

# Make Textbooks Affordable Campaign

[www.MakeTextbooksMoreAffordable.org](http://www.MakeTextbooksMoreAffordable.org)

A project of the Student PIRGs, Arizona Students Associations, California State Student Association, and other allied student government associations

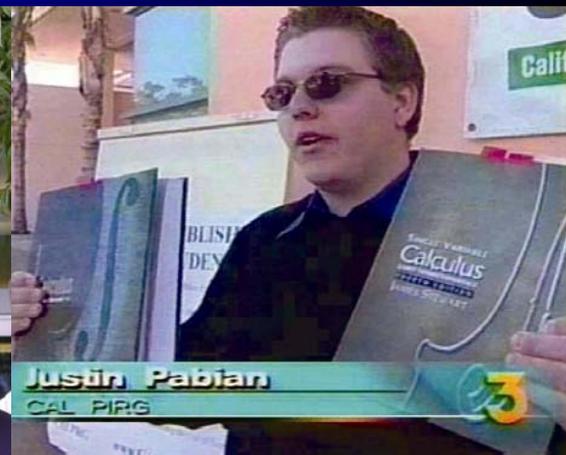
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# Student Led



# Media Attention in Nearly Every State

- LA Times
- Associated Press (ran several times in nearly every state)
- Wall Street Journal
- Chicago Tribune
- USA Today
- Washington Post
- NPR
- Boston Globe
- San Francisco Chronicle
- Seattle Post-Intelligencer
- Boston Herald
- New Jersey Star Ledger
- Chicago Herald
- Associated Press
- Chronicle of Higher Education
- U-Wire
- Lots of local TV, radio, print, campus newspapers.

# Cos Angeles Times

- "... Less demand also could push publishers into lowering prices. Think it can't be done? Though it denies that consumer pressure prompted the change, college publishing giant Thomson Higher Education recently announced plans to produce a U.S. history text (previously retailing at \$90) with fewer photos and illustrations and charge less than one-third its usual wholesale price..." (3/16/04)

# Faculty Advocacy

- 700 math and physics professors from 150 universities issue call to stop issuing unnecessary new editions.
- California State University academic senate (23 campuses) adopts resolution encouraging purchasing standards.
- University of MD campaign to accelerate timeline of book orders.

# The Boston Globe

With letters, professors enter fray over rising textbook prices

“...’I think of teaching as a form of public service,’ said Bradley Ballinger, professor of mathematics at the University of California at Davis. ‘Publishers, I thought, were victimizing students to a large extent, thinking of them as an extension of their parents’ wallets. If you price things so that only parents can afford them, you put them out of reach of students who don’t have wealthy parents.’”

# “Publishers Lunch” Editorial

“One of the big legs of the AAP's case in defending the pricing of higher education textbooks--claiming that purchase decisions rest with professors...took a big whack yesterday....Professors have spoken. Students--or more appropriately--consumers, have spoken...the marketplace has looked at industry efforts and penciled in an “F.” Fact. This tide has turned...” (4/9/05)



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These days, you can end up paying over \$400 a term on new textbooks. That's why we created this site, to help you find the cheap used books you need and sell the books you no longer want. And this site is run by students, for students.

This site is like a bulletin board - we help you find students on your campus who want to sell their used books, and give you a place where you can advertise the books that you want to sell. **Learn more about how our site works.**

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Title	Author	Price
Arguments of Arguing	Hollihan	\$25.00
Whaddaya Say?	Nina Weinstein	\$8.00
Automotive electricity	Hollemeak, Barry	\$75

The Student PIRGs

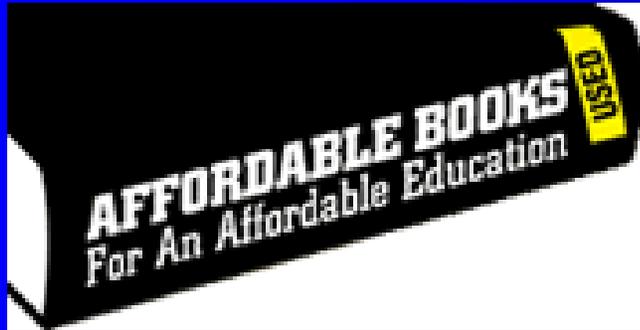
## Spread The Word

Help get more students to post their books on this site. Here's a **poster** you can hang around campus. And **tell your friends** about this site. Have a website? **Link to us from your site.** And **encourage your professors** to advertise this site to their students.

## Make Textbooks Affordable

Want to do even more? Think textbooks are too expensive? Check out our **campaign to get publishers to lower the price of textbooks.**





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Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of the coalition partners of the Affordable Textbooks Campaign, thank you for the opportunity to offer remarks to the Advisory Committee at the April 13, 2007 hearing in Portland, Oregon.

Since I have already outlined our big picture analysis of both the problem and the most viable solutions to the problem in my September 2006 paper to the Advisory Committee, I will limit these remarks to an outline of student-led efforts over the last few years, an analysis of the effectiveness of those efforts, and some further observations about what the future holds.

### **Student efforts**

First, a word about the Affordable Textbooks Campaign. The Campaign is a student-directed campaign started by CALPIRG at the University of California Irvine in 2003, and has broadened over the last few years to include all of the Student PIRG organizations and a number of Student Government Associations, including the California State Student Association and the Arizona Students' Association.

The Affordable Textbooks Campaign is by nature, a decentralized project. Students on different campuses and different states have chosen to take a variety of approaches to solving the problem, many of which you have heard about in previous hearings and will hear more about at the Oregon hearing. However, most of these activities are tied together by a few key points of analysis, which are outlined in more detail in my September 2006 written testimony to the Committee:

- Although students are the primary constituency adversely affected by excessive textbook costs, the unique nature of the market renders publishers with a disproportionately large share of market power to affect price, renders faculty with virtually no incentive to use their market power to affect price, and renders students with almost no market power whatsoever. These dynamics include industry consolidation and the fact that the person that orders textbooks (faculty) is not the same person who purchases textbooks (student).
- Because of the publishing industry's First Amendment rights, and because of the importance of preserving the academic freedom to choose classroom content, solutions that involve content regulation and price controls are not viable options. Therefore, the ideal solutions are market-oriented.

These key analysis points have led the Affordable Textbooks Campaign to engage in the following activities:

- Research. When we began working on the project, there was virtually no data to explain how much of a problem textbook prices were, what their root causes were, and what kinds of solutions were viable. To address that, we conducted a series of investigations that, to date, have resulted in six reports (found at <http://www.maketextbooksaffordable.com/newsroom.asp?id2=14221>), all of which have been covered widely in local, state and national media. Research continues to be the foundation of our campaign; our most recent report, released last month, exposed the degree to which publishers withhold pricing information from faculty.
- Faculty education and advocacy. We've engaged in a number of collaborations with faculty members at the campus, state and national level to help raise the profile of the issue to faculty members. Nationally, we helped 700 mathematics and physics professors organize a joint call to action for Thomson Learning to stop producing unnecessary new

- editions of introductory calculus and physics textbooks (<http://www.maketextbooksaffordable.com/textbooks.asp?id2=14222>). At the state and campus level, students are working with faculty senates to adopt voluntary textbook purchasing guidelines – see the California State University Academic Senate’s 2006 resolution at <http://www.maketextbooksaffordable.com/newsroom.asp?id2=24713>.
- Promoting alternatives to the traditional market. On many campuses, students have been actively promoting non-profit bookswaps that help provide other channels to keep used textbooks on the market – such as [www.CampusBookSwap.com](http://www.CampusBookSwap.com). We have also attempted to act as a clearinghouse for students and others who are interested in rental programs, recently hosting a conference call for over 40 student leaders and administrators on the topic.
  - Legislation. Although we generally think there is only a limited role that legislation can play in addressing the problem, there has been high demand from legislators and student leaders alike for legislative solutions. Therefore, we crafted model legislation (<http://www.maketextbooksaffordable.com/actioncenter.asp?id2=18570>), which has been used in a number of states and in Congress. Central to our model legislation is a requirement for publishers to disclose all of their products and prices in writing to all faculty at the time of any sales interaction. We believe this measure – already passed in CT and pending in at least CA, IL, MD, MA, TX and Congress – helps inject price back into the sales conversation between faculty and publishers and subsequently becomes a useful tool (although not a silver bullet) to help shift some of the worst market dynamics in play. Other forms of legislation have passed in at least WA and VA. Students have been instrumental in nearly every instance in the introduction and passage of textbooks legislation.

I believe the primary effect of these efforts has been to shed light on the problem itself, create a roadmap for solutions, and bring the issue to a wider audience of policymakers and academics. I also believe that these efforts are sparking campus-level conversations, and in many cases, action. For example, the newly launched rental program at the San Mateo Community College District (CA) came about in part because of statewide legislation that students helped craft and pass. The successful faculty-organized program at the University of Maryland-College Park to prompt faculty members to submit book orders earlier (and hence, give students and the bookstore more time to find used copies) came about as a result of a student outreach campaign to faculty. There is good reason to believe that the intense public scrutiny about the problem has helped encourage many publishers to offer their new (albeit flawed) lower-cost options<sup>i</sup> and played a role in the plateau in the rate of price increases as reported recently by the Wall Street Journal.<sup>ii</sup>

That said, student-led efforts can only be one piece of the puzzle. My September 2006 testimony to the Committee outlines the other key elements of an integrated plan to lower textbooks costs, so I won’t detail all of them again here. However, I will reiterate that academic associations, colleges and the state have the capacity to employ any number of the particular tactics mentioned earlier, and doing so would likely create results at a scale far beyond what students alone can create. Moreover, there are approaches that other market players are more suited to employ. For example, a true investment in new models for publishing and content distribution - such as rental programs, the Rice University Press creative commons program, the work of numerous individual authors featured at [www.textbookrevolution.org](http://www.textbookrevolution.org), or the ideas promoted by Fred Beshears at UC Berkeley - are another important element to shifting the market. A combination of academic

institution brainpower, and private and state funding are the key elements needed to bring these models to a market-inducing scale.

### **Student Response to Technology**

I have also been asked to detail how I see students responding to new forms of technology that deliver instructional content in such a way as to reduce textbook costs. In particular, I've been asked to comment on whether or not students seem to have a preference between traditional textbooks and online material if expense is not an issue.

We have not conducted any research on this particular topic, so my remarks are limited to personal observation. The students and faculty who I've spoken to about this topic appear to be split over the viability of online textbooks as opposed to traditional textbooks. Some actually find online-only content preferable to printed content; others are absolutely uncomfortable with online-only content; and others are uncomfortable with online-only content but believe that over time, students will become more comfortable with it. It is unclear what the actual trend is and what it will be.

Given that the jury is still out on the viability of online-only textbooks, we have taken the position that true low-cost alternatives to traditional textbooks *must always* include a printed version (produced in a lower cost format) in addition to an online only version in order to truly serve its purpose as a viable low-cost book.

This is a major gap in the offerings of publishers. We conducted a study in Fall 2006 (<http://www.maketextbooksaffordable.com/newsroom.asp?id2=26063>) that randomly reviewed the online catalogues of each of the major publishers. Only half of the textbooks (11) surveyed had a comparable lower-cost book. Only two of the lower-cost books (18%) were available in a low frills paper version; eight of the lower cost books (73%) were available only in an online format. The majority of lower-cost options offered by the major publishers are online textbooks. Only one of the lower cost books was available in both a low frills paper and online version.

It is likely that the greatest opportunities to lower textbook costs are not with restricted access, traditionally licensed websites currently offered by most traditional publishers. Instead, I believe the greatest breakthroughs could be in high-quality, peer-reviewed textbooks with a Creative Commons license that make the textbooks widely available online (and easily downloadable into print formats) at much lower prices and with virtually no restrictions on access, distribution and re-distribution. Bringing production of this kind of textbook to scale could have a greater impact on the market, with no greater technology required than the existing Internet infrastructure, a computer equipped with Adobe Acrobat (or comparable software), a printer, and a copy machine.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present our ideas to this committee. I can be reached via phone at 503-231-4181 x311 or via email at [daver@pirg.org](mailto:daver@pirg.org).

Sincerely,

David Rosenfeld  
National Program Director  
The Student Public Interest Research Groups (Student PIRGs)

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<sup>i</sup> Los Angeles Times editorial, *Students Find Ways to Fight High Cost of Textbooks*, March 31, 2004.

<sup>ii</sup> Wall Street Journal, *Costly Textbooks Draw Scrutiny of Lawmakers*, April 26, 2006.