



USED TEXTBOOK ASSOCIATION POSITION PAPER: FACULTY ADOPTION

Faculty Decisions Drive Textbook Adoption Process

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The traditional textbook remains a core element of college educational tools. Even as other media and experiences gain attention, it is the standard bound textbook that still serves as the primary classroom tool. But scrutiny of this traditional bound book, and the process by which it comes to the student, is increasing. Selection, content, timing and pricing are all key factors in the interrelated educational experience.

It begins as a simple process. The professor selects the textbook. The college bookstore orders and stocks the book. The student pays the bookstore for the book. This commerce cycle appears simple and complete. But the factors of timing and the option for re-using the book impact the process.

The drivers of this supply and demand cycle are the faculty members. Their decisions, selections and timing are the drivers for the entire textbooks cycle. This cycle is gaining an increasing amount of attention as the costs of books increase at a pace that exceeds virtually every other aspect of the educational or national economies.

FACULTY ROLE IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS

It is the privilege and responsibility of faculty members to select textbooks that include pertinent, accurate and effective information for the designated class.

Extensive research and energy are dedicated to the textbook development process. Generally, faculty members from various educational institutions are closely involved in the textbook development process.

The responsibility for the textbook preparation and release falls to the traditional book publisher. These companies work with authors, often faculty members, and create effective content and format. The publisher then assumes the responsibility for sale and distribution of the textbooks. For the financial success of their own operations, publishers aggressively market textbooks and updated

editions of the core material to faculty members. The life cycle of a textbook can extend over multiple semesters, or can end quickly.

For example, a professor could require Book A for the fall term. If the faculty includes the same text book for the same course offered in the next semester, then Book A can be re-used, re-sold, and re-cycled in future sessions. This is the creation of the used book option. However, the introduction and adoption of a new edition of the same core material removes the used book option for usage. The book selection, new, used or bundled, remains the domain of the faculty members.

The textbook is the core factor in the class experience. The Harris Interactive survey of faculty members reports 94 percent of college professors require a textbook and 81 percent of professors consider a textbook “very important” or “extremely important” to the overall course experience.¹

When considering course materials, faculties are encouraged to use their power as educators to review content of textbooks, especially when publishers introduce revised versions. Publishers have varied criteria to justify the publication of a new edition. It remains the responsibility of the faculty review to determine the value of the new edition over the prior, existing and in-use edition.

In a new option, publishers are working to expand their business success with bundled course options. The bundled option generally includes a textbook, with supplemental publications such as lab documents, study guides, worksheets or practice tests. When bundled together, these elements require the purchase of the complete package, not just the textbook. By the nature of the supplements, they cannot be re-sold or re-cycled in future semesters.

The Harris Interactive survey of college students indicates 40 percent of students surveyed said that bundled material was either “not useful at all” or “not very useful.” Just 19 percent of students who responded said these materials were either “extremely useful” or “very useful.”²

Of professors surveyed, 75 percent recognized that bundling causes prices to increase and 54 percent said report the practice prevents students from selling their textbooks back or from obtaining used textbooks for class work.

¹Harris Interactive Study of U.S. Faculty, the NBC Commissioned Harris Interactive Survey of faculty members in April 2005

²Harris Interactive Study of College Students, the NBC Commissioned Harris Interactive Survey of U.S. college students in April 2005

ADOPTION PROCESS – IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

The decision by the faculty member that an existing textbook meets the criteria for repeat usage in a class is the first step of the academic adoption process.

This decision triggers a series of actions by the college bookstore and, ultimately, the student.

The bookstore and the faculty are in a partnership to supply the textbook needs of students. If the faculty requests a new edition of a textbook, the bookstore contacts the appropriate publisher and secures the estimated number of needed textbooks. If a professor decides to re-use an existing textbook, another series of events begin.

To secure an adequate supply of the used textbooks, the bookstore buys them back from current student owners. In order to establish the need to “buy back” the textbook, the bookstore sets a deadline in the preceding term for the faculty member to provide this official notice. With the notice in place, the book is added to the needed buy list and students are paid premium rates for their textbooks. If the faculty misses the deadline, the bookstore has no way to know that textbooks will be re-used and the need for the next term. As a result, students are not paid the premium re-sale price and an adequate supply for the upcoming term may not be available at the bookstore.

According to the Harris Interactive study, 86 percent of the professors surveyed did not understand the importance of turning in book orders early to the bookstore.³ The fact is, if professors turn in their adoptions in a timely manner, bookstore managers can pay the highest prices at the end of the term, providing students anywhere from 5 to 50 percent of their initial investment.

The “Turn the Page, Making College Textbooks More Affordable” report echoes that fact. The report states college faculty members have a “critical impact” on the price and availability of used books, especially if their orders are submitted to bookstores by the adoption deadline.⁴

If a faculty member re-adopts a textbook for the following term and sends that order to the bookstore on schedule, the store can pay more for the book at buyback, saving the student about 30 to 35 percent. In addition, students the following term have a supply of used books from which to buy.

³Harris Interactive Study of U.S. Faculty

⁴“Turn the Page, Making College Textbooks More Affordable” report, A Report of The Advisory Committee On Student Financial Assistance, May 2007, chartered by Congress and provided to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education

TIMING AND MECHANICS OF ADOPTION AND BUY BACK

The timing of the adoption process is an integral part of the used book process. As with any economic chain, each element of the used book cycle is dependent on the other factors.

The academic calendar announces the final day of the term, with closing tests and last days of class. These course-ending events mean that the students are ready to sell their textbooks back to the college bookstore. In this relationship, the bookstore is ready to capitalize on the timing of the term end with the book buy back event.

Again, the faculty member is the key driver in the path the book takes, the method of buy back the store uses, and the amount of money the store pays for books. If faculty adopts the textbook, the bookstore needs an inventory for the next semester. The bookstore provides a target decision date for the faculty to decide to adopt – or not. If the faculty member notifies the bookstore the book is adopted for uses next term, the bookstore pursues one path of actions. If the faculty decides not to re-use the book, another path is pursued. This decision date is set in advance of the term-end buy back, so the bookstore can know what inventory is needed for the next semester.

At the buy-back event, students bring the books they no longer need to the bookstore and the store buys them for cash. The amount paid for each book is dependent on faculty plans. If the faculty member has indicated the textbook is adopted for the following term, the bookstore follows one path.

For the adopted textbook, the bookstore needs to establish an on-hand inventory of the books for the rapidly approaching term. To accomplish this, the bookstore pays a premium price to the students, generally 50 percent of the original purchase price. This increases the likelihood that students will sell to the bookstore and the store will be able to build an adequate inventory of used books for the next group of buying students -- at used book purchase prices.

If the faculty member decides not to adopt the book for the upcoming term, the demand for the book by the bookstore diminishes. There is no driving need to have the book physically on hand for the next semester. The bookstore demand is less, so following true economic principles, the price paid to the student for the used book drops. In addition, the bookstore may contact a book wholesale partner. The wholesale organization will buy the used books, at the reduced price, and then re-sell them to another bookstore at another college or university campus.

As with every part of the adoption cycle, the faculty member's decision to adopt—or not—a textbook is the driver for options and actions that impact others.

TEXTBOOK PRICING DYNAMICS

The price of textbooks, new and used, is steadily increasing and impacting students.

The value of used textbooks to students is immediate and significant.

To understand the true cost of a textbook to a student, assume that a new book sells for \$100 and a used book, typically, for \$75. That's an immediate savings of 25 percent.

If the book is adopted for use in the coming term, the bookstore will pay \$50 for that book at term's end. That is another 50 percent savings for the student, whose net cost is then \$25.

If, on the other hand, a new textbook is used at the initial cost of \$100, and not re-used, the cost to the student is the full \$100.

A 2005 General Accounting Office Report reveals students at four-year public educational institutions pay textbook totals equal to 26 percent of tuition and fees while community college students face textbooks expenses that are 72 percent of tuition and fees. The GAO also reports textbook prices have nearly tripled since 1987, increasing by 186 percent while overall inflation has been 72 percent over the same period.

Those facts are echoed in the "Turn the Page, Making College Textbooks More Affordable" report that textbook expenses in the period from 1987 to 2004 rose far more rapidly than the prices of other commodities nationwide – 109 percent for textbooks at four-year public colleges compared to 65 percent for the Consumer Price Index.⁵

"If the bookstore knows prior to buy-back which texts will be used in the upcoming term, the store is guaranteed buyers and resale value for student is higher,"⁶ the "Turn the Page" report states. "Early notice of re-adopted books allows the bookstore to determine the number of textbooks that can be purchased at buy-back; and the number that must be located through wholesale distributors. Faculty who re-use the same edition for multiple terms help ensure a higher resale value for their students."

⁵"Turn the Page, Making College Textbooks More Affordable" report,

⁶"Turn the Page, Making College Textbooks More Affordable" report

BOOKSTORE ROLE IN TEXTBOOK SELECTION AND SUPPLY

The college bookstore is, quite simply, a retail business that supplies textbook products as prescribed by the faculty, and sells to the students who need to purchase the books for their classes.

The textbook price increases impact students from all income levels, according to the “Turn the Page” report. The study states that a “groundswell of criticism against colleges, bookstores and publishers (that) has translated into action across the nation to do something about it.”⁷

Currently, textbooks cost students an average \$900 per year. These costs are added to steadily increasing college student expenses that include tuition, fees, room and board, and transportation costs.

For incoming first-year students, buying textbooks is usually the last item on the enrollment agenda. Students enter the bookstore, often unprepared for the upcoming textbook expenses. Some students pay out of pocket, while others attempt to bridge the timing gap between financial aid disbursement and the start of classes. For the latter group, textbook expenses can be “the final barrier to college,” reported the authors of “Turn the Page.”⁸

It is at the time of textbook purchase that the value of used books is clearly illustrated for students.

A strong used textbook inventory is, as stated, depends on faculty choices. Building strong faculty awareness and cooperation for adoption deadline submission requires commitment from bookstore management. Informing faculty about the textbook ordering process is critical to increasing the number of available used books and decreasing the cost of educational materials for students.

Early notice of re-adopted books allows the bookstore to determine the number of textbooks that can be purchased at buy back; and the number that must be located through wholesale distributors. Bookstores can build a local communication strategy to effectively inform and motivate faculty about the adoption and buy-back process.

The San Mateo County Community College District ensures adequate supplies of used textbooks at its three campus bookstores through ongoing communication with faculty. E-mails containing reminders, updates and information about the textbook-ordering process are sent out weekly. “As a result of the initiative,

⁷“Turn the Page, Making College Textbooks More Affordable” report

⁸“Turn the Page, Making College Textbooks More Affordable” report

nearly 90 percent of faculty now turn in their orders on time and used textbook sales increased by 27 percent between 2004 and 2006,”⁹ says the “Turn the Page” report, adding the SMCCD bookstores also encourage faculty “to use bundled materials only when absolutely necessary.”

By reminding faculty of adoption deadlines, Bob Somers, director of University of Maryland Baltimore County Bookstore, reported strong increases in adoption rates from fall 2006 to fall 2007.

STUDENT ROLE IN THE PROCESS

Students assume the role of consumer with the bookstore. Their purchase choices are generally directed by the choice of textbooks made in advance by faculty and provided by the local college bookstore.

When polled by the Harris Interactive study of U.S. faculty¹⁰:

- 85% of students surveyed said new textbooks cost too much;
- 28% said used textbooks cost too much; and
- 50% of students said the cost of textbooks and materials caused “an extremely difficult or very difficult financial burden” for them.

Even with their general disapproval of textbook costs, 80 percent of those surveyed said buying used books was the preferred answer. From this point in the commerce cycle, students can assume the dual role of advocate, and lobby faculty on the advantages of timely re-adoptions of existing textbooks.

UTA ROLE IN ADOPTION PROMOTION

The Used Textbook Association (UTA) was founded in 2006 to advocate the role and value of used textbooks in the marketplace and increase the supply of used textbooks available to students. UTA works to educate students and faculty members on the buy-back process, improve the rate of early adoptions by faculty members, and ensure textbook merchandising practices are appropriate and meeting the goals of higher learning.

Since its beginnings, UTA has grown to include more than 580 bookstores. Members are urged to employ strategies to help the textbook industry, students, faculty and community adopt the “buy used first” practice. These strategies include:

⁹“Turn the Page, Making College Textbooks More Affordable” report

¹⁰[Harris Interactive Study of U.S. Faculty](#)

- Eliminate unnecessary new editions which cost more, contain only minor changes and render older editions less valuable at buy back;
- Eliminate unnecessary bundling of components and instead pricing textbooks and classroom material separately;
- Eliminate unnecessary built-in obsolescence such as tear-out pages and book covers with embossed school names;
- Increase the rate of timely textbook adoptions by faculty.

The UTA works to provide information to faculty and students. In addition, the UTA provides actual tools to bookstores to support the used book adoption and re-sales processes

To help in the effort, the UTA offers members a number of online tools and pieces to show students that the bookstore is advocating for affordable textbooks. From window stickers to posters, videos and marketing materials – UTA works to provide information to support bookstore messages to faculty and students.

The UTA urges bookstores to create a customer-first approach, build loyalty with faculty members and students; put more money in the pockets of students at textbook buy back; and create improved perceptions of the textbook purchase process.

The UTA promotes five specific steps to help bookstores educate faculty members and students about textbook adoptions, textbook buy backs, and impact attitudes in the process.

1. Meet with the people who are directly involved.

Talk to faculty, department chairs, faculty senates and the dean's council. Explain the adoption and buy-back cycle, and the advantages it can offer.

2. Serve as a resource.

Bookstores know the facts regarding industry and student trends, textbook data, buy back and can leverage that knowledge to enhance their positions with faculty. Sharing data on new trends, discussing the impact of textbook decisions on students, and recommending textbook options are all within the realm of bookstore service and should be utilized.

3. Promote important dates.

Proactive efforts pay rewards. Consistently remind faculty members of adoption deadlines. Through this step, bookstores emphasize the importance of timeliness, which translates to increases in adoption rates by faculty. This translates into more money for students in the buy back process.

4. Involve students.

Build awareness for the true cost of textbooks by holding informative sessions with student groups. Encourage students to ask professors to re-adopt texts, to avoid texts bundled with other material, and to reject built-in obsolescence.

5. Recognize success.

Express appreciation. Thank faculty who submit timely adoptions. Reinforce and build beneficial and cost-effective habits.

Barry Waters, director of Central Michigan University Bookstore, posted materials and distributed flyers to inform students and faculty on what textbooks really cost, once buy back was factored in. "We want students to understand it is important for them to sell back their books, both to add to the supply of used textbooks and to recoup some of their original investment," Waters said.

SUMMARY

Faculty members, bookstores and students are joined in the educational organization structure. By sharing clear information, each group increases the understanding of the other for their perspective.

Once this understating is in place, the primary role of faculty members in adopting textbooks for re-use in classes is clear.

- The faculty member determines to re-use the textbook and promptly notifies the college bookstore.
- The bookstore identifies that book as a necessary resource and pays students a premium price to build inventory when the students sell the book at the close of the term.
- Students the next term have an adequate supply of used, lower price, textbooks.

The textbook adoption process illustrates an interdependent cycle, launched by faculty decisions, with potential benefits for each audience.