work into three phases:

1. Recommend a textbook policy to the Board of Trustees;
2. Evaluate the current bookstore business model and emerging trends in the development of course materials; and
3. Submit final recommendations.

The first phase included the recommendation that has led to the approval of Board of Trustees Policy 617, which brought the IHL System into compliance with the textbook provisions of the Higher Education Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-315) (HEOA). The Task Force next investigated two topics: The impact on the existing business model of the university-affiliated bookstore and the trend toward digital media and emerging trends in course materials. The Task Force established subcommittees to focus on each topic, and their findings and recommendations are included in this report.

The second phase of the work of the Task Force included compiling and submitting key findings and recommendations resulting from this work.

The Task Force would like to thank Trustee Christy Pickering, who spearheaded this effort for the Board.
of Trustees as the Chair of the Board’s Student Affairs Committee, as well as Blake Jeter, Student Association President at Mississippi State University, and the members of the 2009-10 Student Body President’s Council for their untiring support and commitment to this effort.

The Task Force would like to acknowledge the contribution of those who served on the IHL System Textbook Task Force in 2007. The work of the 2007 Task Force provided a sound foundation for these final recommendations and was invaluable to our efforts.

REPORT:
Business Case Evaluation Subcommittee

Reducing the cost of textbooks to students could mean reducing the total sales of the university-affiliated bookstores.

Of the eight universities within the IHL system, only one bookstore (Mississippi Valley State University) is operated by the university. The other seven university-affiliated bookstores are outsourced to either Follett or Barnes & Noble. These seven contracts generally result in commissions paid to each university based on the total sales generated by each university-affiliated bookstore. Any losses in total sales at the university-affiliated bookstore will reduce the potential commissions received by each university.

The strategies for reducing the cost of textbooks to students are based on several premises. The first is to adopt a policy establishing a firm deadline for selecting textbooks each semester. Knowing which textbooks will be utilized the following semester allows the university-affiliated bookstores to potentially buy more textbooks back from students at favorable prices, which in turn lowers the net cost to students for textbooks and also provides more used textbooks for sale the succeeding semester.

Another key component of the strategy to strengthen the used textbook market is to set a minimum adoption period for textbooks. This aids in meeting the adoption deadline, and it also reduces textbook “churn” when new editions become available. The adoption deadline and minimum adoption period are both designed to increase the amount of used textbooks available to students, which provides an immediate savings of 25 percent compared to the cost of new textbooks. The implementation of the minimum adoption period for textbooks will also create the opportunity for successful textbook rental programs.

Another strategy employed is the dissemination of textbook information to students and parents in order to give them the most information possible to aid in the acquisition of textbooks. Information such as the ISBN of adopted textbooks, the availability of alternative formats (ex. e-books), price-matching policies, and results of surveys of student satisfaction with the adopted textbooks should aid students in searching for the best values. All of these strategies will put significant pressure on the university-affiliated bookstores to maintain their current share of the text market. Our subcommittee reviewed the financial effects of these strategies to determine how they may affect each university’s business model.

BOARD POLICY 617

In March 2010, the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning adopted a new policy aimed at increasing the used book market.

The key provisions include:

* Provide textbook information, including ISBN and pricing, to students at the time of registration;
* Adopt institutional policies that establish firm textbook adoption deadlines and indicate if a textbook is required or recommended;
* Clearly identify the responsibilities of the faculty, department heads, deans, and the institution’s textbook coordinator;
* Establish guidelines for minimum adoption periods for textbooks with a minimum three-year adoption period for lower division courses, while encouraging a minimum textbook adoption period of at least two years for upper division courses;
* Provide information to faculty on best practices in textbook adoption;
* Provide advice to students on ways to save money on textbook purchases;
* Implement an assessment plan that includes questions on student surveys (e. g. course evaluations) about the value of the assigned textbooks, reports that document compliance with adoption deadlines, costs of textbooks for the 20 highest enrollment courses, the volume of buy-back purchases at the affiliated bookstores, the number of electronic textbooks being used; and
* Submit the prescribed annual assessment report to the Commissioner of Higher Education and make it available on the institution’s website.

Each institution’s assessment report will be made available on the IHL system website.

For more information or to view the full policy visit www.mississippi.edu/board/downloads/policiesandbylaws.pdf.
The University of Mississippi began publishing ISBNs on their campus website beginning in January 2007. UM’s sales experience since that time has reflected a $1 million decrease in net sales.

The first year after publishing ISBNs, total textbook sales declined 7.95 percent. The University of Mississippi experience was used to estimate the potential impact on sales (and resulting commissions) at the other seven universities. It should be noted that other factors could have impacted this reduction in sales, such as the amount of textbook adoptions available in a timely manner or the potential for The University of Mississippi website having different text adoption information than the Barnes & Noble website.

The subcommittee was unable to evaluate the impact of these other factors, but the reality is that gross sales dropped 7.95 percent. Decline in actual sales was used to estimate potential commission reductions at each school as shown on the chart (Appendix). The reduction in commissions is substantial for all universities.

Adopting a deadline on textbook adoptions and mandating that textbooks be used for a minimum period before a new text can be adopted are both designed to increase the used textbook availability for students.

The state of Arkansas recently enacted legislation mandating these same adoption guidelines. In an effort to determine what impact these adoption guidelines might have on Mississippi universities, the committee looked at the University of Arkansas’ experience a year after they implemented the guidelines.

The University of Arkansas saw its sales ratio of new textbooks to old textbooks decrease to 64 percent new and 36 percent used. This is consistent with data from the National Association of College Stores for schools with similar adoption policies. This sales ratio was applied to the textbook volume sales reported by each of the IHL universities for fiscal year 2009. The change in total sales volume was then multiplied by the applicable commission percentage for each school to determine the potential effect on commissions received.

The subcommittee found that commissions would be modestly affected at all schools except The University of Mississippi, The University of Southern Mississippi, and Mississippi State University.

All three of these universities could expect large reductions in commissions received per the attached chart. It should be noted that since Mississippi Valley State University’s bookstore is self-operated, their total sales volume potentially will decline. However, their net profit margin has the potential to increase because used textbooks have a higher profit margin to the university-affiliated bookstore than new textbooks.

As stated earlier, success in reducing the cost of textbooks to students inherently can lead to reduced sales and reduced commissions at the university-affiliated bookstores.

As described above, each school whose bookstore is outsourced is at risk for reduced commissions. The key to minimizing this potential risk is to maintain or increase market share. The university-affiliated bookstores must mitigate the potential for students to buy textbooks elsewhere in the market.

University-affiliated bookstores must aggressively market their services to students, emphasizing the advantages of buying textbooks at the university-affiliated bookstore. Price-matching guarantees, the guaranteed availability of adopted textbooks, the ability to return books, and other benefits of the university-affiliated bookstores must be continually communicated to students, parents, and faculty.

On some campuses, the potential loss of commission revenue may be offset by the timing of financial aid disbursements.

Campuses that release award disbursements on the first day of class do not provide for bookstore charges based on textbook vouchers or textbook credits. Those disbursements to students will allow students to buy from whatever source has the best prices.

Campuses that delay disbursement for two or more weeks to allow for attendance verification usually allow students to obtain a textbook voucher or credit upon registering in order to allow them the opportunity to purchase textbooks before the disbursement date and not fall behind in their homework. Such policies provide some protection, although unintended, to the university-affiliated bookstore since the voucher or credit is only good at the university-affiliated bookstore.

Textbook vouchers or textbook credits in some form are provided to students at all IHL campuses except The University of Mississippi, Delta State University, and Mississippi State University.

Typically, textbook vouchers are issued by the business office if students are scheduled to receive aid funds that exceed their direct institutional costs. Coordination with the university-affiliated bookstore is essential and textbook charges must be posted to the student’s account before disbursement is authorized. When disbursements are made, all institutional charges, including textbook charges, are paid and excess funds are released to the student.

“"The key to minimizing (loss of commission) is to maintain or increase market share."”

**Business Case Evaluation Subcommittee**

TEXTBOOKS TASK FORCE REPORT

[3]
ANALYSIS: Future Impact to Business Model

The emerging technologies and delivery methods for college textbooks will have a tremendous impact on where and how students acquire textbooks. The subcommittee report on the emerging types of course materials used at the university level describes e-readers (ex. Kindle and Nook), e-Textbooks, and open source textbooks in great detail. Since the subcommittee report was published, Apple Computer has introduced its iPad which brings even more capabilities. The key point is that technology is emerging so rapidly that its impact on the current bookstore business model cannot be predicted.

The other predominant future option for students to acquire textbooks is textbook rental programs. Again, as described in the subcommittee report, both Follett and Barnes & Noble are now offering textbook rental programs at a number of their university-affiliated bookstores.

Barnes & Noble has extended the textbook rental program to its university-affiliated bookstores at Mississippi State University, The University of Mississippi, and The University of Southern Mississippi.

The impact on the university-affiliated bookstore business model is affected by both the target volume of textbook rentals anticipated and the actual rental income realized.

Of the strategies evaluated in this report, the availability of a textbook rental program at the university-affiliated bookstore has both the largest potential for immediate savings to students and for reductions in the commissions paid to the host university.

Since these textbook rental programs are so new, and in so few bookstores currently, their total impact on the bookstore business model cannot be presently predicted.

REPORT: Emerging & Digital Course Materials Subcommittee

The means by which instructional materials can be accessed by students is in a rapid state of flux. The traditional modality is the printed textbook, published by a publishing company, selected by instructors, and distributed by the university-affiliated bookstores. This standard model is rapidly expanding to include technology-based models in addition to online purchasing of textbooks by students.

This subcommittee report summarizes some emerging types of course materials that are being used in higher education. The purpose of this report is to provide guidance to institutions regarding these options.

Different types of course materials will probably work best for different disciplines, and the subcommittee envisions that in the near future there will be a variety of course materials and methods of access used at a given institution. Hopefully, these developments will lead to enhanced teaching and learning while also being more economical for the student consumer.

This report will focus primarily on two technology-based types of course materials: e-readers/e-textbooks and open source textbooks. In addition, other related topics will be briefly highlighted.

E-READERS

E-readers are a handheld device for viewing the e-textbooks described below. The technology for e-readers and related devices is rapidly evolving. The major players in 2009/2010 are Amazon’s Kindle (Kindle 2 and Kindle DX), Barnes & Noble’s Nook, and the Sony PRS-700.

The competition for features and market share is very aggressive.

Technology experts are mixed in their assessment of the future of e-readers as stand-alone reading devices. Most e-textbooks can also be read on notebook computers and netbooks, and, with certain applications, some smartphones can also serve as e-book viewing devices. Apple has recently launched the iPad, which serves as an e-reader and has various other features.

An e-reader/e-textbook initiative at Northwest Missouri State University (ex. Kindle and Nook), e-Textbooks, and open source textbooks. In addition, other related companies) that specialize in providing electronic version of textbook material was not interactive. The study also showed that students found e-readers lacking with regard to word searching and taking notes.

E-TEXTBOOKS

The availability of college level textbooks in an e-textbook format is continually growing and will soon no longer be a limiting factor in the adoption of such textbooks. In addition to major bookstores, such as Barnes & Noble, and online providers, such as Amazon.com, there are online services (or branches of publishing companies) that specialize in providing electronic version of textbooks. Among these are Pearson’s CourseSmart.com, CengageBrain.com, and TextbookRevolution.org.

COMPARISON Information

For technical comparisons of leading e-readers, visit:
- ebook-reader-review.toptenreviews.com/
- ebookreadermatrix.com/

E-readers are a handheld device for viewing the e-textbooks described below. The technology for e-readers and related devices is rapidly evolving. The major players in 2009/2010 are Amazon’s Kindle (Kindle 2 and Kindle DX), Barnes & Noble’s Nook, and the Sony PRS-700.

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An e-reader/e-textbook initiative at Northwest Missouri State University () showed that students quickly lost interest in the e-reader (to view textbooks) if the textbook material was not interactive. The study also showed that students found e-readers lacking with regard to word searching and taking notes.

STUDIES & ARTICLES

Websites

To view the Northwest Missouri State University study visit admin.na3.acrobat.com/_a729300474/p62534536/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal.

To view the article on experts’ predictions on the future e-reader field visit moconews.net/article/419-tenpredictions-for-the-e-book-market-in-2010/.
In general, the cost of e-textbooks is about half the value of the printed textbook. However, e-textbooks transactions are often set up as a digital rental for a set period of time (e.g., 180 days) and the e-textbooks cannot be resold.

For academics, an important question is whether there are any advantages or disadvantages to the use of e-textbooks in instruction. The e-reader/e-textbook initiative at Northwest Missouri State University provided useful insights. The ability to do word searches and to annotate the text was found to be an important feature for instruction.

Simple PDF-formatted textbooks were found not to be very useful, with students and teachers expecting to have interactive online content. Such advanced features, along with supplemental electronic materials, appear to be the current and future features of modern e-textbooks.

OPEN SOURCE

An emerging approach to fighting the costs of textbooks is the availability of free (or modestly priced) course materials provided in the realm of open source textbooks.

“An emerging approach... is the availability of free... course materials.”

Digital Course Materials Subcommittee
TEXTBOOKS TASK FORCE REPORT

Often the only charge is for printing of page in the case where a student wishes to obtain a bound version. The learning content is often made available as open source (like Wikipedia) for other faculty to modify.

OTHERS:
University-Affiliated Bookstore & Online Rental

Another practice designed to minimize costs to students is a textbook rental program. Among the strategies are for a university or university-affiliated bookstore to manage a rental program or for some other entity, including online services, to provide textbook rental services.

Both Barnes & Noble and Follett have announced pilot textbook rental programs. Online textbook rental services include the following:

- CengageBrain.com
- CourseSmart.com
- Chegg.com
- BookRenter.com
- CampusBookRentals.com

In addition, online textbook swapping services exist. For example, www.campusbookswap.org is a non-profit, bulletin board-style posting site for used textbooks.

OPEN SOURCE TEXTBOOK

Information

Open source textbooks including the following initiatives:

- Connexions, cnx.org, is a non-profit company launched at Rice University which is used to download modules of learning materials (equivalent to a textbook for a course) is free. The cost of the effort is support by foundations and other donors.

- Flat World Knowledge, www.flatworldknowledge.com, a for-profit company that provides free access to open source textbooks online in a variety of formats.

- California Open Source Textbook Project, www.opensourcetext.org, a collaborative public/private undertaking that primarily addresses K-12 texts.

- MIT Open Courseware, ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/web/home/home/index.htm, which provides free access to course content at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

- The Orange Grove Open Textbooks, www.theorangegrove.org/open_textbooks.asp, which is a partnership between universities in Florida to provide open source textbooks.

- The Student PIRGS, www.studentpirgs.org/open-textbooks/catalog, which primarily relates to materials in accounting, economics, business, marketing, mathematics, physics and computer science.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force recommends authorizing a Phase Two effort, coordinated at the system-level but implemented at the institution level, to appropriately involve students, faculty, and administrators to further understand and make specific recommendations regarding:

#1 Evolution of Digital Course Materials

- Evaluate the appropriate use of digital course materials (e-books, podcasts, and video), identify best and promising practices emerging around the country, and frame recommendations to encourage wider adoption of digital course materials;
- Evaluate the impact of the digital trend on campus IT infrastructure, including hardware, software, networks, and end user devices;
- Evaluate the lessons learned from those early adopters of digital readers, such as the Kindle, Nook, Sony PRS 700, iPad, netbooks, and portable computers (including appropriate use, cost, and accessibility of these tools);
- Identify faculty advocates currently using these materials;
- Evaluate the availability of high quality, low-cost course materials such as open source and custom textbooks and determine their current adoption rate; and
- Prepare recommendations, as well as best and promising practices to encourage the appropriate use and the adoption of open source and custom textbooks.

#2 Future of the University-Affiliated Bookstore

- Consider the university-affiliated bookstore’s changing role as digital, open source, and custom content becomes more common, and its impact on outsourcing decisions and contracts;
- Evaluate emerging pricing models for course materials, such as end user licenses and university-wide site licenses (including the best means to recover these costs);
- Evaluate this as an opportunity to harness the system’s combined purchasing power to bundle student (end user) licenses and/or university site licenses;
- Systematically evaluate existing outsourcing contracts and determine the need to modify to further strengthen price-matching policies; authorize textbook rental programs; broaden the used textbook market; improve the ability of students to be savvy consumers; increase their involvement in data collection and analysis and alternate format course materials; and
- Engage students, faculty and administrators to develop a training module that can be used for faculty and staff development, as well as by students, to understand the changes taking place in course materials.

This report was prepared in June 2010 by the Textbooks Task Force authorized by the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning.

For more information visit www.mississippi.edu/ihl.
### Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning

#### Textbook Task Force

**Potential Effect on Commissions from Publishing ISBN**

**January, 2010**

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#### Potential Effect on Commissions from Adopting Hard Deadline on Adoptions and Minimum Adoption Periods

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#### University-operated bookstore

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* University of Arkansas mix is 64% new to 36% used