

Open/Alternative Textbook Proposal

Overview

The College Board estimates that an average student spends over \$1000 per year on textbooks. With over 19,000 undergraduates, that would be a total of around \$20 million per year spent by our students on textbooks. By moving away from purchased textbooks, we can recover part of this money, reducing costs to our students while increasing funds available to meet the goals of K-State 2025.

With support from the student government and K-State Libraries, we have run the Open/Alternative Textbook program for the past two years. This program has provided grants, typically of around \$5000, to faculty who wish to convert their class to use free materials. This has involved everything from updating a syllabus to use existing online materials in place of a purchased textbook, designing supplemental materials to adapt existing online materials to the needs of a specific course, developing a completely new online text, or moving from a textbook entirely to using video or other modern resources. The program has been very successful in saving students significant amounts of money on textbooks in the affected classes, with \$96,000 in one-time awards leading to *annual* savings in the range of \$800,000 to \$1 million. Furthermore, initial results are that using materials that are more precisely aligned with the course leads to increased student use and increased student learning. This is a successful program and should be rapidly expanded. There are several issues that can and should be addressed in this expansion.

- We have only been able to address about 20 classes over three semesters of funding. While we have targeted primarily large-enrollment classes, the amount of total funding needs to be significantly increased for students to know most of their (at least low-level) classes will not require costly textbooks.
- Because funding from the student government comes at inconvenient times, our advertising of the availability of funds has been limited to a short window. While conversations with faculty show many are interested in moving to a more affordable model for textbooks, they need to have time to think through the issues and plan before submitting a proposal, which is not possible given the current funding window.
- Right now we only need to fund new developments. But just as textbooks come out with new editions every 4 years or so, running a course with an open/alternative textbook requires maintenance. In a few years we will need to be funding proposals for updating materials as required due to changes in course content and technology.

Proposed Plan of Action

1. **Funding for the Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative should become a responsibility of central administration, rather than depending on grants from student government.** With guaranteed funding, a grant process could be advertised and run on a set schedule, improving faculty response. While the office of the vice provost for undergraduate studies seems a likely home for the initiative, the details of administration can be worked out later.
2. **Grant funding should increase from the current average of \$36,000 per semester to \$80,000 per semester by spring 15, and then to \$160,000 per semester in FY 16 and \$240,000 per semester in FY 17.** This will provide adequate amounts for about 120 courses to change, figuring roughly one summer month of pay per course. For FY 18 it will be reasonable to look at providing maintenance grants in addition to funding new developments. That seems a reasonable time to look at progress and decide on what levels of future funding are appropriate.
3. **Workshops and professional development opportunities to support changing to open/alternative textbooks should be created, including paid mentoring.** Faculty are more likely to think of changing to open/alternative textbooks when they can see successful models. Now that we have a cadre of early adopters who have built or adapted materials for their own classes, we should leverage their experience to help other faculty who are interested in making changes but aren't sure where to begin or how much work it will be. In addition to funding the workshops, we should also be funding faculty who have completed projects to serve as mentors to less experienced faculty beginning the process. An initial stipend of \$1000 per project seems reasonable.
4. **The university should openly move toward a goal of significantly reducing student-purchased textbooks.** To be truly successful, we need to move from saving students money in selected courses, as worthwhile as that is, to allowing students and their families to know they can budget significantly less for books. This requires that we move from a case where open/alternative textbooks are a possibility to where they are the norm. This requires that the campus have a conversation about the issue. The administration and faculty senate can work together to spark such a conversation and eventually adopt such a goal.
5. **Donor funding should be sought to support Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative.** Significant donor support should be found for the goal of replacing purchased textbooks, particularly in the current climate when college and textbook costs are featured in the news. Donors like to donate money that directly affects students. Our experience shows that money donated toward replacing textbooks pays off in student savings in large multiples. In addition, we can provide donor recognition in the online materials.

Budget

The budget will scale up to be on the order of \$400,000 by fiscal 2017. This includes \$300,000 in direct grants for FY 17. If every proposal has a paid mentor, that would add an additional \$60-70,000, but of course not every project is likely to need or want a mentor. An additional amount needs to be provided for running workshops and other professional development opportunities, leading to the rough estimate of \$400,000 per year. The plan calls for the budget to scale up over time so we will not reach that level immediately. Given that the current pilot program is already saving students on the order of \$800,000 to \$1 million a year, this seems a reasonable investment, particularly if some funding can be raised from donations.

Outcomes

Primary Outcome

- **By Fall 2018, over 75% of student credit hours in the first year of college will not require purchasing a textbook.** There are approximated 200 lower-level classes that use a textbook currently on campus. While some faculty will not change, others have already switched to open/alternative materials. Targeting the larger classes, we will need about 75-100 classes to switch to meet this goal. This is a stretch, but with both improved funding and increased campus acceptance of the need to consider open/alternative textbooks, it seems possible. We will of course also try to encourage and support faculty in higher-level classes in using open/alternative textbooks as appropriate.

Secondary Outcomes

- **K-State will become more affordable.** By decreasing the overall amount students pay, we will become more affordable for both in-state and out-of-state students. Since financial issues are the primary barrier to student enrollment and are one of the two main issues in retention, this should directly improve our enrollment management efforts, our freshman-sophomore retention rate, and our six-year graduation rate.
- **K-State students will learn more.** Giving faculty a month of summer support to adapt or develop course materials will improve the learning experience for students. Open/Alternative materials offer the ability to more closely integrate the materials and the course than a prepackaged textbook. They also can be updated much more quickly and easily to adapt to changing situations. Students learning will improve with the appropriate use of these materials.
- **We will become part of the national conversation about top colleges.** Making and keeping a plan to significantly reduce purchased textbooks will be a signature accomplishment that will draw national attention to K-State. Such stature will improve our ability to draw students from across the country and the world. It will also make it easier to attract top-tier talent in pursuit of the goals of K-State 2025.