

# Course Materials Cost Report

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Sonoma State University

Senate Diversity Subcommittee

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## Introduction

The Senate Diversity Subcommittee (SDS) is a committee of elected SSU faculty members that serve to review diversity issues and make recommendations to the Academic Senate to foster inclusiveness and equity at Sonoma State.

The SDS is interested in minimizing the barrier to educational goals and degree completion for our under-resourced students that arises due to the cost of required course materials. For that reason, we urge our faculty colleagues to consider the costs when selecting course materials. In response to 2016 Senate Resolution on the College Textbook Affordability Act of 2015, SDS has prepared the following report, and associated recommended actions.

Textbook prices have been increasing since the 1970s. The price increase has been more than 3x the rate of inflation. The College Board's annual survey<sup>1</sup> puts the cost of new materials at about \$600 dollars per semester. The average price per text increased from \$57 in 2007 to \$87 in 2014. Although the price of new textbooks is increasing, surveys by the National Association of College Stores<sup>2</sup>, which surveyed 57 campuses and 41000 students, reveal student spending on materials is decreasing. For example, students spent 14% less in 2015 than in 2007. This trend has continued in the last few years. The high prices for course materials influence the courses and the number of courses students take. Furthermore, students take courses that are required for their degree, sometimes without purchasing the materials<sup>3</sup>. This in turn can affect student performance and learning experience in the course and major. The State of Florida Virtual Campus Student Textbook Survey in 2012<sup>4</sup> with 18000 respondents showed that 35% of students take fewer classes. National trends show that recently, costs are decreasing due to online options, from \$701 in 2008 to \$484 in 2018 to \$415 in 2019, although the 2018 Florida survey reflects slightly lower textbook costs, but increase in overall course material costs, including print and other digital learning materials<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://research.collegeboard.org/pdf/trends-college-pricing-2019-full-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nacs.org/research.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> SSU 2017 Survey of Students by Faculty Center, Preliminary Report

<sup>4</sup> [https://florida.theorange grove.org/og/file/10c0c9f5-fa58-2869-4fd9-af67fec26387/1/2012\\_Florida\\_Student\\_Textbook\\_Survey.pdf](https://florida.theorange grove.org/og/file/10c0c9f5-fa58-2869-4fd9-af67fec26387/1/2012_Florida_Student_Textbook_Survey.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://dlss.flvc.org/documents/210036/1314923/2018+Student+Textbook+and+Course+Materials+Survey+-+Executive+Summary.pdf/3c0970b0-ea4b-9407-7119-0477f7290a8b>

# At Sonoma State University

Textbook price affects students at SSU. At SSU, the majority of students purchase materials at the start of the semester. The slightly more affordable prices of electronic versions are not a solution to this problem, since roughly 67% of students prefer paper-based materials. SSU and the CSU system recognize the importance of affordable materials, so the course schedule lists if course materials are free of charge or “low-cost” (<\$50). A push towards low-cost materials is supported by research that shows that student outcomes are the same or better with open access online materials as compared to traditional textbooks (Fischer et al, 2015).

There are many campus and system-wide policies, as well as relevant legislation which encourage or require due diligence in course materials selection, including the following:

- SSU Course Instructional Materials Policy – “Timely adoption and notification of instructional materials used in courses significantly affects the learning opportunities of students in various ways, including but not limited to issues involving financial constraints, reimbursement procedures, and timely conversions to accessible formats for those with specific accommodation needs.”  
<https://www.sonoma.edu/policies/course-instructional-materials-adoption-policy>
- The Academic Senate of the CSU resolution on the Faculty Role in Textbook Affordability (AS-2747-06 -  
<https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/faculty-staff/academic-senate/resolutions/2005-2006/2747.pdf>
- Existing State Law: AB-798 (The College Textbook Affordability Act of 2015) -  
[https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201520160AB798](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB798)

The SSU Faculty Center conducted a survey which reflected 1033 respondents, all registered students for the spring semester of 2017. This study is likely biased to those upset by costs, but it is quite clear that the core of students in the study find cost problematic. 98% of respondents report that the cost of materials is too high. 79% of students experience hardship due to the cost of materials. For 60% of students learning has been negatively impacted, when a choice was made to not purchase the required textbook. The average cost reported for this survey was \$354 per semester.

The survey also revealed a disproportionate impact for first generation students, which feel a bigger impact. 90% experience financial hardship due to high prices, and 17.6% changed courses due to cost of materials. 45% of students did not purchase a textbook and 32% shared a textbook. FAFSA can help students in need, but 70% of SSU students in the 2017 survey did not apply for FAFSA. For students that qualify for FAFSA, material costs are estimated by the SSU office. The estimate for academic year 19/20 was \$985 per semester, and \$493 per semester for 20/21. The average per student per section at the SSU Bookstore in Spring 2017 was \$173, while a national poll concluded that student budgets for public 4-year colleges include \$620 per semester for supplies.

Sourced from:

Faculty Center Director, Justin Lipp; Faculty Fellow for Affordable Learning, Kirsten Ely.

Fischer, L., Hilton, J., Robinson, T.J. et al. A multi-institutional study of the impact of open textbook adoption on the learning outcomes of post-secondary students. *J Comput High Educ* 27, 159–172 (2015).

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12528-015-9101-x>

## Financial Aid

SSU Financial Aid website suggests that all financial aid packages are based on the SSU Cost of Attendance (COA), which sets books at a specific amount.

- SSU provides a yearly COA estimate, which includes a figure for books and supplies.
- Financial Aid awards are created based on that estimate, and award packages cannot exceed that amount.
- The 2020-21 Cost of Attendance estimate for books and supplies for on and off campus students is \$986.
- Currently, the 2019-2020 Cost of Attendance estimate for books and supplies was \$1970.
- Additionally, the CSU Systemwide website (as of January, 2020) lists book fees for Sonoma State at \$1764, although there is no academic year for the data provided.

An explanation of the process for determining the budget for student expenses follows:

Beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, the Chancellor's Office changed how budgets will now be calculated by all campuses. In the past, campuses were provided with recommended budget category numbers from the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) and the Chancellor's Office. SSU used the higher of the two numbers to establish budgets.

Beginning the 20-21 school year the following change was made. For the 20/21 year, CSAC administered the Student Expenses and Resources Survey (SEARS) in 2018. The survey went to all CSU students and was an effort to try to get more accurate numbers for budget categories. Each campus was then provided with the Mean and Median values reported by their students for each category. Budget components cannot exceed the Mean survey amounts for SSU. (SSU Financial Aid Office; personal communication February, 2020)

[https://web.sonoma.edu/finaid/help\\_book/viewing\\_and\\_accepting\\_your\\_aid\\_offer.html](https://web.sonoma.edu/finaid/help_book/viewing_and_accepting_your_aid_offer.html)

[https://web.sonoma.edu/finaid/cost\\_of\\_attendance/2021\\_costs.html](https://web.sonoma.edu/finaid/cost_of_attendance/2021_costs.html)

[https://web.sonoma.edu/finaid/cost\\_of\\_attendance/1920\\_costs.html](https://web.sonoma.edu/finaid/cost_of_attendance/1920_costs.html)

<https://web.sonoma.edu/finaid/glossary/#coa>

<https://www2.calstate.edu/attend/campuses/sonoma/Pages/cost-and-financial-aid.aspx>

## University Response

The University and various Departments within the University have mounted a response to the pressure of high textbook costs. The academic senate resolution passed in 2016<sup>1</sup> endorsed SSU participation in AB 798<sup>2</sup> declaring support for “high-quality, low cost or no cost, accessible textbook alternatives.”<sup>1</sup> The SSU Faculty Center has received a grant in response to AB-798 to promote open

education and low cost adoptions. This has funded stipends, professional development funds offered at department levels, including student assistants and faculty fellow programs. Ongoing development of workshops, collaborative working sessions, consultations, student assistant roles dedicated to supporting course material processes, led by Faculty Fellow for Affordable Learning Solutions<sup>3</sup>, providing grants for instructors of large courses that are willing to transform their course to low-cost<sup>4</sup>, and offering ongoing workshops and working sessions<sup>5</sup> to educate and support faculty navigating the available low-cost/no cost resources, and implementing solutions directly into courses. Additionally, the movement to increase technology usage as relates to accessibility, also impacts affordability. Banner notices for the required book adoption timeline in Canvas, which reach all faculty using the LMS, have increased awareness and compliance, yielding some lower prices and greater accessibility for disability services to develop accommodations for students in need. The emergence of Universal Access Hub also offers support to faculty around course material selection and adaptation<sup>6</sup>.

The SSU Library is also committed to this agenda by providing information sessions about using copyrighted materials in the classroom, and by publishing an open education resources (OER) guide for instructors. Additionally, a designated Scholarly Communication Librarian's role includes addressing topics such as open access, copyrights, and collaborates with the Faculty Center for training and support of partnerships for open education and affordable learning<sup>7</sup>. Various departments throughout the university have also worked on developing and utilizing OER materials. For example, professor Steve Farmer from the Chemistry department has developed material from ChemLibre and held multiple talks introducing faculty to this platform. Many departments and individual faculty have worked to investigate lower cost, quality course material options, and have made significant changes in courses, yet faculty reflect that processes of exploring, identifying and adopting lower cost options are overwhelming.

<sup>1</sup><https://senate.sonoma.edu/resolutions/support-ssu-participation-open-educational-resources-adoption>

<sup>2</sup>[https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201520160AB798](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB798)

<sup>3</sup><https://facultycenter.sonoma.edu/affordable-learning-ssu-0>

<sup>4</sup><https://facultycenter.sonoma.edu/initiatives/affordable-learning>

<sup>5</sup><http://facultycenter.sonoma.edu/affordable-learning/faculty-center-support-programs>

<sup>6</sup><https://accessibility.sonoma.edu/universal-access-hub>

<sup>7</sup><https://library.sonoma.edu/about/faculty-staff/rita-premo>

## Open Educational Resources:

The following is a list of some OERs available online. This extensive list shows that a lot of materials are available and are being developed for instructors.

- SSU OER Guide: [libguides.sonoma.edu/opened](http://libguides.sonoma.edu/opened)
- Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) founded by CSU in 1997 ([www.merlot.org](http://www.merlot.org)) it has 50000 educational resources
- California Open Online Library for Education (COOL4Ed) ([cool4ed.org](http://cool4ed.org))
- OpenStax ([openstax.org](http://openstax.org))
- CSU Affordable Learning Solutions Program ([als.csuprojects.org/home](http://als.csuprojects.org/home))
- U of Minnesota open Textbook Library and Network ([open.umn.edu](http://open.umn.edu))
- OER commons ([www.oercommons.org](http://www.oercommons.org))
- MIT's Open Courseware ([ocw.mit.edu](http://ocw.mit.edu))

- “The Orange Grove” State of Florida Educational Resources Repository ([www.floridashines.org](http://www.floridashines.org))
- Saylor Foundation ([www.saylor.org/books/](http://www.saylor.org/books/))
- College Open Textbooks Consortium ([www.collegeopentextbooks.org](http://www.collegeopentextbooks.org))
- Open SUNY Textbook Project ([textbooks.opensuny.org](http://textbooks.opensuny.org))
- ChemLibre ([www.chemlibre.org](http://www.chemlibre.org))
- Textbook Revolution ([www.textbookrevolution.org](http://www.textbookrevolution.org))
- WikiBooks ([en.wikibooks.org](http://en.wikibooks.org))
- BCCampus OpenEd ([open.bccampus.ca](http://open.bccampus.ca))
- Open Washington Educational Resources Network ([www.openwa.org](http://www.openwa.org))
- Internet Archive OER Library ([archive.org](http://archive.org))
- Smarthistory ([smarthistory.org](http://smarthistory.org))

## 2017 Faculty Center Student Survey Data

The tables below show the cost of course materials at SSU, by department. The first table lists the Top ten departments, with respect to the average price. The second table takes into account the number of sections for each field. For example, English is fourth in this table even though the average price is fairly low at \$117 dollars, due to the high number of English sections(n=60). A small reduction in price for these students can have an impact on a larger number of students. The third table reflects the complete list of cost by department.

Table 1: Top Ten Textbook Costs by Department

Department	Sections	MIN	MAX	AVG
BUS	68	\$29.95	\$584.00	\$271.50
NURS	20	\$43.60	\$1,412.65	\$267.31
CHEM	21	\$21.95	\$532.65	\$241.59
POLS	19	\$79.95	\$498.65	\$240.62
ECON	12	\$85.35	\$329.00	\$220.80
BIOL	53	\$65.95	\$352.80	\$215.70
PHYS	12	\$16.95	\$419.35	\$213.70
MATH	75	\$7.20	\$355.00	\$203.47
SSALI	5	\$68.35	\$317.85	\$200.48
ARTH	6	\$46.50	\$379.50	\$191.62

Table 2: Top Ten Cost Accounting for Highest Student Impact/# Sections

	Sections	MIN	MAX	AVG
BUS	68	\$29.95	\$584.00	\$271.50
MATH	75	\$7.20	\$355.00	\$203.47
BIOL	53	\$65.95	\$352.80	\$215.70
ENGL	60	\$15.00	\$316.40	\$116.89
EDEC	35	\$38.00	\$410.40	\$170.51
PSY	32	\$5.10	\$532.65	\$179.57
NURS	20	\$43.60	\$1,412.65	\$267.31
CHEM	21	\$21.95	\$532.65	\$241.59
POLS	19	\$79.95	\$498.65	\$240.62
LIBS	29	\$3.20	\$362.15	\$154.27

Table 3: Costs by Department - Complete List

Department	Sections	MIN	MAX	AVG	Median
AMCS	7	\$32.95	\$165.20	\$75.77	\$33.00
ANTH	8	\$47.95	\$287.00	\$148.23	\$121.00
ARTH	6	\$46.50	\$379.50	\$191.62	\$165.48
BIOL	53	\$65.95	\$352.80	\$215.70	\$211.80
BUS	68	\$29.95	\$584.00	\$271.50	\$294.98
CALS	6	\$16.00	\$181.00	\$51.15	\$22.98
CCJS	19	\$47.00	\$325.35	\$182.64	\$163.00
CHEM	21	\$21.95	\$532.65	\$241.59	\$180.00
COMS	6	\$17.00	\$206.00	\$116.29	\$117.05
COUNT	7	\$29.30	\$442.25	\$185.11	\$218.00
CS	27	\$45.00	\$209.00	\$143.29	\$182.65

ECON	12	\$85.35	\$329.00	\$220.80	\$256.00
EDEC	35	\$38.00	\$410.40	\$170.51	\$193.60
EDEL	2	\$24.95	\$155.80	\$90.38	\$90.38
EDMS	21	\$47.00	\$436.10	\$137.81	\$106.35
EDSP	10	\$118.95	\$269.70	\$177.01	\$145.50
EDSS	5	\$77.85	\$150.30	\$97.94	\$77.85
EDUC	8	\$22.65	\$111.35	\$83.87	\$111.35
ENGL	60	\$15.00	\$316.40	\$116.89	\$88.40
ENSP	8	\$51.95	\$178.40	\$104.50	\$100.18
GEOG	16	\$16.00	\$202.40	\$124.90	\$159.50
GEOG	16	\$72.00	\$270.95	\$157.58	\$114.10
GERN	2	\$104.95	\$220.00	\$162.48	\$162.48
HIST	29	\$19.95	\$305.85	\$128.00	\$110.95
KIN	14	\$44.50	\$301.40	\$149.05	\$112.00
LIBS	29	\$3.20	\$362.15	\$154.27	\$126.80
MATH	75	\$7.20	\$355.00	\$203.47	\$210.60
MLL	18	\$29.95	\$525.30	\$162.12	\$140.00
MUS	8	\$39.95	\$218.70	\$150.01	\$163.35
NAMS	7	\$27.95	\$122.85	\$99.31	\$122.85
NURS	20	\$43.60	\$1,412.65	\$267.31	\$99.40
PHIL	26	\$4.45	\$526.45	\$151.78	\$69.90
PHYS	12	\$16.95	\$419.35	\$213.70	\$209.40
POLS	19	\$79.95	\$498.65	\$240.62	\$173.00
PSY	32	\$5.10	\$532.65	\$179.57	\$163.15
SOCI	26	\$41.95	\$591.65	\$132.86	\$114.98

SSALI	5	\$68.35	\$317.85	\$200.48	\$197.30
THAR	7	\$13.50	\$35.85	\$19.04	\$13.50
UNIV	20	\$15.00	\$165.75	\$97.60	\$65.00
WGS	12	\$10.85	\$249.00	\$99.90	\$85.63

## Next Steps: Recommended Actions

In addition to complying with existing policies and laws, we, as faculty, should consider the following options when designing courses (Source: *CSU Memorandum to campus presidents regarding "Update on existing and new state and federal regulations regarding textbook affordability with recommended actions"*, dated August 24, 2018).

- Designation of a faculty member Course Materials Champion within each department to explore open education resources (OER) and low cost or zero cost options for course materials available through SSU. *Consider release time or a stipend to take on this role within each department, and service credit for tenure track criteria.*

### Role Description

- Check Course Materials costs at the beginning of each semester and provide a report at a department meeting reflecting cost of required materials - include cost for purchase/rental from the bookstore, and if available, cost from other sources.
  - Educate colleagues on how to use FacultyEnlight to submit timely course adoptions and to review the bookstore's prices for their required textbooks.
  - Curate list of OER resources and online access options for department topics (Collaborate with Library/Faculty Center)
  - Attend Faculty Center workshop on OER and report back to department
  - Support peers to work with Library personnel to offer course material through reserves for students who cannot afford to buy or rent.
- Deans and Chairs to collaborate with Faculty Center and Library to develop partnerships for sharing meaningful learning resources and educate faculty on resources and processes available.
    - Facilitate Faculty Center "Traveling Roadshow" at Chairs' meetings, and/or Department level meetings with faculty to update on resources, programs and services available.
    - Work with Kirsten Ely as Faculty Fellow for Affordable Learning Solutions (<http://facultycenter.sonoma.edu/affordable-learning-ssu-0>); a position dedicated to implementing affordable resources
    - Collaborate with departments to support Faculty Champion (described above)
  - Request increased transparency of pricing protocols with university bookstore.
    - Faculty should review information on bookstore prices for required materials.



- Faculty may also negotiate directly with publishers to advocate for digital access and pricing discounts.
- Bookstore to generate a reflective report on actual costs of required textbooks by department each semester, and send to the department chair. *Bookstore may collaborate with the Office of Reporting and Analytics to generate and distribute this.*
- Clarity of Communication with Bookstore regarding faculty requirements for course materials presented to students accurately. For example a different colored tag/indicator for:
  - A free e-book version available online
  - Instructors are okay with older editions of the text or used copies.
  - Additional Online Access Codes not required.
- Bundle messaging of accessibility and affordability to address inequities across multiple student groups. Integrating efforts to address costs also aligns with intentions to improve accessibility and support the “education for all” mission.

## Strategies for Implementation

- Begin working on these recommendations now. Request for progress report to SDS by Spring 2022.
- Work with Faculty Center and Faculty Affairs to target new hires during orientation.
- Utilize Faculty Champion in departments to engage current faculty.
- Utilize CSU, Faculty Center, and Library resources:
  - No and low-cost educational resources are available conveniently for faculty at MERLOT, COOL4Ed, and [www.affordablelearningsolutions.org](http://www.affordablelearningsolutions.org).
  - Discover the CA Open Online Library COOL4Ed.org to view free and open etextbooks aligned with frequently taught CSU courses. These etextbooks were selected and peer-reviewed by faculty in the CSU, UC, and CCC for 52 high enrollment courses.
  - Explore the [AffordableLearningSolutions.org](http://AffordableLearningSolutions.org) website to learn about the many ways to choose and provide more affordable, quality educational content. Use CSU MERLOT to discover more than 6,300 FREE and OPEN textbooks and over 80,000 FREE course materials.

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