

Nicole Allen, “Open Textbooks: A Cover to Cover Solution: How Open Textbooks are the Path to Affordability”

Read the article here <https://edtechbooks.org/-VvdJ>

Background

The average student spends \$900 on textbooks a year, which is 26% of average university tuition, and 76% of average community college tuition. Student Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) conducted groundbreaking research in 2010, surveying 1428 college students across ten campuses on the cost of the ten most common college textbooks. Student PIRGs makes several recommendations on how to reduce costs for students, mainly, that by using open textbooks students can realize 80% savings.

Key Points

The issue of high cost textbooks emerges in part due to the lack of transparency in the process and in the end user accountability being waylaid by uninvolved middlemen. Publishers provide the textbook information to the administration or faculty who oftentimes make selections based on factors other than cost. New laws, however, such as the Higher Education Opportunity Act, now require vendors to disclose textbook prices during marketing. Other tactics, such as releasing a new edition with minute cosmetic changes every 3-4 years, bundling curriculum packages and not selling textbooks individually, or engaging in “resale sabotage” by reselling items that have no resale value like a 180 day textbook subscription.

The existing marketplace is changing. Students can now rent textbooks in either hardcopy or digital formats. E-books and e-readers are also available, but many students still prefer a traditional textbook. Alternate models are currently emerging. Open-source textbooks are available online under an open-source license, provide free digital access, low cost printing and customization.

Student PIRGs found that textbook affordability solutions must satisfy a wide range of student preferences:

- students are split between print and digital - leaning toward print.
- A combination may be best

- Most students prefer to rent some books and buy some others
- Traditional cost-reducing options only appeal to a subset of students, and therefore cannot reduce much of the overall market cost.
- Open Textbooks can reduce costs for all students and have potential long-term sustainability
- Course reduce costs by 80% over the market
- Sustainability
 - Many students would purchase hard copies of textbooks even if digital copies were available for free
 - 76% said they would support a small fee to subsidize open textbook authors

Therefore, the solution must reduce costs and appeal to a wide range of students, both of which open textbooks can accomplish. And it seems as though open textbooks can incentivize publishers to respect students as consumers.

The research recommendations includes the following:

- Publishers should develop models that can produce high quality, reasonably priced books (e.g. Flat World Knowledge) because print on demand is more cost effective.
- Faculty should use open and other affordable textbooks when possible.
- College and governments should invest in open textbooks and other sustainable models.
- Students should spread information about open textbooks.

Discussion Questions

1. Students who prefer print text books cite readability/notetaking. How can open textbooks be more readable and conducive to note taking?
2. Why are students choosing to rent some of their books?
3. How can authors increase textbook relevance so students will be more likely to keep them?

Additional Resources

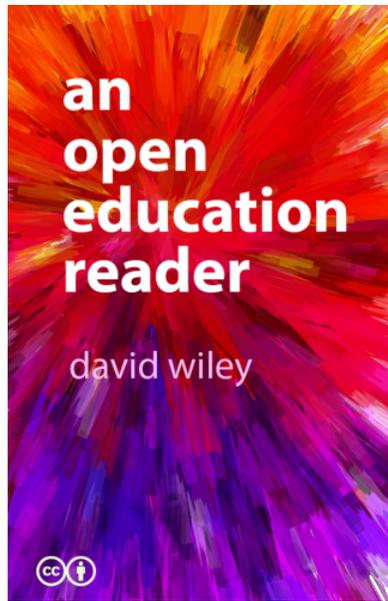
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Wiley, D. (2016). *An Open Education Reader*. EdTech Books.
<https://edtechbooks.org/openedReader>