

Testimony for SB 667

University System of Maryland - Textbooks - Availability of Free Digital Materials

Textbook Transparency Act of 2020

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, Wednesday, Feb. 26th 2020

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Maryland PIRG is a state based, non-partisan, citizen funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state and a student funded, student directed chapter at the University of Maryland College Park. For forty five years we've stood up to powerful interests whenever they threaten our health and safety, our financial security, or our right to fully participate in our democratic society.

We urge you to support SB 667 to increase textbook price transparency for students in the Maryland University system. Students in the midst of financial planning for college need access to the full cost and range of choices, including those related to cost of course materials, as outlined in SB 667.

I'd like to share the story of my friend Rima, who is currently a senior in her final semester. When I worked with her on campus in 2017, Rima had just dropped two classes because she could not afford to purchase the books for them. These two classes were pre-requisites for her business major, and were only offered in the spring semester. This meant that Rima had to delay her graduation -- and take on additional student loan debt for another semester's worth of tuition -- because she did not have \$250 out of pocket to pay for books.

Rima's story is sadly not unique. In 2016, research from the Student PIRGs found that over [\\$3 billion in federal financial aid is spent on textbooks every year.](#) [1] [And in 2014, our research found that 65% of students have skipped buying textbooks because of their high cost.](#) [2]

Free open textbooks provide an innovative solution to the barrier of materials cost for college students. Open textbooks are peer reviewed, like traditionally licensed textbooks, but their open license means they are more flexible for educators and not only can students access them for free but they can retain access after the end of the semester. Many professors, in an effort to remove barriers, already opt to use openly licensed or other free materials. Allowing students to know which classes utilize these materials, as laid out in HB318, gives students the ability to easily identify courses that utilized openly licensed options.

If we want a future where financial cost is not a barrier to student success in higher education, we need to address the high cost of course materials. Open textbooks are an excellent step towards affordability, and especially effective if students know which class sections are using them.

- We know that students are smart, and will work to cut costs however they can. [Most students already make decisions on which classes to take based on the cost of materials, and one out of five students report dropping a class due to the materials cost.](#) [3]
- Giving students access to course material information when they register for class will allow them time to shop around and find the best deal, if they still want or need to purchase materials.
- In addition to affordability, some studies indicate open textbooks can improve student performance. [A University of Georgia study showed not only an improvement in student success, but also a decrease in dropping the course. Beyond that, Pell-eligible students benefited more than their peers.](#) [4]

SB 667 provides students with vital information about their textbook options while they are registering for classes, allowing them to make informed choices and financially plan.

Thank you for introducing this legislation, and we urge a favorable report.

[1] The Student Public Interest Research Group, *Covering the Cost: Why we can no longer afford to ignore high textbook prices*. accessed online 02 February, 2020,

<https://studentpirgs.org/2016/02/03/covering-cost/>

[2] The Student Public Interest Research Group, US PIRG Education Fund, *Fixing the Broken Textbook Market*, accessed online 02 February, 2020,

<https://uspirg.org/sites/pirg/files/reports/NATIONAL%20Fixing%20Broken%20Textbooks%20Report1.pdf>

[3] Tillinghast, Beth. "Student Textbook Survey." Manoa, HI, 2017. Accessed online 02 February, 2020.

https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/48545/UH%20Undergraduate%20Textbook%20Survey_Spring%202017.pdf

[4] Colvard, Nicholas B., Edward Watson, and Hyojin Park. "The Association of American Colleges and Universities ." International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2018.

<http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/pdf/IJTLHE3386.pdf>