

TO: Renata K Miller, Dean of the Division of Humanities and the Arts(CCNY)
and Susan Perkins, Dean of Science(CCNY)

FROM: Tahsina Khan, Undergraduate CS student at CCNY

DATE: Saturday 19, 2022

SUBJECT: Reducing Textbooks Costs

For years the City College of New York has attempted to combat one of the greatest barriers to education: economic inequality. The college prides itself on ensuring education to people of all ethnic, racial and economic groups regardless of background. Therefore, it's reasonable to say that a significant portion of CCNY students suffer from financial struggles, which is why overly expensive textbook prices are a common, urgent issue that restricts many students from utilizing their education to the fullest. Tuition is expensive enough and many have complained that having to buy several costly textbooks every semester only adds to the immense financial pressure college bestows. Thus, my peers and I have composed solutions and a summary of the issues present so that we can inform you of the problem and ease students' concerns by reducing textbook expenses.

The Issue at Hand

According to a study by the College Board, undergraduate students in four year schools spent an average of \$1240 on textbooks and supplies in the 2020-2021 academic school year. Keep in mind that it's very common for textbook materials to be paid for out of pocket since they're rarely covered by financial aid. This is very unattainable for low income students especially, who need to pay for their food and housing expenses, and must find other ways to complete their textbook assignments without paying extra money they can't afford.

Some students will comb through the internet and find illegal PDFs or eBooks, but this can also expose them to the risk of scams and viruses. Others will rent textbooks or purchase old, physically worn versions of the book from past students at a lower price. However, sometimes the latest edition of the textbook is required. Evidently, there's a limited amount of options, which eventually leads to students not purchasing a textbook at all. The Public Interest Research Groups did a report in 2014 in which they surveyed college students and determined that "65% of students decided against buying a textbook because it was too expensive". Majority of those students were also very concerned that their grades would be negatively impacted as a result of this.

The Negative Effect on Students' Education

The reason why costly textbooks are such an inconvenience is because it threatens students' overall education. In CCNY, almost every single class, especially in the Arts and Humanities, Science and Math departments, rely on textbooks for the main curriculum of the course. Professors utilize them to the best they can, assigning homework and curating exams that test information found in the chapters. It's almost impossible to get through the semester without them. Thus, grades can plummet if students don't have access to the textbook. This increases the possibility of students failing classes and lowering their GPA. Many students will even limit the amount of classes they take every semester in order to save on textbook costs. As a result, they may not even graduate within a timely manner. Overly expensive textbooks are detrimental to the students' success and largely contribute to the reason why some students are pushed to drop out of school.

Possible Solutions

Here are some potential workarounds that my group members and I have brainstormed with the goal of lowering book expenses and financial pressure for students at CCNY.

- Cut down on textbook required courses. Instead, Zero Textbook Courses can be implemented into major curriculums.
- Using more Open Educational Resources (OER), which are teaching and learning resources that can be freely used in the public domain. These include online services. These resources completely rid students of the textbook cost and allow them to look through course materials whenever they please. Students can even choose to prepare for the class before the semester due to the easy accessibility.
- Reuse and repurpose previous textbooks or online services for multiple courses. This way, even if a textbook is expensive, students are still saving money because it's a one time purchase for a book that will be used time and time again.
- Add more textbooks in the CCNY Libraries that students' can utilize
- Possibly implementing a subscription style service that allows students the option to purchase a yearly subscription for any textbook they need under a specific company.

Chancellor Felix Matos Rodriguez praised CUNY for being a “beacon of access, opportunity and economic mobility for all New Yorkers”, mentioning that in recent years the public university system has been “especially focused on helping students from the lowest income levels join the middle class”. Thus, relieving students of their textbook financial concerns should be one of City College’s most relevant and high priority issues. I believe that you two, as the Dean of the Humanities and Arts and the Dean of Science, can spearhead this discussion with higher ups since these are two departments that rely heavily on textbook usage. If you would like to contact me to speak more about our ideas and how we can make them a reality, you can call me at 929-580-8414 or email me at tkhan015@citymail.cuny.edu.

AUDIENCE PROFILE SHEET

Reader's name: Renata K Miller

Reader's Job Title: Dean of the Division of Humanities and the Arts at CCNY

Kind of Reader: Primary

Education: A.B., Princeton University M.A., Ph.D., Indiana University

Professional Experience:

Job Responsibilities: Teaches courses on Victorian literature and theater, science (in) fiction of the Victorian period, modern appropriations and uses of the Victorian period, literature of the fin de siècle, women writers, sensation and melodrama, and, occasionally, theater history.

Personal Characteristics: Creative, extroverted, good at public speaking

Cultural Characteristics: Nothing to note.

Attitude towards the Writer: Respect, because I understand she is a very skilled and professional woman who looks over an entire college department

Attitude towards the Subject: Interest and concern because I am a student

Expectation about the Subject: Probably knows a bit about it

Expectation about the Document: Of interest.

Reasons for reading the Document: To resolve this issue and address students concerns.

Way of reading the Document: Most likely skimming

Reading Skills: Excellent.

Reader's Physical Environment: Her Office

Reflection Paper

In this paper, I chose Renata K Miller, Dean of the Division of Humanities and the Arts and Susan Perkins, Dean of Science as my audience because most courses in these two departments rely heavily on textbooks for the class curriculums. As a result, I believe the issue of expensive textbooks would be very important for them to consider, and they could refer me to higher ups who can directly address my textbook concerns and cause change. In the memo, I addressed them in the heading and I mentioned their positions in the closing in order to remind them on how they align with the college's mission and goals. I explicitly stated the purpose of my memo in the introduction, mentioning that I would like to inform my audience about the problems arising from expensive textbook materials and hopefully cause traction that will lead to reducing textbook costs. My purpose is reinforced throughout the memo, because I continue to familiarize the audience with the reason why students can't buy textbooks and the way this negatively impacts their educational careers. I explain that students who can't afford textbooks have limited options and many go without buying any textbooks at all. This leads to anxiety over their grade and more hesitation on other academic decisions they need to make, like how many courses they'll take per semester. My stance is also declared clearly. I believe that textbooks are too costly and alternatives need to be provided. My exigence is the start of the Spring 2022 semester, which prompted many professors to require textbooks that are selling for hundreds of dollars and are not easily affordable. This caused apprehension and stress among my peers in the CCNY community, who believe, along with me, that something should be done to lower textbook material costs. Finally, the design of my memo is very organized and split into different paragraphs, separated by bolded headings so that it's easier to read.

This assignment helped me "Formulate and articulate a stance through and in your writing", which is the sixth Course Learning Outcome, by making me choose a position on the issue of expensive textbooks. My position was that expensive textbooks are causing a financial burden on students and we need to find ways to make them more affordable or lessen the use of these textbooks. Before writing this assignment, I would have difficulty being firm with my stance, and I wasn't completely sure on how to effectively support it, or how to convince my audience that my stance was important. However, this paper taught me how to reinforce my position with statistics and logical reasoning, as well as supporting details. I learned how to manage my tone and show the urgency of the issue.