

Affordable Textbooks

Introduction

Creating access to affordable textbooks is an essential step toward the goal of providing low-income students a greater opportunity to succeed. The three major innovations to meet this need are: assistance funds, lending libraries, and open textbooks.

An **assistance fund** pays students with legitimate need for some or all of the cost of their books through a grant or loan program similar to an emergency aid fund (See “Emergency Fund” user guide).

Lending libraries are stocked with textbooks for students to borrow during the semester. In order to be sustainable, a lending library must selectively buy the books needed most, while aiming to stay up-to-date.

An **open textbook** is a textbook available online to be freely used by anyone. Foundations, such as Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, have helped establish these sources to create affordable access to quality textbooks. These sources are also often sold in print at a small cost.

“Many low-income students were selecting their classes based on the price of required textbooks, rather than on academic interests.”²

Best Practices

- Establish clear requirements for receiving aid, or access to a lending library
- Establish clear source of budget (for aid/books)
- Work with students and faculty to stock books through book drives and money donations
- Monitor which books are in the highest demand to prioritize book purchases
- Encourage faculty to find/use open textbooks

Resources

A study of the issue:

- [U.S. PIRG: Fixing the Broken Textbook Market](#)

Tools to find cheap books:

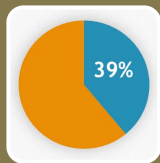
- [Affordabook.com](#)
- [Cheapest Textbooks.com](#)

Lending library examples:

- [College and Research Libraries News. Textbook Lending Service](#)
- [Library Journal: Brown’s FLIP Library Lends Textbooks to Low-Income Students](#)
- [Mira Costa College: Textbook Loan Program](#)

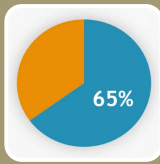
Open textbook resources:

- [University of Minnesota: Center for Open Education](#)
- [College Open Textbooks](#)
- [Open Stax: Open source. Peer-reviewed. 100% free.](#)



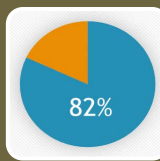
Save Students Money

- Books cost as much as \$1,200 yearly
- That is up to 39% of tuition and fees at a community college



Increase Education Quality

- 65% of students did not buy a required book¹
- 94% of students without required books were concerned about their grades



Increase Student Success

- 82% of students felt they would do significantly better if open textbooks were used as required readings

Statistics come from a 2013 study conducted by Student PIRGs¹

Implementation

To start, ensure you are fulfilling these two simple steps. First, share tools to find cheap books (see resources) with students by using welcome emails, resource lists, or flyers to publicize sites that can save them money. Second, communicate book requirements as soon as possible. This allows students time to find the best deals and budget for extra expenses.

Schools should also designate a team to plan and establish a lending library. This undertaking has most of the work at the front end, using your collection of textbooks to set up a checkout system. To manage the effort required, schools can use student and faculty donations, along with offering volunteer hours.

As for open textbooks, it may be best to use a focus group of selected classes to begin usage. Then, through a gradual introduction of these sources, faculty can ensure the quality of each text and effectively transition their classes.

¹Senack, Ethan. [“Fixing the Broken Textbook Market”](#). U.S. PIRG. Jan 2014. web. Oct 2016.

²Dixon, Jennifer A. [“Brown’s FLIP Library Lends Textbooks to Low-Income Students”](#). Library Journal. April 2016. web Oct 2016.