

September 22nd, 2020



Textbook Affordability Workgroup Review

House Education Committee – September 2020

- **Original charge of the workgroup:**

- In 2019, passed [HB 2213](#) that requires each college and university to establish a textbook affordability plan that includes steps to market the no-cost/low-cost designation to students.
- However, we removed a key addition in the bill that would require colleges and universities to ensure course description lists textbooks required for that class by the first day of registration.
- Our workgroup was charged with looking at an appropriate way to give students the maximum amount of information ahead of registration to help them plan for the costs of textbooks.

- **Timeline of our meetings:**

- Workgroup met four times, as well as having a number of email exchanges and phone calls outside of the workgroup with participants to gather more information.
- August 2019 – First work group meeting
 - This was a fact-finding mission meeting to meet stakeholders and discuss challenges with the original text from HB 2213.
- January 2020 – Second work group meeting
 - We heard from stakeholders on ways to define textbook, and the challenges in adoption of textbooks from both universities and colleges.
- April 2020 – Third work group meeting
 - We discussed the (1) definition of textbook, (2) whether to create a cost threshold, (3) whether to provide additional flexibility for faculty situations outside their control.
 - Due to the difference of opinion among stakeholder groups, the legislators met after the meeting to discuss these policy questions.
 - They agreed that supplies will not be included in the definition of course materials.
 - They also agreed that there should be flexible timelines for faculty and these circumstances are rare, therefore, less relevant for the work group.
 - There was agreement from work group members to not establish new thresholds, and to use already established thresholds by post-secondary institutions in response to HB 2871.
- July 2020 – Final work group meeting

- We discussed the policy conclusions, and stakeholders shared perspective on policy ideas for consideration.

- **Those who participated:**

- Student Organization
 - Oregon Student Association.
- Faculty:
 - American Association of University Professors-Oregon;
 - American Federation of Teachers Oregon;
 - Association of Oregon Faculties;
 - Non-Union Faculty Member/Curriculum Committee;
 - Oregon Education Association;
- Bookstores:
 - Bookstore and Auxiliary Services;
 - National Association of College Stores;
- Institutions:
 - Chemeketa Community College;
 - Linn-Benton Community College;
 - Oregon Community College Association;
 - Oregon Public Universities;
- Nonpartisan informational agencies
 - Higher Education Coordinating Commission;
- Oregon Open Educational Resources;

- **Some information for you to consider:**

- Cost transparency and budgeting will be more important to students than ever due to the economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.
- Data from the HECC shows that books and supplies are about 7% of the average cost of attendance in Oregon, or approximately \$1400 per year.
- This component of the overall cost of attendance is especially hard for students to plan ahead for because it varies from one term to the next and the real costs may not be known until the term starts.

- **Fundamental problems we sought to address:**

- Students need cost information in advance.
- Students will face new hardships due to illness and unemployment
- Benefits for multiple stakeholders: students, bookstore managers, schedulers, registrars, accessibility services, etc.
- Practices that prioritize institutions over student experience, such as:
 - Using “TBD” (To Be Determined) for material and book listings
 - Assigning an expensive textbook with no intention of teaching it

- Assigning a textbook adopted by the department but telling faculty they don't need to use it

- **Workgroup member concerns:**

- Perception that reporting deadlines conflict with academic freedom
- Faculty turnover, late hires, late decisions
- Whether to include supplies in disclosing the cost of course materials
- The barriers to reporting adoptions on time
- Faculty may not be aware of deadlines or procedures to submit adoptions
- Institutional culture places low priority on reporting
- Students need information in order to budget for the real cost of attendance for the upcoming term.
- Developing policy that is cost-neutral
- Allowing time and flexibility to implement changes

- **Our current proposal:**

- NOTE: This is not a proposal that came from “unanimous” consent by the workgroup members, but represents some broad consensus on the direction we would like to go and strives to address all concerns with flexibility
- The proposal is:
 - Instead of requiring institutions to provide the information on total costs of all required course materials and fees at the point of registration (examples: textbooks, access codes, inclusive access fees, etc), institutions will be required to provide this information for a percentage of courses – such as 70 percent or 80 percent, by the point of registration.
 - We are still open to the definition of “course materials,” while noting that it will NOT include “supplies” since work group members explained the challenges in calculating the cost of each supply.
 - This proposal would also require regular reporting to HECC about the status of implementation.
- There are three benefits to this proposal:
 - The first benefit to this is academic freedom is protected because this policy would be about transparency rather than restrictions on faculty choices.
 - The second benefit is this proposal allows individual institutions to develop their own allowances and exemptions.
 - The third benefit is this proposal compliments HB 2871 which had post-secondary institutions establish thresholds.
- Work group members will be consulted as additional details get laid out in the next couple of months.

- **How we addressed workgroup member concerns:**

- Notification requirements would be the responsibility of the department or other appropriate role, and would not be the responsibility of the faculty.
- Avoiding use of the word “textbook” or specific definitions of formats; instead use generic phrases and allow institutions to determine what is appropriate to report
- Academic freedom is protected because this policy would be about transparency rather than restrictions on faculty choices.
- Most importantly, students will be able to budget for the real cost of attendance for the upcoming term. This was the primary goal of this work group – finding transparent savings for students.
- It would also put us in compliance with the letter *and spirit* of the federal [Higher Education Opportunity Act](#) of 2008 passed by Congress

- **Final thoughts:**

- Thresholds were less relevant for this work group since the purpose of the work group is to create a starting point with policy focused on disclosing information before registration opens.
- We still need to figure out the metrics, but we are confident that we can produce a plan that balances timing and flexibility, but more importantly prioritizes the student experience and supports their academics and livelihood.
- There is still a difference of opinion on how to provide flexibility for faculty in specific situations, such as late hires or course changes
- But we know that a plan can work. Look at Chemeketa, Umpqua, and Linn-Benton Community Colleges, they are doing it now!