

Back to Campus 2017: Course Materials (i.e. Textbooks)

Some of our most frequently asked questions

How much do textbooks cost?

The average textbook cost for the Fall 2016 / Spring 2017 academic year was \$66. Prices for individual titles vary depending on the subject, format and publisher. Students spent on average \$579 or less in 2016/2017 for course materials. To put these costs in context, a year's worth of course materials may cost less than a new iPhone.

Why do textbooks cost around \$66?

It takes around \$500,000 to \$3 million to develop just one textbook or digital learning resource. Upfront development expenses include professional research, peer-reviews, creating compelling graphics, editing and fact checking and securing copyrighted images.

Have textbook prices risen this year?

No. The cost of textbooks has slightly declined according to independent research firm Student Monitor. In 2016-2017 students spent on average of \$66 on a textbook (new, used, rented, or digital), down from \$69 in 2015-2016. In addition, the cost per unit of traditional print textbooks has declined by 13%. Over the past few years learning companies have championed multiple solutions, which are effectively reducing the cost of course materials, including the shift to digital and Inclusive Access programs.

Why have costs declined over time?

The transition to less expensive digital materials, increasing use of rental options for both print and digital materials, and a competitive retail market are among the factors that have led to the cost decrease. Most notable is the transition to digital learning: in the 2016/2017 academic year 52% of students used less expensive digital materials - more than any prior year. Other reasons for declining costs include increased variety of available formats, increased availability of markets to find materials and [Inclusive Access programs](#), which offer substantial discounts on digital course materials.

Is the College Board's estimate of \$1,300 a year for books and supplies accurate?

The College Board's figure for "books and supplies" is often cited incorrectly. The [College Board](#) provides an estimated average that university financial aid offices believe students should budget - not what students actually spend. The College Board figure factors in supplies, which includes expenses for tablets, peripherals (like printers) and lab supplies. Student spending on course materials (new, used, print, digital, or rented) is between \$543 and \$579 annually as reported by the students themselves to [Student Watch](#) and Student Monitor.

According to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), textbook prices are increasing faster than inflation. Is it true?

The consumer price index reflects only the cost of a new hardbound print textbook. The CPI excludes digital learning materials, used textbooks, rented materials and publisher initiatives that make course materials more affordable for students. Since new textbooks are only about 36% of units sold, according to Student Monitor, the CPI is not an accurate reflection of the cost of course materials.

Do course materials make up a large percent of college expenses?

No. When students spend \$579 on course materials, that's just 1-2% of their overall budget at four-year universities. More details on that calculation can be found [here](#).

Do students prefer print or digital?

While students acknowledge that they're more likely to get a better price with digital materials, most still prefer a printed textbook format. Surveys suggest it's because students find print easier to study from (58%), easier to navigate/flip through (46%), and easier to read than a screen (42%).

Students who prefer digital like it because it is easier to carry and more portable (56%), lower priced (45%), and environmentally friendly (36%). Due to these benefits, interactive features that help improve performance, and greater exposure to digital in K-12 classrooms, student preference is slowly shifting towards digital materials.

Will all books be digital eventually?

In the 2016/2017 academic year 52% of students used some type of digital content, which includes interactive features like quizzing, collaboration tools, digital flashcards, and multimedia. While more students than ever were using digital materials we believe that print books will remain an available option for students.

What are Inclusive Access programs?

Inclusive Access Programs (also called Digital Discount, Digital Direct Access or Enterprise Solutions) provide students access to course materials on the first day of class at a discounted price. Students pay for materials when paying tuition and fees and can use loans, grants or scholarships.

What is OER and how is it used in classrooms?

Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching, learning and research materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. The nature of these open materials means that they are released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and anyone can legally copy, use, adapt and re-share them freely without compensating the creator or rights holder. OER can include courseware (e.g. textbooks, tests, tutorials); learning objects (e.g. supplemental and modular learning resources); and multimedia (e.g. audio, video, online animation). Many learning companies, including AAP members, integrate OER content into their commercial platforms and partner with OER producers to create content-rich digital products.

Is OER free for students?

Not necessarily. Students may need to purchase access codes for digital platforms or pay for print copies of digital material. Students may also be paying for OER indirectly through tuition or fees.

OER materials must be developed, formatted, integrated with other systems and regularly revised. The money to do this has to come from somewhere, so OER is typically funded by grants from government or philanthropies, venture capital, tuition or some combination of these.

Why should students pay for textbooks when there is free OER available?

There is a vast amount of free educational content available online. However, the right content may be hard to find or there isn't enough high quality content on a specific subject. Many faculty find there is still a need for professionally researched and vetted materials produced by learning companies. Other times students benefit from the interactive technology platforms, the assessments and the material's alignment with course curriculum and learning objectives. OER may be the right solution for some professors or universities, but this isn't always the case. More information on OER is available [here](#).