

**Report to the Texas State University System Board of Regents  
and to the Texas State University System Component Institutions  
on the  
Rising Costs of College Textbooks and  
Proposed Strategies to Reduce Price Escalations**

**August 2007**



*Sam Houston State University  
A Member of the Texas State University System*

***Prepared by the Office of the Vice President for Student Services and  
the Student Government Association at Sam Houston State University***

# Texas State University System

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## Component Institutions

Angelo State University • Lamar Institute of Technology • Lamar State College-Orange •  
Lamar State College-Port Arthur • Lamar University • Sam Houston State University •  
Sul Ross State University • Sul Ross State University Rio Grande College • Texas State  
University-San Marcos

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

While the spectrum of costs associated with attending any institution of higher education typically increases marginally on a yearly basis, the same is true for the majority of traditional consumer expenses. However, textbook price increases across the nation have far outpaced standard inflationary increases over several decades, resulting in a rising and unrelenting financial burden on college students and their families. Additionally, it is clear to the majority of postsecondary students that textbooks, in some form or fashion, are intricately tied to their academic success and development. As students are the primary consumers of this product, their collective voice should be heard.

For these reasons, student leaders and administrators at Sam Houston State University felt compelled to analyze factors associated with textbook prices and develop on-going strategies to mitigate future increases. By presenting these recommendations to higher education administration, those represented respectfully anticipate policy changes that will positively affect those in the Texas State University System and, perhaps, ultimately benefit college students across the state and nation.

**INFORMATION SOURCES**

The authors of this report relied in part on data published in a United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report to Congressional Requesters in July 2005. The GAO responded to inquiries concerning the causes of significant textbook price increases and published its findings in a document titled, “College Textbooks – Enhanced Offerings Appear to Drive Recent Price Increases.” In addition, excerpts from articles and publications addressing various stakeholder positions have been consulted in preparation of this report. A diagram of stakeholders is provided in Appendix A. In the course of an analysis of textbook issues and prevailing faculty and student opinion, the Division of Student Services at Sam Houston State University (SHSU) conducted an informal e-mail survey of the faculty and students at certain Texas State University System components, including Angelo State University, Lamar University, Lamar Institute of Technology (LIT), Lamar State College – Orange, Lamar State College – Port Arthur, Sam Houston State University, and Texas State University – San Marcos (TSU-SM).

Participation by each component was voluntary, and two survey instruments were constructed, one for faculty and one for students. Refer to Appendix B for the surveys. At LIT, only faculty members received surveys, and personnel at TSU-SM managed the distribution of both surveys via e-mail in addition to collecting the responses within their in-house Information Technology department. The results were provided to Sam Houston State University staff and subsequently

incorporated within this report. The following tables provide the distribution, response number and response rate by institution for faculty and for students.

#### FACULTY SURVEY

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Number of E-mail Addresses Contacted</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
Angelo State University	329	74	22.5%
Lamar University, Lamar Institute of Technology, Sam Houston State University	1,632	478	29.2%
Lamar State College – Port Arthur	132	31	23.5%
Lamar State College – Orange	107	27	25.2%
Texas State University – San Marcos	1,321	221	16.7%

#### STUDENT SURVEY

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Number of E-mail Addresses Contacted</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
Angelo State University	5,542	380	6.9%
Lamar University, Sam Houston State University	25,537	2,690	10.5%
Lamar State College – Port Arthur	1,996	174	8.7%
Lamar State College – Orange	1,717	121	7.0%
Texas State University – San Marcos	25,783	1,833	7.1%

### **PREVAILING CONDITIONS**

After reviewing secondary sources and survey responses, the prevailing complaint by students is that the high cost of textbooks prevents them from adequately participating in their academic responsibilities as a direct result of having to choose between textbooks and other costs of living (Kinzie, 2006). Responses to the TSUS survey indicate 73 percent of students paid from \$300 to \$500 or more for textbooks and course materials in the fall of 2006, and more than half of the students responding were not able to afford required texts on one or more occasions. Adding to the student frustration, according to student survey responses, as many as 88 percent of students have experienced an occasion where they were not assigned work from a required

textbook. Additionally, students who may have funds to purchase textbooks and those who sacrifice to buy their books are often left very dissatisfied with 1) the limited use of the text and/or bundled materials and electronic media required by the course, 2) the small return (if any) when selling the text back to a bookstore, and 3) the limited number of used textbooks available at bookstores (Fairchild, 2004).

Long ago, bookstores determined the best way to reduce the cost of textbooks for students is to utilize textbooks more than one semester and maximize the number of used books available for sale per course. This effort depends almost wholly on faculty members' participation in identifying required texts before students are ready to sell back their books at the end of each semester and resisting publishers' efforts of encouraging faculty to require only the most current editions. When a bookstore manager is knowledgeable of what books to buy from the students in a timely manner, the result is a significant increase in the number of used books available the next semester. According to the TSUS survey, 89 percent of faculty responders are willing to submit their textbook orders earlier than current deadlines if it would reduce costs to students. When a used book can cost one-third to one-half the price of a new book, this becomes a significant source for cost reduction.

The majority of primary and secondary data indicates **frequent updates to textbook editions and the bundling of supplemental material to be the primary causes of textbook price increases** (Fairchild, 2004). If faculty members routinely accept publishers' calls to frequently adopt new editions or to bundle extra materials with an older textbook to create a new product, bookstores cannot provide used books at discounted prices to students. Faculty responses to the TSUS survey indicate 73 percent of faculty members are not aware of the cost to students of the textbooks they assign, and the same number indicated the multimedia packets that accompany many textbooks are not necessary for their course. From the students' perspective, only 27 percent of survey responders agreed that bundled materials are beneficial to their studies.

Fortunately, the majority of survey responses indicate faculty members support using the same edition of a text between three and four years on average. This is particularly true for subject matter that experiences limited change and few updates. The prices of certain textbooks could be reduced almost immediately by increasing the number of semesters each edition is assigned. For many upper level, specialized courses, technical updates to textbook editions are critical to providing students with a quality education; however, many fields of study lend themselves to fewer updates, such as freshman and sophomore level English, History, Biology, Mathematics, Speech, foreign languages, etc. Textbooks printed for the latter subjects are well suited to be maintained in circulation for at least three or four semesters. As for limited updates, it is reasonable to consider updating texts with inserts, rather than publishing an entirely new edition with a few changes. Unfortunately, this determination rests with the publishers, who rarely opt to sell inserts over new textbooks.

Publishers readily acknowledge their objectives include maximizing the number of books in print so that profits can be made on volume sales and costs can be spread across a certain number of copies (TAA, 2005). When the impact of a used textbook market is factored into the publishers' paradigm, the demand for copies of new books decreases. Based on this perspective of the used text market, publishers regularly increase prices on future editions to

address shortfalls in sales and royalties on new books, and they participate in bundling course materials to restrict the return of opened bundles and thereby restrict the acceptance of books for resale, eliminating the used book option students demand.

Students often associate negative textbook issues with the bookstore, as this is where the student often receives the bad news; only new textbooks are available and the store is not buying back the student's book. Unfortunately, students are not generally aware their circumstances are directly related to choices made by their current and future professors and the publishing industry. Similarly, faculty members do not realize the impact their decisions have on the students' bank accounts and morale. It is an objective of this report to highlight the needs of the students and offer recommendations for strategies to decrease the costs of textbooks.

### **REPORT SIGNIFICANCE**

According to The College Board the cost of attending college is continuing to increase at public four-year institutions while student grant aid is failing to keep up with the ever-mounting cost. Students are borrowing more at an alarming rate in order to close the gap between grant aid for college which in turn results in increased debt that students must pay back at the end of their college career. A vast number of our students must also work long hours in addition to borrowing money to help finance their education. In some cases, capable students have sacrificed their academic achievement to work more hours just to be able to afford to attend school. Even today, the rising cost of college textbooks is a contributing factor to this unfortunate trend, which, in effect, has an overall negative impact on the quality of their education.

A little more than a year has passed since we began the task of analyzing factors associated with textbook prices and developing on-going strategies to reduce the current cost of college textbooks and mitigate future increases. In that time, the cost of college textbooks has continued to rise.

During the last three years, no fewer than 200 reports and articles were published at the state and federal level chronicling the issue of rising textbook costs. Research indicates more than 146 legislative bills have been introduced in 34 individual state legislative branches regarding the issue of textbook cost since 2005. The respective governing bodies have passed fewer than four percent of those bills. In the Texas legislature, 13 unique bills concerning textbook cost were introduced over the course of the 79<sup>th</sup> Regular and Called sessions (2005) and the 80<sup>th</sup> Regular session (2007). To help explain how Texas' legislators attempted to deal with this issue, the following table lists these bills and their companions, a brief description of the bill, and the status of the legislation at the conclusion of the respective legislative session. The bill summaries were obtained from the U.S. Department of Education's Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance *Study on the Affordability of College Textbooks 2004-2007*.

TEXAS LEGISLATION PERTAINING TO COLLEGE TEXTBOOKS

<b>Legislative Session/ Bill Number</b>	<b>Description of Legislation</b>	<b>Status Upon Adjournment Sine Die</b>
79 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 257	Allows textbooks to be tax exempt if purchased by a college student; requires the student to present university ID.	In Committee: House Ways & Means
79 <sup>th</sup> Regular / SB 1483	Identical to 79 <sup>th</sup> R / HB 257.	In Committee: Senate Finance
79 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 1184	Requires the governing board of higher education institutions to set policies that encourage faculty to use the same required textbook and edition from one academic year to the next for at least three years, if possible, for core courses.	House Higher Education Committee report sent to Local & Consent Calendar
79 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 2488	Relating to the sale of instructional materials and other merchandise to students of institutions of higher education.	In Committee: House Higher Education
79 <sup>th</sup> Regular / SB 222	Allows textbooks to be exempt from sales tax for the second Friday in August to the second following Sunday and from the second Friday in January to the second following Sunday; requires the student to present valid university ID.	Out of Committee: Senate Finance
79 <sup>th</sup> Regular / SB 1716	Requires off-campus bookstores the same access to booklists, campus marketing opportunities such as orientation and buyback, and student credit accounts that the campus bookstore offers.	In Committee: House Higher Education
79 <sup>th</sup> (1) Called / HB 54	Identical to 79 <sup>th</sup> R / SB 222	In Committee: House Ways & Means
79 <sup>th</sup> (1) Called / SB 72	Identical to 79 <sup>th</sup> R / SB 222	In Committee: Senate Finance
80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / SB 49	Relating to exempting books purchased by university and college students from the sales tax for a limited period.	In Committee: House Higher Education
80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 1890	Identical to 80 <sup>th</sup> R / SB 49	In Committee: House Ways & Means
80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 1434	Relating to exempting books purchased by university and college students from the sales tax for a limited period.	In Committee: House Higher Education
80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 3062	Relating to exempting textbooks for university and college courses from the sales tax.	In Committee: House Ways & Means

80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / SB 114	Identical to 79 <sup>th</sup> R / SB 1716	House Higher Education Committee report sent to Calendars
80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 2009	Identical to 80 <sup>th</sup> R / SB 114	In Committee: House Higher Education
80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 955	Creates a temporary sales tax exemption on school supplies and textbooks for K-12 and college students; price cap on individual items is placed at \$100.	In Committee: House Ways & Means
80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 956	Prohibits faculty from requiring the purchase of books by students that will not be used in the course; requires faculty to adopt texts for three years with limited exceptions; faculty must explore open-access course materials in lieu of purchased books; schools are required to post booklists and ISBN data together online within one week of the information being relayed to the bookstore; requires institutions to permit credit arrangements for students to purchase textbooks off-campus; requirements are established for bundled course materials; requires the Texas Building and Procurement Commission to negotiate textbook pricing when bought in bulk with the publishers; bans state employees from accepting inducements to adopt certain books.	House Higher Education Committee report sent to Calendars
80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 960	Directs governing boards at each higher education institution to develop policies requiring faculty to adopt textbooks for at least three years for core courses.	In Committee: House Higher Education
80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 1729	Exempts required textbooks from sales tax if full-time or part-time students purchase the texts and the texts meet the qualifications set forth as educational and instructional.	In Committee: House Higher Education
80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 2488	Identical to 80 <sup>th</sup> R / HB 1729	In Committee: House Ways & Means
80 <sup>th</sup> Regular / HB 2965	Prohibits faculty from requiring or recommending a textbook edition that is less than three years old for student use unless a newer edition is needed for adequate instruction or would cost less; prohibits requiring a specific edition unless information that needs to be updated in the edition can be provided or sold as an insert to the text.	In Committee: House Higher Education

This report, prepared for the Texas State University System, is relevant to students and administrators, and, one would venture to say, it is critical at this time because textbook costs continue to rise and there has been no coordinated effort by the stakeholders to work together to address the issues. These stakeholders include students, faculty, parents, legislators, universities and their governing boards and the textbook industry, which includes publishers and bookstores. The recommendations offered in this report provide the opportunity for all of the stakeholders to play a role in the reduction of textbook cost.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION TO REDUCE TEXTBOOK PRICE ESCALATIONS**

In offering recommendations, the authors have taken a two-pronged approach. The first set of recommendations is respectfully submitted for consideration of adoption by the Texas State University System to reduce the costs of higher education for those students in this system. The alternatives are reasonable, economical, and do not necessarily require additional staff or substantial resources to implement. In addition, components of the TSUS may have one or more of the practices in place. For these reasons, implementation can occur in a relatively short time frame.

The second set of recommendations is geared toward legislative action and takes into consideration the wide purview of statutory laws. If the state university systems support and encourage lawmakers who have showed a commitment to work for meaningful textbook legislation, the recommendations made here can be achieved.

### **Recommendations for Texas State University System Action**

Bookstore Advisory Committee: Create a university committee at each component to serve as an advisory board to the university bookstore. The committee should be made up of students, faculty and staff and meet monthly to develop communications, review procedures, consider innovations and trends, and make recommendations to the bookstore management. Bookstore management should be encouraged to address strategies to reduce textbook costs.

Online Student Textbook Swap: Require that each component maintain an online Bulletin Board service free of charge where student buyers and sellers can connect and list textbooks for sale or exchange. Samples of online book swaps are included in Appendix C.

Textbook Adoption Policy and Guaranteed Buy Back Programs: Create a textbook adoption policy or procedure that encourages faculty to use the same required textbook and edition for core and introductory courses for at least six long semesters. It is recommended that changes in editions should occur only in the fall semester. It is recommended that university representatives evaluate each required textbook by course to maximize the number of semesters it will be used. This information should be provided to bookstores in order to promote the re-purchase of textbooks for sale in the following semester(s) at reduced prices. As a result, a bookstore could implement a Guaranteed Buy Back program that identifies for students at the

time of purchase which texts will be re-purchased at the end of the semester by the bookstore. Lower textbook costs will be a direct result of the increase in the number of used books.

Create Meaningful Textbook Adoption Deadlines: The provision of used textbooks by a bookstore is contingent on faculty book adoptions. Once a faculty member determines the texts he/she will require, it is critical for the information to be delivered to the bookstore. If faculty do not provide the information in a timely manner, bookstores are faced with obstacles to acquire the appropriate number of texts on campus in time to meet academic calendar deadlines. Bookstores will re-purchase texts that can be sold as used only if textbook orders from faculty are timely. Meaningful textbook adoption deadlines are crucial to any bookstore's success in ordering and receiving textbooks.

Implement Textbook Education for Faculty, Students and Parents: Educating students, parents and faculty can play a valuable role in the reduction of textbook cost. It is recommended that institutions should be required to provide accurate information to students and parents on the cost of textbooks so that they understand the need to plan for this expense. Most students and parents coming from public schools have not been required to purchase texts. Information should be prepared and sent out early that instructs them on the need to budget for textbooks, as well as information about alternatives such as online book swaps/sales, reputable Internet sites specializing in textbook sales, electronic media and the availability of library reserves. Parents and students should receive information explaining how to locate course syllabi for their classes from university websites. Syllabi should incorporate information about the textbook(s) required for that course, thus giving parents and students more time to explore alternatives.

Keeping faculty informed as to the potential costs associated with textbook adoptions is an important role for bookstore managers. This is especially true when publishers make minor changes to texts that are not materially significant or bundle materials in ways that do not benefit the student or enhance the academic function. As the driving force behind the textbooks purchased by students, faculty members often have a great deal of influence on the publishers of those textbooks. Programs that regularly educate faculty as to the prevailing student textbook concerns can work to the students' advantage.

Develop Alternatives to Printed Textbooks: E-Books and electronic materials should be considered as alternatives to traditional printed texts. Due to the increasing availability of titles and the lack of shelf space required, faculty should be encouraged to identify acceptable electronic sources available on websites such as Freeload Press. The savings to students can be as much as 50 percent of the cost of printed materials.

### **Recommendation for Statewide/Legislative Action**

Textbook Tax Exemption: Pass legislation that would allow the purchase of any required or recommended textbook to be tax exempt for all students enrolled at Texas colleges or universities. Students would be required to present a valid student ID card at the time of purchase to the textbook vendor whether on-campus, off-campus or online.

*Effect:* This legislation would represent an average savings of approximately six percent on the total cost of each student's college textbook purchases.

Textbook Fairness Act: Pass legislation that would require all state universities to post on a general access website a complete textbook list at least 60 days prior to the start of each term. Require publishers to provide in writing to the faculty at least the following details: retail price of textbooks and supplemental materials, a list of the new or used editions available, indication whether the textbook is bundled. It is recommended the state establish incentives or mutually beneficial contracts with publishers who allow Texas higher education faculty to order unbundled textbooks and make electronic editions of the textbook available for purchase.

*Effect:* This legislation would make the required textbook list available to all bookstores, students and parents, in addition to making faculty aware of the cost of the text they are using. The creation of collaborative partnerships between the state and publishers can provide deep discounts to universities.

Benefit Prohibition: Pass legislation that would prohibit any employee or academic unit at a state university from receiving any payment or benefit from publishers for selecting certain textbooks for courses. Faculty and academic units may still receive sample and instructor copies and receive royalties on textbook and laboratory materials prepared for special class applications.

*Effect:* This legislation would eliminate unfair enticements in the selection of textbooks.

Online Libraries: Pass legislation that would require state universities to create online libraries for locally generated laboratory manuals, study guides and supplemental reading text.

*Effect:* This legislation would reduce course material costs for students enrolled in labs or courses that require the purchase of manuals, study guides and short supplemental text often generated locally.

Library Enhancement: Pass legislation and provide funding that requires each state university to provide at least two copies of each textbook used in the reference section of the school library.

*Effect:* This legislation would provide students who are unable to purchase their textbooks additional access to the books at no cost.

## CONCLUSION

The costs of college textbooks continue to rise at an alarming rate. According to the Government Accounting Office (GAO), textbook costs are increasing at a rate that far outpaces normal consumer price increases. Their report states, “since 1986 the cost of college text has increased 186 percent which equates to an annual rate increase of six percent per year. During that same period, consumer prices rose only seventy two percent.” The GAO also estimates that the price of textbooks for the average student represents 26 percent of the total cost for tuition and fees (GAO, 2005). The end result is the increased cost of textbooks has been a significant factor in the rising costs of attending college.

As state institutions, public universities are charged with meeting the goals of the state's higher education plan, *Closing the Gaps by 2015*. Incorporated into the plan is an increase in enrollment of roughly 300,000 new students by the target year. These efforts are jeopardized by significant increases in the cost of higher education, specifically textbooks. Institutions of higher education in Texas, and around the country, are being held accountable for cost increases to degrees not seen in the past, resulting in the scrutiny of local fees and the efficiency of institutional processes (Connecticut Board of Governors, 2006). Regardless, it is the responsibility of all public universities to take even the smallest steps to mitigate cost increases for the direct consumer, the student, and the indirect consumer, the public, when doing so does not sacrifice core academic objectives. This report strives to promote strategies that exemplify the fiscal responsibility of the institution to lower textbooks costs without damaging the inherent integrity of the academic process.

The authors of this report are encouraged there is not just one solution or one magic formula that will help reverse the trend of rising textbook cost. The benefit to this multi-option scenario is that universities can adapt the recommendations to best fit their culture and climate. However, if all the stakeholders identified in this report, not strictly the universities, would join forces in a concerted effort to implement the recommendations in this report, the end result would be a measurable reduction in the rising cost of college textbooks and a mitigation of future increases for many years to come.

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