Addressing a Dire Issue
Running a Textbook Affordability Initiative with Students

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Affordable Learning Summit ✫ September 16, 2020
Overview

● Timeline of relevant events and meetings
  ○ February 2019 to today
  ○ Focus on pivotal presentations and decisions
● Practical advice for starting a textbook affordability initiative
● Textbook Affordability Action Plan
● Key components of our initiative
  ○ Textbookbroke Wall
  ○ Faculty Textbook Affordability Awards
  ○ Faculty Course Materials Survey
  ○ Student Textbook Spending Survey
  ○ Textbook Affordability outreach for new and first-generation students
● Practical advice for working with students
Practical advice for starting an affordability initiative

1. Meet with as many people/stakeholders as possible
2. Think about what’s in it for them professionally beyond helping students
3. Invite feedback on major presentations before giving them
4. Run things by your library director if possible
5. Establish a working relationship with your bookstore
6. Gather local data of various kinds (statistical and anecdotal)
7. Identify affordability advocates on campus
8. Be wary of forming a textbook task force or affordability committee too soon
   a. Consider starting with a small “response team”
Timeline: February 2019

● 4: Start as Scholarly Communications Librarian at Franklin & Marshall College
  ○ Second person in this relatively new position
  ○ Main responsibilities: advocacy and support for OA/OER; manage and promote IR
  ○ $9 million deficit announced week before
  ○ Bookstore contract up for renegotiation with B&N College
  ○ Elsevier reps coming to negotiate new contract
  ○ Students experiencing textbook affordability issues contacting College Library, others

● 14: First meeting with Committee on Instructional and Research Services (CIRS)
  ○ Director of IT, Director of College Library, Head of Instructional Technology, Head of Special Collections, 1 faculty representative from each division, and two students
Timeline: February 2019

- 14: Initiated email discussion re bookstore contract negotiation and textbook affordability with AVP for Administration (signs bookstore contract)
  - New perspective for me
  - Bookstore important source of revenue (especially given deficit)

- 21: Meeting with Director of Financial Aid
  - Another new perspective
  - Would love to lower the amount he tells students to allot for course materials

- 22: Meeting with B&N College Bookstore Manager
  - Could have gone (much) better…
  - Recommend inviting admin who can introduce and mediate
Timeline: March 2019

- 5: Email to Diplomatic Council (DipCon) on possible textbook affordability discussion (Open Ed Week) and meeting with VP for Administration to discuss bookstore

- 6: DipCon’s response
  - Drafting open letter to Faculty Council to be sent this week
  - Would you comment on our draft? (already asked others)

- 8: Open Letter to Faculty Council (expected date)
  - Connected to diversity initiatives recruiting students from lower-income backgrounds.
  - “A student at Franklin & Marshall should never have to drop a class or have their ability to keep up with the pace of the class impeded upon by the financial barriers which textbooks can represent.”
Timeline: March 2019

- 12: Meeting with Care Coordinator
  - Also a new position
  - First responder to dire student issues
  - Had been receiving requests for help with affording course materials

- 14: Began communications with an Associate Dean re textbook affordability initiative
  - Had met with DipCon before me
  - Helped draft letter

- 17: Draft of Affordability Action Plan with steps for faculty and students
  - 10 steps faculty can take
  - 5 steps students can take
Affordability Steps for Faculty

1. Know the prices of the books and resources you assign
2. Check to see if the library owns or can buy access to the e-book
3. Encourage the use of older or other editions and digital formats
4. Use physical and electronic course reserves
5. Talk to your students about which books to rent, which to buy, and in which formats
6. Consider using OER first
7. Use the bookstore
8. Get book orders in as early as possible, ideally by the time registration starts.
9. Establish affordability guidelines and goals
10. Formally recognize the value of OER usage and creation in the tenure and promotion process
Affordability Steps for Students

1. Award **prizes** to faculty who replace an expensive textbook with an open or affordable one

2. Supply funding for faculty grants designed to support OER adaptation or creation

3. Launch an **awareness raising campaign** on campus using strategies found in the Open Textbook Alliance Student Government Toolkit: [Making Textbooks Affordable](#)

4. Formal **survey** of F&M student experiences with the cost of course materials run in conjunction with college administrators

5. Compile a list of **anecdotes** that illustrate the Textbook Crisis at F&M
Timeline: March 2019

● 18: Meeting with Chair and Vice Chair of DipCon’s Academic Life Committee
  ○ Loved suggestions for student engagement
  ○ Planned Textbookbroke wall and affordability awards

● 19: Meeting with Director of Student Success
  ○ Dealing with affordability issues for years, esp. with first-gen students
  ○ Control of affordability content on website

● 20: Presentation to Department Chairs Meeting
  ○ OER and affordability tips

● 26: Presentation to Faculty Meeting
Textbook Prices, Commercial Publishers, and the Generic Option

Christopher Barnes, Ph.D.
Franklin & Marshall Faculty Meeting
26 March 2019
What you can do

Short-term Steps
● Support students in their textbook affordability efforts
● Employ affordability strategies whenever possible and share them
● Help me gather data about what books you assign and platforms you use
● If you assign a commercial textbook, insist on 5 desk copies for reserves
● Talk to me about textbooks and OER in your discipline

Long-term Goals
● Adopt an affordability action plan and/or form a textbook task force
● Ensure no students drop courses because they can’t afford the books/codes
● Ensure Barnes & Noble backs up its affordability rhetoric with action
● Stop assigning overpriced products from for-profit academic publishers
Timeline: March 2019

- **27**: Meeting with AVP for Administration and Regional Manager for B&N College
  - Inclusive Access programs
  - Sharing of book list with library
  - Included bookstore manager

- **28**: Meeting with CIRS
  - Invited Yousra and Ruby
  - Highly recommend finding a similar committee on your campus
    - Run ideas by them
    - Get good ideas from them: e.g. faculty course materials survey
    - Use them to vet recommendations and request information
Timeline: April 2019

- 15: Open letter to Faculty Council actually sent (!)

- 15-21: Textbookbroke Wall
  - Created and run by DipCon Academic Life Committee
  - Displayed and tabled in Student Center, Martin Library, and Shadek-Fackenthal Library
  - Simultaneously solicited nominations for inaugural Faculty Textbook Affordability Awards

- 25: Textbook Affordability Award winners notified and photo shoot scheduled
Inaugural Faculty Textbook Affordability Awards

And the first Student Advocacy Award for members of professional staff who help with the affordability of course materials.

- **May 2**: Yousra and I meet with Faculty Council to garner support for surveys
For the 2019-2020 academic year, we ran two surveys:

The Fall 2019 Faculty Course Materials Survey

&

The Spring 2020 Student Textbook Spending Survey
The Fall 2019 Faculty Course Materials Survey

- 20 November to 14 December
- Administered by the Center for Opinion Research
- All 328 members of the F&M faculty and professional staff (FPS) with teaching responsibilities were emailed an invitation to complete the survey with a link.
- There were 141 total responses, giving an overall response rate of 43%.
- 132 of the 279 full-time members of the faculty during the 2019-2020 academic year responded to the survey, a response rate of 47%.
- At least two faculty members from every academic department completed the survey
The Fall 2019 Faculty Course Materials Survey

A sampling of questions:

● Do you require that students use publisher courseware (website linked to textbook requiring access code) to complete homework assignments and other coursework online?

● When you require students to get a certain book, do you place an order for it with the campus bookstore?

● Do you teach any courses wherein the required materials usually cost nothing for students?

● Have you searched for or assigned an open educational resource (OER) in your courses?

● If you had to guess, what percentage of students (in a typical course that you teach) do you think go without purchasing a required course textbook?
The Spring 2020 Student Textbook Spending Survey

“Four questions for more equitable access to course materials: take the survey!”

“DipCon and the College Library want to know how you get your books and what you spend. Take our four question survey!”

“What did you spend on books and access codes this semester? Take the 4 question survey!”

“It’s only four questions and will take you less than 5 minutes!”
Student Textbook Spending Survey

F&M Textbook Affordability Initiative: A Collaboration of the Diplomatic Congress and the College Library
What measures have you taken to reduce the amount you spend on required books and access codes? Select all that apply.

- Borrow a copy from the College Library or another library
- Buy a used copy from the F&M bookstore
- Buy a used copy from other store or website
- Get an ebook when you would prefer a print copy
- Rent when you would prefer to buy
- Share books with classmates
- Swap books with other students
- Use a copy on reserve at the College Library
- None of the above
- Other:
Has the cost of required books and access codes caused you to do any of the following? Select all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choose a different major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop or withdraw from a course</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Earn a poor grade because you could not afford to get a book or access code</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail a course because you could not afford to get a book or access code</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not register for a certain course</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Take fewer courses</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
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Other:
Promoting the survey

This is where students can really take the lead:

- Social media
- Emails from class presidents
- Leaders of student groups
- Tabling around campus
- Requests to professors to advertise (provide them with slide with info)
- Contact Provost and other senior officers about emailing faculty
The Spring 2020 Student Textbook Spending Survey

- The survey ran from 30 January to 13 March, 2020.
- All first- and second-year students were emailed directly on the day the survey opened and reminder emails were sent on 9 March.
- Flyers with a QR code link to the survey were hung around campus.
- Representatives from the Academic Life Committee of the Diplomatic Congress staffed a table in the student center to solicit responses during the weeks of 3-7 February and 2-6 March (Open Education Week).
- A total of 406 responses were received.
- 193 out of 617 first-year students completed the survey, a response rate of 31%.
- 168 out of 564 second-year students completed the survey, a response rate of 30%.
- COVID-19 drove down response rate at the end.
1. **Start searching and shopping as soon as possible**: the sooner you start looking for required course materials, and the more places you look, the more likely you are to find affordable options.

2. **Don’t forget the College Library**: while the Library cannot purchase traditional, commercial textbooks (i.e. *Intro to Microeconomics, 12th ed.*), they do have thousands of books and movies commonly assigned in courses, and many of them are available electronically (ebooks and streaming films). Run a search in Discover. If you need help searching, just ask! They can also try to get the work from another library through Interlibrary Loan.

3. **Rent books when possible and advisable**: check if there are rental options available and consider if you will need or want to refer to the book in the future. For example, buying may be more cost effective if you will use the same book next module or semester, as with some language courses.

4. **Ask your professor about your options**: F&M professors are aware that course materials can be very expensive and often answer questions about whether a different edition, version, or translation is acceptable. Don’t be afraid to ask questions or tell them if you can’t get or access required materials.

5. **Email Chris Barnes or Susan Knoll**: Chris is the Scholarly Communications Librarian and runs the F&M Textbook Affordability Initiative in conjunction with representatives from the Diplomatic Congress. He and I will do everything we can to help you get the course materials you need to succeed.
Fall 2020 Outreach to New and First-Generation Students

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Practical Advice for Working with Students

1. Remember that they are students and not coworkers
2. Work with multiple people whenever possible
3. Attend and present at meetings of the student government
4. Ask them to send emails asking for meetings with admins
5. Ask them the best ways to reach their peers
6. Ask them who else has been helpful or receptive on campus
7. Double check that things have been done
8. Provide them with options and let them choose
9. Get their cell phone numbers in case emails go unanswered
10. Use shared docs to organize the initiative and keep track of tasks and progress
Thank you!

Questions? Comments?

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