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# Rising Textbook Expenses and a Search for Solutions: Survey and Interview Results from Michigan Faculty

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*Rising Textbook Expenses and a Search for Solutions:  
Survey and Interview Results from Michigan Faculty*

Scholarly Publishing Office  
University of Michigan Library

December 2009

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## 1) Executive Summary

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### 1.1 Introduction

The increasing financial burden of textbook costs on undergraduates is well documented and is a growing concern in the university community. In 2009, the University of Michigan Library undertook a year-long study of the opportunities to help alleviate this burden with a special focus on the possible uses of digital publishing and networked resources. This study consists of two major components:

- 1) A formal exploratory business feasibility analysis to determine the costs and benefits (both financial and social) of three textbook-related initiatives, carried out with the assistance of an outside consultant.
- 2) An in-depth survey, followed by extensive interviews, to better understand Michigan faculty attitudes and motives in the selection of textbooks and their willingness to consider adopting, contributing to and authoring alternatives to mainstream commercial textbooks.

Dr. Raym Crow, an advisory board member of the Scholarly Publishing Office of the University of Michigan Library (SPO) and Managing Partner of Chain Bridge Group (an independent publishing consultancy and SPARC Group affiliate), was an outside consultant for our textbook study. Dr. Crow prepared the report entitled *Potential Online Textbook Initiatives*, in which he provides a framework within which SPO can assess the viability of several alternative publishing programs to reduce textbook costs for Michigan students. In particular, the report provides an overview of current open textbook initiatives relevant to SPO; describes three potential textbook-related initiatives that SPO might undertake to realize savings for Michigan students; and compares the relative benefits of each program. The report is available on request.

In tandem with this business feasibility study, SPO has undertaken a study aiming to explore the potential for and viability of a library-based textbook publishing program to assist in lowering the costs of textbooks for our students. Prior to studying the situation at the University of Michigan, we reviewed the history of escalating textbook costs and investigated new initiatives at other universities and non-profit or commercial publishers in order to increase textbook affordability. The report of this background study is also available upon request. As part of the Michigan case study, the SPO textbook team invited all faculty of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LS&A) to take a survey in order to help us identify which factors most influence the selection of instructional materials and to better understand faculty views about rising textbook costs, more affordable alternatives to traditional textbooks, and the potential role that the University Library might play in textbook publishing. To follow up the textbook survey, we conducted extensive interviews with twenty-four Michigan faculty members.

This document provides a brief context for our Michigan study and reports on what we have learned from a survey of Michigan faculty and follow-up in-person interviews with twenty-four faculty members across disciplines who volunteered to be interviewees after taking the survey. We research faculty views on rising textbook costs, attitudes and motives in the selection of textbooks, and the willingness to consider adopting, contributing to and authoring alternatives to mainstream commercial textbooks. Our empirical findings reveal interesting differences across disciplines and various faculty demographics. The SPO textbook team will develop a set of recommendations, pointing both to opportunities for and barriers to change.

### 1.2 About the Survey and Interview

The SPO textbook team has crafted and administered a survey probing concerns over rising textbook expenses and a search for solutions. All LS&A faculty at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor campus) were invited to respond (n=1,442). There was an 18% response rate to the survey. The survey respondents (n=260) are constituted by Humanities (49%), Social Science (26%), and Natural Science (25%). Note that the actual proportions of all LS&A faculty members (1,442) are Humanities 40%, Social Science 32%, and Natural Science 28%. Thus, in our survey data, faculty in the Humanities are slightly overrepresented and those in Social Science and Natural Science are both somewhat underrepresented.

This survey was administered online via SurveyMonkey between June 17 and July 10, 2009. It required five minutes for faculty to complete the survey.

The survey contained twenty-one questions, divided into three sections:

- (i) Faculty Background (Questions 1-3)
- (ii) Faculty Awareness (Questions 4-9)
- (iii) Faculty Practice (Questions 10-19)

Note that in Question 20, we asked faculty about their willingness to be interviewed about their views on the role of the University Library in providing more affordable alternatives to traditional textbooks. Q21 was an open question to invite suggestions for improving the University Library's support services, as well as for the potential role that the University Library might play in textbook publishing.

In Section 2 of this document, we discuss objectives, methodology, and the overall results of the survey. It contains: (i) the precise language used in the email letter sent to faculty and the survey questionnaire; (ii) total results, separate results for each discipline (Humanities, Social Science, and Natural Science), and each respondent's number of years of teaching experience.

To develop a deeper understanding of our survey findings and to uncover more specifics, we designed an interview protocol that we used to gather data from individual faculty members. The interviews were particularly useful not only to follow up our textbook questionnaires, but also for getting the story behind a participant's experiences and for pursuing in-depth information about the topic. Moreover, unlike in the online survey, the interviews allowed us to probe deeper and gather more information. With these goals in mind, we developed a set of interview questions designed to help understand how faculty members define textbooks and consider textbook price and different formats in selecting course materials.

There are different types of interview formats. For instance, interviewing can be informal and conversational with no predetermined questions in order to remain as open and adaptable as possible to the interviewee's nature and priorities. Conversely, interviewing can be guided by an interview protocol to ensure that the same topics are covered in each interview. This approach provides more focus but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee. In our interviews with Michigan faculty, the latter approach was adopted, although the interviewer tried to be as flexible as possible to get the story behind participants' experiences concerning textbooks.

To identify potential interviewees, one of our survey questions asked LS&A faculty about their willingness to participate in follow-up interviews. Of the 61 volunteers, 24 interviews (approximately 10% of survey respondents) were conducted between August and September 2009 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Each interview session was held in the faculty member's office to minimize distractions, and each lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

The following represents the disciplinary and departmental affiliations of the interviewees, as well as their rank.

*Demographics by Affiliation:*

- a) Humanities: 8  
American Literature (1), Classical Studies (2), English Language Institute (1), English (2), German (1), and Near Eastern Studies (1)
- b) Social Science: 8  
Anthropology (1), Economics (1), Political Science (1), Psychology (1), Sociology (2), Survey Research (1), and Women's Studies (1)
- c) Natural Science: 8  
Biology (2), Chemistry (2), Engineering (1), Math (1), Zoology/Ecology (1), and Physics (1)

### *Demographics by Rank:*

Full Professor: 15  
Associate Professor: 5  
Assistant Professor: 0  
Lecturer: 4

## **1.3 Key Findings**

### ***1.3.1 Survey of Michigan Faculty***

Of all survey respondents (n=260), 88% of faculty members report being aware of escalating college textbook costs. Data also show clear differences in awareness across disciplines: 85% of Natural Science faculty report being informed about rising textbook expenses as opposed to Social Science (86%) and Humanities (95%). The survey data also provide ample evidence that faculty are fairly well informed about the Textbook Task Force established by the University of Michigan Office of the Provost in 2006. Of 260 respondents, 62 % report they know of the Textbook Task Force. Yet, when asked about the specifics regarding a series of recommendations proposed by the Task Force, 15% report they do not know any of the Task Force recommendations.

Further, when asked their awareness of recent legislative responses to rising textbook costs, three-quarters (75%) of faculty report *not* knowing of Public Law 110-315 (the Higher Education Opportunity Act), effective in July 2010, requiring the university to include textbook information and prices in its online course listings. There is a clear disciplinary variation; while only 14% of Natural Science and 19% of Social Science faculty say they are aware of Public Law 110-315, 34% of Humanities faculty report being aware of it. The data show that senior faculty are more likely to be better informed than junior faculty concerning recent legislative responses to rising textbook costs.

Among the 260 respondents, more than four-fifths (84%) say that they use textbooks in teaching courses. Among Natural Science faculty, 98% report they use textbooks in teaching courses. It is substantially higher than the two other disciplines polled: Humanities (77%) and Social Science (79%). The length of teaching experience, however, does not seem to influence textbook use in class. Concerning faculty attitudes and motives in textbook selection, 96% of respondents report that they know the prices of their textbooks during the selection process. However, when asked if they provided information about textbook prices and ISBNs in their course listings, only a slight majority (56%) say “yes.” While Natural Science faculty are much more likely to use textbooks in teaching classes (98%), they are *less* likely to provide textbook information when assigning course materials; a little more than half (57%) do not provide textbook prices and ISBN information in their course listings.

Further, four-fifths (80%) of the survey respondents report that prices influence their selection of textbooks. This clearly indicates that rising textbook costs have a significant impact on faculty who actually assign textbooks. Another survey item indicates that textbook price is indeed a factor of concern for faculty, but it is not a sole or primary one. We asked faculty the following question: “On a scale of 1 to 5—with 1 meaning ‘not at all’ and 5 meaning ‘very,’ how important do you consider the following factors in choosing textbooks?” The result shows the level of importance for the price factor was rated 3.63 as compared to four other choices given in our survey: “Quality of content” (4.69), “Scope of coverage” (4.21), “Currency” (3.14), and “Online availability” (2.52).

Because one of our primary goals was to better understand faculty views about more affordable alternatives to traditional textbooks, we also assessed faculty’s familiarity with nontraditional or open textbooks and examined their practice of adopting such textbooks for their classes. To ensure accurate interpretation, respondents were given a definition of “open textbook” as “a no-cost electronic textbook offered online.” A little under three-quarters (71%) report being familiar with open textbooks. Natural Science faculty members (76%) are more likely to be aware of open textbooks compared to those in Humanities (66%) and Social Science (73%). There is no clear association between the length of teaching experience and the level of familiarity with open textbooks.

Despite a relatively high level of familiarity with open textbooks, when asked about the frequency of open textbook use in class, only 13% report having actually used them. There is a distinct gap between awareness and practice concerning nontraditional textbooks. Natural Science faculty members (15%) seem to have begun to adopt untraditional textbooks more than the other disciplines (11% for Humanities and 9% for Social Science). Senior faculty members are more likely to adopt nontraditional textbooks than junior faculty. These survey data raise interesting questions about how the circulation and adoption of more affordable textbook options can be enhanced.

The last two survey items were designed to identify existing and prospective textbook authors, particularly focusing on their future interest in writing and publishing textbooks in a digital format. Among the 260 respondents, 30% report they are existing textbook authors. According to the data, a quarter (25%) expresses their interest in writing a textbook and publishing it in a digital format. What is striking is that 39% of faculty members in Natural Science appear interested in publishing digital textbooks. This is approximately 1.6 times greater than the average and is even higher if compared with the two other disciplines (only 16 % for Social Science and 21% for Humanities). When sorted by teaching experience, the survey data indicate that senior faculty have greater interest in writing and publishing textbooks in a digital format.

### ***1.3.2 Interviews with Michigan Faculty***

This document provides summary and interpretations of the information we obtained from interviews with a special focus on disciplinary trends and preferences. Interview narratives are synthesized based on four themes:

- 1) Definitions of Textbooks
- 2) Concerns about Rising Textbook Costs
- 3) Faculty and Student Preferences about Textbook Formats
- 4) Experiences in Textbook Selection, Use, and Production

#### **Definitions of Textbooks**

While it initially appeared difficult for us to concisely define textbooks, all interviewees shared a clear understanding about what textbooks are, how they are used in class, and about the context of textbook publishing. More importantly, when asked if they think the definition of a textbook has changed, interviewees almost unanimously said “no” because the role that textbooks have played in education has not significantly changed over time. Instead, almost all interviewees agreed that definitions of textbooks in terms of *formats* have been drastically changed, especially over the last decade.

#### **Concerns about Rising Textbook Costs**

Most of the faculty members we interviewed shared concerns about rising textbook costs. Many noted that in the last several years they have begun paying extra attention to the prices of the textbooks they assign. This is because “students have begun to voice their financial burdens in textbook purchases.” Also, faculty awareness of rising textbook prices has been “influenced by an increasing number of reports in both national and campus news and articles” that they read and hear daily. This finding is particularly interesting if compared to the relatively low level of awareness about textbook-related legislative activities and the University’s Textbook Task Force recommendations indicated by the survey. Our interview results do not indicate any substantive disciplinary differences in concerns about rising textbook costs.

#### **Faculty and Student Preferences about Textbook Formats**

Our interview data reveal faculty and student preferences regarding formats of teaching and learning materials. Although we have not surveyed University of Michigan students, we attempted to gather some information about student preferences through faculty interviews. It became apparent that all Humanities faculty members preferred students having traditional print textbooks in class. They also noted that students preferred print formats so they could mark texts.

Social Science and Natural Science instructors showed more diverse preferences about textbook formats. A Chemistry professor, who is an active member of UM-MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for



Learning and Online Teaching) said, "I've been assigning my e-textbook in class, but in reality, many students still prefer to own print books or at least to print my e-textbook." Some professors, including Economics and Women's Studies/Musicology, shared their preferences for electronic textbooks, in which "a number of online examples and exercises coupled with three-dimensional illustrations, audio, and videos are included," which they said are also welcomed by their students. Others, however, did not show strong preferences one way or the other.

According to a Psychology professor, the cost of printing digital content is not negligible, and many students still prefer to print out most of their assigned texts that are electronically available.

Despite the mixed preferences indicated by the survey, interview results revealed faculty member's overall interest across disciplines in discovering more about open textbooks and other electronic resources available to faculty and students. In fact, a junior faculty of Sociology proposed that, "the University of Michigan Library could offer new services to help faculty in finding what kind of nontraditional textbook alternatives are available in my field."

#### **Experiences in Textbook Selection, Use, and Production**

While the survey indicated that price affected faculty textbook selection, our interview data revealed more accurately how it shaped their decisions. Interviewees expressed their opinions that textbook selection should not be affected by cost-saving at the expense of quality. Some noted that they have recently begun to give students more affordable options, for instance a choice of bound or unbound texts if available and relevant. A majority of interviewees noted increasing reliance on electronic articles and other online materials when putting course materials together. Four professors reported that they now check for electronic availability before assigning books. Those who already used e-textbooks in class appreciated some of the e-book functions enabling "online interactive teaching and learning." Finally, several professors shared their experiences of textbook publishing, including two full professors of Chemistry and Economics who published their textbooks in a digital format via Atomic Dog (a division of Cengage Learning that blends online and print delivery) and via MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching) with print editions distributed by Wiley.

## 2) Survey

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### 2.1 Objectives

In 2009, the University of Michigan Library undertook a year-long study of the opportunities to help alleviate this burden with a special focus on the possible uses of digital publishing and networked resources. The Library assessed the viability of several alternative publishing programs to reduce textbook costs for Michigan students. As part of the Michigan study, the textbook team invited LS&A faculty to take a survey. There are three major reasons for conducting a survey:

- To learn about target population and to discover survey respondents' views, attitudes, needs, and motivations about our survey topics;
- To provide an opportunity to discuss key topics with target population: communicating with respondents about our survey topic allows for deeper insight into our survey problem, and can shed light on topics related to our survey problem within a larger context;
- To prioritize our follow-up actions: surveying helps us gather objective information to address issues that are relevant and important.

In particular, our survey is designed to help us assess faculty's awareness of textbook issues and identify which factors most influence the selection of instructional materials and to better understand faculty views about more affordable alternatives to traditional textbooks and the potential role that the University Library might play in textbook publishing.

### 2.2 Methodology

To deliver our online survey, we first crafted an email letter inviting LS&A Faculty to our survey. The following email letter was cordially delivered by the Dean of LS&A to all LS&A faculty (n=1,442).

Dear Michigan Faculty,

The University Library, working in consultation with the office of the Vice Provost for Academic Information has been conducting a year-long study to assess the feasibility of some library-supported programs to assist in lowering the costs of textbooks for our students. As part of conducting this feasibility analysis, we would like to invite you to take a survey in order to help us identify which factors most influence your selection of instructional material and to better understand your views about rising textbook costs, more affordable alternatives to traditional textbooks, and the potential role that the University Library might be able to play in textbook publishing.

To that end, we are writing to ask you a simple survey to share your opinions about the textbook issue. This survey contains twenty-one questions requiring approximately five minutes to complete.

You can complete the questionnaire on the Web.

The Link to the survey:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=BR8xdhUGeaEwlgQrO8CmFg\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=BR8xdhUGeaEwlgQrO8CmFg_3d_3d)

Please complete the survey by Friday, July 10.

This survey is being delivered with a use of open-source survey tool provided by SurveyMonkey.com. We ensure all information is secure, confidential, and completely anonymous. Please contact Natsuko Hayashi Nicholls at [hayashin@umich.edu](mailto:hayashin@umich.edu) with questions or comments about this survey.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Maria Bonn, Director,  
Scholarly Publishing Office, University Library

Next, the SPO textbook team has crafted and administered a survey probing concerns over rising textbook expenses and a search for solutions. All LS&A faculty at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor campus) were invited to respond (n=1,442). There was an 18% response rate to the survey. The survey respondents (n=260) are constituted by Humanities (49%), Social Science (26%), and Natural Science (25%). Please note that the actual proportions of all LS&A faculty members (1,442) are Humanities 40%, Social Science 32%, and Natural Science 28%. Thus, in our survey data, faculty in the Humanities are slightly overrepresented and those in Social Science and Natural Science are both somewhat underrepresented.

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- (iii) Faculty Practice (Questions 10-19)

Note that in Question 20, we asked faculty about their willingness to be interviewed about their views on the role of the University Library in providing more affordable alternatives to conventional textbooks. Q21 was an open question to invite suggestions for improving the University Library's support services, as well as for the potential role that the University Library might play in textbook publishing.

The following document contains the precise language used in the SPO Textbook Survey questionnaire.

\*\*\*\*\*

## University Library (Scholarly Publishing Office) Textbook Survey

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### Section 1: Faculty Background

#### **1. Please describe your association with the university.**

- Adjunct faculty or researcher
- Part-time faculty or researcher
- Full-time faculty or researcher
- Visiting faculty or researcher
- Other

#### **2. What school or college are you primarily affiliated with?**

- LS&A Humanities (American Culture, Asian Languages & Cultures, CAAS, Classical Studies, Comp. Lit., ELI, English, German, History of Art, Judaic Studies, Linguistics, Near Eastern Studies, Philosophy, Residential College, Romance Languages, Screen Arts & Cultures, Slavic Languages)
- LS&A Natural Science (Astronomy, Biophysics, Chemistry, EEB, Geological Sciences, Mathematics, MCDB, Physics, Program in the Environment, Statistics)
- LS&A Social Science (Anthropology, Communication Studies, Economics, History, International Institute, Organizational Studies, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, Women's Studies)
- Other [                    ]

#### **3. How many years have you been an instructor/faculty in higher education?**

- 1 year or less
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21-30 years
- More than 30 years

Section 2: Faculty Awareness

**4. In a recent study, the Government Accountability Office found college textbook prices have risen at twice the rate of annual inflation over the last two decades. Do you know anything about escalating college textbook prices?**

- Fully informed
- Partially informed
- Don't know

**5. Do you know the average cost of textbooks for college/university students, including Michigan, totals around \$1,000 for the 2007 through 2008 academic year?**

- Fully informed
- Partially informed
- Don't know

**6. Are you aware of the Textbook Task Force established by the University of Michigan Office of the Provost?**

- Yes
- No

**7. The Textbook Task Force proposed a series of recommendations in 2007 on textbook matters. Are you aware any of these recommendations? (Please select all that apply).**

- Establish dates by which textbook lists should be posted to allow students to take advantage of the used book market and seek cost savings in other ways.
- Address the rising cost of textbooks by fostering a used book market in partnership with local booksellers.
- Execute a faculty-led communication plan to support efforts to accelerate adoption rates and encourage other cost-saving practices.
- Develop, test, and implement an online textbook tool that: (a) allows faculty to enter and share their textbook lists with students and book sellers; (b) allows students to find other students who want to buy or sell textbooks being reused in a subsequent term.
- Not aware of any

**8. Are you aware of Public Law 110-315 (Higher Education Opportunity Act), effective in July 2010, requiring the university to include textbook information and prices in its online course listings?**

- Fully informed
- Partially informed
- Don't know

**9. Are you aware of the newly proposed Act H.R. 1464 (Learning Opportunity with Creation of Open Source Textbooks Act of 2009), requiring Federal agencies to collaborate with institutions of higher education in the development of freely available open source educational materials?**

- Fully informed
- Partially informed
- Don't know

Section 3: Faculty Practice

**10. Given the definition of college textbook as “a manual of instruction or a standard book in any field of study”, how often have you used textbooks in teaching your courses?**

- Almost always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never (please skip to Question 16)

**11. Are you aware of textbook prices before assigning your books?**

- Almost always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**12. Have you provided information about textbook prices and ISBN in your course listings?**

- Almost always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**13. Have textbook prices affected your choices of teaching materials?**

- Almost always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**14. What is your familiarity with open textbooks, i.e. no-cost electronic textbooks offered online?**

- I have never heard of open textbooks
- I have heard of open textbooks but never looked for any
- I have looked at some open textbooks
- I have looked at and used material from open textbooks in my teaching

**15. How often have you used open textbooks in your teaching?**

- Almost always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

**16. On scale of 1 to 5—with 1 meaning “not at all” and 5 meaning “very”, how important do you consider the following factors in choosing textbooks?**

- Content
- Price
- Year of publication
- Online availability
- Other important factor(s): [Please specify:                    ]

**17. On scale of 1 to 5—with 1 meaning “not at all” and 5 meaning “very”, how important do you think it is for students to have the following resources available?**

- Web links to OCWs at Michigan and other institutions
- Electronic textbooks

- Print-on-Demand services for textbooks

**18. Have you authored or co-authored a college level textbook(s)?**

- Yes
- No
- Other (e.g. In progress) [            ]

**19. Have you considered writing a textbook and publishing it in digital format?**

- Yes
- No

**20. Are you willing to be interviewed about your views on the role of the University Library in providing more affordable alternatives to conventional textbooks?**

- No
- Yes

[Please provide your name, department, email address]

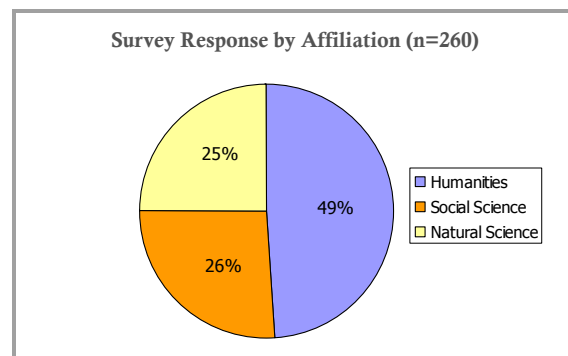
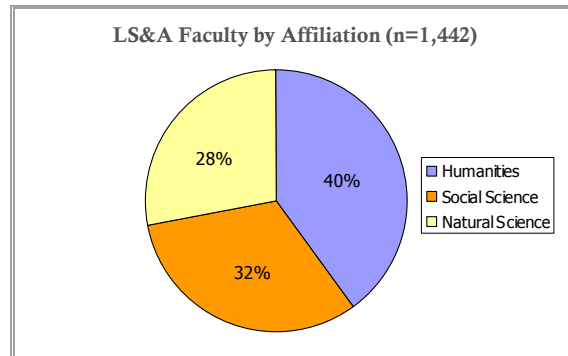
**21. What other ways might the University Library be useful in teaching? Do you have any suggestions for improvement of our potential support services?**

[            ]

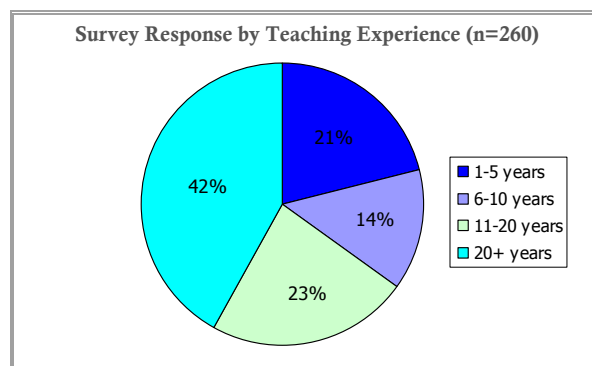
## 2.3 Survey Results

### 2.3.1 Overview of Survey Data

The total number of survey respondents is 260. The survey respondents are constituted by Humanities (49%), Social Science (26%), and Natural Science (25%). Note that the actual proportions of all LS&A faculty members (1,442) are Humanities 40%, Social Science 32%, and Natural Science 28%. Thus, in our survey data, faculty in the Humanities are slightly overrepresented and those in Social Science and Natural Science are both somewhat underrepresented.



The total number of 260 respondents includes 55 faculty members (21%) with 1-5 years teaching, 36 faculty members (14%) with 6-10 years teaching, 60 faculty members (23%) with 11-20 years teaching, and 109 faculty members (42%) with 20+ years of teaching.



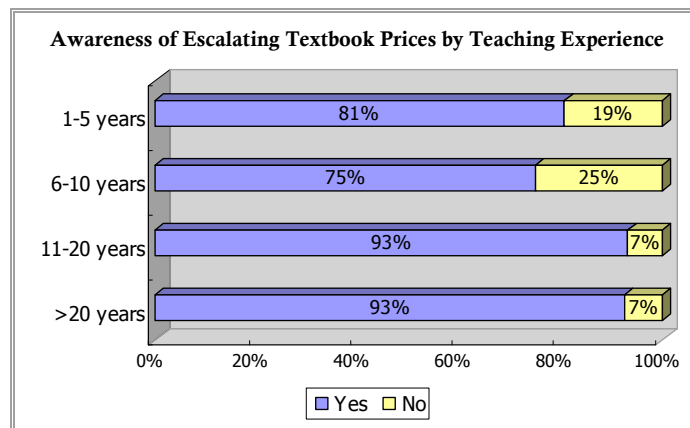
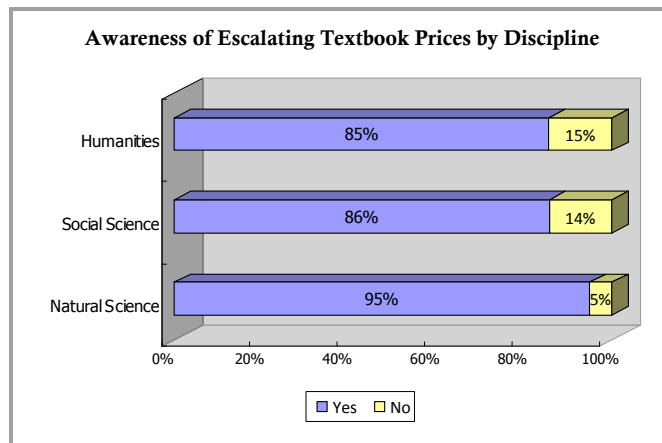
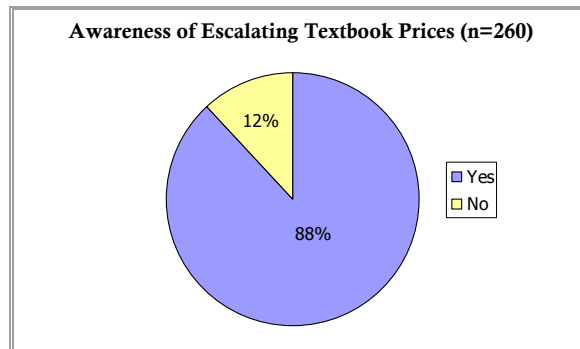
Our survey data will be presented in the aggregate and for two criteria, academic field and teaching experience. Our survey findings reveal interesting differences across disciplines and faculty demographics regarding the level of awareness about rising textbook costs, patterns of textbook selection, and views on alternatives to conventional textbooks.

### 2.3.2 Characteristics of Faculty Awareness about Rising Textbook Prices

#### Rising Textbook Prices as a Campus Issue

In a recent study, the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that college textbook prices have risen at twice the rate of annual inflation over the last two decades. The average cost of textbooks for college/university students, including at the University of Michigan, totals around \$1,000 for the 2007 through 2008 academic years. In our survey, we asked LS&A faculty about their awareness of rising textbook prices.

Overall, data consistently show that a significant number of Michigan faculty know that the cost of college textbooks imposes an increasingly significant financial burden on students and their families. In particular, 88% of faculty members report being aware of escalating college textbook costs. One of the disciplinary trends is that awareness of this issue among Natural Science faculty is 10% higher than among Humanities faculty. The data also shows that teaching seniority is related to a higher level of awareness.





Further, when asked more specifically about the annual expenses (\$1,000+) that students pay for textbooks today, more than three-quarters of faculty members (78%) report that they are informed about this issue. Data also show clear differences in awareness across disciplines, as indicated below.

***How many faculty members say they are informed that the average cost of textbooks for college/university students, including at Michigan, totals around \$1,000 per year?***

- 78% of LS&A faculty

***How does this figure differ across disciplines?***

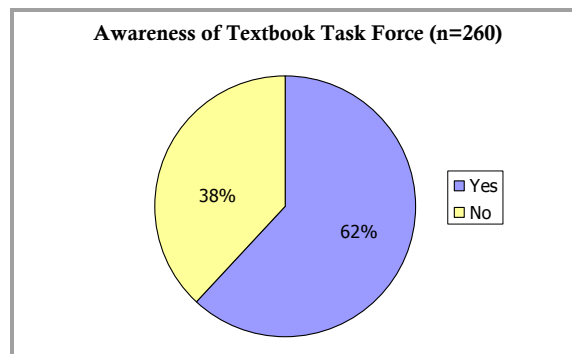
- 73% of Humanities faculty
- 79% of Social Science faculty
- 85% of Natural Science faculty

***How does this figure differ across years of teaching?***

- 65% of faculty with 1-5 years teaching
- 75% of faculty with 6-10 years teaching
- 76% of faculty with 11-20 years teaching
- 86% of faculty with 20+ years teaching

At the University of Michigan, the Textbook Task Force was established by the Office of the Provost in December 2006. The Task Force researched the factors contributing to high textbook costs, including the practices of textbook publishers, faculty selection and ordering of textbooks, bookseller ordering and pricing practices, and constraints on the used textbook market. Additionally, the Task Force examined how technology might be applied to lower student textbook costs. The report, *Research and Recommendations Concerning the Costs of Textbooks*, was produced in April 2007.

Of the 260 respondents, 62% report they know of the Textbook Task Force.



Again, cross tabulation of survey items helps us differentiate the level of faculty awareness across disciplines. In the Social Sciences, more than seven in 10 faculty members (73%) say they know the Task Force. On the other hand, a slight majority (54%) of Natural Science faculty members report they are aware of it. As for the variations across levels of teaching experience, it seems natural to find that junior faculty is less informed than senior faculty about the campus initiative led by the Office of the Provost.

**62 percent of LS&A faculty report being aware of the Textbook Task Force.**

***How does this figure differ across disciplines?***

- 60% of Humanities faculty
- 73% of Social Science faculty
- 54% of Natural Science faculty

***How does this figure differ across years of teaching?***

- 27% of faculty with 1-5 years teaching
- 53% of faculty with 6-10 years teaching
- 71% of faculty with 11-20 years teaching
- 78% of faculty with 20+ years teaching

There is ample evidence that faculty have been informed about the Textbook Task Force. At the same time, when asked about the specifics regarding a series of recommendations proposed by the Task Force, faculty member's level of awareness varies between 15% and 82%. At the highest level of awareness, 82% of faculty members report knowing of the University's new initiative and its implementation of "textbook adoption dates" by which textbook lists should be posted to allow students to take advantage of the used book market and seek savings in other ways. On the other hand, 15% report they do not know any of the Task Force recommendations.

***How many faculty members say they know the following recommendations proposed by the Textbook Task Force?***

- 82% of faculty know the recommendation re: establishing "textbook adoption dates"
- 57% of faculty know the recommendation re: developing the "used textbook market"
- 47% of faculty know the recommendation re: establishing an "online textbook tool"
- 24% of faculty know the recommendation re: encouraging "faculty communication"
- 15% of faculty don't know any

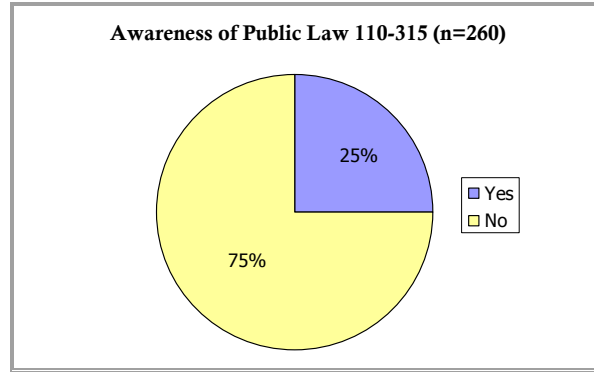
### **Rising Textbook Prices as a National Issue**

The fact that textbooks now cost approximately \$1,000 annually is a tremendous financial burden for many students and their families. At the same time, escalating educational costs (tuition and textbooks) have a negative impact on federal and state government spending as financial aid providers. As a result, both federal and state governments have taken action aiming to contain soaring textbook prices and to improve affordability. The proposed solutions to lower student textbook costs include a variety of federal and state government policies and programs, including advocacy and legislative pressure on textbook publishers requiring transparent pricing, unbundling of supplemental material, and less frequent textbook revising.

To better understand the present and future context of campus initiatives directed at increasing textbook affordability, we asked LS&A faculty two questions to assess their awareness of recent legislative activities. The first question concerned Public Law 110-315 (the Higher Education Opportunity Act), effective in July 2010, which requires universities to include textbook information and prices in online course listings.

Three-quarters (75%) of faculty say that they are unaware of Public Law 110-315. This indicates that recent textbook related legislative activities have drawn limited attention from Michigan faculty.

There is a clear disciplinary variation on this point; while only 14% of Natural Science and 19% of Social Science faculty members say they are aware of Public Law 110-315, 34% of Humanities faculty reported being aware of it. It is not surprising to find that greater teaching seniority would increase opportunities for faculty to be more informed on textbook related initiatives such as recent legislative activities.



**25 percent of LS&A faculty report knowing of Public Law 110-315.**

***How does this figure differ across disciplines?***

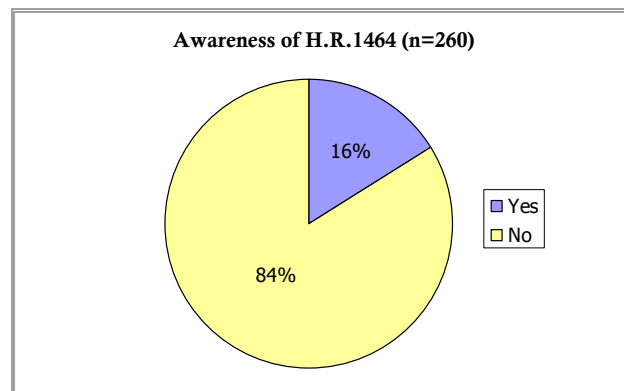
- 34% of Humanities faculty
- 19% of Social Science faculty
- 14% of Natural Science faculty

***How does this figure differ across years of teaching?***

- 20% of faculty with 1-5 years teaching
- 22% of faculty with 6-10 years teaching
- 24% of faculty with 11-20 years teaching
- 29% of faculty with 20+ years teaching

The next question aims to assess faculty awareness of the newly proposed bill H.R. 1464: Learning Opportunity with Creation of Open Source Textbooks Act of 2009, requiring federal agencies to collaborate in the development of freely-available open source educational materials for college-level physics, chemistry, math, and other fields.

Our survey results show that the level of awareness of H.R. 1464 is low; only 16% of faculty members say they know of the newly proposed act. Admittedly, this may be because only four months had elapsed between when the bill was presented to the House of Representatives on March 12, 2009 and when the survey was delivered. As a result, the overall awareness of H.R. 1464 is generally low and without distinct differences across disciplines and years of teaching experience.



**16 percent of LS&A faculty report knowing of H.R. 1464.**

**How does this figure differ across disciplines?**

- 17% of Humanities faculty
- 19% of Social Science faculty
- 10% of Natural Science faculty

**How does this figure differ across years of teaching?**

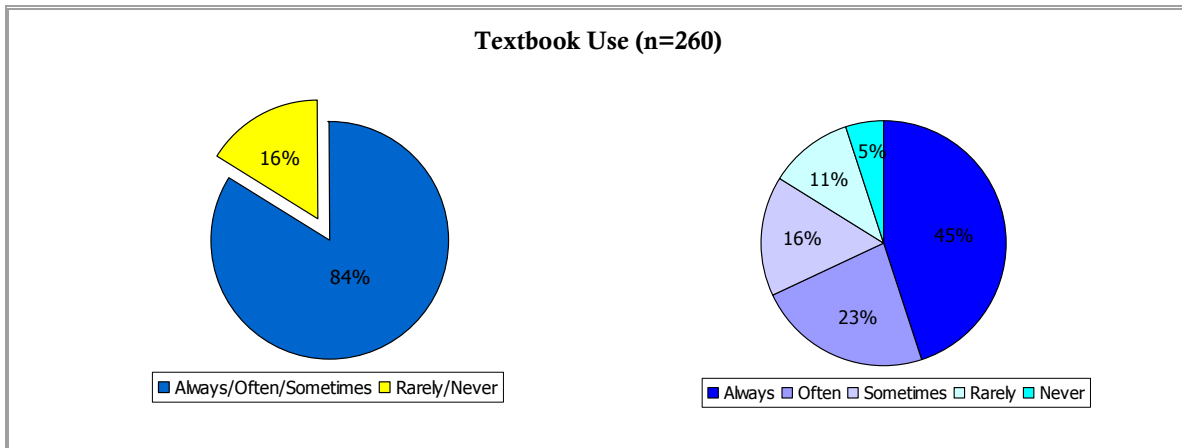
- 8% of faculty with 1-5 years teaching
- 8% of faculty with 6-10 years teaching
- 17% of faculty with 11-20 years teaching
- 22% of faculty with 20+ years teaching

### 2.3.3 Characteristics of Faculty Textbook Selection

#### Frequency of Textbook Use

In the last section of our survey, we asked LS&A faculty ten questions (Q10-19) in order to help us identify which factors most influence their selection of instructional materials and to better understand their views about more affordable alternatives to traditional textbooks. To ensure accurate interpretation, respondents were given a definition of “textbook” as “a manual of instruction or a standard book in any field of study” in Question 10.

More than four-fifths (84%) say that they use textbooks in teaching courses.



In terms of frequency, we find a distinct variation across disciplines. Among Natural Science faculty, 98% report they “always/often/sometimes” use textbooks in teaching courses. This figure is higher than the average (84%), as well as the two other disciplines (77% for Humanities and for 79% Social Science). Length of teaching experience, however, does not seem to determine a pattern of textbook use.

***How often do faculty use textbooks in teaching courses?***

- 84% of LS&A faculty “always/often/sometimes” use textbooks
- 16% of LS&A faculty “rarely/never” use textbooks

***How does this figure differ across disciplines?***

**Humanities**

- 77% of faculty “always/often/sometimes” use textbooks
- 23% of faculty “rarely/never” use textbooks

**Social Science**

- 79% of faculty “always/often/sometimes” use textbooks
- 21% of faculty “rarely/never” use textbooks

**Natural Science**

- 98% of faculty “always/often/sometimes” use textbooks
- 2% of faculty “rarely/never” use textbooks

**Textbook Information**

To better understand faculty attitudes and motives in selecting textbooks, we asked LS&A faculty questions regarding the importance of textbook information. Two questionnaire items (Questions 10 and 11) assess attentiveness to textbook prices in choosing teaching materials, as well as faculty commitment to providing students with textbook prices and ISBNs.

Fully 96% report they are “always/often/sometimes” aware of textbook prices in the process of textbook selection, as opposed to 4% who say they “rarely/never” know textbook prices in advance. When asked if they have provided information about textbook prices and ISBNs in their course listings, a slight majority (56%) says that they “always/often/sometime” provide information about textbook prices and ISBNs in their course listings. Apparently, the data suggest a distinct overall gap between awareness and practice.

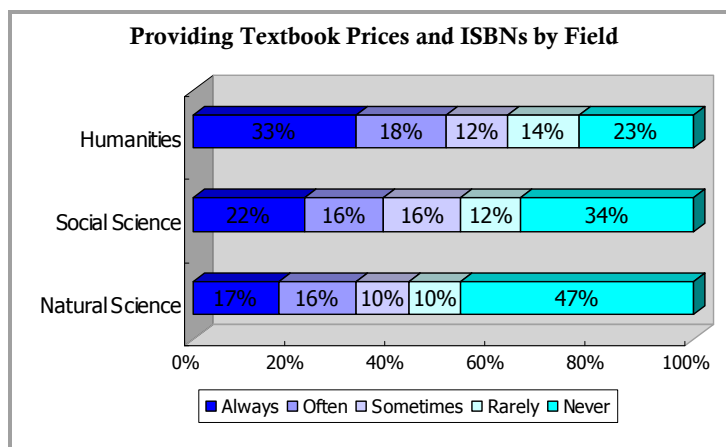
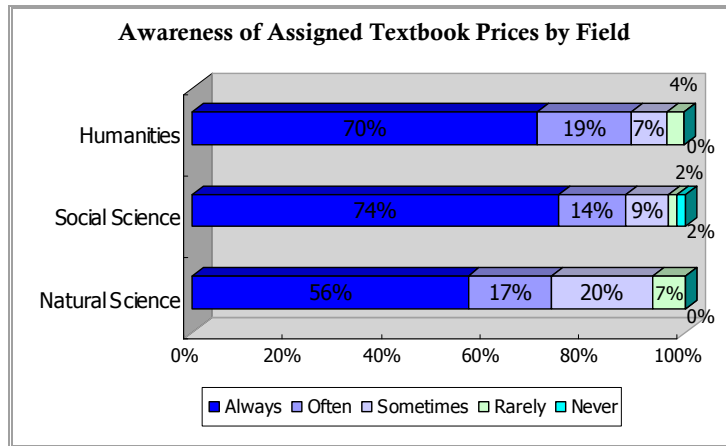
***How many faculty members say they know textbook prices before assigning their books?***

- 96% of LS&A faculty

***How many faculty members say they provide information about textbook prices and ISBNs in their course listings?***

- 56% of LS&A faculty

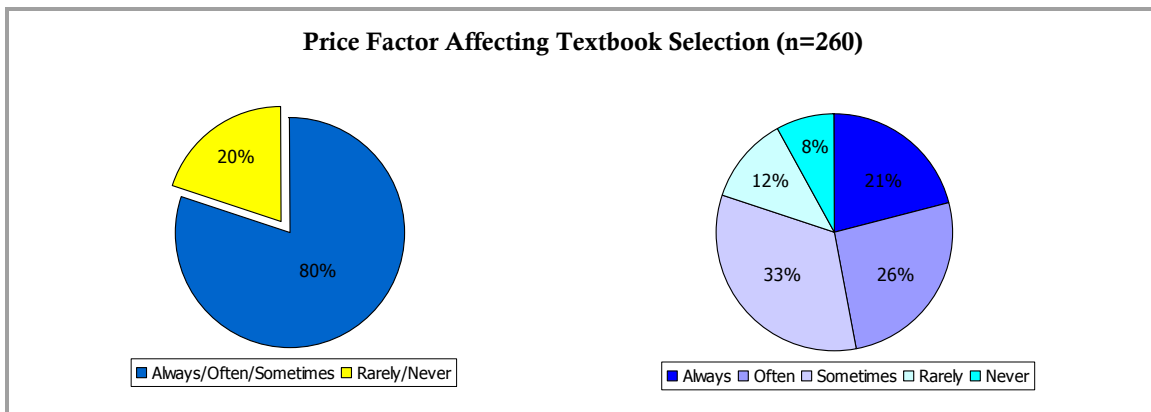
Additionally, the survey data show clear differences across disciplines. As noted above, Natural Science faculty are much more likely to use textbooks in teaching classes (98%) compared to the two other disciplines, and similarly, they are also likely to be aware of textbook prices when choosing their textbooks (93%). Conversely, Natural Science faculty are less likely to provide textbook information when assigning course materials; less than half (43%) report they “always/often/sometimes” provide textbook prices and ISBNs in their course listings. In comparison, although the level of awareness among Natural Science faculty is just 3% lower than in the Humanities, the data regarding practice indicates that Natural Science is 14% lower than the Humanities. Furthermore, while the data shows an overall gap exists between awareness and practice in all fields, this gap seems to be much wider in Natural Science. In contrast, according to our survey results, faculty member’s teaching experience seems to affect neither the level of awareness nor actual practice.



***Factors Affecting Faculty Member’s Textbook Selection***

In Questions 13 and 16, we aimed to identify factors that influence faculty in choosing instructional materials. These two questionnaire items indicate that several key factors, including quality of content, scope of coverage, and textbook prices affect their textbook selection.

Four-fifths (80%) of the survey respondents report that prices “always/often/sometimes” influence their choices of textbooks. This clearly indicates that rising textbook costs have had a significant impact on faculty who actually assign textbooks.



Again, differences across disciplines are worth noting but are not as divergent as we have seen in other questionnaire items, since in all three major fields more than seven in 10 faculty members say price has influenced their textbook selection. Still, it is interesting to note that the price factor seems to have a less significant impact on Natural Science faculty than the other two disciplines.

*80 percent of LS&A faculty report textbook prices have affected their choices of teaching materials. How does this figure differ across disciplines?*

Humanities

- 81% of faculty are affected

Social Science

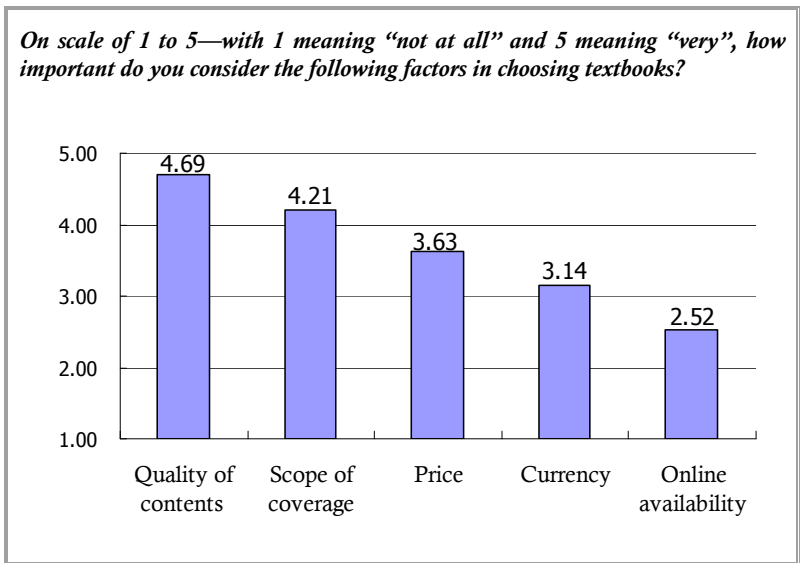
- 88% of faculty are affected

Natural Science

- 70% of faculty are affected

Another survey item about key factors that may shape faculty member’s decision-making about textbook selection indicates that textbook price is indeed a factor of concern for faculty but not a sole or primary one. On a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important), faculty rated 4.69 for “quality of content” and 4.21 for the “scope of coverage.” The “price” factor rates a 3.63 level of concern on the scale, putting it higher than the mid-point. This is particularly interesting given that 80% of faculty report that textbook prices influence their choice of teaching materials. The rate for “online availability” came last with a score of 2.52.

Of all survey respondents, sixty-five faculty members commented that they considered other important factors in addition to the five choices given in our survey. These include: accuracy, clarity, credibility of author(s), illustrations, interest, and readability.

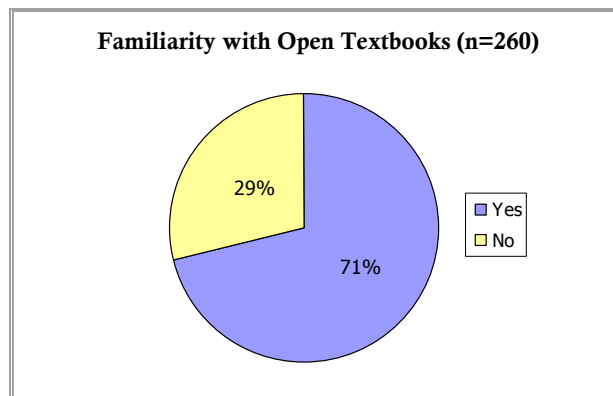


### 2.3.4 Faculty Views on Alternatives to Conventional Textbooks

#### A Search for Affordable Alternatives

Because one of the primary goals of our survey was to better understand faculty views about more affordable alternatives to traditional textbooks, in Questions 14, 15 and 17 we assessed faculty member's awareness and use of open textbooks. To ensure accurate interpretation, respondents were given a definition of "open textbook" as "a no-cost electronic textbooks offered online".

Overall, three survey items about affordable alternatives indicate that open textbooks are relatively well known among faculty. A little less than three-quarters (71%) say they are familiar with open textbooks. Differences across disciplines and years of teaching experience are worth noting; Natural Science faculty has the largest percentage of respondents (76%) who say they are familiar with open textbooks, but there is no clear association between the length of teaching experience and the level of familiarity with open textbooks.



***71 percent of LS&A faculty report being familiar with open textbooks. How does this figure differ across disciplines?***

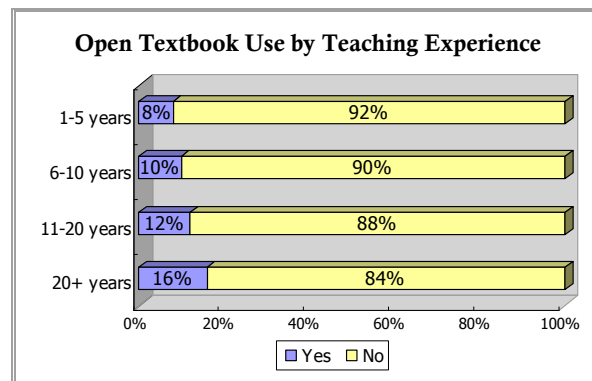
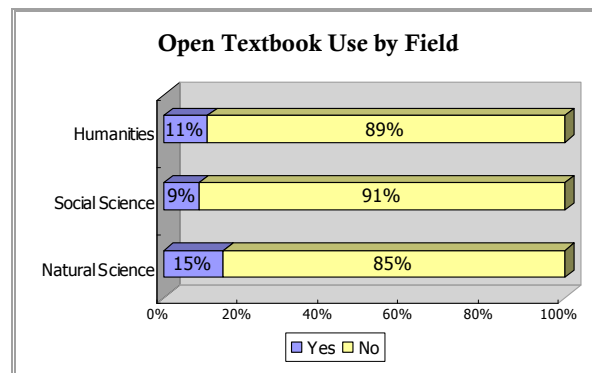
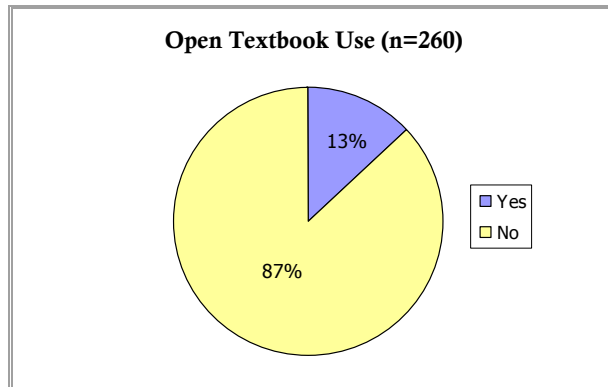
- 66% of Humanities faculty
- 73% of Social Science faculty
- 76% of Natural Science faculty

***How does this figure differ across years of teaching?***

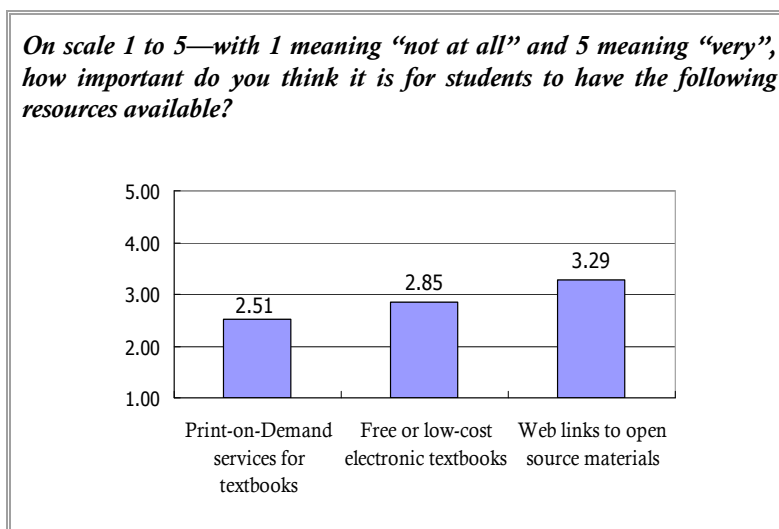
- 68% of faculty with 1-5 years teaching
- 68% of faculty with 6-10 years teaching
- 74% of faculty with 11-20 years teaching
- 73% of faculty with 20+ years teaching



As opposed to a relatively high level of familiarity, when asked about the frequency of open textbook use in class, only 13% of faculty report they have used open textbooks. Apparently, there is again a distinct gap between awareness and practice concerning open textbooks. Despite overall limited use of open textbooks in all fields, Natural Science faculty (15%) are slightly more likely to use open textbooks than the other disciplines (11% for Humanities and 9% for Social Science). Interestingly, senior faculty members are more likely to use open textbooks than junior faculty. Given a fairly high awareness level and low adoption rate of open textbooks, this survey data raise some meaningful questions about how affordable options, such as open textbooks, can be widely used in class.

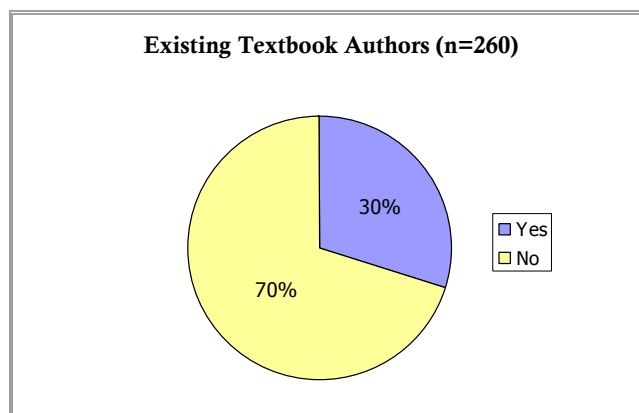


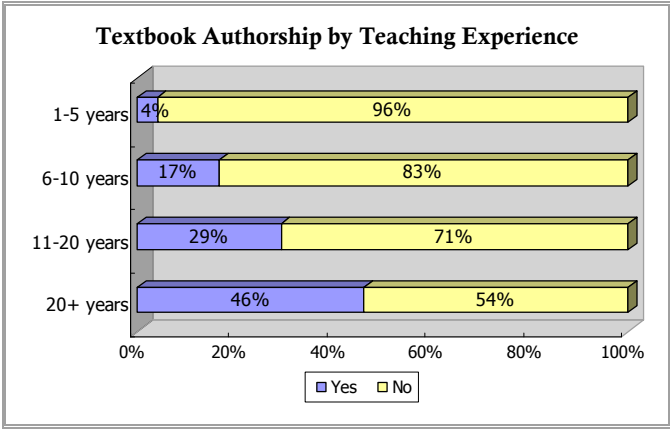
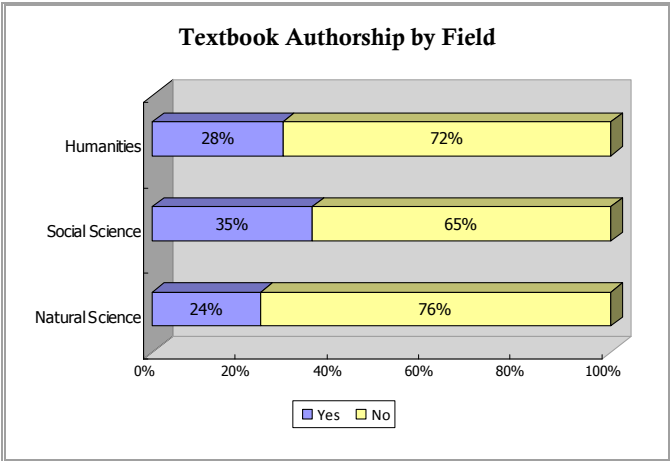
Finally, in Question 17 all survey respondents are asked to rate the importance of alternative resource availability for students on scale of 1 to 5 — with 1 meaning “not at all important” and 5 meaning “very important.” Alternatives include: (1) services that provide web links to open source materials, (2) free or low-cost electronic textbooks, and (3) print-on-demand services for textbooks. The data suggest that these given alternatives are considered somewhat important as all scores fall around the mid-point. This nuanced result may be attributed to the way we framed a question about alternative resources and services that faculty members believe are important to students, instead of having directly asked faculty their preferences. Additionally, we may have been ambiguous about service providers, say, the University Library, or its particular unit, associated with print-on-demand services and others. Still, the fact that one of our given choices, “services that provide web links to open source materials,” came first with the score of 3.29 would indicate the faculty’s potential interest and need for new campus services to identify, locate, screen and seek adoption of open source materials as nontraditional teaching materials.



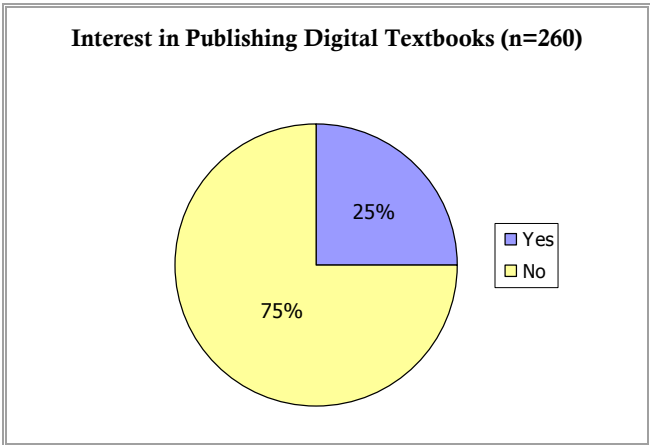
***Existing and Prospective Textbook Authors***

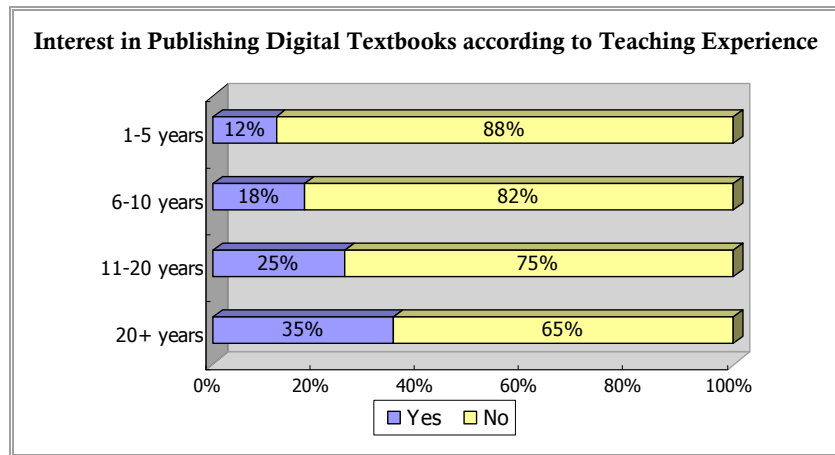
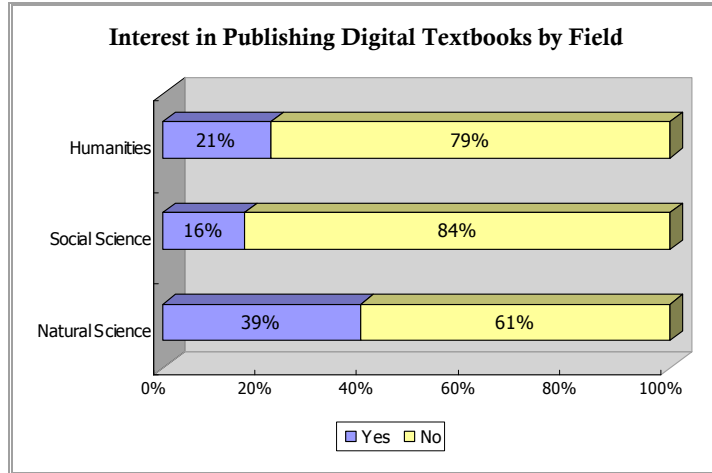
The University Library believes that the University of Michigan has a significant opportunity to leverage the Library’s publishing capacity and infrastructure in support of textbook publishing for our community. In particular, the Library can become a central point of development and distribution of quality textbooks for a fraction of the cost of commercially produced texts. With an eye toward working with our faculty, in Questions 18 and 19 we have identified existing and prospective textbook authors. Among LS&A faculty, 3 in ten (30%) report they are textbook authors. There is no distinct difference across disciplines, but not surprisingly, a greater number of senior faculty have written textbooks than junior faculty; almost half (46%) of faculty with more than twenty years of teaching say they are textbook authors.





According to the data, a quarter (25%) expresses an interest in writing a textbook and publishing it in a digital format. What is striking is that 39% of faculty in Natural Science showed an interest in publishing digital textbooks. This is approximately 1.6 times greater than the average, and is even higher compared with 21% of Humanities faculty that express an interest in digital textbook publishing. When sorted by years of teaching experience, the data indicate that senior faculty members have greater interest than less experienced faculty in writing and publishing textbooks in a digital format.





### 3) Interview

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#### 3.1 Demographics of Interviewees

To further investigate characteristics of survey responses, we have designed an interview that we would use to gather data from individual faculty. Interviews are particularly useful not only as follow-up to certain respondents to our textbook questionnaires, but also for getting the story behind a participant's experiences and for pursuing in-depth information around the topic. Moreover, unlike an online survey, we, as an interviewer, have the opportunity to probe or as follow up questions onsite. With these strengths of interview in mind, we have developed a set of interview questions designed to help understand how faculty members define textbooks, consider textbook price and different formats in selecting course materials.

There are different types of interview formats. For instance, interviewing can be informal and conversational with no predetermined questions to be asked in order to remain as open and adaptable as possible to the interviewee's nature and priorities. Conversely, interviewing can be guided by an interview protocol to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee. This approach provides more focus but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting the information from the interviewee. In our interviews with Michigan faculty, the latter approach was adopted although during the interview the interviewer went with the flow in order to be as flexible as possible in getting the story behind a participant's experiences concerning textbooks.

In identifying potential interviewees, one of our survey questions asked LS&A faculty about their willingness to participate in follow-interviews. Fortunately, of 260 survey respondents, sixty-one faculty members volunteered to be interview participants. Of 61 volunteers, we contacted 50 faculty and ultimately scheduled 24 in-person interviews (approximately 10% of survey respondents). Twenty-four interviews were conducted between August and September 2009 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Each interview session was held in a faculty's office with the least distraction and lasted for between 30 and 60 minutes.

We interviewed a diverse group of respondents and twenty-four interviewees include:

*Demographics by Affiliation:*

- d) Humanities: 8  
American Literature (1), Classical Studies (2), English Language Institute (1), English (2), German (1), and Near Eastern Studies (1)
- e) Social Science: 8  
Anthropology (1), Economics (1), Political Science (1), Psychology (1), Sociology (2), Survey Research (1), and Women's Studies (1)
- f) Natural Science: 8  
Biology (2), Chemistry (2), Engineering (1), Math (1), Zoology/Ecology (1), and Physics (1)

*Demographics by Rank:*

Full Professor: 15  
Associate Professor: 5  
Assistant Professor: 0  
Lecturer: 4

### 3.2 Interview Questions

The interview questions, as listed below, covered both factual and meaningful topics. In formulating certain questions that were specific to interviewee profiles, we considered interviewee's academic discipline, years of teaching experience, and whether they are or might become textbook authors.

1. According to our recent survey, approximately 85% of LSA faculty members are aware of the fact that textbook prices are soaring and that Michigan students spend about \$1,000 annually for textbooks. Yet, this does not necessarily mean all Michigan faculty members define a textbook in the same way and/or consider the escalation in price as a "problem." To help us better understand how Michigan faculty view these issues, we started with the following basic questions:
  - a. How do you define textbooks?
  - b. Do you think the conventional definition of a textbook has been changing? If so, why and how?
2. Many argue that the problem of expensive textbooks is not necessarily common to all subject fields. In fact, one comment from our survey points to the importance of "distinguishing differences between the role and cost of textbooks across the different disciplines, i.e. significant differences between the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences." Regarding differences across disciplines, we asked the following questions.
  - a. Are there any textbook initiatives and/or discussions within your department regarding textbook issues?
  - b. Can you share with us your opinion on the possibility of collaboration between your department and the library in search of alternatives to the traditional expensive textbook?
3. In the survey, we asked faculty about their awareness of the recently enacted public law 110-315 requiring universities to include textbook information and prices in its online course listings, as well as the newly proposed bill encouraging the development of OER to increase textbook affordability. Regarding legislative activities, we asked the following questions.
  - a. Do you think government(s) should or should not be involved in dealing with textbook issues?
  - b. Do you think the university library should be taking more and stronger initiatives as part of campus efforts along with other federal and state efforts?
4. In our survey, we also asked faculty if they knew about our own university's efforts led by the Textbook Task Force established by the Office of the Provost. Of 260 respondents, only a slight majority reported being aware of the Task Force. More surprisingly, some faculty members commented that the Task Force recommendations and some implementations, such as the introduction of Online Textbook, do not necessarily reflect faculty's voices and needs. Therefore, we asked for feedback on the new campus-based textbook initiative and its practical impact on teaching.
  - a. Can you share with us your opinion about the University of Michigan's recent initiatives, especially the one led by the Textbook Task Force?
  - b. How do you feel about its decisions/recommendations affecting faculty? What is your reaction to changes such as the implementation of the Online Textbook Tool?
5. Our current study and a possible launch of a library-based textbook publishing program are not part of the Task Force efforts, but we share with the Task Force the goal of better serving the Michigan scholarly community. In addition to the Task Force and our library efforts, there are a number of campus-based efforts related to the use and development of course materials, including CTools and Open.Michigan's development of OER, to name only two. With all these

- a. How knowledgeable do you feel you are regarding currently available services? Are they too confusing? If so, how do you think we can make improvements?
  - b. Do you think that more instruction about library services and resources should be provided to faculty and students?
  
6. In considering alternatives to traditional print textbooks, we asked about faculty member's practice of choosing and adopting online teaching materials, particularly open textbooks. Despite their familiarity with open textbooks, 85% of faculty members have never or rarely used open textbooks in their teaching.
  - a. What do you think are possible obstacles to circulating open textbooks in your field?
  - b. Some faculty comments in the survey pointed out the difficulty of finding good quality online materials and/or open textbooks. Do you also find a similar problem in your field?
  - c. If you are one of few respondents who reported to have actually used digital textbooks, what is your experience with them?
  
7. In a similar vein, we also asked how important it is for faculty to have three resources available to students, such as free or low-cost electronic textbooks, web links to open source materials, and print-on-demand services for textbooks. The survey results indicate faculty member's mixed preferences.
  - a. Is it true that it is not faculty but students who prefer print textbooks in class? Can you tell us your preferences and your students' preferences?
  
8. We also discussed alternatives to traditional print textbooks. There are a number of different means to reduce textbook costs, including a hybrid model that combines online availability and print-on-demand. In the fall of 2008 an Espresso Book Machine (EBM) was purchased by the UM library. This machine can produce a perfect-bound paperback book in 5-7 minutes. Using the EMB, we could produce books when they are needed, which in many contexts would be cheaper and more convenient than the current system. Eventually, the University Library hopes to partner with people from the University community to experiment with printing new works, including textbooks. Also, since February 2009 the University of Michigan Library has begun to participate in MyCopy, a pilot project offering low-cost print-on-demand (POD) copies of Springer ebooks that the Library has purchased. The MyCopy titles are in English with a copyright year of 2005 or later and a maximum of 832 pages. Titles include monographs, textbooks, reference works, and handbooks in a wide range of subjects. For library patrons, to purchase a print copy of an ebook costs \$24.95 including shipping. Regarding these new library services, we asked the following questions.
  - a. Are you familiar with any of these library services?
  - b. Have you considered using these services when selecting your course materials?
  
9. As a textbook author, you have/have not expressed interest in publishing a textbook in digital format.
  - a. Could you please tell us why?
  - b. As a potential digital textbook author, what are the constraints and motivation for publishing in a digital format?
  
10. In conclusion, do you have any general feedback for services and products that the University Library could offer regarding textbooks?

### **3.3 Interview Data Analysis**

In this section, we provide a summary and interpretations of the information we obtained from interviews by focusing on disciplinary trends and preferences. Interview narratives are synthesized based on the four different themes.

#### ***3.3.1 Definitions of Textbooks***

It is not an easy task to concisely define textbooks since they can be defined quite differently across disciplines and at different academic levels. Yet, to better understand faculty views on textbooks in general and textbook cost-related issues, we began each interview by asking the participant to define textbooks.

According to our interview results, textbooks are defined as “books that are specifically written for use as class material designed to convey knowledge from broad aspects of a given field and suited to supplement lectures.” Slightly differently, some faculty members characterized textbooks as: “being different from required texts/books”; “being repeatedly used in introductory courses”; “including many illustrations, exercises, and examples”; “giving textbook authors the least flexibility to add something new despite frequent revisions (particularly in hard science fields).” Also, for those who teach both undergraduate and graduate courses, it was more common to define textbooks depending on teaching levels. For instance, a Biology professor said, “it is unlikely that one single standardized textbook is assigned in graduate courses, but rather, a variety of sources (mainly articles) covering a set of topics is used in class.” Interestingly, an English faculty member noted the role of publishers in defining textbooks: “textbooks are books that are published mostly by large commercial publishers.” Similarly, a Chemistry professor pointed out “constraints” that are specific to textbook publishing because of a market dominated by commercial publishers.

While it initially appeared difficult for us to concisely define textbooks, all interviewees shared clear understandings about what textbooks are, how they are used in class, and about the context of textbook publishing. Finally, it is important to note faculty member’s views on whether the definition of textbooks has changed. When asked if they think textbook definitions have changed, interviewees almost unanimously said “no” because the role that textbooks have played in education has not significantly changed over time. Instead, all interviewees, except a Classical Studies faculty member, agreed that definitions of textbooks in terms of formats have been drastically changed, especially over the last decade.

#### ***3.3.2 Concerns about Rising Textbook Costs***

Most of the faculty members we interviewed shared concerns about rising textbook costs. In particular, of the twenty-four interviewees, all fifteen full professors we interviewed noted that in the last several years they have begun paying extra attention to the prices of the textbooks they assign. This is because “students have begun to voice their financial burdens in textbook purchases,” according to a Sociology faculty member with 25 years of teaching experience. In addition, according to a Physics faculty member, faculty awareness of rising textbook prices has also been “influenced by an increasing number of reports in both national and campus news and articles” that they read and hear daily. This finding is particularly interesting if compared to the general characteristics revealed by the survey about the relatively low level of awareness about textbook-related legislative activities and the University’s Textbook Task Force recommendations. Interestingly, our interview results do not indicate any substantive disciplinary differences in concerns about rising textbook costs.

While general concerns about escalating textbook prices were commonly shared, there was a wide range of feedback on the University’s current cost-saving practices. Some faculty expressed their support but others made negative remarks regarding new initiatives and services offered as a result of the University’s Textbook Task Force recommendations. Among several recommendations, the Task Force suggested in 2007 that the University should develop, test, and implement an online textbook tool to allow faculty to enter and share their textbook lists with students and booksellers. In the fall of 2008, the online Textbook Tool was launched, and since then Michigan faculty have been encouraged, but not required, to select their books early (at least six weeks before the start of the term) and to post textbook lists with relevant information including title, author, publication year and location, edition, publisher, and ISBN. It is reported that for Winter 2009, approximately 3,000 textbooks were entered in this online textbook system, indicating that 62% of classes



with enrollment greater than 100 students on the Ann Arbor campus had textbook or course pack information at least six weeks before the start of the term. These data show a relatively high textbook entry rate for the online Textbook Tool, yet some faculty members discussed its drawbacks as well.

For instance, a Sociology faculty member commented about lack of guidance prior to the launch of a new textbook data entry system. A German professor said that having to enter textbook information into the Textbook Tool six weeks in advance for a new term is too early, even though he understands “a major advantage of this Textbook Tool is to give students early notice so they can shop around and save money on their books.” An English professor remarked about user experiences: “If you enter a (book) title (at the Website of Textbook Tool), it presents a list of various editions of that title but without enough context to properly choose a right edition. So you have to do this research outside of the system.” In addition, “once you settle on a particular edition (perhaps by supplying an ISBN), you cannot tell whether the title is in print, so you have no idea whether students will actually be able to locate it. You could try to research this on Amazon, but even there they don’t tell you it’s out of print if there are still some copies available in a warehouse. But you can’t guarantee that there will still be enough there once your students buy the book. Local bookstores used to handle all of this for you by searching book distributor databases.”

It is worth noting that these comments not only address usability issues of Michigan’s new online Textbook Tool, but they also remind us that in discussing campus-based cost-saving measures we must take into account the impact of off-campus dynamics, including the fast growing online book market, online e-textbook vendors, online textbook rental businesses, and the roles that local bookstores may have played in the past in faculty member’s textbook selection and ordering. We received several comments through both the survey and interviews regarding the convenience of having local bookstores as middlemen.

Admittedly, we received a number of comments about local bookstores largely because the survey and interviews were conducted shortly after the news broke about the closing of an Ann Arbor local bookstore that had been in business for 29 years; the owner attributed the closing to the rise of Internet book vendors. According to our interview data, the degree to which faculty members rely on middlemen’s assistance in textbook selection and ordering clearly differs across disciplines. The Humanities faculty members seem to have appreciated and utilized local bookstores in textbook selection and ordering to a greater extent than any other academic fields.

Finally, when asked if there are any departmental discussions or initiatives associated with textbook affordability, all interviewees said that there were none except informal conversations among colleagues about choosing textbooks. In fact, a Chemistry faculty member mentioned a Textbook Review Committee in her department, but this seems to be primarily designed for the dozen or so instructors who teach the same introductory chemistry courses to decide which textbooks should be adopted. In this context, we also asked interviewees about how much they think federal and state governments, universities, libraries, departments, and/or faculty should be involved in dealing with textbook issues. Interestingly, almost all interviewees showed stronger support for campus-based initiatives rather than government-directed cost-saving measures. A Political Science faculty member said he prefers the University’s “bottom-up approach” and “something unique to Michigan.” Conversely, an Economics professor looked at cost-saving measures from a slightly different angle, saying that “students have become increasingly competent in gathering and sharing information about more affordable options without much intervention from the university.”

As noted above, the University of Michigan has taken a step forward by introducing the online textbook data entry system as part of a significant infrastructure development. Yet, the extent to which new UM-developed infrastructure can be utilized will depend on what other low-price options are available and feasible. This explains why many other universities have studied possibilities of, and adopted, other more affordable alternatives to conventional expensive print textbooks by altering textbook formats and/or using technology to create and distribute instructional materials in new ways. Such technological innovations include electronic textbooks, no-cost online textbooks, open educational resources (OER), open courseware (OCW), and print-on-demand services. The more faculty members discover and take advantage of these options, the more students will benefit; accordingly, to identify how and where future UM efforts should be directed, we think further feedback from faculty should be gathered. To this end, questions concerning faculty and student

preferences about textbook format and content alternatives were addressed in the second half of each interview session.

### ***3.3.3 Faculty and Student Preferences about Textbook Formats***

Our interview data reveal faculty and student preferences regarding formats of teaching and learning materials. Although we have not surveyed University of Michigan students, we attempted to gather some information about student preferences through faculty interviews. It became apparent that all Humanities faculty members preferred students having traditional print textbooks in class. They also noted that students preferred print formats so they could mark texts. Likewise, a Classical Studies faculty member said, “it is hard to be on the same page with all students in class if some have traditional textbooks and others have nontraditional textbooks on screen without hard copies.” Accordingly, to provide students with more diverse affordable options may require faculty to become more flexible in their teaching and even a “mindset change.”

Both English and Anthropology professors offered similar remarks regarding the association between preferences about textbook formats and the size of classes. In teaching small classes, according to an English professor who uses many novels as textbooks, “a book with the same edition and publisher is more practical and appreciated by faculty and students.” But she added, “I don’t think the ‘physicality’ of books and electronic materials on screen are mutually exclusive.”

Social Science and Natural Science instructors showed more diverse preferences about textbook formats. A Chemistry professor, who is an active member of UM-MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching) said, “I’ve been assigning my e-textbook in class, but in reality, many students still prefer to own print books or at least to print my e-textbook.” Some professors, including Economics and Women’s Studies/Musicology, shared their preferences for electronic textbooks, in which “a number of online examples and exercises coupled with three-dimensional illustrations, audio, and videos are included,” which they said are also welcomed by their students. Others, however, did not show strong preferences one way or the other. According to a Psychology professor, the cost of printing digital content is not negligible, and many students still prefer to print out most of their assigned texts that are electronically available.

To follow up a survey question regarding free open textbooks (and low-cost e-textbooks), we asked interviewees about their own views and experiences of using, or considering using, nontraditional textbooks in their courses. Despite the mixed preferences indicated by the survey, interview results revealed faculty member’s overall interest across disciplines in discovering more about open textbooks and other electronic resources available to faculty and students. In fact, a junior faculty of Sociology proposed that, “the University of Michigan Library could offer new services to help faculty in finding what kind of nontraditional textbook alternatives are available in my field.”

Finally, when we asked faculty member’s opinions about laptops (and other e-text reading devices in general) that enable students to read open textbooks and/or e-textbooks in class without print materials, several interviewees preferred *not* to allow laptop use in class. An English professor mentioned possible drawbacks of e-book readers like Amazon’s Kindle and hinted at a potential negative impact of online reading on students’ learning behavior. In particular, she pointed out distinctive differences between book skimming and scrolling on screen. Conversely, a Math professor stated that, “I believe students are a lot more adaptable to new reading devices.” An Economics professor warmly welcomed the era of e-book readers, but he also reminded us that “when it comes to reliability, students cannot afford being unable to access online materials, free or low-cost, purchased or rented, a night before their final exams.” Indeed, the issue of usability and reliability of access to digital materials is significant and “should not be overshadowed by a pursuit of more economical and convenient choices” in today’s digital age.

### 3.3.4 Experiences in Textbook Selection, Use, and Production

While the survey indicated that price affected faculty textbook selection, our interview data revealed more accurately how it shaped their decisions. In turn, the in-depth interviews helped us discover faculty member's various but unique approaches to the University's social mission to increase textbook affordability.

In general, interviewees expressed the opinion that saving costs should not come at the expense of quality. At the same time, many discussed their own efforts to help students save money on textbooks. Some faculty members have recently begun to give students more affordable options, for instance a choice of bound or unbound texts if available and relevant. A Sociology professor, a textbook author herself, said that "my textbook publisher, Pierson, has recently begun to offer unbound textbooks at a half price." This is an interesting indication that commercial publishers have also begun to look into new services to better meet customers' needs.

Similarly, a Physics professor now allows her students to use textbooks of different editions; generally, an older edition of the same title is less expensive than the current edition. Because this professor thinks that "short revision cycles, or more frequent revisions, are not always legitimate as new content in hard science textbooks is very hard to add," she makes an extra effort to assign different chapters and pages for an older edition. Indeed, as is often noted, short revision cycles of textbooks—mostly driven by commercial publishers—not only continue to raise the price of newer textbooks but also to limit students' ability to reduce their costs by purchasing used textbooks and selling their textbooks back to bookstores at the end of the term. It is surely remarkable that some faculty members have already started to help students reduce textbook costs in various ways. Another remarkable example to increase affordability, according to a Chemistry professor and a textbook author, is that "authors have an opportunity to intervene by saying 'no' to too frequent revisions." And in fact, he added, he and his colleagues have done so once in the past.

A majority of interviewees noted increasing reliance on electronic articles and other online materials when putting course materials together. Four professors reported that they now check for electronic availability before assigning books. Those who already use e-textbooks in class appreciated some of the e-book functions enabling "online interactive teaching and learning."

When we asked interviewees about the familiarity with one of our new library services called MyCopy (a pilot project offering low-cost, POD copies of Springer e-books that the Library has purchased), none of them reported being familiar with such a service, except for one professor whose Biology textbook is published by Springer and is available in a POD option to Michigan patrons. Yet, this professor did not know that registered students and researchers at the Michigan Library are able to purchase his textbook in a different format or delivery option for only \$24.95 including a shipping cost. He noted with some surprise that, "the new format is much less expensive than a standard print textbook sold for (the full list price of) \$99." After confirming that the royalties on MyCopy book sales correspond with the royalties authors receive for standard print book sales, this professor replied, "I may have to tell my students about this new (more affordable) option when assigning my textbook for the next term." It is expected that the competitive price of \$24.95 would meet new demands from price-sensitive students and researchers who are unwilling to pay the full list price. Our interview results address an important question of how we could enhance the adoption of alternatives such as MyCopy books over standard print textbooks.

In addition, when asked about the Espresso Book Machine (EBM), only one-third of interviewees reported knowing of the Library's purchase of this machine. In each interview, we described the EBM as: "A book-making machine that automatically prints, binds, and trims --on demand-- library-quality paperback books with four-color covers indistinguishable from their factory made versions. The EBM will print, bind and trim a 300 page book in about seven minutes. The EBM can be used to make low cost reprints available on demand to UM faculty and students." On the subject of the use of EBM, many interviewees not only asked about the ability to reprint a book that depends upon the book's copyright status and agreements with the rights holder, but also expressed an interest in finding out more about reprint, particularly re-issuing faculty-authored works that are no longer available for sale in print. In each interview, we showed a sample of publication that the Library recently worked with former UM faculty Wilfred Kaplan and Donald J. Lewis to reissue their classic textbook, *Calculus and Linear Algebra*, both online and in-print for purchase at a fraction of

the cost of other calculus textbooks. The faculty interviews helped us to identify their interests and needs, but more importantly, provided an opportunity for us to introduce some of our library services and functions during the interviews.

Finally, several professors shared their experiences of textbook publishing, including two full professors of Chemistry and Economics who published their textbooks in a digital format via Atomic Dog (a division of Cengage Learning that combines online and print delivery) and via MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching) with print editions distributed by Wiley.

#### 4) Recommendations

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This document provides a brief context for our Michigan study and reported on what we have learned from a faculty survey and interviews. We researched faculty views on rising textbook costs, attitudes and motives in the selection of textbooks, and the willingness to consider adopting, contributing to and authoring alternatives to mainstream commercial textbooks. Our empirical findings revealed interesting differences across disciplines and various faculty demographics. The SPO textbook team reached the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. Reinforce (and Raise) the Level of Faculty Awareness about Rising Textbook Costs

We conclude that LS&A faculty members at the University of Michigan are fairly well informed on the increasing burden of textbook costs on undergraduate students. On the other hand, the overall level of faculty awareness of textbook-related legislative activities is relatively low. Accordingly, the University should encourage faculty members to be well-informed about the textbook problem as a campus and national issue so that current and prospective university-based textbook initiatives will be better understood in a broader context. We believe that rising educational costs (particularly escalating textbook expenses) will remain high on the current political agenda, a subject of some national attention and the focus of campus-based debates. With Public Law 110-315 (the Higher Education Opportunity Act) soon to be in effect, it is all the more important for the University to make a greater effort in raising faculty awareness about the need to increase textbook affordability from various angles.

2. Narrow the Gap between Awareness of Rising Textbook Costs and the Selection of Lower-cost Alternatives

There is a distinct gap between the level of faculty awareness of rising textbook costs and the degree to which they consider the option of lower-cost alternatives in textbook selection. Despite a relatively high level of familiarity with open textbooks, the adoption of such materials for their classes is quite limited. We conclude that this distinct gap between awareness and practice in textbook selection needs to be narrowed, and therefore we recommend that the circulation and adoption of more affordable textbook options should be enhanced.

3. Offer More Affordable Alternatives to Traditional Print Textbooks

We conclude that while the students' interests to save money on textbooks have been the primary concern, faculty's interests and needs are equally important. We also must keep in mind that faculty members are not only instructors who assign textbooks to students (i.e. customers/users of textbooks), but they are also prospective authors (i.e. textbook producers). Therefore, to explore opportunities for intervention in the rising costs of textbooks, such faculty's dual roles should be taken into account when working with our faculty.

From the user perspective, the Library can provide an open-access textbook adoption program that promotes existing low- or no-cost e-textbook options to Michigan faculty. Navigating the welter of nonprofit and commercial providers of alternative e-texts requires more effort and time than many faculty will expend. The Library could help to identify, screen, and seek adoption of e-text alternatives to high-cost conventional textbooks.

From the producer perspective, the Library could become a central point of development and distribution of quality textbooks for a fraction of the cost of commercially produced texts. Such an opportunistic textbook publishing program designed to produce free, or low-priced textbooks in digital and print-on-demand formats, would provide our students and their families with a service of tremendous value and signal a firm institutional commitment to help make a quality education more affordable.

## Appendix

In our survey, Question 21 invited faculty to provide suggestions for improving our support services. It asked how the University Library might be more useful in teaching. The table below summarizes faculty feedback and suggestions. Of all survey respondents (n=260), 70 faculty members provided their feedback on current library and campus services as well as suggestions for improvement. Some faculty left multiple comments, and therefore the number of comments does not total exactly 70.

SPO Textbook Survey of Michigan Faculty	
Summary of Faculty Feedback and Suggestions	
Subject	Number of Comments
<b>Library and Campus Services</b>	
<b>Current Services</b>	
Improve Course Reserves service	9
Improve CTools; Offer more help with CTools use	6
Increase textbook collections	3
Offer more guidance about 7Fast	2
Develop better communication channels with subject librarians (e.g. via e-newsletter)	1
Improve the online Textbook Tool	1
<b>Prospective Services</b>	
Provide textbook specialist(s)	7
Offer a 24/7 textbook hotline	2
Assist faculty in dealing with copyright issues	2
Collaborate with faculty in developing digital content	1
Facilitate faculty communication	1
<b>Textbook Costs and Alternatives</b>	
<b>Cost related matters</b>	
Reconsider high prices of coursepacks relative to rising textbook expenses	5
Reconsider textbook expenses (low) relative to tuition costs (high)	3
Privilege textbook quality over cost-saving	3
Consider the fact that textbook costs vary across disciplines	1
Negotiate with publishers to lower textbook prices	1
<b>Textbook alternatives</b>	
Offer incentives for textbook writing and digital content creation	7
Partner with other campus resource providers (e.g. Language Res. Center, BlueStream)	4
Consider problems with open textbooks	3
Launch coursepack publishing	1
Publish and distribute online versions of out-of-print books	1
Consider ways to encourage interdisciplinary campus discussion about textbook costs	1
Research students' reading/learning behaviors on screen	1
<b>Other Suggestions</b>	
Raise faculty awareness of textbook-related legislative/campus activities	6
Raise student awareness of various library services	6
Reconsider the importance of having print textbooks in class	5
Seek collaboration with local bookstore	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>