

Your Question:

You asked a three-part question. What is the average cost of undergraduate textbooks? In the past five years, what have other states proposed as legislation to reduce or cover the cost of textbooks? What is federal law concerning new edition disclosure?

Our Response:

This response is divided into three sections. The first outlines the various ways textbook costs have been reported. Second, we have provided examples of state legislation to minimize the cost of textbooks. The examples in this section are sorted into three categories: open educational resources, state taxes and textbooks, and textbook adoption periods. The last section outlines federal reporting requirements for new edition disclosure.

Cost of Textbooks

Cost of a Single Textbook

The [National Association of College Stores](#) (NACS) reports that the average cost of a new textbook in 2015-2016 was **\$80**. Some important caveats to this estimate are that this average does not differentiate by degree program, and is based on data gathered in a survey of independent colleges.

Average Student Expenditure

In the 2016-2017 update to their [Student Watch Attitudes & Behaviors Toward Course Materials](#), NCAS found that students spent an average of **\$579 on required course materials** and \$506 on technology and school supplies. Data were weighted to by postsecondary sector and collected at public and independent institutions.

National Averages

Using data from NCES, IPEDS and their Annual Survey of Colleges, [the College Board](#) provides estimates of the cost of books and supplies, disaggregated by postsecondary sector. Annually, students attending public-two year institutions will need to budget **\$1,420** for books and supplies. At public four-year institutions, that estimate decreases slightly to **\$1,250**. The College Board data does not reflect actual student expenditures, but rather estimates provided by postsecondary institutions.

State Level Information

Education Commission of the States has not found many states that have collected data on textbook costs. In 2016, Florida's Office of Distance Learning and Student Services issued an update to their [Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey](#). Using responses from more than 22,000 students, the report found that **more than half of students spent more than \$300 on textbooks in the 2016 spring term**. Almost 18 percent of students spent more than \$500 on textbooks in the 2016 spring term. These data are not disaggregated by postsecondary sector, degree level, or degree program. However, elsewhere in the report, it was found that students attending state colleges (which include two-year community colleges) were more likely to pay more than \$300 for textbooks in the 2016 spring term than their peers attending a university. This echoes the College Board data that estimate the cost of textbooks and supplies at public two-year institutions to be slightly higher than at public four-year institutions.

In the News

Inside Higher Ed recently [published a story](#) detailing how campuses are using "inclusive-access" models to lower textbook costs. "Inclusive-access" models involve publishers pricing textbooks for purchase by entire classes or sections, rather than students individually purchasing textbooks.

Nonprofit Initiatives

Achieving the Dream launched an [Open Educational Resources Degree Initiative](#).

Thirty-eight community colleges are redesigning courses and pathways to implement OER degree programs.

State Legislation

Open Educational Resources

Some state legislation aimed at reducing or covering the cost of college textbooks has focused on [open educational resources](#) (OERs). **OERs are open-access educational materials** – this can include instructional materials, syllabi, tests and textbooks. Beyond what is included below, [this Education Commission of the States report from 2014](#) provides additional examples of OER legislative activity. Perhaps more numerous than state legislation are institutional initiatives, however, such efforts are not covered in this review.

California's [SB 1052](#) and [SB 1053](#) (2012, enacted) established the California Digital Open Source Library and the California Open Education Resources Council. The Council was composed of three faculty members each from the University of California, California State University and the community colleges. The Council was tasked with developing a list of **50 strategically selected lower division courses** for which open source textbooks and other related materials could be developed or acquired, and creating a request for proposals for funds to produce the 50 open source textbooks and related materials.

The College Textbook Affordability Act of 2015 ([CA AB 798](#), enacted) created the Open Educational Resources Adoption Incentive Program. Intended to accelerate adoption of OER, the bill reallocated remaining funds from SB1052/1053 to support faculty professional development around using OER, and secure release time for faculty to modify curriculum.

New Jersey [A 2653](#) (2016, carryover until Dec. 2017) would require four-year public or independent colleges to submit a plan to the Secretary of Higher Education to expand the use of OER textbooks. The bill would require bookstores at four-year public or independent colleges to buyback used textbooks at 50 percent of the purchase price.

Oregon's [HB 2871](#) (2015, enacted) established the Open Educational Resources Grant Program in the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis to public universities, community colleges or consortia of public universities and community colleges. The Commission is required to employ an OER specialist who will collaborate with the universities and community college, and assist faculty members looking to use OERs. Additionally, the Commission must **identify OERS that can be adopted for use for at least 15 courses**. Considerations must be made for courses that have high enrollment, are in general education disciplines, and are transferable among and between community college and universities. The bill also requires that postsecondary institutions identify courses that exclusively use open source textbooks or related materials in course descriptions.

State Taxes and Textbooks

Some states have proposed **changes to state tax laws** as a means of addressing textbook affordability.

Florida ([HB 1317](#), 2015, died), Nebraska ([LB 153](#), 2016, failed) and Ohio, ([HB 337](#), 2017, pending) are among a handful of states that looked to make textbooks exempt from sales tax.

Maryland [HB 1337](#) (2017, failed) would have established two, tax-free periods that roughly coincide with the beginning of fall and spring terms. During this period, the sale of textbooks to students would be tax-exempt, and students would need to produce a student ID upon purchase.

Mississippi [HB 466](#) (2013, died) would have provided an income tax credit for textbooks purchased by the filer or for the filer's dependent.

New Textbook Adoption Periods

Other efforts to address textbook affordability would have established **minimum adoption periods**.

Connecticut SB 931 (2015, failed) would have prohibited a higher education institution or faculty member from requiring students to purchase a new edition of a textbook issued less than three years after the previous edition.

South Carolina S 262 (2017, carryover until May 2018) would require the Commission on Higher Education to establish guidelines by which public higher education institutions adopt textbooks. The bill requires each institution to establish their own guidelines for textbook adoption. There should be a **minimum three-year adoption period** for lower division courses, and a **two-year minimum adoption period** for upper-division courses, with reasonable exceptions allowed. Institutions must provide information on best practices to minimize cost of textbooks, and develop procedures to report on best practices. Reporting assessments must include information from student surveys and information about textbook costs for the twenty courses with highest enrollment.

Federal New Edition Disclosure Requirements

The **Higher Education Opportunity Act** (20 U.S.C.A. § 1015b) requires textbook publishers to provide the following information regarding their textbooks or supplemental materials to institutions receiving Federal financial assistance:

- the copyright dates of the three previous editions of a textbook, if any, and
- a description of substantial content revisions made between the current edition and the previous edition.

In 2013, the U.S. Government Accountability Office issued a **report** on the implementation of college textbook disclosure information requirements. The report did not focus on the copyright date and content revision information disclosure requirements. GAO observed that while greater transparency about college and textbook costs is useful to students, **transparency alone does not make textbooks more affordable**, and that students are more able to manage textbook costs through comparison shopping and being intentional about renting or reselling books.

Outcomes from California and Oregon OER Legislation

California: Major **outcomes** from the Open Education Resources Council's work include:

- 50 courses have 1-5 open source etextbooks available for use
- Each etextbook has about 3 evaluations
- Qualitative and quantitative data were collected to inform the adoption and use of such materials by faculty and students
- Toolkits were developed to support faculty adoption of etextbooks

Oregon: The **2016-2017 final report** estimates that adoption of OERS at 21 Oregon institutions saved 8,370 students \$1,146,788.33. One hundred and forty-three grantees modified 108 courses to use OERS. The final report noted that proposals tended to overestimate savings and underestimate the length of time needed to convert courses, and the largest savings to students were accomplished when all sections of large courses or entire departments adopted OERS together.