

Affordable Books for an Affordable Education

A joint project of the Student PIRGs, the Arizona Students' Association, and the Minnesota State University Student Association

www.MakeTextbooksAffordable.com

organizer toolkit

Tired of outrageous textbook prices? Can't sell back any of your books? Can't find any used books? Sick of all the extra CD-ROMs and workbooks that you don't ever use? We're fighting back against the Great Textbook Ripoff and we're making progress. Join our national student campaign and fight for affordable textbooks!

CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

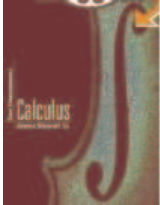
Why Are Textbooks So Expensive?

Everyone knows that textbooks are expensive. Students spend an average of \$900 a year on textbooks, which is 20% of tuition at an average university and half of tuition at a community college!

And the prices keep going up. Textbook prices have increased at four times the rate of inflation since 1994!

But exactly why are textbooks so expensive? What can be done about it?

We've done a lot of research over the last few years, and here's what we've discovered.



Case Study: Thomson Learning's Calculus: Early Transcendentals, Edition 5.

There are no significant changes between edition 4 and edition 5 of Thomson Learning's widely used calculus book – Calculus: Early Transcendentals, but the price difference is significant – a new copy of the book sells for about \$130, while a used copy of the previous edition sells for between \$20 and \$90!

1. Textbook publishers produce lots of unnecessary new editions, which drive cheaper, used books off the market. Publishers keep textbook editions on the shelf for an average of only 3.5 years before updating them. Once they issue a new edition, faculty and the bookstore have no choice but to stop using the old edition. That's why it's so hard to find used books. Many of these new editions are in fields like calculus and introductory physics – which haven't changed significantly in years!

2. Textbook publishers jack up the price of textbooks from one edition to another at twice the rate of inflation. This means not only is it hard to find a cheaper used book, but you also have to pay more for a new copy of the new edition!

3. In addition, textbook publishers “bundle” textbooks with bells and whistles – like CD ROMs and workbooks – which inflate textbook costs. These bundles are an average of 10% more expensive than regular books, and can be up to 50% more expensive.

4. Not only are bundles more expensive, but there's evidence that bundles make it harder to buy and sell used books. A lot of professors don't actually use the bundles, but the bookstore has to assume that the extra materials are required unless the faculty say otherwise, which, at schools with thousands of professors, can be hard to determine. So, in a lot of cases, bookstores can't buy back textbooks with missing or damaged CD ROMs and workbooks even if those items aren't actually required for class!

Here's the kicker. Most professors don't think the new editions and bundles are necessary. 76% of the professors we surveyed thought that new editions were justified “half the time or less” and 65% of the professors we surveyed said that they used the bundled items “rarely or never”!

So how do publishers get away with this? Mostly because there are only a handful of major publishing companies, and they all do the same exact thing, so professors don't have a heck of a lot of choices when they order your books. Until recently, many professors have been frustrated by textbook prices, but didn't think they had any ability to change things.

But if we have anything to do with it, we're going to change all that!

Long Term Solutions

Bottom line, we think that textbooks should be reasonably priced, students should be able to easily sell their books and used books should be easy to find. Here is what we think publishers, faculty and universities should do to make this happen:

- Publishers should keep the cost of producing their books as low as possible without sacrificing educational content.
- Publishers should keep textbook editions on the market as long as possible without sacrificing the educational content. Publishers should give preference to paper or online supplements over producing entirely new editions.
- Publishers should always allow professors to order unbundled textbooks.
- Publishers should clearly and proactively disclose all of their products and prices and length of time they will be on the market.
- Publishers should pass on any cost-savings from digital books to students.
- Faculty should give preference to the cheapest textbooks and unbundled textbooks when there's no impact on educational content.
- There should be as many forums for students to purchase many used books as possible. Universities should consider rental programs such as those as several universities in Wisconsin and Illinois and encourage students to consider using online bookswaps.

We're Making Progress!

Some really encouraging things have come out of our work. The media has been totally on our side and has done tons of articles and editorials. Congress launched an investigation into the problem, and state legislatures all over the country are holding hearings on this issue. And over 700 math and physics professors from over 150 universities joined us in calling on Thomson Learning to stop issuing unnecessary new editions! And, we're hearing more and more stories of professors and departments that are driving harder bargains, negotiating with textbook publishers, switching to lower cost options and even writing their own books and posting them online for free!

In response, textbook companies are trying to get the heat off their backs. Thomson Learning agreed to cut the price of their calculus book by 20% at a couple of schools in California and launched a new line of reduced cost books. Pearson Education is launching a series of online textbooks that is half the cost of the printed edition.

Behind the scenes, we've heard that publishers are really nervous. So we want to increase the heat even more to make them feel the need to change or risk losing business.

Your campus is key to making this happen! The more that students are protesting textbook prices on campus and the more that your professors, Chancellors and Presidents are speaking up and driving hard bargains with publishing sales representatives, the more likely we are to win!

Who We Are

The Affordable Textbooks Campaign is a coalition of Student PIRGs and Student Government Associations in seventeen states who are working to make college more affordable.

This campaign was started by students on one campus – University of California, Irvine. Now, it's running on 50 college campuses around the country. This year, we want this campaign going on 200 campuses!

The next few pages have some ideas for how you can run this campaign on your campus. Check back frequently at www.MakeTextbooksAffordable.com for other ideas and resources to help you out! Also, post what you're doing as well so others can copy you!

IDEAS FOR LOWERING TEXTBOOKS COSTS ON CAMPUS

Keep in Mind... We Need Your Ideas, Too!

Our experience tells us that the best way we can get textbook publishers to stop ripping off students is through a combination of bad publicity and direct economic pressure from faculty and university administrators. So, pretty much ANYTHING you do that falls into these categories is GREAT! Be sure to take the ideas listed below as just that...ideas...and we're confident that you've got even better ideas, so have fun, go crazy, and keep us all posted on what you're doing at www.MakeTextbooksAffordable.com.

Also, most of these ideas are simple, but if you need help with things like recruiting volunteers, getting media attention, organizing events, check out our online Activist Toolkit at www.StudentPIRGs.org/PIRG_Activist_Toolkit.pdf for tips on how to organize these kinds of activities.

A. GETTING MEDIA ATTENTION

Here's a couple of event ideas that are really fun, give students a chance to vent their frustration at textbook prices, and are likely to get covered by your campus and local papers if you contact them in advance.

- **Build "The World's Largest Textbook Pile".** Pick a spot in the middle of the quad, and get people to leave all the books they couldn't sell because a new edition came out or they didn't have the CD ROM. Watch the tower get higher and higher, and call the Guinness Book of World records.
- **Send it Back!** Don't let publishers stick you with unusable and un-sellable junk! Encourage students to send back every page and every CD-ROM of every textbook that they can't resell because of unnecessary new editions and bundling. Make sure students staple short letters with their personal stories to the items they send back.
- **What Are They Good For? CD-ROM Challenge.** Challenge students to come up with the most creative use for bundled CD-ROMs that they don't use. No idea is stupid - sculptures, murals, cooking recipes! Hold an "Art Show" with the best entries and give the winners fun prizes! Then send *all* the entries to the publishers!
- **CD-Rom Ultimate Frisbee Game.** Collect all the CD-ROMs that aren't actually used in class (be careful to ask for the ones that aren't required for class) and play a game of ultimate Frisbee.
- **Used Book Funerals.** Ask students to give their used books that they can't resell a proper burial by holding a Used Book Funeral. Make it a good funeral, with coffins, pallbearers, a priest, and lots of Kleenex and shades. Make sure the "burial" is complete by having students mail the individual pages of the books back to the publishers!
- **Textbook Tea Party.** When the American colonists were fed up with the unfair price of tea from England, they held the Boston Tea Party in protest. We'll protest the practice of charging American students more than British students for the same book by holding Textbook Tea Parties. We'll dress up with wigs and Pilgrim hats, hold up stacks of books that are cheaper in England, drink tea and then send the books, by the page, back to the original publishers. Make sure students include a short letter with their personal stories.

B. WORKING WITH FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS

Below are ideas for what professors and administrators can do to help lower textbook costs, as individuals, departments, and governing bodies. Check back frequently at www.MakeTextbooksAffordable.com to get more ideas, and post any new ideas you have.

Things individual professors can do:

- **If they have the power to choose their textbooks, chose the lowest cost options.** Negotiate the lowest price possible and consider switching to a low-frills brand; press the publisher for a commitment to produce the current edition for as long as the professor thinks is valid (ideally 6 or more years); and avoid ordering bundled books. If they do this, they should inform their publishers why they are doing this.
- **Get textbook orders in as early as possible** so that students and the bookstore have enough time to order used books online.
- **Let students use older editions of textbooks.**

Things Departments and Academic Senates can do:

- **Adopt a resolution** calling on publishers to change their practices and committing the faculty to negotiate better deals for students. You can download a sample resolution at www.MakeTextbooksAffordable.com.
- **Adopt or revise textbook purchasing guidelines** so that they give preference to lower cost books, unbundled books, and books that stay on the market the longest.

Things that University Presidents/Chancellors/Board of Trustees can do:

- **Write a letter to the Association of American Publishers** putting them on notice that they need to change their practices or risk losing business from the university.
- **Establish a textbooks rental program.** A bunch of schools in the Midwest have programs in which instead of buying textbooks, students rent textbooks for the semester for free, paying only a mandatory fee that is usually significantly less than the average student's textbooks costs. CALPIRG recently wrote a report on how to get this started, which you can find at www.MakeTextbooksAffordable.com.

Tips on how to be most effective at approaching professors and administrators:

- **Approach professors respectfully**, and make it clear that you need their help, but that you believe that publishers, not professors, are the problem.
- **Pass a Student Government resolution calling on both publishers and the university to take action.** A Student Government resolution will help demonstrate that the students are concerned and want action. You can download a sample resolution at www.MakeTextbooksAffordable.com.
- **Show the letters from 700 math and physics professors from around the country calling on Thomson Learning to stop ripping off students** – that will show your professors that they are not alone in taking action. You can download the letters from the website.

C. LAUNCHING A BOOKSWAP

- **Either launch www.CampusBookSwap.com or a comparable bookswap for students to trade used books online for free.** Check out the site for ideas on how to publicize your bookswap on campus.

What else?

Post your ideas at www.MakeTextbooksAffordable.com!