Academic Senate Task Force on Textbook Pricing
Final Report

Submitted on February 26, 2007
by
Frank Vuotto, Task Force Chair and Academic Senate Vice Chair

This report was reviewed by all task force members before being submitted to the Academic Senate as an official document.
Introduction and Background Information
On January 31, 2006, the Academic Senate Faculty Affairs Committee proposed a resolution on textbook pricing. The original resolution was revised on February 28, 2006 and approved by the Academic Senate (AS-646-06) on May 16, 2006 (See Appendix A).

The resolution called for the creation of an Academic Senate Task Force on Textbook Pricing. The specific charge of the task force, as stated in the resolution, was to "look into the feasibility of developing a central publicly accessible website which will provide information about textbook requirements and alternative formats and pricing of textbooks for Cal Poly courses."

In addition, the resolution identifies Information Technology Services (ITS), Cal Poly Corporation, El Corral Bookstore, and Associated Students Inc. (ASI) as collaborative partners in the Task Force's official charge.

The Task Force members include:
Task force chair and Academic Senate representative: Frank Vuotto, Academic Senate Vice Chair; ITS representative: Tim Keams, CIO; Faculty Affairs Committee representative: Manzar Foroohar, faculty; Academic Affairs representative: Kimi Ikeda, Assistant Vice Provost; El Corral Bookstore representative: Frank Cawley, Director; Cal Poly Corporation representative: Frank Mumford, Executive Director; and ASI representative: Todd Maki, ASI President.

In addition, Cindy Giambalvo (El Corral) and Nicole Stromness (ASI) participated in the discussions.

Industry Overview
The soaring price of college textbooks has forced schools, publishers, and lawmakers to find ways to ease the financial burden on students and their parents.

According to the Association of American Publishers, a New York-based trade group, college textbooks are a huge industry with combined sales of new and used textbooks amounting to nearly $8 billion annually. A recent Government Accountability Report states that textbook prices have almost tripled between 1986 and the end of 2004 while tuition and fees increased by 240%.

One major driver of textbook prices is the current oligopoly in the market. Dave Rosenfeld, co-coordinator of the Student Public Interest Research Group's (PIRG) Campaign for Affordable Textbooks, claims that the lack of competition in the industry continues to drive—and directly impact—higher textbook prices.

Many states are now developing legislation regarding textbook costs. For example, a number of states have recently passed laws encouraging professors to be more "textbook cost conscious" and urging them to consider cutting back on big packages of materials that may not be used in class.
A recent report issued by the National Association of College Stores states that the legislatures in nearly 20 of the 50 states have passed—or are considering—bills designed to lower textbook prices. Bundled textbook packages were especially targeted and several state colleges are now required to create policies regarding bundled texts.

Additionally, student governments on more than 25 campuses have passed resolutions demanding a reduction in the cost of textbooks.

Here are some examples of recent state laws:

- A new Virginia law addresses the bundling of textbooks with other materials
- Washington State requires bookstores to inform faculty of the costs and frequency of revisions
- Illinois is reviewing the feasibility of textbook-rental programs
- In Connecticut, publishers must now make pricing information and new-edition schedules available for professors at state universities
- California has established advisory legislation that urges interested parties to work together (See Appendix B)

Congress is looking at the textbook issue as well. In March 2006, the House passed legislation that takes aim at bundled packages and calls on colleges and universities to develop book-renting, lending, and swap policies. Professors argue that their academic freedom could be jeopardized if they were compelled to choose books based partially on price. Anita Levy, a senior program officer at the American Association of University Professors in Washington, D.C., supports the idea that faculty should not be forced to negotiate with publishers to reduce the net price of textbooks.

Most experts agree, however, that there is little that can be done to compel publishers to lower their prices. The majority of recent bills and pending legislation is advisory and uses non-binding words and phrases such as encourage, urge, consider, and where possible.

**Situation Analysis and Key Issues**

The first meeting of the Academic Senate task force was held in December 2006. The general consensus was that developing a central publicly accessible website that provides information about textbook requirements and alternative formats and pricing of textbooks for Cal Poly courses is crucial and merits serious consideration. However, such a website already exists and is managed by El Corral Bookstore.

El Corral Bookstore maintains an informative website (http://www.elcorralbookstore.com/) that provides information on a variety of textbook options such as sell backs, VIP buyback, textbook orders, textbook reservation schedule, textbook buyback schedule, used books, textbook lookup, exchange programs, and other relevant information.

On January 17, 2007, the Chair of the Academic Senate task force requested a special closed fact-finding meeting that brought together representatives from ASI (Todd Maki
and Nicole Stomsness) and El Corral Bookstore (Frank Cawley and Cindy Giambalvo). The purpose of the meeting was to identify specific issues that impact textbook prices and to evaluate strategies that might be utilized to effectively distribute helpful and relevant information to the Cal Poly community.

The following issues were identified as having a direct impact on textbook pricing—and student frustration:

- Requisitions: Late requisitions\(^1\) by faculty have the greatest impact on pricing (e.g., the used-book market dries up, buybacks)
- Last minute changes: 15\% of instructors\(^2\) change their mind on textbook purchases (e.g., a new edition versus a different book)
- Timely data: The bookstore cannot post textbook information too early because the information might change and the posted data may become incorrect
- Teaching notification: Some lecturers receive limited notice that they will be teaching a course and therefore submit late requisitions
- Bundles and required readings: Many faculty post required course texts—many of which are bundled—and subsequently do not use the materials during the course

**Recommendations**

The Taskforce supports the following recommendations:

- Encourage faculty to submit requisitions on time
- Promote the UU Message Box that lists books for sale by students
- Promote El Corral Bookstore programs designed to help students secure textbooks such as VIP Buyback, Textbook Reservation, Textbook Shopping Calendar, Rental Programs, and other related services
- Update the bookstore website so that it includes user-friendly navigation that highlights key links (e.g., *Textbook Look-Up*)
- Add the *Textbook Look-Up* link on the official ASI website
- Include El Corral Bookstore in the CTL New Faculty Orientation during fall conference. New faculty need to understand the importance of timely requisitions

---

\(^1\) The data is available from El Corral Bookstore.

\(^2\) The data is available from El Corral Bookstore.
Conclusion
After an exhaustive literature review on this topic, the Chair believes that Cal Poly is doing everything possible to keep textbook prices as low as possible. In fact, Cal Poly currently offers many of the same options and programs being promoted on university campuses across the nation. These include:

- Book swaps
- Library reserves and electronic course packs
- Book rental programs
- Student websites that offer book exchange opportunities
- Resolutions (both state and campus based)
- Message boards to help students secure used books from other students
- Student groups that help facilitate sharing or trading books
- Cheaper e-materials and/or customized packages of texts

Finally, Frank Cawley, El Corral Bookstore Director, has indicated to the task force chair that he is open to suggestions and continuing dialog with key constituencies and will consider any relevant and plausible recommendations from faculty, staff, and students.

---

3 The literature review pulled information from a variety of resource types such as legal (Westlaw, Lexis-Nexis), government (Accountability Reports, Congressional Releases), education (Chronicle of Higher Education), mainstream (Factiva, Expanded Academic), and professional associations (National Association of College Bookstores, Association of American Publishers).
RESOLUTION ON TEXTBOOK PRICING

WHEREAS, The Associated Students, Inc of Cal Poly (ASI) has expressed its concern regarding the rapid rise in textbook pricing by recently approving a resolution addressing this matter; and

WHEREAS, The Academic Senate of Cal Poly has supported the principles set forth in the ASI resolution; and

WHEREAS, The complexity of textbook pricing necessitates a comprehensive study of the issues and a search for solutions; and

WHEREAS, The Academic Senate of Cal Poly recognizes that the high cost of certain textbooks and coursepacks can adversely affect the affordability of higher education for its students; and

WHEREAS, The Academic Senate of Cal Poly and the University must protect the academic freedom of faculty in assigning textbooks and other course materials while recognizing the negative impact high textbook prices has on its students; therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate of Cal Poly will establish a task force to work with Information Technology Services (ITS), Cal Poly Corporation and/or El Corral Bookstore, and Associated Students Inc. (ASI) to look into the feasibility of developing a central publicly accessible website which will provide information about textbook requirements and alternative formats and pricing of textbooks for Cal Poly courses.

Proposed by: Academic Senate Faculty Affairs Committee
Date: January 31, 2006
Revised: February 28, 2006
Revised: May 16, 2006
California Education Code

CALIFORNIA EDUCATION CODE
SECTION 66406
http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cillaw.html

66406. (a) The Legislature finds and declares that the production and pricing of college textbooks deserves a high level of attention from educators and lawmakers because they impact the quality and affordability of higher education.

(b) The State of California urges textbook publishers to do all of the following:

1. "Unbundle" the instructional materials to give students the option of buying textbooks, CD-ROMs, and workbooks "a la carte" or without additional materials.

2. Provide all of the following information to faculty and departments when they are considering what textbooks to order, and post both of the following types of information on publishers' Internet Web sites where it is easily accessible:
   A. A list of all of the different products they sell, including both bundled and unbundled options, and the net price of each product.
   B. An explanation of how the newest edition is different from previous editions.

3. Give preference to paper or online supplements to current editions rather than producing entirely new editions.

4. Disclose to faculty the length of time they intend to produce the current edition so that professors know how long they can use the same book.

5. Provide to faculty a free copy of each textbook selected by faculty for use in the classroom for placement on reserve in the campus library.

(c) The Trustees of the California State University and the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges shall, and the Regents of the University of California are requested to, accomplish all of the following:

1. Work with the academic senates of each respective segment to do all of the following:
   A. Encourage faculty to give consideration to the least costly practices in assigning textbooks, varying by discipline, such as adopting the least expensive edition when the educational content is equal, and using a selected textbook as long as it is educationally sound, as determined by the appropriate faculty.
   B. Encourage faculty to disclose both of the following to students:
      i. How new editions of textbooks are different from the previous editions.
      ii. The cost to students for textbooks selected for use in each course.
   C. Review procedures for faculty to inform college and university bookstores of textbook selections.
   D. Encourage faculty to work closely with publishers and college and university bookstores in creating bundles and packages if they
are economically sound and deliver cost savings to students, and if bundles and packages have been requested by faculty. Students should have the option of purchasing textbooks and other instructional materials that are "unbundled."

(2) Require college and university bookstores to work with the academic senates of each respective campus to do both of the following:
(A) Review issues relative to timelines and processes involved in ordering and stocking selected textbooks.
(B) Work closely with faculty or publishers, or both, to create bundles and packages that are economically sound and deliver cost savings to students.

(3) Encourage college and university bookstores to disclose retail textbook costs, on a per course basis, to faculty, and make this information otherwise publicly available.

(4) Encourage campuses to provide as many forums for students to have access to as many used books as possible, including, but not necessarily limited to, all of the following:
(A) Implementing campus-sponsored textbook rental programs.
(B) Encouraging students to consider on-campus and online book swaps so that students may buy and sell used books and set their own prices.
(C) Encouraging students to consider student book lending programs.
(D) Encouraging college and university bookstores that offer book buyback programs to actively promote and publicize these programs.
(E) Encouraging the establishment of textbook rental programs and any other appropriate approaches to providing high-quality materials that are affordable to students.

(d) It is the intent of the Legislature to encourage private colleges and universities to work with their respective academic senates and to encourage faculty to consider practices in selecting textbooks that will result in the lowest costs to students.
REFERENCES


