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Say YES to the Text: Exploring the Open Textbook Landscape

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Say YES to the Text: Exploring the Open Textbook Landscape

Presented by Krystie Wilfong and Laura Conforte, Ladd Library
Supported by the Center for Inclusive Teaching and Learning

March 6th, 2024





Today's Agenda

- College costs, textbook market trends, and their impact on our students
- Open Educational Resources
- Hands-on searching with a librarian

In today's session we will:

- Discuss the real cost for attending college, we'll look at textbook market trends and how these trends and textbook costs are impacting our students.
- Introduce one possible solution, Open Educational Resources or freely available textbooks.
- Break-out into a hands-on searching session with our subject librarians.

May 27, 1971

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MAY 27, 1971 Page 10

Dean Announces New Assistant

Coretta Scott King Among Notables To Be Honored

Cost of Books, Just or Unjust?

Cost of Books, Just or Unjust?

by Jonathan Smith

One student totals up his cash register receipts to find he has spent \$170 on required texts for two semesters. Another student moans as the books for one course total up to over forty dollars.

These scenes become more familiar with each passing semester. So the cry is heard, "Why must we pay list prices? The bookstore is supposed to be a non-profit operation!"

Unfortunately the answer is not simple or devoid of points of controversy.

The bookstore pays a net price for each book it orders from a publishing company which is usually twenty percent below the list price then charged to students. This twenty percent markup must pay for freight costs, personnel to count and mark prices in books, and costs in returns of books that aren't sold.

Publishing company policies make returns difficult. Some companies accept no returns whatsoever; others give credit for future purchases to their companies but no monetary refund. These policies mean the bookstore must absorb a loss if the books are not sold.

A year ending in profit for the

bookstore is rare. A deficit is common despite the fact that utilities and janitorial services are considered free in accounting the bookstore operation.

Several ideas have developed in trying to resolve the book costs upon students. One proposal is to have the twenty percent markup, borne by all students, placed in the form of another charge on the general bill so that book prices charged to students would be net prices. This action would have the effect of charging students for books even if they didn't buy any. The costs, however, have been in returns because all the students enrolled in a course do not buy the books.

Another suggestion concerns the assignment of books by professors. If more reading was optional or outside, then fewer books would have to be bought by students, lowering the cost.

Any answer to the book cost situation will involve changes in the present system that may cause apprehension on the part of faculty, administration, trustees, or students. But until an acceptable (if any) solution is found, the price of books will continue up and up.

To begin, textbook affordability isn't new to Bates. This article from the May 27th, 1971 issue of the Bates Student points out the high cost of textbooks impacting our students even then.

Bates College cost of attendance (2023-24)

Item	Cost
Tuition	\$63,478
Food and housing	\$17,904
Books and Supplies	\$900
Transportation	\$250-\$1,150
Personal expenses	\$1,000
Total	\$84,432

Bates Student Financial Services, ["Tuition, Fees and Other Costs"](#)

Fast forward to today... here is where we acknowledge how much it costs to be a student today at Bates College. In this chart which is provided freely on our website you can see the cost of attendance split out into direct and indirect costs (highlighted costs). Books and supplies are considered indirect costs and do not appear on the billing statement.

Students are going to approach these estimated costs in a variety of ways, and while they can't trim anything off tuition, they can try to reduce costs in other areas, including books.

Books and Supplies

- Students are told to budget \$450 a semester
- Students actually spend \$240 a semester (average reported spend)
- Students say \$200 is a reasonable amount to spend per semester in total (most common response)

So let's try this out...we now know that students are told to budget \$900 a year on textbooks making that \$450 a semester.

[click]

What do you think they should be spending a semester?

What do you think they actually spent?

[click]

In the Fall of 2022 we conducted a student textbook survey and found out that our students actually spend a mean of \$240 a semester.

We also asked our students to consider what they feel is reasonable to pay for all books and materials for a single class. Any guesses?

[click]

Our most common response was \$50 a class or \$200 a semester.

The data also found that a majority of students either pay with their own money or their parents/family pay for their textbooks. The student perception is that scholarships/loans are not a source of funding for textbooks. So when students see the price tag for the required textbooks in their courses, they are coming from this angle. And we know that, regardless of how much they are actually spending on course materials, these costs are impacting them. . . .

In your ENTIRE time at your current college, has the cost of required course books caused you to (check all that apply)

Student respondents who indicated that they had experienced this outcome:	
Not purchase the required books	40.1%
Struggle academically because I could not access the book(s)	19.0%
Drop a course before/at the beginning of the semester	9.7%
Not register for a specific course	8.1%
Withdraw from a course later in the semester	3.7%
Change Major	2.1%

Again, looking at data from our Fall 2022 survey the most common impact of the cost of books and materials is that students do not buy all the required books. The responses you see represented here were for a “check all that apply” question, so there were students that selected multiple personal impacts. Not purchasing all their required texts was also a common response when asked about measures taken to save money.

It is important to note that **19% of the students respondents reported struggling academically because they did not have the book for a class.** Nearly 10% reported having dropped a course because of the cost of the books and 8% reported choosing not to register for a specific course because of the cost of course materials.

Cost of required books caused you to... (First-gen status)			
	First-gen	NOT First-gen	Difference
Struggle academically because I could not access the book(s)	29.9%	15.6%	14.3
Drop a course before/at the beginning of the semester	20.1%	6.5%	13.6
Not purchase the required books	45.1%	39.1%	6.0

Cost of required books caused you to... (Pell status)			
	Pell	NOT Pell	Difference
Struggle academically because I could not access the book(s)	32.8%	14.6%	18.2
Drop a course before/at the beginning of the semester	18.2%	7.1%	11.1
Not purchase the required books	48.3%	38.3%	10.0

Digging deeper...there is some variation by first generation student status and Pell grant recipient status. In general, first generation and Pell grant students are much more likely to be affected by costs than students who are not. Struggling academically because student respondents could not access their book(s) had the biggest difference between student groups.

By the Book

Required book prices by division, 2013-2019

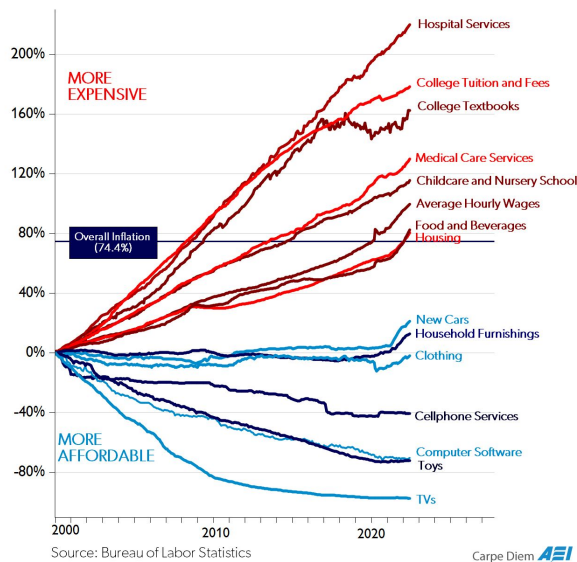
	Mean (Used)	Mean (New)	Highest	% Low Cost
Humanities	\$24.90	\$33.20	\$297.35	74.6%
Interdisciplinary Studies	\$25.15	\$33.15	\$249.00	77.7%
Natural Sciences	\$69.64	\$91.90	\$335.60	34.5%
Social Sciences	\$43.71	\$57.89	\$339.95	62.0%
Bates, All Divisions	\$29.05	\$38.51	\$339.95	71.9%

How are these decisions and impacts affected by choice of major? In 2019 we analysed College Store data to get a better understanding of how much a student could be paying as they go through their major here at Bates.

This slide illustrates the average costs PER BOOK in different disciplines, the highest cost books in these disciplines, and the percentage of books that would qualify as “low cost” by division, that is: under \$40.00 per book (we used the Affordable Learning Georgia metric at that time). Remembering here that these are figures per book and not per course, as any given course may have more than one required text. As you can see (and perhaps guessed), Natural Sciences has the lowest percentage of textbooks that would be considered “low cost textbooks.”

So we now know that students are spending less than we think on course materials. And we know that either not CHOOSING to acquire all required materials (or perhaps not being ABLE to do so) is having an impact on their academic experience. Now let’s look more broadly at the textbook market.

Price Changes: January 2000 to June 2022 Selected US Consumer Goods and Services, Wages



Perry, ["Chart of the Day . . . or Century?"](#)

I know, a very busy graph and perhaps your eyes have had a long day but these data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics on the changes in market prices indicate that the cost of textbooks has drastically increased in the past 22 years. The increasing cost of college textbooks have only been outpaced by hospital services and college tuition and fees. While the overall inflation rate has increased by 74.4%, college textbooks prices have increased by more than 160%.

On the bright side, you might have noticed that in more recent years textbook costs have started to decrease. This could partly be due to the pressures of the open education movement on commercial publishers or the fact that students will simply not buy books at a certain point due to cost.

Textbook Publisher Trends

Removing/undermining second hand market

- Activation codes, digital subscriptions (e-renting)
 - [Radical Transformation of the Textbook](#)
 - ["\\$300 Textbook is Dead"](#)
 - [Textbook Giant Pearson Makes Major Shift Away from Print to Digital](#)

Offering "inclusive-access"

- [Do 'Inclusive Access' Textbook Programs Save Students Money?](#)
- <https://www.inclusiveaccess.org/>
- [Biden Admin Clamps Down on Inclusive Access](#)

So, how did we get here? Commercial book publishers know that textbooks sell and have followed a number of trends over time that have contributed to high textbook costs. One such trend is the removing or undermining of the second hand market. Many students choose to purchase previously owned content but activation codes for ebooks can't be transferred to a new owner and digital subscriptions or e-renting are limited term with no buy back option. Recently Pearson announced that they will update all US titles in digital format only. From Pearson's perspective, this move will provide more current information to students at a lower price. From the perspective of professors and students, it means print editions are no longer available for most titles (despite print being a format of preference to our students, 68% of respondents from our survey). It's also important to recognize that textbooks that are only made available electronically cannot be sold and repurchased as used texts by other students, as digital materials cannot be resold in the US.

This also cuts out the library in many ways as well. It's not always possible for the library to acquire a multi-user copy of an electronic textbook for student use. Just this semester we had to opt to purchase a single print copy of a required textbook for our course reserves because the only electronic copy that was available for library purchase would have cost us \$1,115.00 and it would only be available to a limited number of users at a time.

Now book publishers have put forward "solutions" to the textbook cost issue, but they're not as helpful as they might seem.

One of these “solutions” is the “inclusive-access” model, more aptly called an automatic textbook billing program. In this program Required course materials are usually digital-only and are made available to all students on the first day of class. Students are billed for them without being given a chance to use cost-saving strategies to lower or eliminate their direct costs.

In late January 2024 the Biden administration actually started looking into these programs more closely and has proposed limiting colleges’ ability to tack on the cost of books and supplies to a student’s tuition bills.



As we consider affordability and accessibility, we'd like to introduce open textbooks as a way to address these issues. Before I go into open textbooks, what are they and how they are helpful, I want to be clear that open textbooks are just one of many solutions to the challenges we're discussing. We are not proposing open textbooks the singular solution, but rather another tool you can put in your resources box to address educational equity.

What are open textbooks, or "Open Educational Resources"?

“Open Education encompasses resources, tools and practices that are free of legal, financial and technical barriers and can be fully used, shared and adapted in the digital environment.

The foundation of Open Education is Open Educational Resources (OER), which are teaching, learning, and research resources that are free of cost and access barriers, and which also carry legal permission for open use.”

[-Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition](#)

Here is a definition of Open Education and Open Educational Resources that we find especially helpful. The one comes from SPARC (which is the: Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) of which Bates College is a member.

[READ] So, to be considered an OER, a resource must be freely available, and openly licensed in such a way that students and educators can use, adapt, and share the resource in whatever way best supports learning in their context. The only prerequisite is access to the internet.

Is there an academic impact?

A University of Georgia study found that courses that adopted OER saw student grades increase. Instances of grades of D or F, as well as course withdrawals, decreased.

	Δ Grade	Δ DFW
Non-Pell Eligible Students	+6.9%	-2.05%
Pell Eligible Students	+10.98%	-4.43%
All Students	+8.6%	-2.68%

Colvard N. et al. ["The Impact of Open Educational Resources on Various Student Success Metrics"](#)

Research shows that shifting from a commercial textbook to an OER can make a big difference. A 2018 University of Georgia large-scale study (21,822 students) showed that while all students benefit from courses shifting from commercial textbooks to OER (with better grades and lower rates of Ds, Fs, and withdrawals), Pell-eligible students benefit the most. Remember from our textbook survey that Pell grant recipients were more likely to struggle academically because of textbook costs over their non-Pell eligible peers.

Not having money to buy course materials makes a difference. Having immediate, free, and forever access to course materials makes a difference.



What makes all this sharing and adapting of course materials possible is open licensing. The one most commonly used licenses in Open Educational Resources are Creative Commons (or CC) licenses.

If you want to learn more about CC licensing please see our overview presentation, archived in SCARAB: https://scarab.bates.edu/ils_scholarship/13/ or visit <https://creativecommons.org/>

You can also come to me or to Krystie directly with any questions about CC licenses.

“The reason my textbook costs have been so low is because I have been lucky to have professors throughout my Bates career who have worked hard to choose free and online textbooks instead of requiring us to buy our own.”

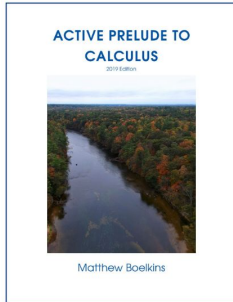
-Fall 2022 Student Textbook Survey Respondent

Here is where we want to highlight one of our own student voices at Bates, this is a quote from one of our students who took the Fall 2022 textbook survey.

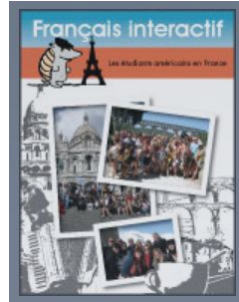
[READ]

Our students appreciate when faculty make these changes and they will have lasting impacts on a student's college career.

Open Educational Resources in use at Bates



MATH 105 & 106
737 students
impacted since 2019



FRE 101 & 102
128 students
impacted since 2018



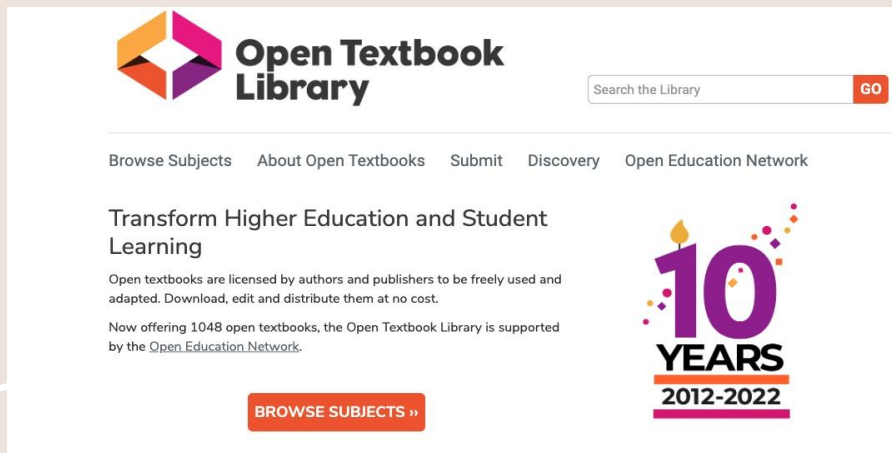
ECON 101
144 students
impacted since 2018



NS/PY 357
[Created by Professor Michelle Greene and students](#)

We actually already have a number of faculty using OER in the classroom at Bates. Here are just some examples including an OER developed by our students!

Where can I find OER?



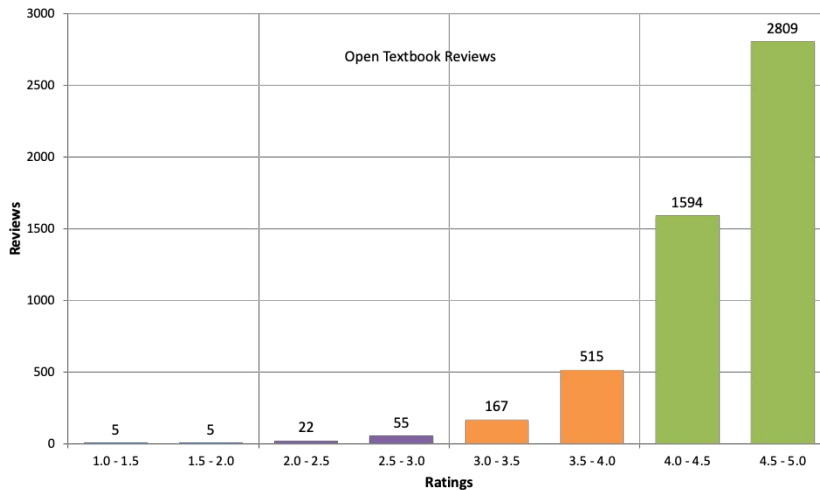
The screenshot shows the Open Textbook Library homepage. At the top left is the logo, a colorful geometric shape made of triangles, followed by the text "Open Textbook Library". To the right is a search bar with the placeholder text "Search the Library" and a red "GO" button. Below the search bar is a navigation menu with links: "Browse Subjects", "About Open Textbooks", "Submit", "Discovery", and "Open Education Network". The main content area features the heading "Transform Higher Education and Student Learning". Below this heading is a paragraph: "Open textbooks are licensed by authors and publishers to be freely used and adapted. Download, edit and distribute them at no cost." Another paragraph follows: "Now offering 1048 open textbooks, the Open Textbook Library is supported by the [Open Education Network](#)." At the bottom of this section is a red button with the text "BROWSE SUBJECTS »". To the right of the main text is a "10 YEARS 2012-2022" anniversary graphic with colorful dots.

open.umn.edu/opentextbooks

We're often asked "Where do we find these books?"

Our favorite place to start is the Open Textbook Library. The OTL is the most comprehensive catalog of open textbooks. Also, about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the textbooks in the collection include faculty reviews of the material. We are also frequently asked. . . .

Yes, but are they any good?



Are they any good? The reviews collected in the Open Textbook Library look like this. As you can see, they're overwhelmingly positive.

The Open Education Network focuses on HONEST reviews, they're not just seeking "good" reviews. Even if a text doesn't live up to expectations, an honest review will tell authors or faculty adopting a text down the line where things can be adapted or improved.

Workshop time!

Thank you!

Visit our LibGuide page for more information on [Open Educational Resources](#)

Contact us any time with questions

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Resources

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Credits

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