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Textbooks in America: A study of the increased scrutiny and debate surrounding the cost of college textbooks in America

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TEXTBOOKS IN AMERICA

A study of the increased scrutiny and debate surrounding the cost of college textbooks in America

Abstract

This paper seeks to answer two questions: why are textbooks so expensive; and what is the political process in effect as a result? This research was originally focused solely on recent legislation in the state of Washington regarding textbook affordability. However, its scope quickly expanded to include the nationwide initiatives and legislative actions that were also occurring simultaneously. The result is not meant to charade as exhaustive on the topic. In fact, it is best approached as an overview of the research I conducted, rather than a paper making any arguments either way. This paper could be useful as a fairly extensive guide for interested parties who have not followed the debate over the past decade or so.

The paper is structured in four parts. The first is an introduction to the topic and the paper. The second is an overview of the landmark reports and Federal legislative activity between 2003 and the present. The third is a brief look at state legislation, before focusing in on Michigan, and the University of Michigan campus in particular, as well as a brief examination of local campus policy movements in reaction to the ongoing debate. The fourth consists of concluding thoughts on the topic.

Section I: Introduction

In the academic community, textbooks have long been a topic of discomfort. For undergraduate students who are attempting to budget for college, there tends to be a severe sticker shock associated with the first semester book-buying experience. Tuition prices are already steep, but when the cost of a year's worth of textbooks adds around $1000 to the burden, the prices can be prohibitive to receiving a quality education. Sometimes faculty members seek alternatives, attempting to be mindful of the cost to students, but often the result is still staggering. Here is an eloquent expression of how and why this system is broken; the textbooks market does not function as a normal market, because faculty members choose the books, but do not act as their consumers:

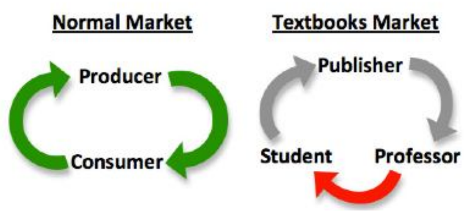


Fig. 1 Textbook Market vs. Normal Market (Student PIRGs)

This paper began as a research project focused on textbook pricing legislation in the state of Washington. However, a very short time into this research, it became apparent that a similar movement had been occurring across the nation over the past decade. People were unhappy about textbook prices, which sparked studies by public interest groups, a congressional hearing, a Government Accountability Office study, and a plethora of legislation at both the state and federal level. This paper attempts to do several things. In Section II, it presents an overview of the landmark reports and Federal legislative activity between 2003 and the present. This should help anyone without background in the subject get up to speed. In Section III, it presents a brief look at state legislation, before focusing in on Michigan, and the University of Michigan campus in particular. It also examines local campus policy movements in reaction to the ongoing debate.

This in no way pretends to be an exhaustive examination of the issue of textbook affordability. However, it should be extensive enough to give individuals without background a good sense of the issue, and where things stand now. This is an exciting time to be involved in the debate, as the focus is swiftly shifting to open access models and the possibilities presented by the digital revolution.

Section II: Influential Reports and Federal Legislation

A Brief Overview of Pre-GAO Report Incidents: 2003-2005

In the first session of the 108th Congress, Representative David Wu of Oregon introduced H.R. 3567 (2003), a bill "To require the General Accounting Office to conduct an investigation of the high price of college textbooks." This bill was introduced on November 20, 2003, and was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce. The bill directed the Comptroller General to investigate and report on: (1) the cost of college textbooks in the United States; and (2) whether the same textbooks are being sold outside the United States at a substantially lower cost. On January 30, 2004, the bill was referred to the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness, and in July of 2005 the GAO released its report.

In the meantime, the state Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) released a report in January of 2004 concerning the same topic on a smaller scale, entitled "Ripoff 101." In July of 2004, a year before the release of the GAO report, the Subcommittee of 21st Century Competitiveness held a congressional hearing called "Are College Textbooks Priced Fairly?" in which they heard the expert testimony of four representatives of major stakeholders in the issue. The last major report to be released prior to the report prepared by the GAO was a second edition of the "Ripoff 101" report. This was released in February of 2005 and featured an expansion of the survey conducted in the original report. The release of this document was closely followed by the GAO report, which sparked much media attention and debate. Before and immediately following this time frame, textbook prices were on the collective mind of the American public.

Ripoff 101: The Start of the Printed Discussion

In January of 2004, the State Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) released a report called "Ripoff 101" which explored and documented the high price of textbooks in the American higher education system. This report surveyed popular textbooks at 10 public college campuses on the West Coast of the country and exposed publisher tactics which artificially raise textbook prices. This report sparked heightened scrutiny of the college textbook publishing industry by media, faculty, and government agencies across the country.

The first major finding of "Ripoff 101" is fairly straightforward: Textbooks are high-cost items in the price of a university education, and they are becoming increasingly expensive. This finding is illustrated by a survey of students at the University of California which found that the average cost of textbooks in the 2003-04 academic year was $898 (U.S. PIRG, 2004, p. 8). From this price tag, the report concludes that textbook prices are equivalent to nearly 20 percent of the average tuition and fees for in-state students at public four-year institutions nationwide (p. 4).

Another major finding of the report refers to the industry practice of adding “bells and whistles” to the textbooks that effectively drives up the price for the student. The worst part of this finding is that 65 percent of the faculty surveyed estimate they “never” or “rarely” include information from the additional bundled items in their courses (p. 11). Students are forced to pay for extra materials that are irrelevant to the course for which they are purchasing the textbook.

This report introduces the term “bundled” to the discussion of textbook prices, which subsequently becomes ubiquitous to the debate. “Bundling” refers to the practice of packaging the “required textbook with non-required materials such as dictionaries, CD-ROMs and study-guides” (U.S. PIRG, 2004, p. 9). This is relevant to the discussion because the report finds that bundled texts cannot be unbundled and purchased a la carte, and that the number of bundled texts is increasing with each new edition.

The final major finding of this report focuses on the publishing industry’s practice of flooding the market with new editions of textbooks. The report contends that changes of content tend to be minor, illustrated by a survey of faculty on the subject: 76 percent stated that the new editions they use are justified “never” to “half the time” (p. 13). These new editions are published on average every 3.8 years, and cost 58 percent more then the used copy of the older edition (p. 12). This practice on the part of the publishing industry makes it difficult for students to save money buying used editions because they are quickly considered obsolete.

The solutions offered up by this first major exploration of the issue are twofold, and indicative of the further debate which unfolds around the issue. First of all, it encourages faculty to reorder older editions of textbooks to help promote a vibrant used textbook market on campus. Secondly, it begins to examine the possibilities of online textbooks for cost-saving potential. The report cites a fact sheet produced by the National Association of College Stores[1] which states that paper, printing and editorial costs account for an average of 32.3 cents of each dollar of a

[1]National Association of College Stores, fact sheet, “Where the New Textbook Dollar Goes.” Available at http://www.nacs.org/common/research/textbook$.pdf.

textbook's price. Based on this assumption, an online model could significantly decrease the retail cost of textbooks.

"Ripoff 101" offered a preliminary examination of the college textbook industry, and it got the attention of policy makers. Many studies have since been conducted to gain further insight into this issue, partially because soon after the release of this report, the United States Congress involved itself in the issue.

July 20 2004: Congressional Hearing on Textbook Affordability

The U.S. House of Representatives of the 108th Congress had a hearing before the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness of the Committee on Education and the Workforce entitled "Are College Textbooks Priced Fairly?" on July 20, 2004. This hearing occurred roughly six months after the State PIRGs "Ripoff 101" report was published. The hearing was one of a series concerning "rapidly rising college costs" (p. 2) and featured the statements of four expert witnesses: Merriah Fairchild, Higher Education Director of the California Student Public Interest Group; Marc Fleischaker, Legal Counsel with the National Association of College Stores; John Isley, Executive Vice-President of Publishing, Planning and Business with Pearson Education; and Virgil Monroe, Manager of Textbook Services at the University of Wisconsin, River Falls.

The testimony of Merriah Fairchild gives interesting insight into the environment of discussion about textbook prices prior to the release of "Ripoff 101": "When we first looked at this issue a year ago, we found there were many theories on why textbooks were expensive…But no real documentation of the problem, or potential solutions" (p. 7). Fairchild gives a summary of the findings and recommendations generated by "Ripoff 101" and offers some suggestions for congressional oversight of the publishing industry, including prevention of anti-competition actions and encouragement to unbundle books.

The testimony of Mark Fleischaker was made on behalf of the National Association of College Stores. His additions of the discussion attempt to prove that college stores are not responsible for the increase in textbook prices. Because they receive a comparatively low discount on pre-priced college texts (p. 14), they are prevented from making a large margin on the sale of textbooks. Fleischaker cites industry surveys which show that the average margin on all textbooks has been 22 percent for "many years" (p. 14), but upon clearing the NACS from blame, avers that “We do not seek a legislative solutions to this problem at the current time…We want to continue to work cooperatively, with our textbook publishers, to lower the prices of textbooks” (p. 15).

The testimony of John Isley emphasizes the many choices that instructors have at their disposal from publishers like Pearson Education. To illustrate this fact, he refers to four different U.S. History books available through Pearson, each with a different price and several with web-based components. He does this to argue that the responsibility falls on the instructor rather than the publisher when it comes to cost of materials for students. He also systematically refutes many of the main conclusions drawn by the “Ripoff 101” report. For example, he cites studies performed by the Student Monitor, a market research company focused on the college student market, which undercut the figures presented in “Ripoff 101”:

> “Their studies say student spending on textbooks at four-year institutions was $620 this past year. And it has risen an average of less than 2.5 percent per year for the last five years—similar to inflation. But at $623 they’re buying roughly 12 books, or paying about $52 a book” (p.19)

The testimony of Virgil Monroe presents an alternative approach to the problem of high textbook prices for college students. Monroe is the manager of a program called Textbook Services at the University of Wisconsin—River Falls. He describes Textbook Services as a kind of library, where current students pay a fee of $59 per semester[2] and in return can check out copies of textbooks they need for class. If the texts are returned undamaged by the due date at the end of the semester, the student bears no other charge. Monroe states that students “check out an average of seven textbooks each, that means 14 textbooks over the course of the year” (p. 26). He does add the caveat that each textbook must be used by instructors for two years, so that the service does not operate at a loss. This is an important note in the discussion, particularly in relation to the accusation of unnecessary new editions.

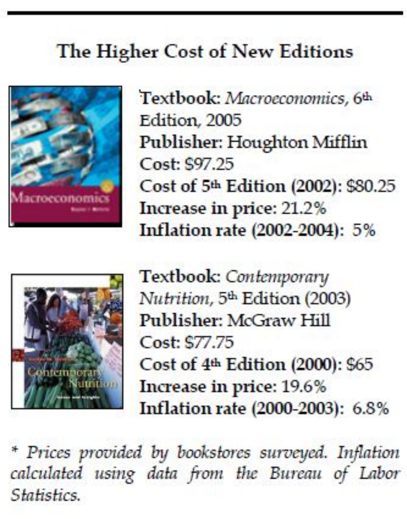
This congressional hearing was significant because it gathered together four key stakeholders in the issue of textbook prices and allowed them to address one another in a common space. At this point, the GAO was already in the midst of conducting their landmark study. However, before the GAO could release its report, the state PIRGs released a second edition of “Ripoff 101.”

[2] As of May 2010, this fee is $71.65 per semester for a full time student, which is rolled into the cost of tuition upfront. http://www.uwrf.edu/library/textbook/

Ripoff 101: Second Edition

The state PIRGs released a second edition of "Ripoff 101" in February of 2005. This second study was conducted "in order to both confirm our initial findings and to follow up on a number of anecdotal reports of additional problems with textbook pricing" (p. 1). The State PIRGs attempted to do this by conducting an "expanded survey of the most widely purchased textbooks at 59 colleges and universities across the country" (U.S. PIRG, 2005, p. 1), rather than only examining popular textbooks at ten public college campuses on the West Coast of the country as the first report did. This new expanded study confirmed the major findings of the first report, while also uncovering one new price-raising tactic.

The findings of the study largely resemble those found in its first edition, and in some cases the data is reused. The first major finding of "Ripoff 101: Second Edition" is that textbook prices are increasing at a fast rate. The study cites the Bureau of Labor Statistics Producer Price Index to substantiate its claim that "textbook prices are increasing at more than four times the inflation rate for all finished goods" (U.S. PIRG, 2005, p. 7). The second major finding is that new textbook editions drive up prices and prevent students from purchasing used books. Much of the data here is cited back to the first report, however, the second edition uses a nice graphic to display the way new editions hike up prices.


The Higher Cost of New Editions

Textbook: *Macroeconomics*, 6th Edition, 2005
Publisher: Houghton Mifflin
Cost: $97.25
Cost of 5th Edition (2002): $80.25
Increase in price: 21.2%
Inflation rate (2002-2004): 5%

Textbook: *Contemporary Nutrition*, 5th Edition (2003)
Publisher: McGraw Hill
Cost: $77.75
Cost of 4th Edition (2000): $65
Increase in price: 19.6%
Inflation rate (2000-2003): 6.8%

* *Prices provided by bookstores surveyed. Inflation calculated using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.*

Fig. 2 Illustration of second finding (U.S. PIRG, 2005, p. 8)

The third finding of the second edition of the report is that bundling drives up the cost of textbooks. Half of the books surveyed were sold bundled and of that half, fifty-five percent were not available without the extra material (U.S. PIRG, 2005, p. 8). The price difference in the bundled and unbundled counterparts ranged from 10 to nearly 50 percent. This finding was also illustrated nicely by another graphic which is included below.

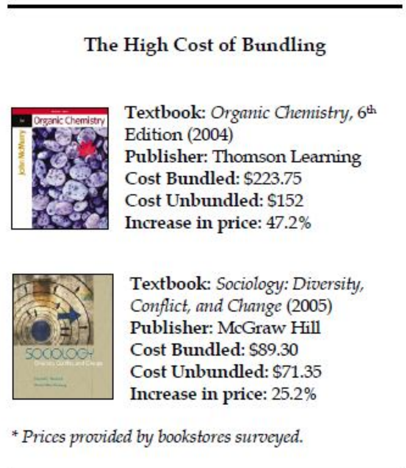
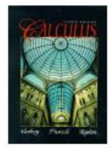


Fig.2 Illustration of third finding (U.S. PIRG, 2005, p. 9)

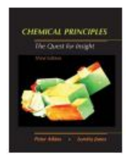
The final finding is, coincidentally, the only new finding of the report. This study uncovered that textbook publishers charge American students more than students overseas for the same textbooks. “The average textbook costs 20 percent more in the United States than it does in the United Kingdom” (U.S. PIRG, 2005, p. 9) and some textbook publishers openly display these disparate prices on their sites. This finding is also graphically presented in a persuasive way, pictured in Figure 3. However, because this information was requested in the GAO report, the state PIRGs cannot be congratulated too heartily for revealing this practice.

This expanded study does not offer any new policy insights in relation to its first edition. The same combination of publisher ethics, faculty awareness, and the creation of used textbook markets on campus is presented at the end of the report as a recipe for lowering costs for students. So “Ripoff 101: Second Edition” is perhaps only notable for its fourth finding, which documents the disparate pricing tactics of publishers with domestic and international textbooks, and for its presence between the congressional hearing and the GAO report. However it does strengthen and validate the earlier findings of the first edition, due to it is broader inquiry. The GAO report, published a few months later, does more to increase public awareness of the issue of textbook pricing in American institutions of higher learning.

American Students Are Paying More



Textbook: *Calculus,* 8th Edition (2000)
Publisher: Pearson
Cost in U.S.: $100
Cost in U.K. (U.S. $): $38
Price Difference: 163% more expensive in U.S.



Textbook: *Chemical Principles,* 3rd Edition (2004)
Publisher: W.H. Freeman
Cost in U.S.: $185
Cost in U.K. (U.S. $): $88
Price Difference: 110% more expensive in U.S.

Textbook: *Biology: Unity and Diversity of Life,* 10th Edition (2004)
Publisher: Thomson Learning
Price Charged to U.S. Students: $108.86
Price Charged to Overseas Students: $51
Price Difference: 113% more expensive in U.S.

** Pricing information for 'Biology: Unity and Diversity of Life' obtained from Thomson Learning's website, January 24, 2005. All other price information provided by the bookstores surveyed.*

Fig. 3 Illustration of third finding (U.S. PIRG, 2005, p. 8)

July 2005: The GAO Report

In July of 2005, a few short months after the release of the state PIRGs "Ripoff 101: Second Edition" and about a year after the congressional hearing on textbook prices, the Government Accountability Office released its report. This report had been commissioned by Representative David Wu of Oregon in November of 2003, and in light of the debate surrounding the issue, which had begun to include state and federal legislation, the results of this report were long-awaited. Entitled "College Textbooks: Enhanced Offering Appear to Drive Recent Price Increases," the findings of this study were very like those offered up in the reports of the state PIRGs. However, the GAO is considered a definitive source, and the report had been commissioned by Congress for its use in deliberating the matter. For these reasons, the results of the study were much more influential than those of the two "Ripoff 101" studies.

The GAO conducted a very thorough study of the problem. They consulted with the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics to create a consumer price index charting the change of price in textbooks for consumers between December 1986 and December 2004. To put this number in context, they also examined the cost of tuition and fees for consumers using a consumer price index from 1980 to 2004. In addition to their corroboration with the Department of Labor, they also worked with the Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. This system showed them the cost of textbooks and supplies (bundled together in the system) for "first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students during the course of an entire academic year, as estimated by postsecondary institutions, and the portion of the total estimated cost of tuition and fees that books and supplies represent" (Government Accountability Office, 2005, p. 2). In seeking to determine causes for the perceived rise in textbook prices, the GAO interviewed a wide variety of industry specialists, including

> "executives from five textbook publishers that account for more than 80 percent of new textbook sales; the three major national used textbook wholesalers; three companies that operate over 1,300 college textbook retail stores, or 29 percent of stores nationwide; the National Association of College Stores; the Association of American Publishers; the California and state Public Interest Research Groups; and various other industry experts" (2005, p. 2).

The study found that between 1986 and 2004, college textbooks prices rose at twice the rate of annual inflation. The cost of textbooks had nearly tripled in that time frame. The study also agrees with the earlier state PIRGs reports in naming textbooks as a burden relative to the type of institution attended: For first-time, full-time students at a four-year public institution, textbooks cost an average of $898 in the 2003-04 school year, compared with $886 for the same year at two-year public institutions. For the first group, this number made up roughly a quarter of the cost of tuition and fees, but for the second group, the number made up roughly three-quarters of the cost of tuition and fees (Government Accountability Office, 2005, p. 3).

The GAO study agrees with the "Ripoff 101" reports in naming the practice of bundling as a main cause of increased prices. The report cites its discussion with publishing executives who claimed that "they have tailored their instructional supplements to enhance instructor productivity and teaching, largely to meet the needs of instructors in an environment of funding cuts" (p. 15). However, the report also cites that wholesalers, retailers and public interest groups that were interviewed in the course of the study voiced concern that the practice of bundling "may limit the ability students have to decrease their costs by purchasing less expensive used textbooks" (p. 16), which lines up well with the arguments presented in the "Ripoff 101" reports. Among the explanation of the difficulties associated with bundling, retailers reported that they cannot reliably attain new bundled materials to be sold along with the used books, and that bundled items with broken seals must be absorbed at loss by the retailer if returned by the student because the publishers will only accept the return of sealed bundles (p. 16, 17).

Another point where the GAO study agrees with the “Ripoff 101” reports concerns the frequency of new editions of textbooks, which the report finds to have an adverse effect on student finances. Publishers admit that textbooks are revised on a cycle of three to four years. The report shows that the turnover rate of new editions prevents the establishment of a used book market for students and prevents retailers from buying back old editions from students. While the publishers claim it is a practice “driven by instructors who want the most current material and may seek products from competitors if they are unable to meet the demand” (Government Accountability Office, 2005, p. 18), the study cites a letter created by the state PIRGs from April 2004 which undercuts this argument: “700 mathematics and physics instructors from 150 universities across the country have petitioned one publisher to delay revisions until there have been substantial changes in content or teaching methods that merit revision” (p. 18). However, the report does offer up the publishers’ counter argument that although new revisions do not always reflect substantial change in content, they might reflect new teaching methods.

Finally, the study examines the allegations first touched on in the second edition of the state PIRGs report, namely that textbook publishers charge more for books sold domestically than for those sold overseas. Rather than completely vilifying the textbook publishers, as the “Ripoff 101” reports do, the GAO report states that “college textbook prices in the United States may exceed prices in other countries because textbook publishers assign prices that reflect the market conditions found in each country” (p. 21), a practice that has become more transparent with the rise of e-commerce. The report further states that “the practice of differential pricing is not exclusive to textbook publishing and occurs both within and outside the United States” (p. 23), thus dismissing it as a concern except in the context of public awareness of the disparity. However, the report does note that the publishers interviewed were concerned with the possibility of large-scale reimportation of textbooks from other countries, and had worked to strengthen contracts with foreign distributors to prevent this from occurring (p. 25). This does not, however, prevent students from purchasing single copies of textbooks from overseas.

The tone of the GAO report is very impartial, unlike that of the state PIRGs reports. The study notes that prices for tuition have risen even more than those of textbooks in the same time period. The bundling practice is approached as the road of progress, ultimately able to increase the quality of an

American education. It also notes that the cost of textbooks can be prohibitive in 2-year institutions where they represent three-fourths of the cost of tuition, which disproportionately affects the affordability of education for a certain segment of the population. The theme of lack of choice for students is prevalent throughout the report. However, because this report serves as an impartial study, the GAO offers no suggestions for the remediation of the problem. The report leaves it to campus, state and federal policymakers to approach the issue as they see fit after being presented with the facts of the matter.

After this report was released, media coverage of the issue exploded, which led to heightened public awareness. Some specific examples of campus and state policy moves in response are covered in the Section III of this paper. The next major report released on the subject was the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance.

May 2007: ACSFA Report

In May of 2006, the House of Representative's Committee on Education and the Workforce ordered a study of textbook prices from the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (ACSFA). The ACSFA is an independent committee that was created by Congress in the Higher Education Amendments of 1986 to be an "independent and bipartisan source of advice and counsel on student financial aid policy to both Congress and the Secretary of Education" (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2009). The Committee on Education and the Workforce requested that the ACFSA

> "investigate further the problem of rising textbook prices, to determine its impact on students in affording a postsecondary education, and to make recommendation for Congress, the Secretary, and other stakeholders on what can be done to make textbooks more affordable" (2006, p. 2).

The ACFSA's report was requested for May 2007. In essence, the Congress was asking for possible direction in light of the findings of the GAO report and the increased public attention following its release. As the actual report (2007) puts it, "the resulting groundswell of criticism against colleges, bookstores, and publishers has translated into action across the nation to do something about it" (p. iii).

Where the GAO report presented the facts gathered in the course of a study of the issue, the ACFSA report, entitled "Turn the Page: Making College Textbooks More Affordable," operates under the impression that public criticism must be addressed swiftly with policies, and thus offers many suggestions of how to alleviate costs for students to the Congress. The report opens by noting some of the efforts that have been undertaken by state and campus communities since the increased scrutiny of textbook costs as a result of the GAO report. Two of the key examples cited are textbook rental programs and the use of free, or open, content. With this report, the emphasis of the debate around textbook costs begins to shift to include "21st century technology," which includes open, digital, and collaborative texts. Overall, the report offers up eight solutions to the then-current issue, but also warns that these solutions will not fix the underlying structural problem of the market, which they frame as "a supply-driven, producer-centric market" (p. iii).

The report offers eight short-term solutions to the high price of textbooks, as follows:

1. Strengthen the Market for Used Textbooks
    a. Used Textbook Initiatives
    b. Guaranteed Buy-back Program
    c. Book Swaps
2. Utilize Faculty Textbook Guidelines
    a. Submit Textbook Orders on Time
    b. Retain Textbooks for a Longer Period
    c. Know the Price of Textbooks
    d. Consider Less Expensive Alternatives
    e. Use the Same Textbook for Multiple Courses
    f. Retain Older Editions
3. Provide Key Information to Students and Parents
    a. Send Information before Term Starts
    b. Post Textbook Lists and ISBNs Online
4. Increase Library Resources
    a. Textbook Reserve Programs
    b. Faculty Use of E-reserves
    c. Donations of Textbooks to Libraries
    d. Textbook Lending Libraries
5. Adopt Alternatives that Lower Price
    a. No-frills Textbooks (Format Alternatives)
    b. Custom Textbooks (Content Alternatives)
    c. Buying Consortiums
    d. Profit Margin Reduction
6. Implement a Textbook Rental Program
    a. Full Rental Programs
    b. Partial Rental Programs
    c. Hybrid Rental Programs
7. Improve Related Financial Aid Policies
    a. Provide Emergency Vouchers, Credits, or Loans
    b. Create Need-based Grants for Textbooks
    c. Increase Financial Aid to Cover Textbook Expenses
8. Utilize 21st Century Technology
    a. Electronic Textbooks

b. No-cost Online Textbooks
c. Open Educational Resources (OER)
d. Print on Demand
e. Electronic Readers
f. Online Collections of Educational Content

(Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2007, p. iv)

The first solution offered by the ACSFA report is to strengthen the market for used textbooks, since they are “typically 25 percent less expensive than new ones” and “the demand for used books often exceeds the supply” (p. 11). The report suggests addressing this need by implementing used textbook initiatives, which emphasize “increased communication between the campus bookstore and faculty regarding text selection options and ordering procedures” (p. 11); a guaranteed buy-back program, which “identifies for students, at the time of purchase, which texts the campus bookstore will accept for buy-back and often guarantees a buy-back price if faculty book selection is known” (p. 12); and online book swaps, which “allow students more control over used textbook resale by connecting student buyers and sellers directly…and enabling them to set their own prices” (p. 13). Each of these options matched a real-world program at the time of the study.

The second solution offered by the ACFSA report is to utilize faculty textbook guidelines, since they choose the textbooks that the students must buy, to encourage them “to act in the best interest of students whenever possible (p. 13). These guidelines include: submitting textbook orders on time, which enables bookstores to find used textbooks and comparison shop; retain textbooks for a longer period, so that more students can buy used and “receive greater return upon buy-back” (p. 14); know the price of textbooks; consider less expensive alternatives, either among texts of equal quality, or low-price alternatives; use the same textbook for multiple courses, in conjunction with their colleagues, to increase the used book market; and retain older editions, through communication with publishers about changed content in old and new editions of a text. All of these guidelines pertain to increasing faculty awareness of price, and making decisions based on what will benefit the students.

The third solution offered by the ACFSA report is to provide key information to students and parents, to ensure that they are prepared for the sticker shock of textbooks and know how to seek out money-saving options from the start of their education. The report suggests that schools send information to students and their families before a semester starts to inform them of what to budget for books, as well as available alternatives. In addition to that step, the report suggests that textbook information be made available before the term begins, perhaps by posting syllabi and textbook lists online with titles and ISBNs. This information will allow students “more time to comparison shop” (p. 15).

The fourth solution offered by the ACSFA report is to increase library resources, because while libraries already provide textbook reserves, they face budgetary and spatial constraints. This solution can be implemented in the following ways: supplementing existing textbook reserve programs; placing course materials on e-reserve through the library or course website; collecting donations of textbooks from various stakeholders; and the creation of a textbook lending library. Each of these suggestions cites a real-world program current at the time of the study (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2007, p. 15, 16).

The fifth solution offered by the ACSFA report is to adopt alternatives that lower the price of textbooks. These alternatives include format alternatives, or “no-frills textbooks,” and content alternatives, or “custom textbooks” (p. 16, 17). A “no-frills textbook” could be a paperback, limited color, spiral bound, or loose-leaf hole-punched version, which is less expensive than a traditional textbook by 25 to 50 percent (p. 16). A “custom textbook” is “created when a publisher combines specific chapters from one or multiple texts and other forms of educational content into a single custom text” (p. 17), which means that faculty choose only the content desired for the textbook. Two other alternatives suggested to lower costs are to participate in a buying consortium, where institutions purchase together to receive discounted rates, and to have bookstores reduce their profit margin, which decreases costs for students.

The sixth solution offered by the ACSFA report is to implement a textbook rental program, like the program run at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls cited at the congressional hearing. At the time of the report, there were 25 textbook rental programs in the United States, which the report clarifies can be full or partial models: “Full rental programs provide instructional materials for most courses offered at an institution, and partial rental programs offer textbooks for certain departments or courses” (p. 18). While a rental program immediately cuts costs for students, they require a substantial investment to start, which is their main drawback as a solution. The report gives examples of both models, as well as a hybrid model, where students have the choice to either rent or buy their texts.

The seventh solution offered by the ACSFA report is to improve related financial aid policies, which "impact many students' ability to purchase course materials" (p. 20). Three policies to counteract inadequate funds to buy books are suggested: provide vouchers, credits, or loans for students whose financial aid has not yet been disbursed when they need to buy books; create need-based textbook grants for students who struggle to buy their books; and increase financial aid to cover the costs of the books. The last two suggestions had existing policies in various institutions and several states at the time of the study (p. 20).

The eighth and final solution offered by the ACSFA report is rather broad and definitively innovative: utilize 21st century technology. The report argues that technology is creating more options for learning materials, among which are "electronic textbooks, no-cost online textbooks, open educational resources, and print-on-demand services" (p. 21). The report cites e-books as costing only 50 percent on average of the cost of a new traditional textbook, simply due to its digital format. A great deal of time is spent on the growing movement of open educational resources (OER) and their benefits for the educational community. OER are defined in the report as "the sharing of digital learning resources at no charge over the Internet, primarily by faculty engaged in course development and collaborative teaching and research" (p. 21). The report cites several prominent OER projects, like MERLOT and Connexions[3], to demonstrate the wide variety of high quality OER available. Finally, the report cites print on demand machines as another new technology available to save students money. These machines "digitally download, print, bind, and cover a textbook within a matter of minutes" (p. 23) and produce very inexpensive materials.

That is a summary of the short-term solutions suggested in the ACSFA report, and there are evident trends of collaboration and digital technology throughout their solutions. However, the bulk of the report focuses on addressing the long-term goal of creating a "21st century marketplace" which would blend OER and traditional textbooks into a national digital marketplace. The ideal is based on a project under development in the California State University System called the Digital Marketplace[4]. The report is very eloquent on the imagined benefits of a national system like the Digital Marketplace:

> "A single collaborative national digital marketplace would eliminate stratification; reduce access barriers to instructional materials, library resources, and

[3] Available at www.merlot.org and cnx.org respectively
[4] The CSU Digital Marketplace is located at this URL: http://www.calstate.edu/ats/digital_marketplace/

> commercial offerings; and create a single, seamless venue for all stakeholders" (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2007, p. 38).

For further information on this part of the ACSFA report, please see the full report, listed in the references section of this paper.

The ACSFA report is important in the discussion of textbook prices because it is the first to offer a full range of suggested policies in the context of a congressionally-authorized platform. In addition, it is notable for its exploration of alternative and collaborative models of textbooks. In the three years since the first "Ripoff 101" report, OER had come to be regarded by a respected demographic as an exciting and very real solution to the problem of high prices for students. In the three years since this report has been released, Congress has taken its suggestions seriously, and even now there are bills being debated which could give the federal government's stamp of approval to OER. These bills will be discussed later in the paper. The next big movement regarding textbooks prices on the federal level occurs in August of 2008.

August 2008: H.R. 4137

In November of 2007 Representative George Miller, a Democrat from California, introduced H.R. 4137, a bill to amend and extend the Higher Education Act of 1965. While the scope of this bill was very broad, certain components dealt specifically with textbook prices. Those sections are directly linked with the findings of the GAO report, more closely than to the suggestions provided in the ACSFA report, which was released only several months before the bill was introduced. H.R. 4137 was referred to the House Subcommittee on Labor and Education a few days after it was introduced. After various amendments were made, the bill passed the House on February 8, 2008 and was sent to the Senate. It passed the Senate on July 29, 2008, and was signed into law by President George W. Bush on August 14, 2008[5]. It is now public law number 110-315[6].

The first mention of textbook prices is found in the call for a survey of student aid recipients by the Secretary of Education, on a state-by-state level, every four years. There are several imperatives associated with that survey, but textbooks are clearly stated here: "to describe how the costs of textbooks and other instructional materials affect the costs of

[5]The details of the bill's passage to law can be found on govtrack.us at this URL: http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-4137

[6] The full text of public law number 110-315 can be found in the Library of Congress's Thomas system at the following URL: http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.uscongress/legislation.110hr4137

postsecondary education for students" (122 Stat. p. 3107). In section 133 of the public law (2008), the original Act of 1965 is expanded to discuss what they term "textbook information." This section places the federal government firmly in the middle of the textbook debate, by declaring itself a moderator that will make all stakeholders

> "work together to identify ways to decrease the cost of college textbooks and supplemental materials for students while supporting the academic freedom of faculty members to select high quality course materials for students" (122 Stat. p. 3107).

The bill includes very specific language regarding textbooks, which closely links it to the GAO report released two years before. Section 133 begins by defining terms like bundle, substantial content, and supplemental material, all of which parallel the GAO report. It also defines the terms custom textbook and integrated textbook, which link to the ACSFA report. After defining these and various other terms, section 133 lays out requirements on the part of the publishers. These include requiring the publishers to inform faculty members at an "institution of higher education receiving Federal financial assistance" (122 Stat. p. 3108) of a book's price; of the price of its supplemental materials; of the copyright dates of the three previous editions; of the substantial content revisions made to the most current text; and whether the text is available in alternative format, like paperback or unbound.

Section 133 continues in its requirements of publishers by stating that any book sold in a bundled package must also be offered separately, such that the publishers "shall also make available the college textbook and each supplemental material as separate and unbundled items, each separately priced" (122 Stat. p. 3109). The next major burden falls to institutions receiving federal aid. Those institutions are required to disclose the ISBN and price information of any textbooks in the manner of their choosing, to "the maximum extent practicable" (122 Stat. p. 3109). There is no mention of a time constraint on the part of the institution, which could make this requirement generally useless. There is an equally limp requirement that college bookstores be informed of this information, along with the number of students enrolled for a given course, "as soon as is practicable upon the request of such college bookstore" (122 Stat. p. 3109).

It is interesting to note that this law encourages, but does not require, institutions to disseminate information regarding cost-saving alternatives, like buy-back programs and used books, in subsection f of section 133. All in all, the law provides a good deal of maneuverability for all named stakeholders. It is very carefully worded to remove authority from the Secretary of

Education in “promulgat[ing] regulations,” and to deny that it “supercede[s] the institutional autonomy or academic freedom of instructors” (122 Stat. p. 3110). Its only proposed method of surveillance that the law is followed is a follow-up GAO report scheduled for July of 2013. This report will examine:

> (1) the availability of college textbook information on course schedules;
> (2) the provision of pricing information to faculty of institutions of higher education by publishers;
> (3) the use of bundled and unbundled material in the college textbook marketplace, including the adoption of unbundled materials by faculty and the use of integrated textbooks by publishers; and
> (4) the implementation of this section by institutions of higher education, including the costs and benefits to such institutions and to students. (122 Stat. p. 3110)

As of yet, the amendment has not taken place. It will take effect in July of 2010. However, the very fact that the Federal government has deemed it needful to involve itself in the debate over textbook prices is notable. Though changes might be perceived on individual campuses as a result of this law, the next GAO report in 2013 will present its full impact on textbook affordability nationwide.

Student PIRGs: Grassroots Movements

Throughout this debate, the student PIRGs have advocated for affordable textbooks. The student PIRGs are campus chapters of the state PIRGs, and are organized and guided by those counterparts. Their movement was jumpstarted by the state PIRGs “Ripoff 101” reports and every subsequent year they have conducted studies and produced reports on various angles of the textbook problem. The topics of these reports range from establishing textbook rental services to low-cost guides to purchasing textbooks. Only the two most recent reports they have produced will be discussed in this paper, because they add an interesting texture to the most current issues of the debate, which the ACSFA report first touched on: digital textbooks. The third section of this paper will also examine the grassroots efforts organized by the student PIRGs.

August 2008: Course Correction

In August of 2008, the student and state PIRGs released a report called “Course Correction: How Digital Textbooks are Off Track, and How to Set Them Straight.” The premise of this report is that while digital textbooks have the potential to cut costs for students, current offerings from major publishers do not meet three key criteria for success and ubiquity:

affordability, printing options and accessibility (Student PIRGs, 2008, p. 4). The study consisted of a survey of 504 students from Illinois and Oregon, and 50 common textbook titles. As the title suggests, the study concludes that current offerings by traditional publishers leave much to be desired. The study notes that although the publishers have made efforts to innovate, for example the "online digital "e-textbook" marketplace CourseSmart"[7] launched by all six textbook publishers in January 2008 (Student PIRGs, 2008, p. 7), their offerings have fallen flat due to their efforts to "fit into the conventional publishing business model" (p. 8).

The report offers three main findings. The first finding is that digital textbooks must meet three criteria to be viable solutions to the high-cost of tradition textbooks: they must be less expensive than traditional books, which they calculate as what a student spends minus what they can sell the book back for; they must be straightforward and inexpensive to print, because three-quarters of students surveyed said they would prefer a paper copy to a digital one, and 60 percent said they would pay for a paper copy even if they could use an electronic one for free (p. 10); and they must be accessible because students need the flexibility to use them on and offline, as well as on different computers.

The second finding of the report is that e-textbooks currently fail to meet those criteria. These e-textbooks were those purchased on CourseSmart. The study found them too expensive, as the titles surveyed cost on average the same as new hardcover textbooks. The study also found them difficult and expensive to print, as publishers limit the number of pages students can print at a time. This causes e-textbooks to be more expensive than a new traditional book, since the student has to use inefficient printing methods if they want a paper copy (p. 12). Finally, the study found e-textbooks difficult to access. They are heavily regulated: students are limited to either online or offline access at one computer, and they usually have an expiration date of one semester.

The third and final finding of the report is that open textbooks meet all the criteria to make digital texts a solution to the high cost of textbooks. The study defines open textbooks as "textbooks that are distributed for free digitally under an open license" (Student PIRGs, 2008, p. 13). Because of their open format, they can offer low-prices, printing options and accessibility. Students can choose the format most suited to their learning style, whether that is a free digital copy or an inexpensive printed version.

[7] http://www.coursesmart.com/

The conclusion drawn by this report are that the textbooks market should be shifted to focus on “high-quality open textbooks” (p. 16). The report does not, however, cut publishers out of the discussion. Rather, it encourages publishers to adjust their business models to a new norm, and points to Flat World Knowledge[8] as a shining example of a publisher of “commercially produced open textbooks” (p. 16). The report also suggests that faculty give preference to open textbooks and that institutions should provide support for the efforts of open textbook producers.

October 2009: High Tech Textbooks

The most recent report to date produced by the student PIRGs was released in October of 2009. It is entitled “High Tech Textbooks: A Snapshot of Student Opinions” and it focuses on the impacts of e-readers, smart phones and netbooks on the textbook consumption behaviors of students. The study consisted of a survey of 1,133 students from 17 institutions and three follow-up focus groups. The main assumptions of the report are that students should be given the freedom to choose mode of delivery and format, so that the market becomes “more student-centric” (Student PIRGs, 2009, p. 2). Where the previous report focused on the attractive option provided by open textbooks, this report looks at how students choose to use textbooks in light of digital devices currently available.

The first finding of the study is that students consider e-readers attractive except for the price. In the initial survey, 40 percent of students who considered themselves familiar with e-readers said they were interested in switching to an e-reader. However, in the follow-up focus groups, students became less interested in switching to an e-reader upon learning the average cost of the device (Student PIRGs, 2009, p. 4).

The second finding of the study is that students generally consider the option to view a textbook on an iPhone or other smart phone device favorably. 77 percent of students surveyed said they would use the opportunity at least a few times if it were available (Student PIRGs, 2009, p. 4). In the focus groups there was a general agreement that reading a textbook exclusively on such a device would be unattractive, but many students were interested in the option.

The third finding of the study is that students still prefer print formats to their digital counterparts, but like the option to use both. 75 percent of students surveyed said they would prefer to use a combination of print and digital copies of their textbooks rather than one or the

[8] http://www.flatworldknowledge.com/

other (Student PIRGs, 2009, p. 5). This makes it clear that students want options when it comes to their textbook consumption. The study argues that those options are not acheivable under current textbook models. The study again mentions Flat World Knowledge as an example of how textbook publishers could transform to meet student needs.

These two reports by the student PIRGs do not have much influence on the federal policy makers, but they do add important perspectives to the overall discussion. The student PIRGs wield more power at the institutional level, as will be explored in the third part of the paper. Their discussion of digital and open textbooks sets the stage for recent legislative action.

Recent Legislation: Open Textbooks

Two bills have been introduced into the House and Senate of the 111th Congress respectively during the course of 2009 which focus on the development and dissemination of open textbooks. In March of 2009, H.R. 1464 was introduced in the House. This is a bill “to require Federal agencies to collaborate in the development of freely-available open source educational materials in college-level physics, chemistry, and math” (p. 1). If it passes into law, any Federal agency that spends more than $10,000,000 a year on scientific education will have to direct two percent of that budget to develop and implement open source materials. This collaboration would be headed by the Secretary of Energy and the Director of the National Science Foundation. These open textbooks would be vetted for accuracy and posted on an online Federal open source material repository. The bill also stipulates a grant program to further develop high-quality open access materials.

In September of 2009, S.1714 was introduced in the Senate. This is a bill “authorize grants for the creation, update, or adaption of open textbooks” (p. 1). This bill would empower the Secretary of Education to award grants on a competitive basis to support the development of open source college textbooks. Only faculty, actual universities, or non-profits that produce open textbooks would be eligible for the grants. This bill does not stipulate for a central repository of the created open materials. However, it also does not stipulate for the topic of the textbooks, unlike the House bill.

As of the writing of this paper, both bills have been passed to committee. The Senate bill has been referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, and the House bill has been referred to the Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and

Competitiveness[9]. Although it is unsure that either bill will pass into law, the existence of interest in creating open textbooks validates their status as a potential solution to the problem of textbook prices. If the bills do pass, it will be an exciting time in the realm of academics.

Section III: State and Campus Initiatives

There has been much focus at the federal level on issues of textbook pricing in recent years, but equal interest and activity can be seen at the individual state and campus levels.

State Legislation

Rather than discuss all of the state-level legislative activity concerning textbook pricing, this paper examines a broad overview of these activities between the years of 2004 and 2010. Then the paper will discuss the specifics of the state of Michigan with regards to this topic. There are several good resources that aggregate all the state-level legislative activity for this time period. This paper draws from two sources for its data[10]. There have been around 240 different bills introduced in 40 of the 50 states concerning textbook prices in the past six years[11]. The ways in which each state approached the subject vary somewhat: many suggest removing the sales tax from textbooks; some attempt to regulate faculty, bookstore, and industry practices; some mandate the unbundling of materials; some create university task forces to examine the problem; and others tackle the problem by attempting to create rental programs, lending libraries, and online textbook libraries. Of all of these different bills, only 24 have been passed into state law in 13 states. However, this activity should demonstrate the pervasive nature of the debate throughout the nation. Arkansas has the most bills and resolutions that have passed at five. Texas has the most attempted bills and resolutions at 30, followed by New York at 24.

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[9] Track both bills at govtrack.us. The Senate bill is here: http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s111-1714. The House bill is here: http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h111-1464

[10] Table of State Legislation Pertaining to Textbook Affordability, 2004-2007 on the ACFSA website: http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/acsfa/edlite-txtbkstudy.html
National Association of College Stores Legislative Updates, State Bills: http://www.nacs.org/advocacynewsmedia/LegislativeUpdates/state.aspx

[11] This number was arrived at by adding all the recorded actions from the two sources listed. It does include some repeat bills as they sometimes have to be filed again every year, but it is fairly accurate.

Michigan had three potential bills concerning textbooks between 2004 and 2010, but they never went anywhere. Listed below is a section of the Proposed and Passed State Legislation Pertaining to Textbook Affordability (2004-2007) table from the ACFSA website, illustrating the proposed legislation from Michigan in that time period[12]:

Michigan	**Focus of Legislation:** Allows the purchase of textbooks to be tax exempt; urges institutions to arrange their textbook orders in such a way as to enable them to negotiate better prices for textbooks	
	SR 24: Urges colleges and universities to collectively arrange their textbook orders so as to leverage their position with publishers and thus negotiate better prices on textbooks; explores the possibility of group textbook orders	**SR 24:** Introduced 4/20/05.
	HB 5568: Allows the purchase of textbook to be tax exempt	**HB 5568:** Introduced 1/19/06.
	HB 6356: Provides an income tax credit for the full cost of college textbooks; the credit is available only after the taxpayer or taxpayer's dependents passes the courses for which the books were bought	**HB 6356:** Introduced 8/16/06.

Fig. 4 Section of ACSFA State Legislation Table (see footnote 9)

In a recent paper from the Scholarly Publishing Office at the University of Michigan, this trend is shown to stretch back even further: “Michigan has failed to enact laws or resolutions to reduce textbook costs, although attempts were made in 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004, and 2006” (Nicholls, 2009, p. 13). In light of the absence of state laws and resolutions to address textbook costs in place like Michigan, many campuses confront the issue themselves. In fact, Mary Sue Coleman, President of the University of Michigan, has dismissed the need for state legislative intervention in the past. In a September 2007 article published in the Michigan Daily, the University of Michigan’s school paper, she is quoted as saying "Regulating markets in the society that we live in is very problematic…Trying to create laws to control prices? I don't think that's been productive anywhere” (Nelson, 2007, p. 2).

If a campus is in a state that has no laws defining approaches to textbook costs, and that campus has yet to feel the effects of the Federal law which has been passed but is not yet active, then that campus has to deal with the issue of textbook pricing in its own way. As this paper has examined, there are plenty of ideas and suggestions in the discussion that could be enacted to

[12] See footnote 9

lessen the burden for students. A common progression of events in these circumstances is that the administration, usually in conjunction with concerned students, has a Textbook Task Force examine the issue as it pertains to their specific campus. This has been done on campuses all over the country, but this paper will only look closely at the University of Michigan's reaction to the debate.

Homegrown Campus Movements: University of Michigan

The major policy movement at the University of Michigan came in December of 2006, when the Office of the Provost established a Textbook Task Force (MLibrary, 2009). However, campus activism on the topic of textbook affordability dates back before that decision. According to Nicholls (2009), this activism is most visible in Michigan Student Assembly presidential campaigns all the way back to 1998 (p. 7). Even before the suggestions of the state PIRGs reports in the middle of the decade, students on the University of Michigan's campus were fighting to "have all classes post textbook lists with the course description" (Michigan Daily, 2001). So there is a substantial history of student concern and activism on U-M's campus.

With the release of the Textbook Task Force's report in April 2007, the University's administration had clear goals set before them to ease the burden on students[13]. The report recommended six steps that the University could take to cut textbook costs for students:

1. 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.
2. Foster a used book market in partnership with local booksellers.
3. Implement a faculty-led communication plan to support efforts to accelerate adoption rates and encourage other cost saving practices.
4. Develop, test and implement an online textbook tool that:
   a. allows faculty to enter and share their textbook lists with students and booksellers;
   b. allows students to find other students who want to buy or sell textbooks being reused in a subsequent term.
5. Provide a structure for launching, publicizing, and managing the recommended new systems and processes by assigning responsibility for the systems to the Office of the Registrar and by appointing a Faculty/Student Textbook Steering Committee to rally faculty support and advise the Office of the Registrar as it administers the textbook listing process.

[13] To read the full report of the U-M Textbook Task Force, go to http://www.provost.umich.edu/reports/Textbook_Task_Force_Final_Report.pdf

6. Encourage other institutions of higher education to join with Michigan in bringing pressure to bear on commercial publishers. (MLibrary, 2009)

These recommendations have guided the University of Michigan in making improvements to the textbook issue. Among these improvements is the creation of a textbook calendar[14], which disseminates information on bookseller deadlines for next term texts, and when a student can look for textbook information on Wolverine Access and CTools, two academic portals used by the University community. This transparency increases the amount a student can expect to get from selling their books back to a campus bookstore, while also allowing them to comparison shop before the next semester begins.

Another improvement made as a result of the Textbook Task Force recommendations is the Textbook Tool[15] on CTools, which allows instructors to post the required reading list on the course page. This improvement is in conjunction with the UBook application on CTools. UBook is a used book exchange, which allows students to post their used books and name a price for them, and to find other used books they need for class.

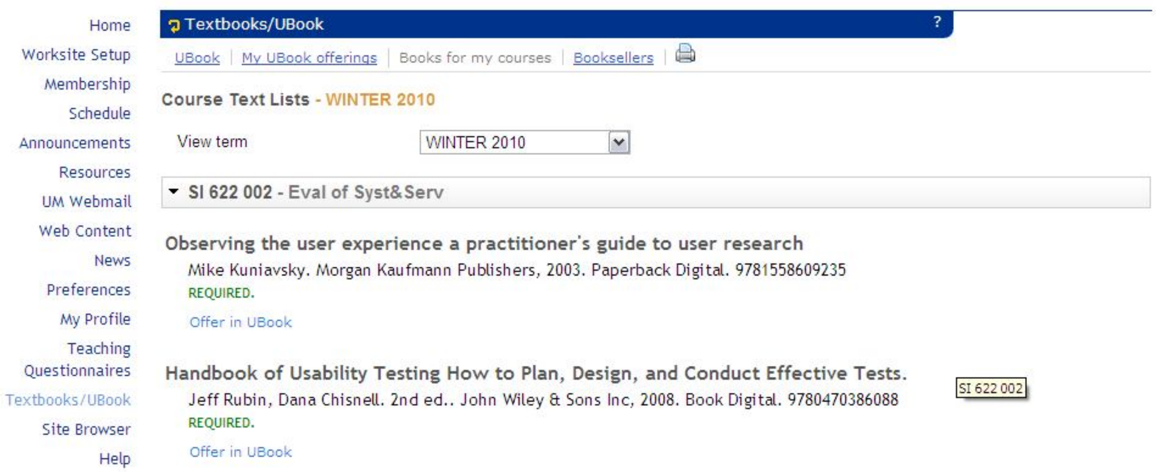

Fig. 5 Student's View of Textbook Tool/UBook on CTools

These improvements revolve around empowering students with information. The more a student knows about what textbooks she needs, the more options she has. These improvements are still very new, so their full effect has not yet been measured. However, the Scholarly Publishing Office report (2009) noted that the program is considered a success:

> "It is worth noting here that MAIS, Michigan Administrative Information Service, considers the results concerning the new textbook system as "successes" as of this

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[14] The textbook calendar is located with the academic calendars, and can be visited here: http://www.ro.umich.edu/calendar/

[15] Read more about Textbook Tools and UBook here: http://www.umich.edu/~umctdocs/Textbooks.html

> writing —for Winter 2009, the new textbook web tool has been adopted by faculty and students alike, thereby approximately 3,000 textbooks were entered on the system" (p.16)

There are other campus initiatives to decrease the cost of textbooks at the University of Michigan. For example, the library has recently purchased an Espresso Book Machine, which "automatically prints, binds, and trims --*on demand*-- library-quality paperback books with 4-color covers indistinguishable from their factory made versions" (Espresso Book Machine). This is an important investment because of the library's partnership with Google in digitizing its print collection, and then maintaining digital copies in HathiTrust[16]. This purchase gives students the ability to buy low-cost print versions of digital titles, provided that there is "a clear agreement with the rights holder to print copyright-protected works, or the content must be in the public domain" (The Espresso Book Machine at the University of Michigan Library: Questions and Answers, 2009).

Finally, the University of Michigan is involved with the OER movement through the group Open.Michigan[17]. Open.Michigan is a curriculum-based OER initiative that makes course materials available to learners beyond the school, but it also takes a unique approach to the movement, as noted by Nicholls (2009):

> "Open.Michigan is a space for communication and collaboration. Its website serves as an introduction to the projects and the partners that form the basis of our open community, but it is also a virtual forum where collaborators from across the University and the larger OER community can learn more about what's happening within the open community at the University of Michigan, connect with other projects and people, and share best practices and other resources" (p. 30).

So it is a repository of coursework material as well as a collaborative portal for academic endeavors. Another very innovative aspect of the Open.Michigan initiative is its use of the dScribe model, which "leverage[s] the interest and talent of students in working with faculty and staff to transform educational material into open educational resources (OER)" (dScribe, 2010). While the University of Michigan is not unique in its pursuit of OpenCourseWare, its community has approached the issue in innovative and exciting ways[18].

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[16] http://catalog.hathitrust.org/
[17] https://open.umich.edu/
[18] Other examples of OER initiatives include: OpenCourseWare Consortium (www.ocwconsortium.org); MIT OpenCourseWare (ocw.mit.edu); Rice University's Connexions (cnx.org); and California State University's MERLOT (www.merlot.org).

Student PIRGs: Make Textbooks Affordable

After specifically examining the practices of the University of Michigan's community in response to the cost of textbooks, this paper will broaden its scope to examine campus movements organized by the student PIRGs' Make Textbooks Affordable Campaign[19]. This campaign organizes college students and the concerned public on individual campuses to create change on the lowest level possible. The campaign has been active since 2003, and their main achievements are as follows: promoting used books by setting up campusbookswap.org, a "bulletin board style website where students can post their books for sale" (Student PIRGs); releasing a guide to setting up a textbook rental program[20]; promoting open textbooks; and organizing professors.

The idea of organizing professors has been touched on briefly in earlier efforts, but never stated so frankly. Because faculty members choose which textbooks students have to buy, their knowledge and compliance is key to achieving cost savings for students. The student PIRGs campaign acknowledges this fact, which is why it has recently acted to promote faculty awareness. The Make Textbooks Affordable campaign declared October 28, 2009 a national Day of Action to promote open textbooks to faculty members: "Student volunteers on 30 campuses educated more than 2,000 professors about switching to open textbooks" (Allen, 2009). This movement leverages the same student-faculty relationships that Open.Michigan's dScribe model uses.

In addition to the national Day of Action, the Make Textbooks Affordable campaign website features a faculty statement on open textbooks[21]. Over 2,000 faculty members from across the country have signed it, and that number is always increasing as awareness grows. An excerpt from the statement follows:

> Therefore, we the undersigned declare our intent to:
>
> • Seek and consider open textbooks and other open educational resources when choosing course materials.
>
> • Give preference to a low or no cost educational resource such as an open textbook over an expensive, traditional textbook if it best fits the needs of a class.
>
> • Encourage institutions to develop support for the use of open textbooks and other open educational resources. (Student PIRGs)

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[19] Find the homepage of the campaign here: http://www.studentpirgs.org/textbooks

[20] Available here: http://www.studentpirgs.org/textbooks/reports/rental-services-guide

[21] Available here: http://www.studentpirgs.org/open-textbooks/faculty-statement

Section IV: Concluding Thoughts

The debate surrounding textbook affordability has changed drastically in the span examined by this paper. When the first “Ripoff 101” report was released in 2004, alternative and open textbooks did not occupy any space as a viable option to reduce costs. Now, there are initiatives at many major universities in the country to create and disseminate this type of material. There are bills being considered by Congress now which lend validation to the idea of open materials as cost-savings mechanisms. However, the open access model has its own obstacles to surmount before it can be widely adopted in the academic sphere, let alone by major publishing companies that are still trying to package digital products as traditional textbooks.

The involvement of the government may give some pause in this discussion. It seems impractical to assume that universities and publishers will adopt practices that are merely suggested by public law 110-315. However, people who follow this issue will be eager to see what changes can be perceived when the law takes effect in the summer of 2010, and even more eager to see the next GAO report on the subject, due in 2013. Many campuses have had to be like U-M in that they are situated in one of the 37 states without a law defining the desired approach to textbook costs. Maybe Mary Sue Coleman is right, and government intervention is not the answer. However, that can be a hard line to take when you are a member of a state-funded school.

That is another point to consider. All of the legislation only refers to higher-education institutions that receive state aid. Private colleges are not represented in this paper, partially because they were not evident in the research. It would be interesting to see a study on how private schools are approaching this issue, to see if any similarities exist between public and private policies.

Although this paper is quite extensive, it should not be considered exhaustive by any means. However, independent research into any of the sources listed should benefit the interested mind. One thing is quite sure, the landscape of the debate changes at a fast pace. Who can tell what new innovation will influence the policy makers and their critics tomorrow?

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