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Key Information on College Textbooks

The postsecondary publishing sector is highly complex and highly competitive. Publishers must design their instructional and learning materials to accommodate a tremendous number of variables – teaching styles, student needs, professorial demands, school locations, school sizes, course content, among others. No two students, no two campuses, no two courses, and no two faculty members are exactly the same.

Currently, fifty-four percent of America’s four-year college students are not graduating in six years, either dropping out or struggling to graduate while piling up expenses and, too often, debt. Only 22 percent of entering freshman are considered to be college-ready in English, math and science.

Improving student retention and graduation rates is a particular concern to publishers as they invest millions of dollars in the development learning tools that will best serve America’s diverse student population.

Publishers are aware of and sensitive to the debate about the cost of textbooks. This is a very old and emotional debate. And today, with the soaring costs of tuition, fees, room and board, along with the increasing concerns about keeping a college education affordable, publishers have responded by producing numerous textbook choices, including hundreds of low-cost options from which faculty can choose for their students.

Unfortunately, there are numerous misunderstanding about the products publishers offer, how they are marketed, and publishers’ risks and profit. On the risk side, only 20 to 30 percent of textbooks introduced into the market are reprinted; competition is keen among the publishers of new textbooks. In terms of profits, publishers make between five and seven cents profit, after taxes, from every dollar that is spent on *new* textbooks.¹

A common misperception is that the availability of used book – which generally sell for 75 percent of the price of a new texts – has decreased in recent years. In fact, the opposite is true. Overall, the used book market in 2004 grew by 11.1 percent over 2003, and sales through online channels grew up to 33.3 percent over 2003 levels.²

¹ See “Textbook Dollar” at [http://www.nacs.org/common/research/textbook\\$.pdf](http://www.nacs.org/common/research/textbook$.pdf) and “Student Course Materials Expenditure” at <http://www.publishers.org/highered/pdfs/Graphic.pdf>

² The Book Industry Standard Group’s *Used Book Study*

Today's higher education students, professors and institutions are facing very different challenges and issues than they did even ten years ago. With information and technology changing at such a rapid rate, understanding the factors that influence textbooks and their costs can be confusing. Publishers are only one part of a very complex system. One of the best ways to improve the textbook purchasing process is to eliminate that confusion by increasing communication between all the stakeholders – students, faculty, publishers, bookstores and policy makers.

Choices

- Publishers will continue to provide lower-cost options, including digital and custom texts.
- Publishers will continue to invest in new delivery methods, particularly those that respond to advances in technology, changing learning methods, and the desire of professors and students for choices that can save them money.

Publishers already offer a broad range of textbooks and instructional materials at different price points to meet the diverse requests of higher education faculty. These options include low-cost editions, one- or two-color editions, loose-leaf editions, split editions, black-and-white editions, custom books, abbreviated editions, electronic books and complete learning packages. From these options, instructors select what they believe best serves their instructional needs and the educational needs of their students.

The market for lower-cost editions and custom books has undergone significant growth in recent years, and publishers are supporting that trend. As a result, the average price of a new textbook is \$52.36. Custom books are particularly popular among instructors because custom books enable instructors to obtain precisely what they want and with students because they pay only for the materials used in their course. Digital textbooks are a relatively new phenomenon that has appeal for students who want all the content of a textbook provided via an online subscription or downloaded to their computer at a substantial savings from the hardcover version. Hundreds of titles are available to students interested in this option.

Supplemental Learning Materials

- AAP supports its members as they work closely with faculty to better ensure that any supplemental materials provided with a textbook are exactly those a professor believes is most appropriate for his or her students. While most packages of learning materials are specifically designed for integrated use, and there are definite cost advantages to buying such materials in a bundle, publishers are also making these same materials available “a la carte,” unless there are restrictions due to third-party licensing or copyright requirements.

Publishers, through their campus representatives and Web sites, already provide faculty with information on available textbooks and supplemental learning tools. Textbook

marketing representatives work with faculty to identify materials that will best meet their instructional needs and, when appropriate, bundle course materials with the textbook when the instructor chooses to order them. For example, a professor could ask that one or many materials, such as study guides, lab manuals and digital media like online homework CD-ROMs, online tutorials, self-assessments, online testing and digital libraries, support his or her adopted textbook. These materials would then be sold as a package.

Publishers work closely with professors and universities to develop learning tools that meet educational needs. For instance, the University of Illinois College of Business pilot program with Thomson Learning and Turning Technologies that has yielded significant results in student learning and positive student feedback regarding the use of innovative technology in the classroom.

Many students have expressed concerns about the concept of “forced bundling,” requiring a professor to adopt a textbook with specific items included. It is considered bad practice in the industry to automatically bundle a textbook. Even if a textbook is typically offered in a package with other materials, publishers will sell the textbook individually, if requested by the faculty.

In some cases, third-party agreements may make it impossible, per the contract, to offer an item separately from the textbooks. In these instances, publishers would offer the textbook alone if faculty request, but this is generally not recommended because students’ ability to purchase the third-party materials, such as music, art and statistical software, would be difficult, if not impossible, and considerably more costly. If these kinds of restrictions were imposed, most students would go out of state or online to get the materials they need at lower prices.

When used correctly, “bundle” items significantly improve student success rates.

Industry Transparency

- To promote informed textbook adoptions, individual publishers provide revision cycle information to faculty.
- To facilitate easy access to information about textbook product offerings, the Association of American Publishers has posted on its Web site a list of its higher education member publishers and links to their respective Web sites.
- AAP’s members will continue to post information about their textbooks offerings on their Web sites.
- Included in the preface of new editions of textbooks is information on exact changes made between the current edition and the previous edition and a description of all student and faculty supplemental materials.
- Using an online search engine, students and faculty can easily find textbook pricing information.

Publishers are committed to transparency in the adoption process, and the Internet has helped improve transparency, both before and after the adoption is complete. A wide array of information is available to students and professors online via the Web sites of individual publishers, including details on changes between editions, professor and student resources, related titles, table of contents, and packaging options. (See Appendix A for a list of publisher Web site addresses.) Suggested retail prices for many textbooks are available on the Web sites of the respective publishers. This information is also available to faculty through their textbook sales representatives. Finally, both faculty and students can simply type the title of a textbook, its author or ISBN into an online search engine to find numerous Web sites that provide not only pricing information, but would also be more than willing to sell a copy of the textbook.

Of course, publishers do not set the actual retail prices of textbooks sold through any particular bookstore, so faculty should contact their campus bookstore to obtain information on the prices that will be charged to their students.

Providing information on changes between editions and listing all supplemental tools in the preface of a textbook is standard procedure in the industry. This information sets forth the number and kinds of changes made in a new edition and the applications for supplemental materials. Faculty have access to this information via sample copies of textbooks provided at no cost by publishers for use in the textbook evaluation and selection process.

Based on the wide number of options that are available, each textbook and supplemental material(s) package needs to be easily identifiable. Packaged materials are given a unique ISBN number that identifies the exact edition of the book and the materials contained in that bundle. These ISBN numbers actually help students identify the materials contained in a bundle and enable them to search elsewhere for the packaged materials, if they would like. In many cases, students can purchase the textbook, the supplemental materials or the entire bundle directly from the publisher.

New Editions

- Publishers' revision cycles have been steady for the last decade, averaging four years between editions from 1996 to 2004.
- Publishers typically keep previous editions available even after a new edition is released and will generally reprint an old edition for a minimal order. Instructors are welcome to adopt a previous edition rather than use the new edition.
- Textbook wholesalers also keep warehouses full of used textbooks and will gladly sell previous editions of a textbook to the bookstore, if ordered by the faculty.
- Even if the previous edition is not in stock, many times faculty can choose to create a custom text of the older version.

Revision cycle information is readily available to faculty. In fact, instructors provide publishers with significant input on the content and design of new editions. Eight-in-ten college professors (80%) say it is important that the material in texts used for their

courses be as current as possible—a stand reflected by the nearly two-thirds (62%) who say they prefer to order texts with the most recent copyright date, according to nationwide study of college faculty conducted by Zogby International.

The average length of time between editions is four years, although some textbooks, such as medical, current events and technical books, may be on more frequent revisions cycles. The revision cycle is driven by a combination of faculty demand and changes in subject matter, teaching aids, pedagogy, and student needs.

Additionally, publishers do not revise books unless there is a market for them. For example, the best seller in the Latin market has not been revised in almost six years. Moreland's *Intensive Latin* text, among the top 10 in this market, has not been revised in 28 years.

On-Campus and Faculty Initiatives

- To improve the overall value of their materials, publishers have developed on-campus initiatives to explain to faculty, bookstores and students how to best use textbooks and supplemental materials and how these materials can enrich the classroom experience and improve grades. Publisher representatives go into thousands of classrooms the first week of classes to explain the best use of their materials and answer student and faculty questions about textbooks.
- Publishers offer flexible, personalized training and consulting services, generally at no cost, to faculty and departments who have adopted their programs, enabling faculty to integrate various technology components with their teaching.

AAP's members are actively engaged in on-campus and faculty training programs to ensure the best use of both textbooks and supplemental teaching and learning materials. Publishers are devoting more resources to faculty training and support, and professional development. Technical support for some courses is provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Professional development opportunities are offered, both on campus and at dedicated conferences that educate faculty on the latest teaching and learning trends. Special support is available to adjunct faculty, often via the Internet, to provide them with much needed support in a context that fits their varied schedules. These support offerings are used by tens of thousands of faculty yearly, and demand is increasing as college and university budgets get tighter.

How materials are actually employed by faculty or students is not within the control of the publishers.

Appendix A Higher Education Publisher Web Sites

Bedford, Freeman, Worth Publishing Group

<http://www.bfwpub.com/>

Houghton Mifflin

<http://college.hmco.com/flash.html>

McGraw-Hill Higher Education

<http://catalogs.mhhe.com/mhhe/home.do>

Pearson Education

<http://www.pearsoned.com>

Thomson Learning

<http://www.thomson.com/learning/learning.jsp>

<http://e-catalog.thomsonlearning.com/150/>

<http://www.wadsworth.com>

<http://www.brookscole.com>

<http://www.southwestern.com>

John Wiley & Sons

<http://he-cda.wiley.com/WileyCDA/>