STUDENT CONCERNS ABOUT TEXTBOOKS & LIBRARY ACTIONS

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Textbook costs are a recognized impediment to student success, resulting in students taking fewer courses, choosing courses based on textbook cost, or getting a poor grade due to not having reliable, day one access to the text. Currently, 25 states have legislation or policies addressing course materials affordability, but North Carolina is not among them. Libraries at UNC institutions are taking campus-specific and collaborative steps to provide student access to textbooks and to encourage the adoption of course materials that are open, low cost, or licensed/owned by the respective library. Major actions taken by UNC Libraries are summarized below. Many of these actions could be expanded with appropriate funding, staffing, and support. Following the summary are additional proposals that the UNC Faculty Senate Chairs may want to consider. The University Library Advisory Council (ULAC) is ready to help with future efforts to support student success through programs that save students money on textbook costs, provide access on day one of courses, and support the creation of open materials that can be customized, shared, and used by others.

Summary of Activities by Libraries at UNC Institutions

1. ULAC charged the Educational Resources Affordability Committee in 2016 with examining issues around textbook affordability and reporting regularly back to ULAC.
2. ULAC joined the Open Textbook Network (OTN) in 2017 and offered train-the-trainer workshops for UNC librarians, who in turn led faculty workshops. Faculty who reviewed a textbook for OTN received a $200 stipend and many went on to adopt open textbooks from OpenStax or other sources. The UNC System Office paid for the OTN membership and textbook review stipends.
3. Even before the System OTN membership, several libraries offered monetary awards/stipends for faculty to explore using open educational resources or library materials in place of commercial textbooks. They also offered support such as purchasing library materials, identifying potential open resources, and advising on copyright/fair use. For example, cumulative potential savings at UNCG, which began its stipend program in 2015, exceed $1.4 million. More libraries now offer such programs and provide faculty workshops. Several campuses have estimated their potential cost-savings and the Educational Resources Affordability Committee will implement a methodology this spring to collect and cumulate potential savings across the System.
4. NC LIVE began the Open Education NC project in 2018 with grant funding from the Institute of Museum & Library Services, administered through the State Library. The project will reduce the cost of higher education for North Carolina students by providing, free, open textbook alternatives for 30 of the most frequently taught courses across North Carolina’s 2 and 4-year institutions. Projected savings over 2 years is $5.3 million with 39,500 students impacted. The program provides grants for selected faculty
who commit to adopting open textbooks. UNC librarians provide training and serve on the NC LIVE advisory committee.

5. In collaboration with the campus bookstore or academic departments, many libraries are purchasing multi-user e-book versions of required textbooks and notifying faculty that they are available. Potential savings to date exceed $200,000 per semester at large institutions. A collaborative UNC pilot program currently underway with Wiley provides access to the same e-books at 16 of the 17 constituent institutions.

6. A few libraries purchase at least one copy of some or all required textbooks and make them available through course reserves for brief loan periods. At NCSU, the potential student savings per semester are approximately $424,000.

Proposals for Consideration

1. Implement UNC System-wide faculty initiative to provide stipends and address course development time for the creation of textbooks and open online materials to support their courses. Consider targeting high-cost, gateway courses that supplement NC LIVE’s project. Build faculty communities across UNC to collaborate on textbook and ancillary material creation.

2. License additional shared multi-user e-books across the UNC System for student use at no cost, possibly with funding provided by the UNC System. Encourage faculty to review the multi-user e-books that are available (not all textbooks are available in this manner) to consider as replacements or supplements for texts that they currently use.

3. Require transparency for course costs (textbooks, access codes for third party tools, etc.), including a way for students to identify all course costs prior to the start of the course by, for example, requiring all departments to list costs for each course section in the course catalog. Incorporate “course cost consciousness” in faculty reward structures through awards and possibly, longer term, through the tenure and promotion process.

4. Administer a survey similar to the University of Guelph Student Textbook Survey to determine the impact of the cost of course materials on student success in the UNC System.

5. Conduct research on library and educational systems that provide wide-scale access to Open Educational Resources; investigate leveraging the UNC System and NC Live to consider statewide implementation of such systems.

6. Advocate for state-level legislation to support course materials affordability.