Course Material Cost Reduction Initiative
Associated Students of Washington State University

Mission Statement:

Washington State University is a Tier 1 research institution, heralded for its collaborative learning environment, community integration, and opportunities for future success that have spanned the last 125 years. Attending Washington State University is an educational investment that is beyond comparison. As a part of this, over the past 100 years, the Associated Students of Washington State University have represented student interests, needs, and welfare on issues affecting student life. It is because of this responsibility we speak candidly in hopes of correcting the most common grievance presented by our constituents.

The cost of college education has skyrocketed over the last decade. This not only includes tuition; a large portion of this is the resources and materials required by nearly all courses. The proliferation of textbook prices, course fees, access codes, iClickers, and other BYOD instructional formats have become a problem for the current generations of students. This is heightened by the inability to sell back textbooks and other materials. Over the past few years, ASWSU has made various attempts to curtail additional course material fees, but has made little progress for a number of reasons. For starters, our organization functions primarily as an advocacy group in terms of policy direction, creating awareness of problems to faculty and administration. Due to this, we lack an ability to implement large-scale initiatives which require numerous parties such as, the Bookie, Departments, Colleges, Faculty, and the Administration. Secondly, many of our attempts have gone unnoticed and often are rendered ineffective. This is not due to the lack of participation of any particular party. In fact, when approached, all parties have been receptive of change, but identifying the issue has been a problem in itself. Failure to identify the problem has led to our collective inability to delegate responsibility, thus hindering a solution. There is no particular party to blame, because it involves so many actors. Therefore, we find it necessary that student affordability be investigated holistically, through collaboration and communication. It is because of this we strongly believe action had to be taken. Our primary goal is to address the problem of rising course material costs on students at Washington State University. In order to reach our goal, it will take organized communication among all the parties involved, and require our institution to formulate viable solutions that will reduce these costs on students.

We alone are not capable of addressing this issue by ourselves. Thus, we would like to present grievances explained by our constituents, demonstrate the work we have done so far, and illustrate opportunities for change we believe possible. With the participation of the Bookie, Faculty, Administration, President's Office, Provost Office, and Board of Regents, we believe WSU can make a big change, and in turn incentive future students to attend a university actively searching for ways to help its students.

Sincerely,

Associated Students of Washington State University
Textbooks and Course Materials as a National Problem:
- According to NBC’s review of Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data, textbook prices have risen 3 times the inflation rate from January 1977 to June 2015, more than 1,000%
- According to College Board, the average estimated cost of books and supplies is $1,290, with “other” expenses estimated at $2,106 (College Board.com)
- A 2014 PIRGs study found that 65% of students had skipped buying or renting a textbook because it was too expensive, and 94% of those students felt doing so would hurt their grade in the course.

How does this relate to WSU-Pullman?
The rising costs of textbooks have been an easily-identifiable problem for most students, but certain aspects are perpetuated by our inability to combat the issue. Throughout the year, ASWSU has been working diligently to understand where students are having problems. Ranging from ASWSU’s umbrella committee involvement, daily interactions with other student organizations, and social media campaigns, like DearWSU, our organization actively engages with students in many ways to better understand their interests and needs. During such programs, we have identified that “course material costs” are one of the greatest areas of concern to students. Below, is a list of specific problems on-going at the WSU-Pullman campus.

Issues WSU Student’s Face:
- Purchasing new textbooks:
  - Students fear the benefits of buying a new textbook do not outweigh the cost.
    - They run the risk of not being able to sell the textbook back at the end of the year for a multitude of reasons (Faculty submission, newer editions, Bookie not selling next semester).
    - Students would rather spend time finding the information online for free, if at all possible, than spend money on a textbook.
  - If a book is not required, students will avoid purchasing in order to save money even if it may benefit their overall grade. This is also a common occurrence for required textbooks if the students think they can get by without the textbook.
- Purchasing Textbook Bundles:
  - Even if a student has the means to obtain the textbook from a peer, they are often unable to do so because of textbook and homework bundles.
- Purchasing Used/Rented Textbooks:
  - There is a lack of availability for certain courses, requiring students to purchase the new textbook.
- Purchasing Mediums for Instruction:
  - In order to meet attendance requirements, it is often required that students purchase an iClicker or access code for a particular course.
    - Students will often pay for multiple instruction resources for different classes.
    - iClicker is mostly used, but costs roughly $60 per device and is typically purchased multiple times over a 4 year period.
    - iClicker, being the primary instruction resource, offers an alternative online format (REEF Polling), and if used, requires a separate purchase.
- Alternative online instruction resources are also available at lower prices.

- **Lack of Resource Availability:**
  - Availability of FREE open-source material.
  - There is no identifiable department on campus primarily focused on course material costs for students, making it difficult to address the problem.
  - Lack of departmental coordination.
    - No general plan for most, which articulates what textbook to expect if they wished to prepare ahead of time (while a peer was taking the course).
    - Diverse textbook selection for introductory courses within certain departments, leaving students with little to no resale value after purchasing.
    - Multiple textbooks for the same sections of certain introductory classes: Each professor uses a different textbook, but the courses are still the same on transcripts.
  - No online resource for WSU which shows the availability of less expensive editions of the textbook (i.e. ISBN number)

### ASWSU’s Progress Thus Far:

#### Cost Awareness Campaign

Dating back to fall of 2015, ASWSU Executive Staff members began investigating ways to improve college affordability for students. Initial conversations primarily concerned students being able to sell back their purchased textbooks to the Bookie. In coordination with staff in the Provost Office, Bookie, and Faculty members, we attempted to improve the promptness of textbook submission dates by making sure deadlines were clear and faculty was aware. With the awareness campaign, we were able to present the problems students were having to Faculty members surrounding affordability issues. Unsurprisingly, there were issues beyond surface level that were portrayed by the Faculty. The experience helped us better understand that there is no particular group at fault, rather it is the bureaucratic complexity of a large organization, such as WSU, which can make it difficult to pinpoint specific inefficiencies. After numerous discussion about the topic we came to the understanding that WSU Faculty is generally concerned with the problem, and they want to do whatever possible to help as long as it does not jeopardize their ability to instruct their class freely. Likewise, administrators and staff in the Bookie shared their interest. Overall, WSU has been very receptive, but each group seems to maintain a narrow perspective which only focuses on a minor issue related to their group, making large scale institutional changes difficult.

### #DearWSU – Social Media Campaign

Moreover, the Director of Communication for ASWSU continued their #DearWSU campaign on twitter. The goal of the event is to generate feedback from students on topics which concern a majority of the undergraduate population. The campaign lasts two weeks, with each day centered on a topic presented from ASWSU social media. College affordability topics, including textbooks, fees, iClickers, and course material prices, lasted about three days. The responses were eye-opening, and generated some of the highest responses over the two week...
period. The DearWSU campaign provided a better understanding of student perspectives, and ultimately became the catalyst for our stance today.

**Legislative Affairs – Coug Day at the Capitol**

ASWSU has been maintaining a presence in Olympia, lobbying on behalf of bills supporting college affordability. This January, WSU students traveled to Olympia for our annual Coug Day at the Capitol event to meet with State Legislators. We lobbied in support of Washington State House Bill 2680 by Rep. Melanie Stambaugh (R-25) to establish an incentive program for professors to create open source material for their courses instead of requiring a textbook.

- ASWSU Senate passes Resolution 45-05
  - “Resolution in Support of Washington State Bill 2680”

**Institutional Cost-Reduction Strategies Nationwide:**

**CSU’s Affordable Learning Solutions Initiative**

- **About:**
  - CSU’s Affordable Learning Solutions enables faculty to choose and provide more affordable, quality educational content for their students.
  - By reducing CSU student course material expenses, more students acquire the course materials they need to succeed and benefit from their CSU learning experience.
  - Now, CSU faculty and students have greater access to quality free and low-cost learning materials through a variety of ALS programs and partnerships.

- **Website & Resources:** [www.affordablelearningsolutions.org](http://www.affordablelearningsolutions.org)
  - Enables faculty to find quality free or low-cost course content that can substitute for more costly textbooks.
  - Showcases the use of campus library resources for course materials.
  - Organizes tools for faculty to customize and author course content.
  - Provides easy access to information about usability and accessibility of e-readers.
  - Helps faculty be recognized for quality teaching and efforts to reduce students' costs.
  - Enables faculty to share best practices for using low-cost digital and print content in CSU courses.
  - Supports campus Affordable Learning Solutions strategies and initiatives.

**Minnesota Office of Higher Education**

- **About:**
  - In 2007, the Minnesota Office of Higher Education produced a report on strategies for reducing textbook prices, with advice from a task force representing bookstores, students, faculty, publishers and others. The report is available online at [www.ohe.state.mn.us](http://www.ohe.state.mn.us) under “Reports”.

- **Strategies for Bookstores and Department Heads**
  - Develop automated, online and easily accessible textbook information for faculty.
  - Enable faculty to place orders online and provide clear deadlines.
  - Provide price information to faculty.
Assist faculty in planning negotiations with publishers for reduced prices.
- Determine the availability of less expensive editions of textbooks (e.g., printed on less expensive paper or without color) and provide this information to faculty.
- When student registration is complete, e-mail students the ISBN of the textbooks required for the course, thereby giving students the option to purchase textbooks online.
- Explore ways that departmental coordination could reduce costs for students. Departments could consider using a standard book for all sections of introductory level courses so that used books will have more resale value.
- Facilitate regular communications among bookstore managers, department heads, students and faculty

Open Textbooks: The Billion Dollar Solution – The Student PIRGs
- Summary:
  - The report depicts the rising cost of textbooks and the effect it has had on student’s purchasing course material. Additionally it offers short and long-term solutions to the problem by breaking down various Open Educational Resource (OER) strategies similar public institutions have implemented.
  - Open textbooks are faculty-written, peer-reviewed textbooks that are published under an open license—meaning that they are available free online, free to download, and print copies are available at $10-40, or approximately the cost of printing.
  - According to the report, they predict that when a traditional print textbook for an introductory level course is replaced with OER and open textbooks, a student saves approximately $128 per course, per semester.
    - Open Education Initiative; University of Massachusetts, Amherst
    - Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative; Kansas State University
    - OER Project; Tacoma Community College
    - Open Textbook Library; University of Minnesota
The Proposed Solution:
Under careful consideration, ASWSU is recommending the changes below to help curtail the rising cost of course material.

1) Develop a University Taskforce to investigate and implement effective cost reduction strategies.
   a. Members:
      i. Include representatives from all members on campus—students, faculty, department chairs, Bookie staff members, and any other administrative actors associated with the area.
   b. Objectives:
      i. Analyze student costs pertaining to all course materials (i.e. textbook prices, mediums of instruction, access codes, and course bundles).
      ii. Investigate organizational procedures surrounding textbook purchases; includes online information available for faculty and ordering procedures, communication between faculty and Bookie, availability of low-cost resources, and long-term strategies to recycle used textbooks within departments.
      iii. Investigate methods used by other institutions across the nations which seek to reduce the cost of course materials, including but not limited to, open-source availability, online resources for lower cost options, negotiations with textbooks companies, price-matching in student book store, and other available solutions.
      iv. Implement changes which seek to enhance communication among involved parties, reduce the cost of course material, and enhance student’s availability of learning resources.
   c. *** We believe this to be the most important aspect. If we are able to develop a taskforce with the means to achieve these goals, while providing an organized format to communicate, we will be able to introduce improvements which require the attention of numerous parties.

*Listed below are specific resolutions. Although we support the list below, we understand the importance of analyzing a decision with such a large impact. The suggestions should be considered as a framework for the committee to investigate and decide upon following careful consideration.

2) Introduce an open-source program.
   a. Many universities nation-wide have began investigating an open-source program rewarding grants for faculty members to compile open-source course materials.
   b. As state legislators have become more keenly aware of the situation, we believe this could be an area to take advantage of.

3) Educate: Faculty, Administration, and Students on means to reduce the cost of textbooks and other course materials.
   a. Adding a “course materials” section of the instructor evaluations at the end of the semester that would be reviewed by the Department.
b. Develop automated, online and easily accessible textbook information with clear deadlines listed and enforced.

c. Introduce an organized system from each department focused on recycling textbooks for a determined period of time.

   i. This would increase availability of used textbooks and increase opportunities to sell back textbooks.

4) Eliminate additional costs of instructional resources (iClicker, TopHAT, REEF Polling, etc).

   a. Standardize a uniform instructional resource in order to eliminate multiple purchases for students each semester.

   b. Move toward subsidizing cost of selected instructional resource.

      i. Consider using Student Technology Fee.

Summary:

The goal of the Associated Students of Washington State University is to improve college affordability for future and prospective students by reducing the burden students pay each semester for course materials. A committee chiefly focused on identifying these issues, evaluating viable solutions, and implementing effective change, will be the enormous first step for the institution as a whole. Such change would exemplify Washington State University’s commitment to its students, while also providing an incentive for prospective students to attend an institution focused on making college an attainable and affordable experience. We are reaching out with hopes that this initiative is not perceived as an attack on any particular group or our beloved school; rather as a university-wide goal which seeks to address a problem we simply do not have the means to achieve alone, because it requires assistance from all of the WSU community. We are proud to be a part of such an excellent institution, and with the “cost reduction initiative,” ASWSU hopes to improve the welfare of students for years to come.