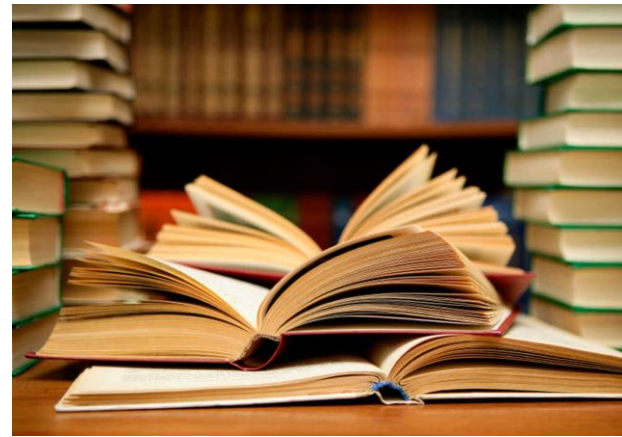
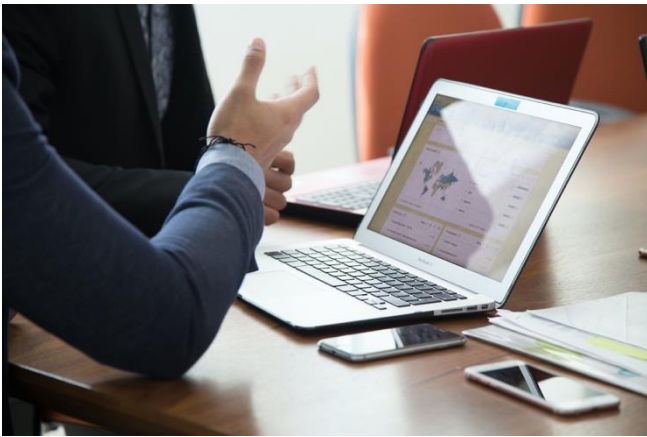


# Evaluation of Oregon Textbook Affordability Policies

*Photos courtesy of HECC, Oregon Forests Research Institute, and NPR*



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Final Report

Prepared for  
Higher Education Coordinating Commission  
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School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management



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## About the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement



**School of Planning, Public  
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Research and Engagement**

The Institute for Policy Research & Engagement (IPRE) is a research center affiliated with the School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management at the University of Oregon. It is an interdisciplinary organization that assists Oregon communities by providing planning and technical assistance to help solve local issues and improve the quality of life for Oregon residents. The role of IPRE is to link the skills, expertise, and innovation of higher education with the transportation, economic development, and environmental needs of communities and regions in the State of Oregon, thereby providing service to Oregon and learning opportunities to the students involved.

# Executive Summary

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From 2015 – 2021, the Oregon Legislature passed three bills to advance textbook affordability in higher education.

- **HB 2871 (2015)** requires Oregon’s public universities and community colleges to prominently label courses that use no cost or low cost course materials in the course schedule.
- **HB 2213 (2019)** requires each public institution to establish a textbook affordability plan.
- **HB 2919 (2021)** requires the on time adoption and displaying of course materials for at least 75 percent of for credit courses before registration opens.

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission contracted with the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement at the University of Oregon to conduct an implementation evaluation of these textbook affordability bills. Through a student survey, a review of course schedule, a review of textbook affordability plans, two focus groups and interviews with various stakeholders, we provide a picture of how Oregon public universities and community colleges are implementing the bills, as well as how students are experiencing the effects of it, and provide a set of recommendations for advancing textbook affordability in Oregon.

## Cost Designations

This section summarizes the status and challenges of implementing HB 2871 (2015) and HB 2919 (2021). We drew our findings from the student survey, our course schedule review, and the focus groups.

### Displaying cost designations

Based on our survey of 479 students from 17 public community colleges and universities, eight years since HB 2871 (2015) was first enacted, 61% of students do not know where to find information about courses with no-cost and low-cost materials. Additionally, our student survey showed that 88% of students do not understand what “low-cost” means. While institutions set the low-cost threshold at \$40 or \$50, students indicate a median desired low-cost threshold of

\$30 or less per course. Based on our review of course schedules, we provide a checklist for effectively displaying course designations to students.

## EFFECTIVELY DISPLAYING DESIGNATIONS

- ✓ **Clearly define “No cost” and “Low cost”:** Provide definitions on the course listing website.
- ✓ **Use a clear indicator:** Use short, straightforward phrases rather than symbols or codes.
- ✓ **Display designations wherever possible:** On the search result page and on the course detail page.
- ✓ **Allow filter by cost:** Use separate filters for no cost and low cost.
- ✓ **Provide detailed cost information:** Give the textbook title and specific cost amount.

## Challenges in implementation

All universities and community colleges encountered challenges collecting cost information from faculty and displaying it on-time due to:

- Lack of faculty awareness of state policies
- Lack of accountability in reporting course materials
- Labor and hiring practices not aligned with reporting timeline
- Reporting being manual and time-intensive

## Textbook Affordability Plans

This section summarizes our findings from reviewing institutions’ textbook affordability plans, as well as successes and challenges in creating and implementing these plans that institution representatives shared in our interviews and focus groups.

### Textbook Affordability Plan Review

There are common key themes from textbook affordability plans that spread across institutions, no matter their size or location. Two most important themes are:

- First, institutions have created measurable goals for increasing textbook affordability on their campuses but face barriers when it comes to collecting and analyzing data to measure progress.
- Second, though institutions are creating resources to help instructors in their transition to no-cost and low-cost materials, the buy-in from instructors often varies as there is no legal requirement to use affordable materials.

# Textbook Affordability Plan Creation

Institutions took a variety of approaches to develop their textbook affordability plans. Some plans are being implemented; some are “sitting on the shelf”<sup>1</sup>. Our focus groups discussed critical elements that contributed to the meaningful development and implementation of their plan.

<b>Buy in from administration, faculty, and stakeholders</b>	<b>Transparency and student engagement</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Active Involvement of faculty and stakeholders is crucial in the planning process for textbook affordability initiatives</li><li>• Active engagement of the administration in the task force, effective communication facilitation, and widespread plan sharing are essential</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Institutions should communicate student involvement in the development of textbook affordability plans and express their level of commitment to consulting with students in future initiatives</li></ul>
<b>Reevaluate Textbook affordability plan bill requirement</b>	<b>A sustainable approach to textbook affordability plan development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The requirement in the bill concerning mitigating on-campus bookstore revenue can be revisited to ensure it aligns with textbook affordability advancement</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Institutions should adopt a sustainable approach to the drafting, reviewing, and finalizing of textbook affordability plans by for example, establishing a subgroup</li></ul>

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<sup>1</sup> Focus group participant

# Recommendations

The passing of the three textbook affordability bills introduced preliminary steps institutions can take to make education more accessible for their students. However, many institutions are struggling to fully comply or leverage these state requirements to advance textbook affordability.

In this section, we provide a set of recommendations for the HECC and institutions to improve the implementation of Oregon’s textbook affordability bills. Our recommendations cover two domains:

- Process recommendations: Suggestions for improving the process of creating goals, implementing strategies, and tracking progresses to advance textbook affordability; and
- Strategy recommendations: Specific strategies to increase the availability and visibility of affordable course offerings.

RECOMMENDATION	PROCESS	STRATEGY
<b>State-level recommendations for Open Oregon and the HECC</b>		
Target communication at institutional leaders to increase institutional commitment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Facilitate cross-institution sharing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Among staff and implementors</li> <li>• Among institution leaders</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Streamline and centralize guidelines for adopting no-cost and low-cost materials		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Appropriate more funding to expand the quantity and improve the quality of OER materials		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Institution-level recommendations for institutions’ textbook affordability taskforces</b>		
Engage students in the creation of textbook affordability goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate student perspectives on affordability.</li> <li>• Design systems that work for students</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Engage faculty in the creation of textbook affordability strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand faculty’s challenges</li> <li>• Involve them in forming textbook affordability strategies</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Improve progress tracking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop trackable goals given institution’s access to data</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

<p>Establish accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign responsibility to specific person or department</li> <li>• Introduce carrots and/or sticks</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Communicate and support faculty to adopt affordable course materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve faculty awareness and build relationships.</li> <li>• Provide support for adopting existing and creating new no-cost and low-cost materials</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Develop a comprehensive plan for communicating with students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve student awareness through multi-channel communication, paying attention to low-income and students of color</li> <li>• Improve system's accessibility.</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>