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**Student Strategies for Coping with Textbook Costs and the Role of
Library Course Reserves**

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Abstract

College and university students across the United States are concerned about the cost of textbooks. This study examines the student patterns of coping with textbook inflation and the role that course reserve collections play in ameliorating costs. In the winter of 2007, an online survey was distributed to 1,500 Oregon State University students to explore their textbook purchasing habits and use of course reserves. Students reported that textbook costs come directly from their personal funds. They see course reserves as one mechanism to help them deal with textbook costs. Libraries could focus efforts to assist students by purchasing recommended and optional textbooks.

Introduction

Students at Oregon State University (OSU), like students throughout the country, have expressed concern about the high cost of textbooks. When the Associated Students of

Oregon State University (ASOSU) proposed that two copies of required and recommended textbooks be placed on reserve in the library as one of several strategies to combat textbook cost inflation, the issue caught the attention of OSU librarians. We learned about this proposal from an article published in the student newspaper.¹ There were potentially enormous repercussions for the library with respect to budget, space, and staff time.² We decided to investigate OSU students' attitudes toward purchasing textbooks, their strategies for coping with textbook costs, and their use of the OSU Libraries' course reserves service. We hoped that hearing directly from students themselves would help the library to participate in further discussion of textbook affordability and the role that libraries might play in alleviating textbook costs for students.

Background

In January 2004, the California Student Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG) published a report written by Merriah Fairchild on the high cost of textbooks.³ Data presented in this investigation included a survey administered in the fall of 2003 to students (521 responses) from seven universities in the University of California system. This study identified the publisher practice of "bundling" additional instructional material with textbooks and frequent production of new editions as key factors contributing to inflation in textbook costs. The CALPIRG report initiated a subsequent flurry of reports from public interest research groups and interested groups in other states including Georgia, Connecticut, Illinois, Virginia, and North Carolina, as well as at the federal level. A study written by Kate Rube for the state public interest research groups (PIRGs)

expanded CALPIRG's cost data for widely purchased textbooks with data collected in fall 2004.⁴ The Connecticut Taskforce on the Cost of College Textbooks established by the Board of Governors for Higher Education surveyed more than 500 students in the fall of 2004. The taskforce's first report published by the board in January 2005 included a recommendation that Connecticut university libraries should have copies of textbooks on reserve.⁵ A second report published in January 2006 included the same recommendation.⁶ Congress requested that the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) study textbook affordability. Its report appeared in July 2005. The GAO staff did not directly survey students but used the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and data from the Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to create a picture of textbook costs and college tuition from 1987 through 2004. Like the CALPIRG report, the GAO report identified bundling and frequent editions as major contributors to textbook inflation.⁷ Both of these reports have since been widely cited by others exploring the high cost of textbooks. The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) also investigated textbook costs and received 12,650 student responses from a survey conducted in the fall of 2005. One conclusion of the council's report, which appeared in January 2006, was that a robust used book market was essential to maintaining textbook affordability.⁸ The news media have also kept the textbook cost issue before the public. Articles have appeared many times in newspapers such as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*, as well as in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Like the situation with scholarly journal subscription prices, concern about inflation in textbook costs is not a new phenomenon. Robert Sommer and Marina

Estabrook cited J. K. Noble's 1984 publication, *Trends in Textbook Markets 1984*, which reported, "The average cost of hardcover textbooks quadrupled between 1951 and 1981, and prices are predicted to double again by 1990."⁹ In 1994, Stanley W. Hatch and Michael T. Cron surveyed optometry students on their textbook purchases and found that cost of the books was the main reason that students did not buy them.¹⁰

Academic libraries have a long history of providing reserve reading for students.¹¹ The usefulness of the reserves service has been debated over the years,¹² but there have been very few recent studies that have addressed how students use the print reserve collections of college and university libraries in the United States. Over the past 10 years, the advent of electronic reserves services in U.S. academic libraries has generated several surveys of students, chiefly to investigate preferences between electronic and print reserves. Laurie Isenberg's study published in 2006 involved two groups of mature-age graduate students at the California Institute of Integral Studies.¹³ Charles J. Cobine surveyed students at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill in 2003, receiving responses from 57 undergraduates and 14 graduate students.¹⁴ JoAnn Jacoby and Mary S. Laskowski compared checkouts in a duplicated print and electronic reserve collection at the undergraduate library of the University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign in spring 2002.¹⁵ Mary Laskowski and David Ward also conducted a student survey at the undergraduate library in 2000.¹⁶ Anna Klump Pilston and Richard L. Hart surveyed history and psychology students at Penn State Erie–The Behrend College in 2001. They compared student use of the electronic and paper reserve collection after the establishment of electronic reserves.¹⁷ All of these studies returned data that documented student preference for electronic reserves over print. Certain types of readings, such as

journal articles and book chapters, are good candidates for electronic reserves, but the traditional print reserve collection still may be the most viable alternative for providing access to entire textbooks because of copyright issues involved with digitizing complete or large portions of books.

Only three studies from the past 20 years focused solely on print reserve collections. All of these were conducted before electronic reserve services were widely established in academic libraries. Most recently, Catherine A. Larson reported on a process improvement study of the print reserves service at the University of Arizona. Students participated in focus groups as well as in a survey of walk-in users in August 1995. The survey focused on three aspects of satisfaction with reserves—overall experience, service, and quality.¹⁸ Julie Banks' research concerned the use of the print reserves collection at Southeast Missouri State University. She surveyed students who came into the library during two different time periods in the 1994 spring semester. She asked how students found out about course reserves, how often they used the service, and how much of the material for each class they used.¹⁹ James Self at the University of Virginia investigated the relationship between students' use of the reserves collection and their academic performance. Self found that there was a positive correlation between reserve use and student grades, but it was very small and could not be used to predict the grade achieved.²⁰ None of these studies on textbook costs or library course reserves specifically explored the connection between textbook affordability and student use of the reserves collection. Other library researchers have suggested, however, that students are looking more and more to their campus library as a source of textbooks. Cynthia Hsieh and Rhonelle Runner wrote that "as textbook prices continue to rise, more students

are turning to their academic libraries with the expectation that the library will have a copy of the required book" ²¹ Laskowski stated that, "though textbooks are often not considered appropriate for long-term addition to library collections, there is a growing demand from students for access to these materials." ²² Our study represents an attempt at achieving greater understanding of the relationship between student textbook purchasing decisions and use of the library course reserves collection.

Setting and Methodology

Oregon State University is located in Corvallis, Oregon, in the heart of the Willamette Valley. The university offers a comprehensive array of programs at the undergraduate level, and undergraduate enrollment is approximately 15,000 students. The Valley Library is on the main campus in Corvallis and has branches in Newport and Bend. All three libraries provide a physical course reserves service. In the 2006/2007 academic year, the physical course reserves collection at The Valley Library contained approximately 900 items in each of the fall, winter, and spring terms. The reserve collection consists of print and multimedia formats only. In 2000, Oregon State University purchased the Blackboard Course Management System (CMS). At that time, the OSU Libraries made the decision not to offer an electronic course reserves service because it would duplicate the functionality of the CMS.

The authors developed an online survey in consultation with the OSU Survey Research Center. After approval by OSU's Institutional Review Board, the survey was distributed to undergraduate students aged 18 years or older and with a class standing of second year and above. First-year students were not included in the study because we felt

that they did not have enough exposure to college life to answer the questions that we wanted to ask. The survey consisted of 18 questions and took approximately five to 10 minutes to complete. We asked students how they make their textbook purchasing decisions, as well as about their reasons for using the library's course reserves service (see appendix). Students were not offered any incentives for participating in the survey. The OSU Survey Research Center advised us that, if we were to receive a response rate of 15 percent from a sample size of 1,500 students, we would have a statistically valid survey with a 5 percent margin of error. We sent e-mail messages to 1,500 students on January 30, 2007, inviting them to respond to our survey. The survey was available for three weeks. We sent out a reminder message to these students halfway through this period to encourage more responses.

Two hundred fifty-six students replied to the survey—a 17 percent return rate—rendering statistically sound data representing the OSU student body. Most of the students who responded were upper division. Twenty-nine students skipped the question about their class standing (see table 1). In reporting on the rest of the responses to the survey, we have compared and contrasted our findings with earlier textbook affordability studies whenever we could determine that the questions asked were similar enough for comparisons of the data to be made.

Table 1

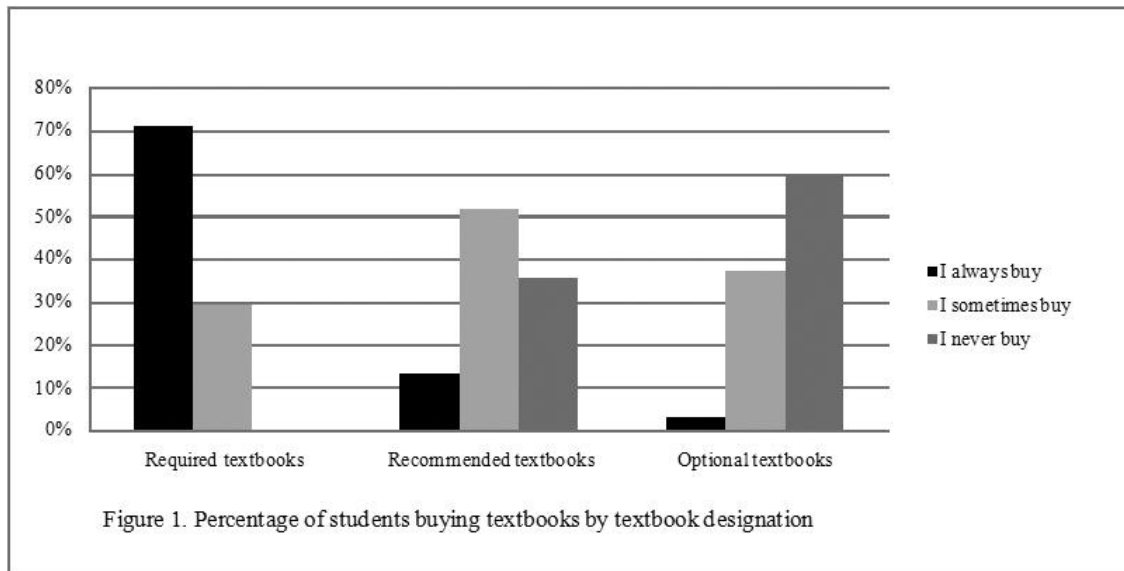
Student response rate by class standing

Class standing	Number of survey respondents	Percentage of respondents
Sophomore	44	19%
Junior	82	36%
Senior	101	44%
Did Not Specify	29	11%
Total	256	

Factors Affecting Textbook Purchasing Decisions

At OSU, instructors categorize assigned textbooks as required, recommended, or optional. When asked how these categories affected their decision to buy textbooks, the majority of the students said that they always buy the textbooks that are required. Many fewer students said they always buy recommended or optional textbooks. Over half of the students said they only sometimes buy recommended books, and more than one-third said that they never do (see figure 1). The Connecticut Taskforce on the Cost of College Textbooks also found that students are most likely to buy required books; 78 percent always buy required books, whereas only 21 percent buy recommended or optional books. Notably, 35 percent (86/243) of the OSU students reported never buying recommended textbooks, and 59 percent (145/244) reported never buying optional textbooks, indicating that there are potentially a large number of students who do not own

the textbooks for their classes. In Hatch and Cron's 1994 study of optometry students, the authors listed several reasons delineating the importance of textbooks as supporting materials for classes. They noted that, "given their importance, it is disappointing to many optometric faculty to see students decide against the purchase of textbooks."²³



OSU students are much more likely to buy textbooks for classes in their major (79 percent, 193/245) than for classes that are not in their major (42 percent, 102/243). When asked for comments in response to this question, 32 students (all but two of whom were juniors or seniors) raised other issues that influence their decision about buying textbooks. More than half of this group of upper division students volunteered that the cost of the textbooks was a factor, as was their financial situation in any particular term. Additional factors influencing their decision included their personal interest in the topic or the potential value of a textbook in relation to their future career. Some students mentioned alternatives to buying their books, including whether or not the books were

available either in the library collection or on reserve, borrowing from other students, or finding the information they needed online.

When asked directly about factors that influence their decision to buy or not to buy a particular textbook, the most important factor for OSU students was whether or not the syllabus showed that most of the book would be used in the class (63 percent, 154/243). Other important factors were whether the book would be useful in the future (58 percent, 143/245) and the cost (51 percent, 125/244). These last two factors appeared throughout the survey in student comments, reinforcing their importance in the decision process. Although bundling has been named as a major factor contributing to textbook cost inflation, it does not appear to have much influence on textbook buying by OSU students. More than half (54 percent, 132/245) did not consider bundling an issue when deciding whether or not to purchase a textbook, whereas 35 percent (85/245) reported that it was only somewhat influential. The informal communications network among students exerts a strong influence on OSU students' textbook purchasing decisions; more than three-quarters of students (78 percent, 192/244) reported that advice from other students is somewhat or very influential in guiding their choices.

Sources for Obtaining Textbooks

When asked where they purchase their textbooks, a majority of OSU students (58 percent, 142/246) reported they always purchase their textbooks from the centrally located campus bookstore. Another 40 percent of responding students (41 percent, 101/246) reported that they sometimes purchase from the OSU bookstore. Seventy percent

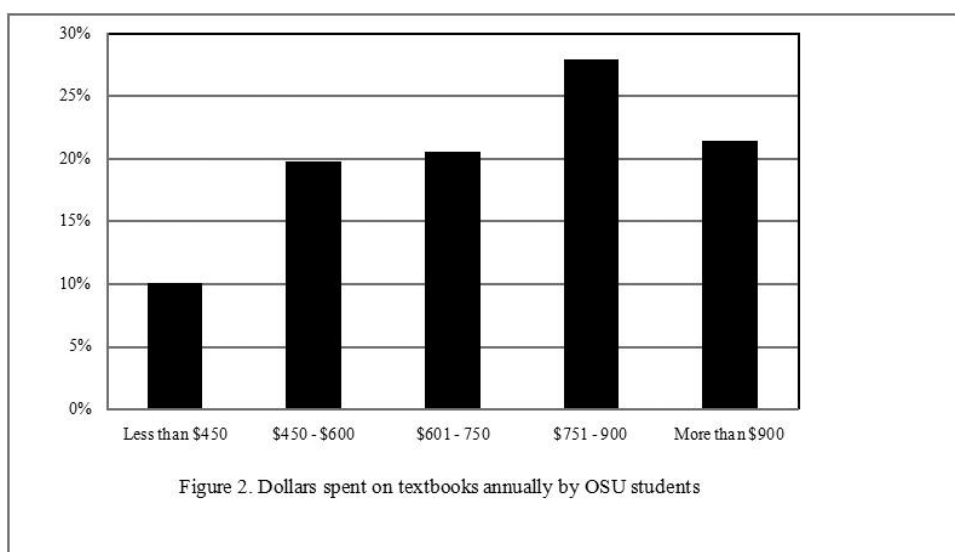
(160/229) never buy their books from any other "bricks and mortar" bookstore. This is not surprising because OSU is a residential campus located in a small college town with only three other traditional bookstores that do not focus on the textbook market. Students from Connecticut (72 percent) and Virginia (77 percent) are also heavy users of campus bookstores.²⁴

Fifty percent (154/233) of OSU students report using online bookstores in the United States to always or sometimes purchase their books. According to the PIRGS textbook cost study and the GAO report, American textbooks may be less expensive when purchased overseas.²⁵ International online bookstores are used much less by OSU students; only 15 percent of students (35/227) reported buying books this way. A few students mentioned that they have used eBay for buying textbooks. Students in Connecticut (21 percent in 2004) and Virginia (15 percent in 2005) also use online sources but no distinction was made between U.S. and international sources in these surveys.²⁶ Students in Virginia reported that they saved money by buying online rather than from the campus bookstore.²⁷

Expenditure on Textbooks

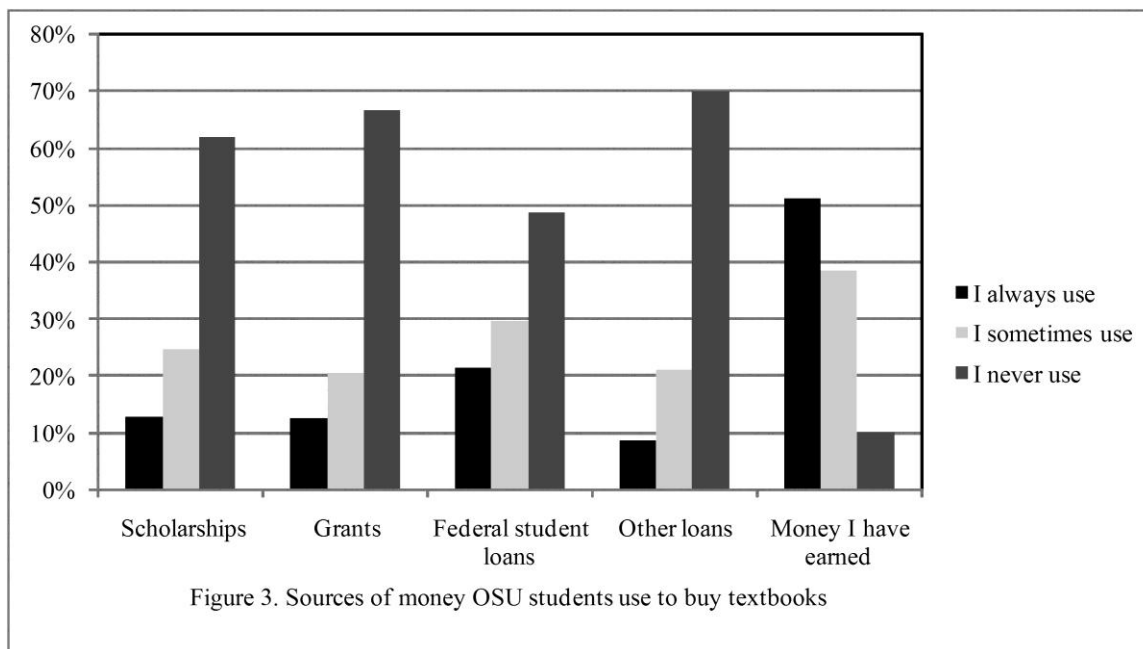
When asked to estimate what they spend on textbooks in a typical term, 40 percent (100/247) of the OSU students responded that they spend \$150 to \$250 per term, 28 percent (68/247) spend \$251 to \$300, and 22 percent (53/247) spend more than \$300. Most students attend classes in three terms of an academic year; therefore, almost half of them (49 percent, 121/247) are spending at least \$750 on textbooks (see figure 2). The

following costs are reported for students in other states. In California, students spent an average of \$898 per year according to survey data from fall 2003.²⁸ The Illinois Board of Higher Education Student Advisory Council reported that for 2004, first-time, full-time students would spend on average \$930 if purchasing new books for a typical freshman year.²⁹ In Connecticut, 38 percent of students spent \$500 or more for their fall 2004 books (\$1,000 per year), whereas, in Virginia, 24 percent of students spent \$500 or more for fall 2005 (\$1,000 per year).³⁰ In 2006, the University of Wisconsin Office of Operations Review and Audit calculated the cost of textbooks for a "typical freshman course load for one semester" to range from \$410 to \$581 (\$820–\$1,162 per year).³¹ We surveyed OSU students in the fall of 2007; and, at first glance, it appears that many of them are spending less on textbooks than students in these other states. It is possible, however, that concern over textbook costs may have led students in the other states to spend less now than they first reported. More extensive data are needed before definitive statements can be made comparing what students in different states are spending on textbooks.



Among OSU students, there were no discernable differences between class standing and the amount spent on textbooks in a typical term. Similarly, the SCHEV study from Virginia did not find any consistent difference in the cost of textbooks in relation to class standing.³² We were not able to collect data on the majors of the OSU students; therefore, we could not determine if there were differences by major in what students spend on textbooks overall throughout their degree program. Scanning the OSU bookstore shelves suggests science and engineering books are more expensive than books for other disciplines. Some of these textbooks, however, are often used for more than one class in a student's academic program. Also, students in the liberal arts may be required to purchase a greater number of books than students in science and engineering so that their overall textbook costs could be quite similar.

Money earned by OSU students themselves is the most common source of funds used to buy textbooks (see figure 3). More than half (51 percent, 121/236) always use their own funds, whereas another 39 percent (91/236) sometimes do. Federal student loans are next; 22 percent (44/205) always use these loans, whereas an additional 30 percent (61/205) sometimes do. Many students, however, never use scholarships, grants, federal student loans, or other types of loans to buy their textbooks. Several students commented that family members give them money toward their textbook expenses. In Connecticut, many students purchase books with their own funds (54 percent), or books are paid for by their parents (40 percent).³³ The Connecticut study also noted that scholarships and other sources contribute only minimally to textbook purchases.³⁴

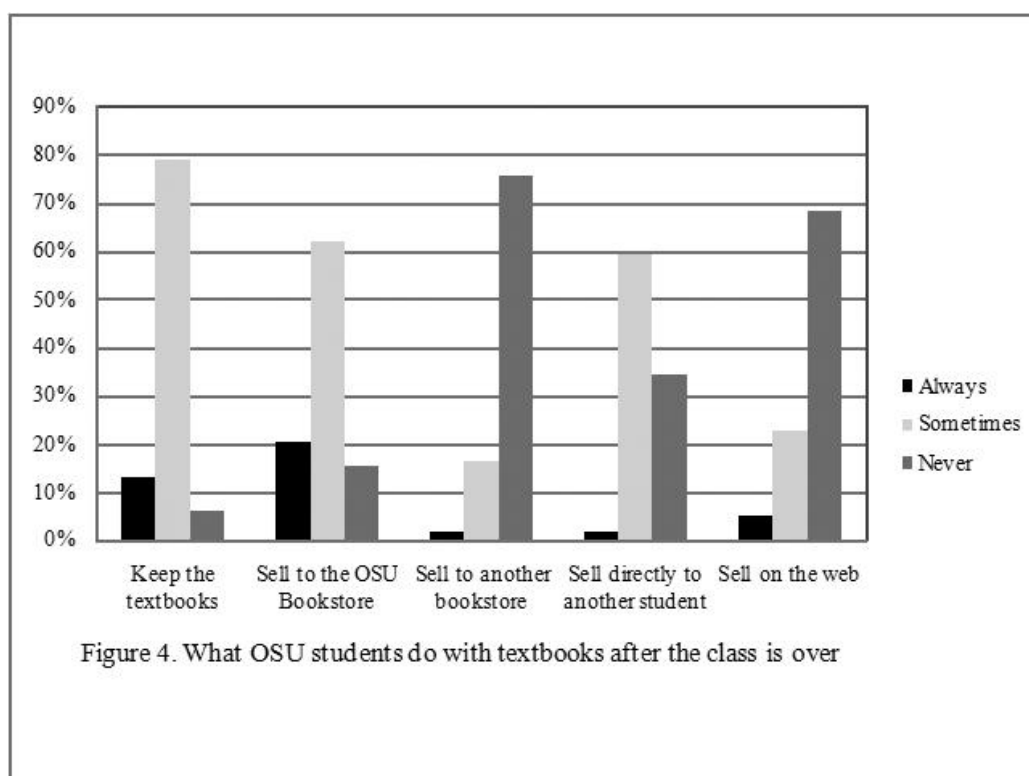


Strategies for Reducing Textbook Costs

Used Books

As a cost-saving measure, almost two-thirds of the OSU students always buy used books (65 percent, 160/245), although many (83 percent, 199/241) will buy new books if necessary. Apparently, the supply of used books can be a problem; there may not be enough used copies available in the OSU bookstore or through other sources to fill the need. Difficulty in finding used books was also reported by students in California and Virginia.³⁵ Some OSU students commented that they would choose to buy new books rather than used if they are relevant for their major or if they plan to keep the books. When they have completed a class, many OSU students dispose of their textbooks. Very few OSU students (13 percent, 32/240) reported that they always keep their textbooks,

although a much larger number (80 percent, 193/240) do sometimes keep them (see figure 4). In the Virginia survey, "75 percent of students reported that they would try to sell their books back at the end of the semester."³⁶ Students at OSU mostly sell their books to the campus bookstore or directly to other students. There appears to be a brisk used book trade among OSU students; at least 60 percent report buying from and selling books to their peers. Some OSU students sell on the Web or to another bookstore; but, at the time of our survey, the majority of them had not used either of these routes for selling their textbooks.



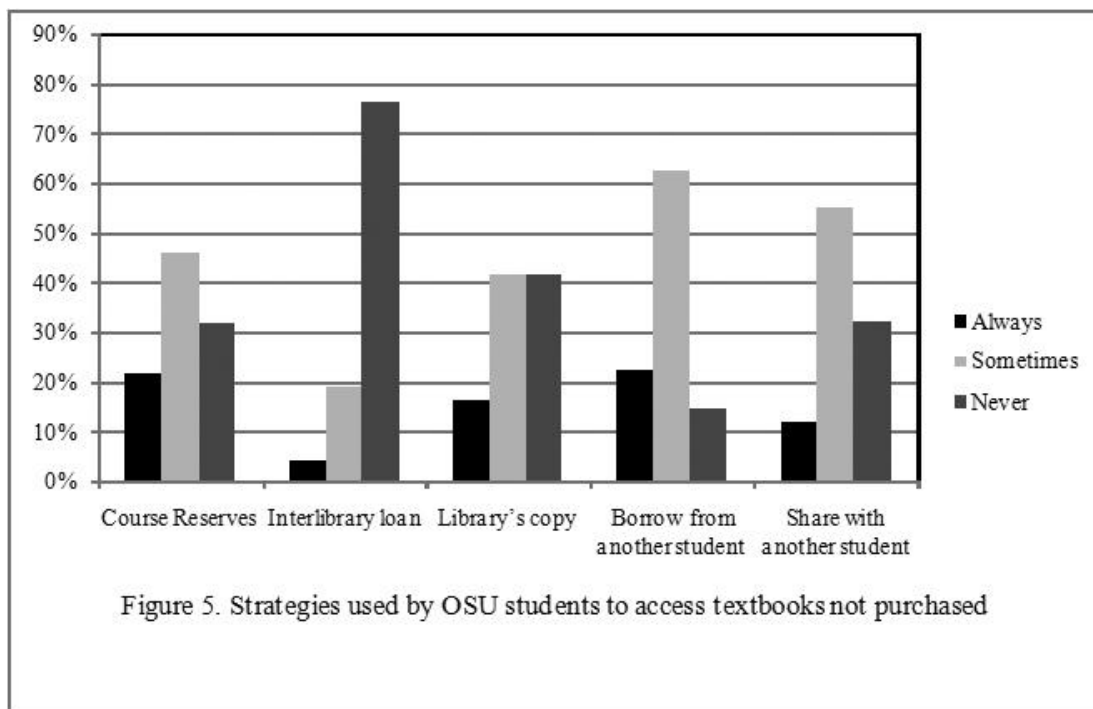
Virginia's SCHEV report from January 2006 pointed to a robust used book market as essential for textbook affordability.³⁷ A report by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance in May 2007 provides more detailed information about the place of

used books in making textbooks more affordable for students.³⁸ Our data indicate that OSU students rely on selling books that they do not see as having future value. The students who wrote comments on this question mentioned two main reasons for not selling textbooks—the books were from classes they took in their major, or the textbook had lost all value because a new edition had been published.

Electronic Textbooks

The CALPIRG report suggested that electronic textbooks present an opportunity for reducing student textbook costs because of savings in printing and other production costs.³⁹ Figures from the National Association of College Stores indicate that these expenses still account for around 30 percent of the cost of publishing a textbook.⁴⁰ At OSU, it appears that not many instructors are assigning electronic books. When asked about electronic textbooks, only 20 percent of the OSU students (49/247) said that they had been required to buy a textbook available only in this format. Our survey also indicates that electronic textbooks have not yet reached large-scale acceptance on the OSU campus. When asked what format they prefer for textbooks, print versus electronic, a clear majority of the students (93 percent, 228/245) responded that they prefer print. This finding contrasts with a study reported by the ebrary Corporation in 2008, in which only 45 percent of students in an international survey reported that they prefer print books.⁴¹ Disadvantages of electronic textbooks noted in the GAO report are that students may not be able to sell them back and that they sometimes do not have the option to keep the books if they wish.⁴²

Open textbooks as a component of the wider Open Educational Resources (OER) offer promise for ameliorating some of the disadvantages of current textbook publishing business models. The OER can include everything from learning objects, class modules, and textbooks to full, online classes provided freely for others to employ and adapt. Much like the open access journal movement, open textbooks are intended to share knowledge rather than profit from it. At the 2009 ALA midwinter conference, the ACRL-SPARC Forum sponsored a panel discussion on textbooks, bookstores, and the open textbook movement. This program was designed to inform librarians about textbook initiatives that are very important to students and faculty.⁴³ Open textbooks represent a means for saving students' money and could eventually allow libraries to redirect course reserve funds to other services. On March 12, U.S. Representative Bill Foster of New York introduced H.R.1464, *Learning Opportunities with Creation of Open Source Textbooks (LOW COST) Act of 2009*, to Congress to "require federal agencies to collaborate in the development of freely available open source educational materials in college-level physics, chemistry and math, and for other purposes."⁴⁴ If this bill passes, it could make a substantial difference in textbook expenses, especially for science students.



Alternatives to Buying Textbooks

When asked how they access information from textbooks if they do not buy them, OSU students reported that they use a variety of strategies (see figure 5). Borrowing from or sharing with another student are popular options. Students in Virginia also reported borrowing books from other students.⁴⁵ Course reserves or checking out a library copy if available are also methods OSU students use to access textbooks. They recognize that interlibrary loan is not a very satisfactory way to obtain a copy of a textbook because of the restricted borrowing period, although some do occasionally use this route.

Student Attitudes to Textbook Purchasing

Many students took the opportunity to comment on textbook purchasing, some complaining vociferously (47/114) that textbooks cost too much. A few students reported spending well over \$300 per term, which was the largest amount that we included in the survey question on textbook costs. They also remarked on the price of specific books; one organic chemistry text reportedly cost more than \$200. A number of students were obviously resentful, feeling that they were being "ripped off." Many placed the blame on either the university or the OSU bookstore. Another issue that particularly bothered them was that textbooks are assigned by their instructors and then only partially used for the course so that they feel they have wasted their money. This irritation is further compounded by their view that the OSU bookstore offers only low buyback prices when they try to sell their books. They also complained about the frequent production of new editions, which differ little in content from the previous edition. In this situation, students may not be able to sell back the older edition if it will not be assigned for future classes at OSU or at other campuses. Several students reported that they would often use an older edition in preference to buying the latest one. Their concerns about partial use of assigned textbooks and frequent publication of new editions are echoed by students in Virginia.⁴⁶ Concerns about buyback problems are echoed by students in both Connecticut and Virginia.⁴⁷

It was disturbing to read some of the student comments. Several students specifically mentioned the effect of textbook costs on their personal budgets with respect to making choices about what they spend their money on—food or books. Other students mentioned that financial aid and scholarships may not be applied to purchasing textbooks and that they must cover these costs from their own funds. The Advisory Committee on

Student Financial Assistance's 2007 report noted that "textbook expenses are especially troublesome for students from low- and moderate-income families because financial aid rarely covers them."⁴⁸ This situation appears to be true for at least some students at Oregon State University. There are potentially negative implications for their academic success and retention if they are either unable or unwilling to purchase the materials that they need for their coursework.

Use of Library Course Reserves

Fifty-five percent of the students (136/247) had used the OSU Libraries' course reserves service within the past year. Seventy-three percent (98/135) reported they had used the reserve system for textbooks they perceived as too expensive to buy, and 84 percent (114/135) used it when they only needed to read small parts of a course textbook. When given the opportunity to comment on course reserves and textbook prices at the end of our survey, 39 percent (44/114) expressed the point of view that the library's course reserve system was an alternative or supplement to buying books. Many specifically mentioned how course reserves saved them money. One student said, "It has allowed me to *eat and go to school*." Another said, "Without it [reserves], I wouldn't be able to take some classes." More than half of the students who used course reserves (55 percent, 75/137) felt that the service was very important in supporting their success at the university. A number of students suggested that all assigned textbooks should be on reserve or that at least all required textbooks should be on reserve, with preferably more than one copy. Their suggestions mirror the recommendation by OSU student leaders that

all textbooks should be on reserve in the library.⁴⁹ One student proposed that the library have textbooks available for long-term checkout.

To illustrate what it would mean for OSU Libraries to honor the students' request, numbers for the winter term of 2008 show that the OSU bookstore listed 1,694 individual books assigned for classes. The library had 1,011 items on reserve, not all of which were books. Of these reserve items, 574 were owned by the library and 437 by faculty. Assuming that all the items on reserve were books, this leaves a minimum gap of 683 books that would need to be provided, without allowing for the purchase of any extra copies. According to the *Higher Education Retail Market Facts & Figures 2009* report by the National Association of College Stores, the average cost of a new textbook during the 2008 academic year was \$57.⁵⁰ This means that it would have cost OSU Libraries at least \$38,931 to acquire one copy of the textbooks not represented in course reserves.

Several students pointed out the obvious problems of a course reserves service as a mechanism for providing access to textbooks. There may not be enough copies of the textbooks available, especially for larger classes; checkout times are too short for in-depth study but too long for ready availability. Finally, their access to textbooks is dependent on their fellow students returning the books on time. Students see the library course reserves as a service that can help them avoid purchasing costly textbooks but seem to understand that it is not without pitfalls.

Conclusion

We undertook this study to learn how OSU students make their textbook purchasing decisions and pay for their books in light of textbook cost inflation. By focusing on how a specific group of students copes with the cost of textbooks and their view of course reserves, we have built on previous textbook affordability studies to spotlight the role that university libraries can play in assisting students to better afford a university education. At OSU Libraries, we had been unaware of the difficulties and stresses that students face in paying for textbooks. This article is intended to provide other libraries with information they can use in understanding the problem and evaluating their response to an inflation in publishing costs that affects their students' budgets in much the same way that journal inflation affects library budgets. The responses to the survey provide insight into students' approaches to confronting textbook inflation as well as offering them an opportunity to put into words the ways they see that libraries can help them.

Our survey results confirmed that OSU students are very concerned about the high cost of textbooks. They employ a variety of strategies to help stretch their textbook dollars. Some of the things we learned might be expected. Students are much more likely to buy required textbooks than either recommended or optional books. They are also much more likely to buy books for classes in their major than not. They will opt out of purchasing a textbook if they learn that it will not be used much in a class. They are rightly upset when required textbooks have only a minor impact on course curriculum. Less expected was that, despite the cost, they will readily spend their funds when they feel that a textbook will be useful in the future, particularly if it will be useful in their major. Students are interested in value for their money. They want to know that a textbook is worth their investment. They rely heavily on the used book market to give

them a perception of recouping some of their outlay; and they often rely on their social networks—borrowing from or sharing with fellow students—in order to find ways around purchasing textbooks.

We also sought to learn how OSU students use course reserves and how they perceived this service as assisting them with textbook affordability. Perhaps the most important message for library administrators revealed by our survey is that the cost of textbooks comes right out of student pockets rather than filtered through scholarships or grants. It is no wonder that textbook affordability is such a pressing issue. The costs are substantial; many students spend more than \$750 each year, adding as much as 13 percent to what they are paying in tuition and fees. Our survey showed that the main reasons that OSU students look for textbooks in library course reserves are because they only need to use a small part of the books and because of their high cost.

Previous textbook affordability studies have made little mention of a role for campus libraries in mitigating the costs of textbooks for students other than course reserves. The Connecticut and Illinois reports both recommended that textbooks should be on reserve in university libraries.⁵¹ A report from the Minnesota Office of Higher Education in 2007 made a similar recommendation.⁵² The 2008 report from New York's Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) suggested that students should ask faculty to put textbooks on reserve in the library.⁵³ Many academic libraries do not routinely collect textbooks,⁵⁴ a situation that appeared to be a surprise for Virginia's State Council of Higher Education.⁵⁵ None of these reports addressed issues such as how libraries might afford to purchase all assigned textbooks to put on reserve, other than the Minnesota report stating that "faculty can be encouraged to support library expenses for the

placement of copies of textbooks on library reserve"⁵⁶ or whether libraries would have the space and staff to handle an expanded reserves collection.

At OSU, students have indicated that they believe their library has a role in helping them deal with the high cost of textbooks—first, through the OSU student government proposal that two copies of all textbooks be on reserve in the library and, second, through the responses to our survey. Unfortunately, buying textbooks on a large scale is not a viable option for the OSU Libraries,⁵⁷ as proved to be the case for the Undergraduate Library at the University of Illinois's collaboration with the Illini Union Bookstore to provide textbooks for students.⁵⁸ Some other campus libraries have also recognized their students' struggles with textbook expenses and have taken proactive steps to address textbook affordability, including the following examples. At Virginia State University, the library has reserve copies of textbooks " for basic courses, such as English, History and Psychology." ⁵⁹ At the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the library "sponsors a program to place high-cost textbooks on reserve."⁶⁰ Our survey results, however, suggest that libraries might do better to focus on using funds, whenever possible, to purchase recommended and optional textbooks, rather than required textbooks, and to make sure that these books are on reserve without waiting for faculty to initiate requests.

Our survey revealed that OSU students were satisfied with the general workings of the course reserve system, indicating that the basic operation was functioning well but the service could be improved in ways that helped students with textbook affordability. Expanded publicity about the service to students would enable more of them to take advantage of reserves as an alternative to buying textbooks. Promotion of the course

reserves service to faculty as a counter to high textbook costs and encouraging them to place books on reserve and to do so promptly would also serve students faced with purchasing textbooks. Clearly, at OSU, students use the library reserve service and would like the library to play a larger role in providing textbooks. As libraries continue to adjust services to meet student needs and learn more about the textbook affordability situation on their campuses, opportunities may arise which would allow some library funds to be redirected toward helping students with textbook costs. Of course, any substantial progress along these lines will require collaboration with faculty, academic administrators, and the campus bookstore.

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Appendix

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Notes

¹ Heather Heartman, "Hitting the Books Hard on Wallet," *The Daily Barometer*, October 10, 2005.

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