

**MINUTES OF THE  
FACULTY SENATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2014  
Mason Hall D1, 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.**

**Senators Present:** Jim Bennett, Charlene Douglas, Star Muir, Peter Pober, Joe Scimecca, Suzanne Scott, Peter Stearns, Susan Trencher.

**I. Approval of Minutes of November 25, 2013:** The minutes were approved.

**II. Announcements**

**Updates from Provost Stearns**

Songdo: There are 27 students enrolled on campus and an additional six students coming to Mason. The Admissions Office continues to receive applications. Enrollment more than adequate, he is greatly pleased. A grand opening will take place in March, classes begin March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Six students also signed up for additional English work.

INTO: We have not signed the INTO contract yet, no major issues. There will be meetings later in February with 90 INTO recruiters; visits to gain information about GMU. The process is moving along. Various academic units will provide information; there will also be social events and entertainment (excursions) in the local area. The ELI/SISA transition discussions are moving along. A meeting was held last Friday (which the Provost did not attend).

Budget Forum (earlier today): The state budget is reasonably good for us, \$5M+ increase for Mason next year – enrollment growth favorable to us. There will be new assessments for pensions and health insurance, essentially a wash. We do get \$20M for funding of Academic VII to be completed 2016/2017, still not a done deal, but a big gain. Up to 3% bonus contingent upon various performance terms, he is hopeful legislature will convert this into salary, has no idea for sure. We are working as vigorously as we can on tuition recommendations for BOV (tentatively in late February), not a lot of flexibility, but anticipate revenue gain.

BOV: Discussion with BOV on Faculty Handbook issues, to pull back on revisions they sought regarding the Presidential Search with one stipulation subject to VA law. Hopefully we can pull back from unnecessary confrontation.

Two issues to discuss with you:

#1: To talk with older faculty about classroom issues, instances where faculty are falling asleep. We need to look at teaching evaluations more carefully.

Discussion: Without knowledge of specific circumstances, sometimes more senior faculty do not have control over schedule – late afternoon classes, some older faculty teaching classes from 7-10 p.m. Some faculty travel long distances to campus. Post-tenure review process; also worried about faculty driving, not showing up for class. To approach as a supportive colleague, thanking them for all they have done, their legacy, to have retirement time in your life.

#2: Every time we have to close the university, we are reaching a point for faculty to arrange for electronic alternatives in these situations. May not apply to some disciplines such as dance or laboratory work, but to do this where we can.

Discussion: Students need reading days before final exams. Some faculty use voice-over power points; other faculty not receptive and need transparencies; some faculty use podcasts. Scheduling impacts cornerstone experiences. Sidewalks are also dangerous.

**SLOAN Funded Retirement Coaching Program** – see Attachment A.

Chair Douglas noted this is new, provided by a grant, not the usual HR program.

**III. Progress reports, business, and agenda items from Senate Standing Committees**

**A. Academic Policies – Suzanne Scott, Chair**

Senator Scott distributed two drafts assigned to Academic Policies Committee, which they will discuss on February 18. The documents included suggested changes to Leave of Absence Policy for Undergraduates and to double counting for 6 credits in Mason Core. This was information only for what to expect in the March executive committee and for vote in March Senate. *With thanks to Suzanne Scott for editing.*

**B. Budget and Resources – Susan Trencher, Chair**

Salary Data: Linda Harber reports they are doing a final check on salary. We should get the list by the end of the week.

**C. Faculty Matters – Joe Scimecca, Chair**

The committee has yet to meet this term. The Faculty Evaluation of Administrators survey will be distributed soon. The summer school survey received little response.

**D. Nominations – Jim Bennett, Chair**

Daniel Houser (CHSS) is nominated to fill a vacancy on the University Space Committee

**E. Organization and Operations – Star Muir, Chair**

University Standing Committee Chairs election pending: Academic Initiatives, UPTRAC.

We have asked seven committees to justify their existence, four responses received so far.

We have not yet received responses from NIAL and Admissions. We'll see when we get answers back. He also noted the Academic Policies Committee has a heavy load; is cyclical, wishes we could split it into two committees.

New Issue: We received a complaint from faculty member about the Bookstore. We do not have a committee which addresses auxiliary enterprises. Suggestions including forwarding the issue to Benn Crandall, director of Auxiliary Enterprises, or Budget and Resources work together with Faculty Matters. Executive Committee members recalled additional bookstore issues.

**IV. Other Committees/Faculty Representatives**

- Faculty Handbook Committee - proposed revisions presented at February 5<sup>th</sup> meeting and will be voted on at March 5<sup>th</sup> meeting. General Education Committee to continue discussion from Dec. 4<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- Technology Policy Committee – Update. Chair Douglas had lunch with new CIO Marilyn Smith.

## **V. New Business, Updates, and Discussion**

Task Force on Textbook Affordability Report (See Attachments B & C): to include on FS Meeting agenda. Discussion included rental market for textbooks, textbook markup percentages, and textbook resale pricing for upcoming bookstore contract RFB.

Mason Core Discussion: Objections raised on behalf of department chairs, not just CHSS, COS chairs unaware also. Some department chairs viewed this as a disaster for budgets. Chair Douglas noted public forums took place to receive feedback.

## **VI. Agenda Items for February 5, 2014 FS Meeting**

- Draft FS Minutes December 4, 2013
- Provost Stearns (Announcements)
- SLOAN Funded Retirement Coaching Program (Announcements)
- Resolution to replace “Synthesis” requirement with a “Capstone Experience” associated with the major – General Education Committee (Unfinished Business)
- Daniel Houser nominated to fill vacancy on University Space Committee (Nominations)
- Report from the Task Force on Textbook Affordability (Other Committee Reports)
- Report from the Technology Policy Committee – Stanley Zoltek (Other Committee Reports)

## **VII. Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Meg Caniano  
Faculty Senate clerk

ATTACHMENT A

**Within 5 years of retirement?  
9 or 12-month faculty?**



**FACULTY  
RETIREMENT COACHING**

*Let us assist you in developing personal goals  
for life in retirement and design your own  
transition plan.*

**Includes:**

- **Online retirement readiness assessment**
- **Two individual coaching sessions with a certified retirement coach**
- **Two informative seminars (one 1/2 day and one full day)**

*Your spouse/partner is welcome to attend  
the seminars.*

For questions and to register, please contact Kathy Haldeman at [khaldem1@gmu.edu](mailto:khaldem1@gmu.edu) or 3.2040.

Pilot program funded by the ACE/Sloan Retirement Transitions Award.

**ATTACHMENT B**  
**Task Force on Textbook Affordability Report and Recommendations**  
**Executive Summary**

The Provost charged the Task Force on Textbook Affordability in February 2013 to develop a set of recommendations to make textbooks more affordable for Mason students.

Members of the task force were:

- Diane Smith (Chair), Associate University Librarian, Research & Educational Services
- Kimberly Eby, Associate Provost for Faculty Development; Director, Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence
- Rajesh Ganesan, Associate Professor, Systems Engineering and Operations Research
- Star Muir, Associate Professor; Hiring and Scheduling Director, Communication
- Mark Kraner, Executive Director, Campus Retail Operations, Auxiliary Enterprises
- Steve Nodine, Manager of Instructional Design
- Sharon Pitt, Interim Deputy CIO
- Larry Rockwood, Professor of Environmental Science and Policy; Director, Undergraduate Biology Program
- Cliff Shore, Director, Purchasing and Accounts Payable
- Korey Singleton, Manager, Assistive Technology Services
- Jennifer Suh, Associate Professor, Graduate School of Education

The task force reviewed the literature to identify trends and discussed possible actions. It is clear that the “problem” exists throughout higher education and that all are looking for the “silver bullet.” The crux of the issue is simple: the person choosing the textbook to be used in a class is not the person who has to pay for the book. The textbook decision is made in a publishing environment of planned obsolescence, in which publishers must continually issue new editions or add additional “learning components” to their products in order to guarantee their revenue stream and grow their businesses. At Mason there is the added economic dilemma that the University receives a revenue stream from the bookstore and reducing costs for students can reduce monies that are funneled back into the academic programs.

Given our research and analysis, the recommendations of the task force are:

- George Mason University should appoint a group focused on developing an awareness program to educate faculty on actions they can take to reduce textbook costs for students.
- George Mason University should develop a parallel marketing effort to inform students of steps that they may take to lower costs.
- George Mason University should incentivize faculty to create and share e-textbooks via an open educational resource (OER) repository.
- George Mason University should encourage experimentation and research with e-textbooks to help faculty transition from print to e-textbook format.

- George Mason University should investigate, join, and actively participate in open educational resource (OER) repositories seeking to understand the number of resources that are valuable to the Mason academic community, the quality of the repository's content, the value to our learning community, and the beneficial and sustainable impact on textbook affordability for students.
- The Office of Financial Aid should investigate the feasibility of allowing students to allocate a portion of their financial aid to purchase books at the bookstore.
- The University Libraries should develop programs to support the textbook affordability initiative through a textbook reserve project; build a more robust electronic reserve capability; and develop OER expertise within the staff.
- The course textbook information sheet currently used by the bookstore to gather textbook titles should be augmented to include information on how and if the faculty member will support the use of an e-textbook version throughout the class.
- The State Council of Higher Education of Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia may play a role in the encouragement of the use of open educational resources, as well as the creation of policy and legislation that encourages publishers to provide affordable access to textbooks, whether printed or electronic. George Mason should work with these groups as appropriate to further the cause and development of open educational resources.

## ATTACHMENT C

### Task Force on Textbook Affordability

The Provost charged the Task Force on Textbook Affordability in February 2013 to develop a set of recommendations that would make textbooks more affordable for Mason students. The charge suggested that focus should be on the more effective usage of e-textbooks; the role of open educational resources; volume pricing from commercial publishers; accessibility concerns; issues of e-texts adoption by faculty and students; and the impact on student learning in the development of recommendations. Final recommendations were to be submitted by May 2013. Members of the task force were: Kimberly Eby; Rajesh Ganesan; Star Muir; Mark Kraner; Steve Nodine; Sharon Pitt; Larry Rockwood; Cliff Shore; Korey Singleton; Diane Smith; and Jennifer Suh.

The task force met five times and reviewed the literature to identify trends and approaches others have taken to solve the textbook affordability problem. There are several studies that highlight the rising costs of textbooks and discuss student behavior when faced with these high prices. There are numerous reports from schools and state agencies that offer possible solutions.<sup>1</sup> It is

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<sup>1</sup> There are several examples of these reports. See Natsuko Nicholls, *The Investigation into the Rising Cost of Textbooks* (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholarly Publishing Office, University of Michigan Library, 2010), <http://www.lib.umich.edu/files/SPOTextbookBackground.pdf>; Pennsylvania. State Board of Education, *Report of the College Textbook Policies Advisory Committee* (Harrisburg, PA: State Board of Education, May 2012), [http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/research\\_reports\\_and\\_studies/19722/report\\_of\\_the\\_college\\_textbook\\_policies\\_advisory\\_committee/1215710](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/research_reports_and_studies/19722/report_of_the_college_textbook_policies_advisory_committee/1215710); Minnesota Office of Higher Education, *Reducing Textbook Costs, 2011* (St. Paul, MN: Office of Higher Education, 2011), <http://www.ohe.state.mn.us/pdf/ReducingTextbookCosts2011.pdf>; and California State University. *Report of the California State University Textbook Affordability Task Force*, August 2007, [http://www.calstate.edu/AcadSen/Records/Reports/Textbook\\_Affordability\\_Taskforce\\_report.pdf](http://www.calstate.edu/AcadSen/Records/Reports/Textbook_Affordability_Taskforce_report.pdf).

clear that the “problem” is throughout higher education and that all are looking for the “silver bullet.” The crux of the issue is simple: the person choosing the textbook to be used in a class is not the person who has to pay for the book. The textbook decision is made in a publishing environment of planned obsolescence, in which publishers must continually issue new editions or add additional “learning components” to their products in order to guarantee their revenue stream and grow their businesses. At Mason there is an added economic dilemma, since the University receives a revenue stream from the bookstore (\$1.4M last year but decreasing year over year due to the evolving textbook market). Therefore, reducing costs for students can reduce monies that are funneled back into the academic programs.

### **Is there a “textbook affordability problem”?**

For decades, production of textbooks followed a simple workflow: faculty wrote books; publishers published books; campus bookstores supplied books; and students purchased books. Yearly price increases of textbooks were incremental and new editions were released about every four years. Campus bookstores served the needs of students, providing a convenient location for students to acquire required assigned textbooks. Over time, fiscal pressures on higher education resulting from a declining economy impacted many institutional service models, including the campus bookstore. As the need to ease pressure through the expansion of revenue increased, the purpose of the campus bookstore fundamentally shifted from that of service provider to that of revenue-builder.

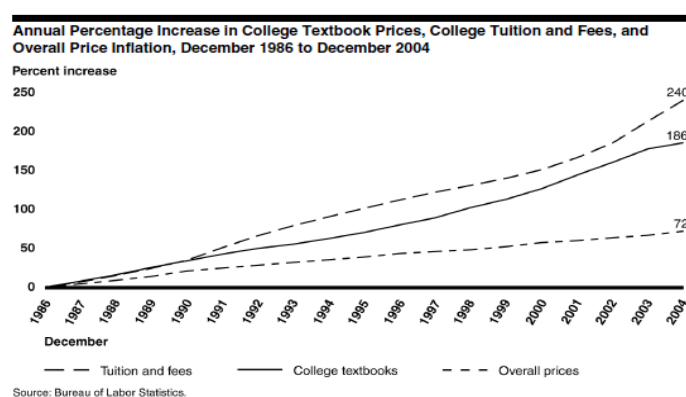
With consolidation of the publishing industry into a few major textbook providers in the 1980s and 1990s, the textbook industry’s focus on profit and market share grew. In an effort to reduce increased costs to students, faculty began creating customized combinations of book chapters and articles, or “course packs.” This practice reduced publishing profits, ultimately leading to a court challenge on copyright (Basic Books, Inc. v. Kinko’s Graphics Co.) which changed the acquisition of course content by enforcing stringent copyright clearance guidelines. The simple workflow of the development, publication, and purchase of a scholarly work was unbundled into even more discrete work functions or outsourced to clearance companies like the Copyright Clearance Center. As institutions ceded power to publishers in this profit driven market, textbook affordability was further challenged.

By the 2000s, as industry pressure to increase profits grew and textbook costs subsequently increased, students sought outlets to reduce costs, sparking a new market for publishers: aggregating and selling used books. Publishers offered used books to students by establishing buy-back programs to acquire inventory for this burgeoning market, consolidating and sharing booklists across the higher education sector to create inventory, and to match need. Solid financial motives catalyzed the used book business model: the profit margin for used books was higher than the margin for new textbooks. As the used textbook market flourished from students seeking deals, the new textbook market suffered. Publishers, in order to sustain their profits, sped

up the cycle to produce new editions, ensuring profitability in both market segments. Because of this continued focus on profitability, textbook affordability was irretrievably threatened.<sup>2</sup>

## Textbook costs and impact on student learning and retention

The cost of attending college goes beyond tuition to include the cost of room and board, fees, transportation to and from the institution, as well as textbooks. Textbook prices have contributed to increasing college costs, having increased significantly over time. According to a 2005 study of the California Public Interest Research Groups (CALPIRGs), textbook prices increased four times the rate of inflation from 1994 to 2004.<sup>3</sup> Another study from the federal government shows that although textbook price increases have trailed tuition increases, prices have more than doubled the rate of inflation for the past two decades, as shown in the graph below.<sup>4</sup>



Textbooks represent an increasing cost of attending college and, as such, reducing the cost of textbooks is important to students and their families. At four-year, public universities, books and supplies accounted for an average of \$1,200 per year to undergraduate students.<sup>5</sup> “Roughly one out of every three seniors—and one in four freshmen—often don’t buy required materials because of their price. That recent finding, from the National Survey of Student Engagement, was only the latest in a series of studies to show that students skip textbooks,” according to a special issue in the February 1, 2013 *Chronicle of Higher Education*.<sup>6</sup>

But is this a real issue or just students complaining? New data from the American Enterprise Institute based on Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics would point to a significant

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion of the textbook publishing industry’s economics and history see: S.R. Acker, “Digital Textbooks,” *Library Technology Reports*, 47(8): 41-51.; and J.B. Thompson, “Survival Strategies for Academic Publishing,” *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 21(4): 3-10 and S. Slaughter & G. Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education*, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) p.18.

<sup>3</sup> K. Rube, and M. Fairchild, *RipOff 101 Second Edition: The State Public Interest* (State PIRGs: Washington, DC, 2005), <http://www.smccd.net/bookstore/downloads/Ripoff%20101%202005.pdf>.

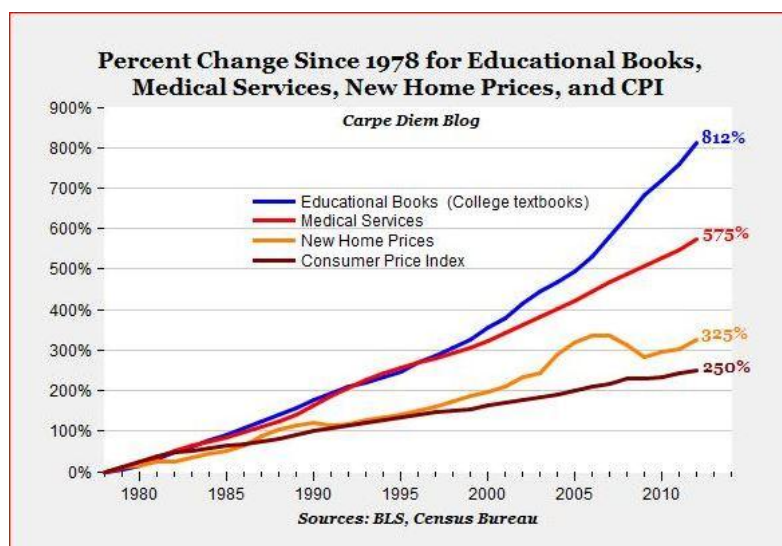
<sup>4</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *College Textbooks: Enhanced Offerings Appear to Drive Recent Price Increases* (GAO: Washington, DC, 2005), <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05806.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, “Student Budgets,” *Trends in College Pricing 2012*, <http://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing>

<sup>6</sup> Marc Perry, “Students Get Savvier about Textbook Buying,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 59, no. 21 (February 1, 2013), <http://chronicle.com/article/Students-Get-Savvier-About/136827/>



problem. The chart below shows the percent change in textbooks from 1974-2012 relative to other “typical” American costs.<sup>7</sup>



Although textbook prices are high, less costly alternatives to printed textbooks are difficult for students to find. While some students seek to reduce textbook costs by purchasing texts from used book retailers, 59% of students are unable to find used versions of assigned textbooks.<sup>8</sup> Entrepreneurial students share books, borrow books, and even purchase books from overseas.<sup>9</sup> Students seeking relief from high textbooks costs sometimes resort to making tough choices that reduce their access to educational resources. In the cited *Chronicle* article, for example, candid interviews with students report a variety of ways to get around the purchase, including illegally copying a book or book chapter or simply not purchasing the text at all; still other students discussed not enrolling in a class due to the expense of the required textbook.

### State and federal legislative/policy initiatives

Concerns for the lack of textbook affordability have risen so high that some state and federal legislators and agencies have taken the step of requiring changes in textbook practices. Passed in 2008 and instituted in 2010, the Higher Education Opportunity Act of the United States (PL 110-315) requires publishers to disclose the price of textbooks and to permit the unbundling of additional material added to publisher packaging to increase the cost of the base textbook. In California, legislative action in the form of “Chapter 161” requires publishers to offer digital versions of all printed textbooks sold and the state recently just enacted a law that will provide for the creation of free, openly licensed digital textbooks for the 50 most popular lower-division

<sup>7</sup> Mark Perry, *Carpe Diem* American Enterprise Institute blog, Dec. 24, 2012, <http://www.aei-ideas.org/2012/12/the-college-textbook-bubble-and-how-the-open-educational-resources-movement-is-going-up-against-the-textbook-cartel/>

<sup>8</sup> B. Wheeler and N. Osborne, “Shaping the Path to Digital: The Indiana University E-texts Initiative” in D. Oblinger (ed.) *Game Changers: Education and Information Technologies* (Lawrence, KS: Allen Press, Inc., 2012) p. 373 – 380.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, p. 8.

college courses offered by California colleges.<sup>10</sup> Using another approach to reduce textbook costs, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges launched a statewide initiative to create an open course digital repository of free e-texts to support its most highly enrolled courses.

### **Library support**

Traditionally academic libraries have excluded the purchase of textbooks within their collection development policies. In the last couple of years the Mason library has been experimenting with a pilot project of putting selected upper level engineering textbooks on reserve. The response has been very positive. In the last few years several academic libraries have started supporting students through similar reserve programs. Examples would be the Textbook Affordability Project (TAP) at the University of South Florida<sup>11</sup> and a recent project undertaken at Virginia Tech.<sup>12</sup>

### **Are e-texts the answer?**

While publisher and industry reports portray e-textbooks in the United States at a crucial tipping point, sales and market share growth have not yet lived up to the hype. Although digital textbooks represent a small portion of overall sales in 2011 (less than 2%), some have predicted that e-texts will represent 25% of the textbook market by 2015. New providers that specialize in the sale of e-texts such as CafeScribe, CourseSmart, Follett's and Xplana, have entered the online textbook market, impacting the increase in these growth patterns.<sup>13</sup> Traditional book vendors like Barnes & Noble are also attempting to increase their educational footprint with textbook apps like NOOKstudy. As these new players enter into the traditional textbook market, publishers indicate that only 10.5% of their textbook titles account for 80% of textbooks sales.<sup>14</sup> If e-textbooks prices in general were to fall significantly compared to the price of the hard copy textbook, there is no incentive for these publishers to lower the price of these "cash cows" even if they provided them in an e-textbook format. It would be more reasonable to assume that they would convert their other titles to an e-format and to try to capture market share by lowering the prices on these texts.

For the moment it appears that the majority of students indicate a preference for reading printed texts. In a 2011 study only 12 % of students preferred digital textbooks, 13% were neutral, and the remainder wanted hardcover texts.<sup>15</sup> At present, the cost of readers may also present a barrier to some students, reducing access to course content. Of adults who do not own an e-reader, 19% indicated that the cost to purchase an e-reader was too high, while 25% of those who

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<sup>10</sup> "Free Digital Textbooks Offered as Gov. Jerry Brown Signs Bills," *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 27, 2012, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/california-politics/2012/09/free-digital-textbooks-to-be-made-available-after-gov-jerry-brown-signs-bills.html>

<sup>11</sup> University of South Florida. University Library. *Textbook Affordability Project*. <http://tap.usf.edu/>

<sup>12</sup> Virginia Tech undertook a reserve textbook effort in the fall of 2012 and currently has 2,500+ textbooks on reserve, according to a conversation with Associate Librarian managing the project.

<sup>13</sup> R. Reynolds, "Trends Influencing the Growth of Digital Textbooks in US Higher Education," *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 27, no. 2 (2011): 178-187.

<sup>14</sup> C. McFadden, C. (2012). "Are Textbooks Dead? Making Sense of the Digital Transition," *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 28, no. 2, (2012): 94.

<sup>15</sup> Reynolds, p. 186.

do not own a tablet computer cited cost as a factor.<sup>16</sup> The investment required by students to obtain e-reading devices and applications may reduce the promise of increased access for some students. Perhaps more importantly, there are questions of accessibility of content on these devices which currently present barriers to learning for some students.

Recently, there have been a number of e-textbook pilot programs to more clearly understand if use of digital textbooks will increase textbook affordability. A spring 2012 e-text initiative at Indiana University employed a course fee model to achieve multiple goals: reduce textbook costs to students, provide faculty with high quality curricular content, deploy learning friendly e-reading technologies, and develop a “sustainable model that works for all stakeholder involved: faculty, students, author and publishers.”<sup>17</sup> Other schools that have participated in these types of Internet2 pilots include Cornell, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Virginia. Internet2 also supported similar studies in the fall of 2012 and will sponsor a third pilot for the fall of 2013. While it is too early to fully know the impact of these pilot programs, it would be prudent to follow these pilot studies closely and be ready to act on their lessons learned.

### **Are Open Education Resources an option?**

The Open Education Resource (OER) movement has arisen as one way to restore the core value of shared and easily accessible knowledge to the higher education community. In part, this movement is a reaction to the profit-seeking nature of the textbook publishing industry. Generally, OERs are distributed via open use licenses, such as Creative Commons, which encourages resource sharing while also protecting author ownership of creative content.

Open Education Resources have impacted the spread of e-texts. The growth of OERs and their shared use stimulates the use of digital content, as this content is easier to integrate and share across learning technologies, such as learning management systems. E-texts are freely available for download and/or review in open education resource collections like the College Open Textbooks, Connexions, Merlot, the National Digital Library, the Ohio Digital Bookshelf Community, the Open Course Library, OpenStax, and The Orange Grove Digital Repository. Almost all of these OERs seek to encourage shared knowledge, reduce costs to students, and increase availability of quality educational resources.

OERs have strengths and shortcomings. A key strength of OER's is the capacity to freely “revise, remix, reuse and redistribute” open content; that being said, a generally recognized weakness is the quality of content varies significantly. To address this concern, some OER repositories have developed peer review strategies to assess and publish the value of each digital resource for OER consumers.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> L. Raine, K. Zickuhr, K. Purcell, M. Madden, and J. Brenner, *The Rise of e-Reading* (Pew Internet and American Life Project of the Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, 2012) p. 37, <http://libraries.pewinternet.org/files/legacy-pdf/The%20rise%20of%20e-reading%204.5.12.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Wheeler and Osborne, p. 375.

<sup>18</sup> “Open Access Textbook Announced by Rice University,” February 2012, (Textbook Affordability Project. University of South Florida), <http://tap.usf.edu/news/open-access-textbooks-announced-by-rice-university/>

## **Textbooks in the Mason Environment**

To learn more about our local textbook environment, the task force met with Barnes & Noble staff. Their rental program saved students \$1.56M last year (from approximately \$10M of sales). While 25% of their titles are available as e-texts, this only constitutes 1% of their sales. The task force also reviewed from the bookstore manager an informative listing of the 2013 spring semester books which provided insights into publisher practices and the costs associated with varying disciplines. The discussion with the bookstore managers, as well as the literature, indicates that there are still significant adoption barriers in moving to e-textbooks in higher education; moreover, there is no compelling evidence that e-textbooks lower costs.

The task force agrees that with the rapid development of mobile technologies and the e-book explosion, it is inevitable that future incoming students will have experienced e-textbooks in their high school curriculum and will expect e-textbooks in college. The group considered participation in two possible e-textbook pilots, Internet2 and Nook Study app, to uncover faculty and student adoption issues with e-textbooks. After much discussion the task force decided not to participate in the fall 2013 for pragmatic reasons. Not only was there insufficient time to get faculty buy-in for a fall 2013 pilot, but there are currently a number of accessibility issues with the Nook Study app that make it a problematic platform to use for those with sight limitations. The task force agreed it would be more strategic to review the results from other institutions' current pilot projects rather than try to run our own study.

## **Final Recommendations**

Based on our discussions and literature review, the Textbook Affordability Task Force recommends a series of actions that will have a long-term impact. Those actions can be grouped broadly into a strategic awareness campaign; infrastructure development; professional development; and public policy initiatives.

### ***Awareness Campaigns***

1. Appoint a group focused on developing an awareness program that is funded to educate Mason faculty on actions they can take to reduce textbook costs for students. Potential stakeholders to be included in this effort are the Faculty Senate; the Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence; the Libraries; and the Office of Disability Services. The group should consider the inclusion of the following elements in such a program:
  - The importance of getting textbook choices to the bookstore 6 weeks before the semester begins. The University of Michigan found this to be the best method of reducing costs since it allows students time to look for alternative sources of the book.<sup>19</sup>
  - The value of course-wide adoption of textbook(s) for courses with many sections; this increases the likelihood that a lower price for the textbook can be negotiated with the publisher. If choosing a textbook for a large number of students or sections, it may be

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<sup>19</sup>University of Michigan. Textbook Task Force Report. *Research and Recommendations Concerning the Costs of Textbooks*, April 10, 2007, p.5, [http://www.provost.umich.edu/reports/Textbook\\_Task\\_Force\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.provost.umich.edu/reports/Textbook_Task_Force_Final_Report.pdf)

possible to have the bookstore push the publisher's sales representative for deeper discounts in order to get the sale.

- The value of multi-semester adoption of textbooks to help lower costs; this provides a stream of used books for resale the next semester.
  - If you require a textbook, use the book in the class. As simple as that seems, it would appear from anecdotal evidence that some faculty require a textbook, but then rarely or never assign readings from it. The students then feel as if they have spent money that did not help them in the course.
  - Consider use of an older edition of a textbook rather than simply accepting the newest version. Versioning is the publisher's method of planned obsolescence and guaranteeing a steady revenue stream.
  - The value of donating any publisher copies of required textbooks to the library so that they can be put on reserve for students to use.
  - The mechanics of creating course packs or required reading using online texts that the Libraries' have purchased.
  - The importance of evaluating whether textbooks bundled with labs, CDs, web access, study notes, etc. add to the learning process or simply add to the cost. The bookstore is required to sell the parts separately and the faculty member should clearly state whether these add-ons will be used in the class.
  - The importance of considering accessibility issues that some students face and reviewing an e-text offering with this in mind.
  - The potential of open education resources (OER) as replacement for traditional textbooks.
2. Develop a parallel marketing effort to inform all students of steps they may take to lower costs. The bookstore makes an effort to educate new students on book purchasing strategies, but an expanded campaign should reach all students, undergraduate and graduate. Potential stakeholders to be included in this effort are University Bookstore; representatives from student government organizations; University Communications; and University Life. The group should consider the inclusion of the following elements in the program:
- Information on aggregator sites to find used books for sale at lower prices than the bookstore offers.
  - Active promotion of the Affinity site, an online mall that aggregates textbook information and which should offer the lowest prices available on the web—[www.affinitystores.com/gmu](http://www.affinitystores.com/gmu)
  - Information on how students can know which books that they will need for the next semester's classes upon enrollment in a class. Once the bookstore has that list, a link could go live in Patriot Web; students can link through immediately upon enrolling in the class to see the required books and begin to search for lower cost copies.

### ***Faculty Professional Development***

3. Over the long term, George Mason University should incentivize faculty to create and share e-textbooks via an open educational resource repository.<sup>20</sup> Such an initiative will take years to reach wide adoption, but the failure to create textbooks that are owned, controlled and shared within the academic community will cede, over the long term, our effective fiscal management of textbooks to publishers, who hope to guarantee their long term revenue stream.
4. The Provost's office, through the Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence, should encourage and provide support for experimentation and research with e-textbooks to help faculty transition from print to e-textbook formats.

### ***Infrastructure Initiatives***

5. The Office of Financial Aid should investigate the feasibility of allowing students to allocate a portion of their financial aid to purchase books at the bookstore. Anecdotal comments from students indicate that NOVA and other Virginia schools already allow this; our failure to offer a similar program often catches transfer students by surprise. If the bookstore were able to take financial aid as a form of payment, it could set up an account in the student's name for a set amount that would enable students to get their books immediately and increase the likelihood that they could purchase cheaper "used books." Currently many students face the choice of doing without texts for a period of time and falling behind in their readings while they wait for their money to be released. This will require coordination with the Information Technology Unit to ensure that Banner can accommodate new processes.
6. To raise awareness of the existence of e-textbook alternatives, the "course textbook information sheet" that the bookstore collects every semester should be augmented to include the faculty's planned use of the textbook.<sup>21</sup> Students would then have additional information to inform their purchase of a hard-copy or e-textbook.
7. The Libraries should actively participate in textbook affordability efforts through a combination of programs, such as:
  - Developing a program to gather duplicate textbook donations from faculty, students and place those items on reserve.
  - Expanding the current Engineering reserve pilot to purchase textbooks for 100-200 level classes.

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<sup>20</sup> See discussion of such programs at Temple and the University of Massachusetts in "Open Educational Resources and Learning Materials: Prospects and Strategies for University Libraries," *Research Library Issues: A Quarterly Report from ARL, CNI and SPARC*, Report 280: (2013), <http://publications.arl.org/rli280/>. Also see discussion of the OpenStax initiative at <http://openstaxcollege.org/>

<sup>21</sup> There are several possible permutations for faculty's book usage that should be considered and which will help the student understand how the textbook might be used in the class. Examples would be whether the faculty intends to use an e-text extensively; whether the faculty plans to use a hardcopy, will allow an e-book, but plans to have closed book exams; whether the faculty will allow the use of an e-book, but plans to have open book, but closed laptop exams – in this instance the e-book user may be at a disadvantage relative to others in the class.

- Developing library liaisons with subject expertise in OER resources and sites to assist faculty in locating and developing their own OER materials.
  - Continuing to negotiate for campus wide solutions for any e-text or full text databases.
  - Working with the faculty education group to provide faculty with advice on how to create links to library online resources.
  - Actively promoting the Libraries' reserve system as a solution for expensive course packs and custom books.
8. In addition to the creation of open e-textbooks, George Mason University should investigate, join, and actively participate in open educational resource repositories, seeking to understand the number of resources that are valuable to the Mason academic community, the quality of the repository's content, the value to our learning community, and the beneficial and sustainable impact on textbook affordability for students. Hand-in-hand with this effort will be the investigation of business models to support institutional participation in an open education resource consortium.

### ***Public Policy Initiative***

- The University should work with the State Council of Higher Education of Virginia and the Commonwealth of Virginia to encourage the use of open educational resources, as well as to advocate for the creation of policy and legislation that encourages publishers to provide affordable access to textbooks, whether printed or electronic. George Mason should work with these groups as appropriate to further the cause and development of open educational resources.