Strategies for Affordable Textbooks
A Fact Sheet for Faculty

The first goal in the University of Massachusetts Boston’s strategic plan is to advance student success and development. UMass Boston believes that in order for students to be successful, they need to obtain the necessary textbooks and materials for their courses.

How Faculty Can Help

1. Be cognizant of the cost of textbooks when selecting required materials for courses. Students report negative impacts from the publishing industry's long-standing practices that inflate costs. Publishers release new editions every 3-4 years regardless of changes to the subject, which effectively eliminates the used book market for the previous edition. “Bundling,” or the practice of packaging textbooks with CDs, pass-codes, and other bells and whistles can force students to pay for unwanted items, which often expire or get lost making books impossible to sell back. Custom editions created for the school, although often presented as a cost-saving measure, can have the opposite effect by segregating students from the larger used book market and eliminating off-campus buying options.

2. Set up a variety of sources for your required materials. Make all possible materials available on your course website. Besides purchase from the bookstore, see if the books can be purchased as a Kindle edition. Reserve e-books and e-textbooks generally come with access restrictions; faculty should consult library.reserves@umb.edu or 617-287-5905 for assistance. Please understand that e-books and e-textbooks in Kindle, Overdrive, etc., do not have the same rules as digital copies available to academic libraries.

3. Use Healey Library Reserves to request that textbooks, e-textbooks, and class and supplementary readings be placed on reserve for student use in the library. Faculty can also place personal copies of textbooks, etc., on library reserve. Contact library.reserves@umb.edu or 617-287-5905 for questions or assistance.

4. Consider using free or low-cost digital materials as required readings. Faculty can use campus-authored content and/or library-licensed digital resources instead of commercial textbooks. A new campus pilot is helping faculty identify materials already available in the Library, or in open access, to create low-cost or cost-free course-packs, readings, and textbooks for students.

5. Consider open-access textbooks which are free online and affordable in print. There are over 140 titles available in the University of Minnesota Open Textbook Library. See also: http://www.studentpirgs.org/opentextbooks/catalog , http://guides.library.umass.edu/oer , http://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/ .

6. Join the Campus’s Open Educational Resource Initiative (OER). The Library, IT, and CAPS are working with faculty to assemble alternative textbooks, create course-packs with materials already licensed by Healey Library, or develop new open textbooks for your courses or your department.

If you wish to join the first wave of faculty looking for alternatives to high-cost textbooks, please contact library.reserves@umb.edu

Many students are finding it increasingly difficult to afford their textbooks. A 2013 survey conducted by Student Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) of 2,039 students from more than 150 different university campuses found that 65% of students said that they had decided against buying a textbook because it was too expensive. Of those who had foregone purchasing a textbook, 94% were concerned that doing so would hurt their grade in a course. In addition, nearly half of all students surveyed said that the cost of textbooks impacted how many/which classes they took each semester.
Advise Students on Strategies

As a faculty member, you can help students find a strategy to obtain the materials necessary for your course:

1. **Via rentals through the UMass Boston bookstore or online rental sites.** The campus bookstore rents textbooks for, on average, less than half the new textbook price. Normal highlighting and note-taking are acceptable in the rented textbook. Follett, the company that runs the bookstore, has a large in-store as well as online rental program. Other online rental programs are Chegg.com, BookRenter.com, or CampusBookRentals.com.

2. **Via Price match policy of the campus bookstore.** The bookstore will match the price of a textbook if a student finds it cheaper elsewhere.

3. **Via e-textbooks.** A student who doesn’t mind reading on a computer screen (or a tablet) and doesn’t plan to keep the book may consider checking CourseSmart.com, BarnesandNoble.com, and Kno.com to purchase a digital textbook. Students should be aware of a couple of drawbacks, however. The average cost is 50% of a new book, which isn’t always a good deal compared to used books or renting. E-textbooks typically expire after 180 days, so one should think of them as “digital rentals.”

4. **Via online sources.** Book shopping online offers a greater selection, which usually means lower prices. Let students know if older editions are acceptable for class use. Sometimes one can find "international editions" of the same book printed for other countries at cheaper prices. Students can search the international arms of the websites below (like Amazon.co.uk) or price comparison sites. They should be aware, however, that there might be differences in the text if it has a different ISBN and they may need to get the new book’s page numbers and workbook questions from a friend. Sources to start with:
   - New textbooks: Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com, or AbeBooks.com (carries hard-to-find or rare books).
   - Used textbooks: Half.com (an eBay company), Textbooks.com, Thriftbooks.com, or eCampus.com.
   - Price comparison: CampusBooks.com, BigWords.com, or AllBookstores.com.

5. **Via Financial Aid as part of a financial aid package.** Sometimes students request less financial aid than they need to be successful because they are worried about debt. By visiting the Bursar’s office they can receive advice about how to balance concerns about debt with academic success.

6. **Via excess checks for living expenses.** Any financial aid funds awarded in excess of the student’s university bill for tuition and fees are available to the student from the Bursar’s Office in the form of a check or direct deposit after the student’s class schedule is locked (i.e., after the add/drop deadline, which is typically two weeks after the beginning of the semester) and financial aid has confirmed enrollment.

7. **Via a book card from the Bursar’s office for excess funds.** Students with a credit balance before the start of the semester may request a book card from the Bursar’s Office—generally two to three weeks before the start of the semester. Students must have all financial aid documents submitted and processed by financial aid to receive a book card. A student may request one book card per semester in the amount of $250, $500, or $750 (depending on the student’s credit balance) which can be redeemed in the campus bookstore only. Any balance on the book card can be redeemed for cash during a cash-out period (typically mid-semester). If students want to buy materials elsewhere, book cards may be used to buy American Express gift cards from the campus bookstore, and these cards may be used anywhere, but they are not eligible for the cash-out option.

8. **Via a tax credit.** The American Opportunity Tax Credit is a $2,500 federal tax credit for qualified education expenses paid for by an eligible student for the first four years of higher education. To claim AOTC, students must save their receipts and attach Form 8863 with their Form 1040 or Form 1040A.

---