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Task Force on Textbook Affordability Final Report

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Task Force on Textbook Affordability
Final Report

February 22, 2020

CONTENTS

Table of Contents	2
Executive Summary	3
Introduction.....	4
Activities & Related Findings	5
Textbook Affordability Task Force	5
Environmental scan	6
Student textbook survey	6
Faculty listening tour	8
Campus infrastructure (Financial aid, Student Support Services)	9
Summary of Task Force Findings.....	10
Course Material Adoptions Reported to the W&M Bookstore	10
Barnes & Noble First-Day Complete	11
Evaluation of Other University Inclusive Access Programs	11
Task Force Recommendations	11
Appendices	
A. Charge to the Textbook Affordability Taskforce	17
B. W&M Student Textbook Survey Executive Summary	18
C. W&M Faculty Listening Tour Summary	21
D. Summary from Federal Student Aid Handbook, Provisions for Books and Supplies	26

Executive Summary

Costs of textbooks and course materials for undergraduates are estimated nationally at up to \$1200 per student per year. With that estimate, the aggregate costs for William & Mary's 6250 undergraduates may approach \$7.5 million per year; graduate students may add \$1-2 million to that total. Course books and materials increase costs of college attendance, and for some students are barriers to success. The Textbook Affordability Taskforce (TATF) composed of W&M faculty, staff, and students was formed in August 2019. The TATF was charged with examining the issue of textbook affordability and with developing and delivering near-term and long-term recommendations for making textbooks more affordable for W&M students (Appendix A: Taskforce members and charge). The TATF broadened the charge to address costs of textbooks and other course materials.

W&M students report that textbook costs can be a barrier to success. In the fall 2019 Student Textbook Survey, more than a third of respondents reported they had not purchased a required textbook because of the cost (Appendix B: Student Textbook Survey Report). Further, 12% reported not registering for a course because of textbook costs, 8% had dropped a course, and 3% had taken fewer courses because of textbook costs. 6.6% of students reported earning a poor grade because of inability to afford course materials. TATF discussions with students were consistent with the survey results. In focus groups, multiple students reported that some instructors seemed unaware that 'required' textbooks or materials could be unnecessary for mastering course content and gaining high grades.

The TATF reviewed policies and reports from governmental bodies and institutions of higher education for potential strategies to address costs. Five broad strategies employed to manage costs are the following: paid access to specific materials at reduced costs from for-profit publishers or bookstores, increasing the development and adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER: freely accessible, openly licensed textbooks and course materials), reducing use of textbooks, offering targeted financial support for course materials to students, and supporting efforts by students to obtain low-cost books and materials.

No support was found from instructors, staff, or students for proposals from for-profit publishers or bookstores to offer materials at lower cost or managed costs. In the plans reviewed, including a proposal from Barnes and Noble for "First-Day Complete" access to all textbooks at a fixed cost for all students, none were considered likely to control costs effectively. The other four strategies offered concrete actions that would help W&M students reduce costs. For example, limited resources supporting OER in the past three years have already provided savings to W&M students estimated at \$255,000.

Recommendations:

1. Increase compliance with deadlines for reporting textbook adoptions to the bookstore.
2. Standardize a means for students to report to instructors their usage of required materials.
3. Promote cultural change at W&M by raising faculty awareness of the repercussions of high course materials costs and outreach to faculty on strategies to reduce student costs, including use of OER.
4. Provide additional support for OER from STLI and W&M Libraries.
5. Offer funding for instructors to use and/or produce and share OER books and course materials.
6. Offer financial support for course materials to students most vulnerable to adverse outcomes.
7. Offer support for web-based and physical locations for used textbook exchanges.

Implementation:

1. Educate instructors about the importance of adoption deadlines, the importance of data collection on the value of course materials to students, and the benefits of OER, text-free courses, or older editions.
2. Increase funding and staff support for applications of OER.
3. Provide resources for a textbook exchange and additional financial support for vulnerable students.

Introduction

Costs of textbooks and course materials for undergraduates are estimated nationally at up to \$1200 per year. With that estimate, the aggregate costs for William & Mary's 6250 undergraduates may approach \$7.5 million per year. William & Mary's 2,500 graduate students likely add \$1-2 million to this total. Because costs can be barriers to student success, colleges and universities nationally are increasing efforts to contain or reduce course material costs. As an example of potential savings, even 10% of courses adopting open educational resources (OER) could reduce student costs by \$750,000 per year. In this report, we discuss issues related to textbook and course material affordability, consider where resources might best be spent to maximize cost savings to students, and recommend actions by the university.

The effort to understand course material costs at W&M is closely aligned with a larger conversation on how costs impact student success. National studies have indicated that as many as 1 in 5 students have failed a course due to textbook costs. To help students better plan and predict costs, the *Higher Education Opportunity Act* required institutions of higher education to make available to students lists of textbooks adopted for their courses in advance of course registration. The *Higher Education Opportunity Act* was amended in 2008 to make several provisions for helping with textbook affordability, including the need for higher education institutions receiving federal aid to publish the required textbooks within academic course schedules.

More recently, Virginia state legislation has addressed the cost of course materials. In spring 2019, legislation (HB 2380) was passed requiring the registrar or another appropriate employee of each public institution of higher education to *identify conspicuously (i) in the online course catalogue or registration system or (ii) as soon as practicable after the necessary information becomes available each course for which the instructor exclusively uses no-cost course materials or low-cost course materials*. Earlier, as part of HB 454, adopted on April 4, 2018, new legislation *required the governing board of each public institution of higher education to implement policies, procedures, and guidelines that encourage the adoption and use of low-cost and no-cost open educational resources in courses offered at such institution*. This includes posting a list of all textbook adoptions in a central place and delivery of course book adoptions to the campus bookstores with sufficient lead time to ensure availability.

At W&M, it was realized that not only had there been insufficient focus across campus on course materials affordability, but there was also little summarized information on this topic at the university. Toward that end, several activities took place beginning in late 2018 with a goal of understanding course materials affordability at W&M. These included development and distribution of a student survey on course materials (Winter 2018-Fall 2019) and formation of a cross-campus Textbook Affordability Task Force (TATF: Summer/ 2019-Spring 2020) composed of faculty, staff, and students.

The W&M Bookstore, run by *Barnes & Noble College*, has supported textbook affordability by sourcing used, rental and digital materials in addition to new materials when timely textbook adoptions are received. They have offered a limited, in-store price match program for students purchasing textbooks. Adopted course materials are available online in compliance with state and federal regulations through: <https://wm.bncollege.com/shop/wm/page/find-textbooks>

W&M Libraries have supported OER by designating a staff member responsible for promoting and providing education on use of OER resources and offering Open Textbook Network (OTN)/OER workshops for faculty through VIVA (the Virtual Library of Virginia). Since the VIVA program's implementation three years ago on the W&M campus, these workshops have contributed to multiple OER adoptions with a savings to W&M students of over \$255,000.

Instructors have attempted to reduce textbook and course material costs in individual efforts including adopting older editions of textbooks, eliminating a textbook through supplemental handouts containing fair-use course materials, using an optional textbook, placing personal copies of textbooks on course reserve at W&M Libraries, gaining alternative funding to help cover laboratory materials costs, finding OER, and/or producing their own course materials for use by students. Over the past few years, increased support for instructors became available through the W&M Libraries OER workshops along with services now consolidated or coordinated by the Studio for Teaching and Learning Innovation (STLI).

To address the need for information at William & Mary and support use of OER, the following activities were implemented in 2019 by the TATF in conjunction with W&M Libraries:

- Participation in distribution of a student survey on course materials
- Development and conduction of a textbook listening tour with faculty and discussions with students
- Performing an environmental scan of textbook affordability efforts at other institutions

Activities/Accomplishments

Textbook Affordability Task Force

The Textbook Affordability Task Force was charged with developing and delivering recommendations in February 2020 to the Provost on solutions to making textbooks more affordable for W&M students.

Committee members were:

- Marian Taliaferro (W&M Libraries, **TATF Co-Chair** and Staff Sub-committee Co-Chair)
- Paul Heideman (Biology faculty, **TATF Co-Chair** and Faculty Sub-committee Chair)
- Jessica Hall (Library Ambassadors, **TATF Co-Chair** and Student Sub-committee Chair)
- Asia R. Randolph (W&M Libraries, Staff Subcommittee Co-chair)
- Adam Barger (Studio for Teaching & Learning Innovation)
- Joe Dobrota (Director of Financial Aid)
- Nancy Everson (Division of Student Affairs- Academic Enrichment)
- Lauren Garrett (Division of Student Affairs -First Year Experience)
- Cindy Glavas (Auxiliary Services)
- Lesley Henderson (Division of Student Affairs -Student Accessibility Services]
- Robert Metaxatos (Student)
- Shené Owens (Center for Student Diversity)
- Peter Savelyev (Economics faculty)

The task force met monthly through fall 2019. For the purpose of more detailed discussion, TATF members self-assigned to one or more of three sub-committees based on stakeholder group: student, faculty or staff. The chairs of each sub-committee reported out on the discussions and activities within their groups at the full task force meetings. Each of the sub-committees sought to learn more about and discussed options for addressing textbook affordability in ways that were most relevant and/or attainable within the scope of their groups. For example, the faculty sub-committee discussed the possibility of endorsing a formal textbook adoption policy.

The sub-committee objectives composition and members were as follows:

Faculty sub-committee [TATF members AB, JH, PH, PS, and MT with additional members: Judi Harris (School of Education), Lori Jacobson (Interim Director, Writing Center), Jordan Walk (Chemistry), Shannon White (Center for Geospatial Analysis)]

1. Gather information from instructors on course material adoption choices.
2. Gather information from instructors on awareness and of OER and barriers to adoption of OER.
3. Identify outreach strategies that could support adoption of OER by instructors.
4. Evaluate the Barnes and Noble bookstore “First-Day Complete” for potential adoption by W&M. (In the *First-Day Complete* proposal, all students would pay a set fee in exchange for receipt of all textbooks on the first class day for potential adoption by W&M; the fee would be set at approximately the average retail price of textbooks for students at W&M.) Also review related textbook industry models for ‘inclusive access’ to course materials, through, for example rental and electronic access offered at reduced rates in exchange for course adoptions limited to e-format texts.
5. Review data from the student textbook survey (below) to understand the scope of the issue for W&M students, and consider findings from the survey to publicize to raise awareness.
6. Consider approaches for cultural change to support reductions in student costs while maintaining course quality. These include education and outreach to instructors, staff, and students that provide effective strategies to reduce costs of course materials.
7. Develop specific recommendations for W&M to reduce the burden of costs for course materials.

Staff sub-committee: [TATF members AR, JD, NE, CG]

1. Perform outreach on textbook affordability and discuss it with campus community
2. Research and prepare background on Banner and textbook integration
3. Research and prepare background on student support services
4. Research and prepare background on library textbook affordability services
5. Evaluate the Barnes & Noble “First-Day Complete” for potential adoption by W&M.
6. Evaluate the availability of financial aid prior to the start of classes for students to use for course materials purchases

Student sub-committee: [TATF members JH, LG, LH, RM, and SO with additional members: Jessica Burns (graduate student) and Coyote Farrell and Mary Olivia Rentner (undergraduate students)]

1. Gather information from students on course material purchasing decisions.
2. Review data from the student textbook survey (below) to understand the scope of the issue for W&M students, and consider findings from the survey to publicize to raise awareness.
3. Evaluate the Barnes & Noble “First-Day Complete” for potential adoption by W&M.
4. Develop specific recommendations for W&M to reduce the burden of costs for course materials.

Environmental scan

Early in the textbook affordability effort, TATF performed an initial search for models to tackle this issue used at other higher education institutions. George Mason University, Brown University, Smith College, and Wake Forest University were identified as example institutions. The scan found that W&M has been similar to these peers through in having focus on education about OER and promotion of OER, exposure to the Open Textbook Network, and educating faculty about the potential repercussions of adopting costly course materials. George Mason University served as a key example in the development of the TATF, and much of their work became known to committee members and served as a guide.

Student textbook survey

The student textbook survey was an outcome of the textbook affordability discussions in 2018-19 with administrators and staff. W&M Libraries had been offering Open Textbook Network (OTN) workshops sponsored by the Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA) with the goal of increasing awareness and use of OER. Staff involved in these efforts helped lead a cross-campus discussion that identified a need to understand the impact of textbook costs on W&M students. National estimates of textbook costs are reported to be around \$600 per semester, but W&M lacked data on costs for our students. The objective of the survey was to understand the textbook spending practices of W&M students to provide campus

administrators with information useful for programs designed to increase course materials affordability. Specifically, they were to:

- Provide an estimate of current costs of textbooks for W&M students.
- Understand methods W&M students take to lower textbook costs.
- Understand the viability of implementing an inclusive access pilot
- Identify student suggestions for reducing textbook costs

On September 23, 2019, the student textbook survey was distributed and remained open for one month. It was advertised in multiple ways, including via the W&M Student Assembly, various campus newsletters, W&M faculty and electronic signboards and social media accounts. Of 596 total survey respondents, 462 completed the full questionnaire, approximately 5% of W&M undergraduate and graduate students. [See Appendix B for the survey executive summary. The full report is available elsewhere.]

Major findings from the student textbook survey were as follows:

- Textbook Costs: Full cost of textbooks at W&M may be lower than the \$600/semester reported national average, with the median for W&M undergraduate participants in the range of \$300-400 for textbooks with, for most undergraduates, < \$100 in additional course material costs. Based upon the survey, the TATF estimates that the median for textbooks and materials for W&M undergraduates may be in the range of \$400-500/semester. The mean cost may be \$500-600/semester due to atypically high costs for a small number of students. For students in the graduate and professional programs, the median costs were similar, but mean costs were higher because of particularly high costs of textbooks in some schools.
- Spending: Overall, most students are finding ways to avoid paying the full cost of textbooks. Twenty-six percent of respondents indicated that their required textbooks cost more than \$400 for the fall 2019 semester, whereas only 13% actually spent that much. A substantial minority are not purchasing all of the textbooks required for their classes. A majority (56%) indicated that in the past year, they “always” (80% of the time or more) purchased the required textbooks assigned, but a surprising 39.2% of students indicated that they purchased required materials less than 80% of the time.
- Financial aid: Of those indicating that they received financial aid, only 8.7% said that financial aid covered all of their textbook and course materials costs. Nearly 35% said that financial aid did not cover any of their textbook and course materials costs.
- Repercussions of high textbook costs: Students behaved in a variety of ways to deal with high textbook and course materials costs. More than a third (37.1 %) indicated that in their academic career, at some time(s) they did not purchase a required textbook due to the cost. A surprisingly high proportion of student respondents (11.7%) indicated that they had not registered for a specific course(s) due to textbook costs. Further, due to textbook costs, 7.8% had dropped a course, 6.6% had earned a poor grade and 3.4% of students indicated that they had taken fewer courses.
- Strategies students take to deal with costs: W&M students reported that in the past year, only 55.4% “always” (more than 80% of the time or more) purchased the required textbooks and course materials; 44.6% reduced costs by not purchasing required textbooks and other course materials in 20% or more of their courses. As strategies for reducing costs of textbooks they purchased, students’ most commonly reported cost reduction strategy (20.3%) was purchasing their textbooks from a source other than the campus bookstore. This was followed by purchasing used copies (12.8%), downloading

books from the Internet (12.9%) and renting printed textbooks (12.5%).

- **Print preference:** Repeatedly, W&M students indicated a strong preference for print format. When asked, 78.4% of students taking the survey said that they prefer a “physical hard copy” when accessing required textbooks. This trend was less pronounced for optional textbooks (48.3%). Undergraduates stated that 82% would be willing to rent whereas only 47% of graduate or professional students would be willing to rent. Half of undergraduates stated that if a rental program saved them money, they had no preference between print and digital formats. In contrast, graduate students who were open to a rental program were strongly in favor of print format.
- **Student suggestions for reducing textbook costs:** Students offered suggestions for ways to bring down textbook costs. The top 5 categories of suggestions reported were (in order from most to least mentioned):
 - Faculty reconsideration of “required” content (Distinguish between “essential” vs “useful”)
 - More use of Open Educational Resources (OER)
 - Faculty acceptance of use of older textbook editions
 - Availability of more inexpensive options at the campus bookstore
 - Use of library services (course reserves and general circulating collection, interlibrary loan)

Faculty listening tour

The “listening tour” at W&M offered instructors a forum to inform library staff of their views on and approaches to course materials adoption. Topics discussed included how faculty/instructors structure their courses, how they communicate adoptions, their thoughts on their current course materials and awareness of Open Educational Resources (OER), including where to find OER and any perceived barriers to their adoption.

In total, 18 instructors met with members of the TATF as part of the listening tour, and additional instructors met one-on-one with team members. Participants were predominantly from Arts & Sciences, with two instructors from the School of Education. The Mason School of Business, Virginia Institute of Marine Science and the law school were not represented. Sessions had been promoted repeatedly through the daily *W&M Digest* email. Major takeaways from the listening tour, separated into broad categories were as follows:

Concerns and Awareness

- **Instructors were very concerned about textbook costs for their students** while generally satisfied with their course materials.
- Those using OER were content with their quality.
- Instructors were able to identify OER as “free online textbooks”
- Some were aware of licensing to share OER
- Instructors generally did not know where to find OER and other low-cost materials.
- Attendees were not aware of the VIVA grants to fund adoption, adaptation or authoring of OER.

Decisions

- **Instructors selected course materials individually**, as opposed to collective decisions by all instructors for a particular course, or selection by a committee for a series of courses.

Actions

- **Attendees were not gathering feedback on their course materials.** None reported any formal or informal survey of students to identify how effectively course materials were being used. Few could report any information on student satisfaction with course materials. None had information on whether students felt the amount they actually used their textbooks justified the cost.
- Attendees reported that textbooks were used more commonly for introductory-level courses than advanced courses.
- Attendee responses to commercial textbook packages were varied. Some ranked commercial packages as extremely valuable and of high quality, while others were rated overpriced.
- Attendees typically did not put books or other print course materials on reserve. Many did use e-reserves.

Barriers

- **By far the greatest barrier to incorporating OER was the time to find OER and to redesign courses** around low-cost materials.
- Lack of suitable OER for the level of course or as a high quality text was a common barrier.
- Lack of incentives to find or create OER was a common comment.
- Attendees did not perceive high interest or demand for OER from students, colleagues, or administrators.
- Academic cultural factors were barriers mentioned for adoption of reduced-cost course materials. For example, attendees reported that when introductory-level courses are taught by non-tenured faculty, the instructors may be unaware of OER and reluctant to risk choosing a non-standard text.

Suggestions

- **Improving bookstore-campus community communications** was a common suggestion. Instructors reported believing they had submitted textbook information and much later discovering it had not been accepted by the portal, and they had received neither a confirmation nor a report of missing information. Instructors were frustrated by student reports of problems with the campus bookstore. Instructors were unsure where and why problems arose, and unsure how to follow up.
- The Barnes & Noble *First-Day Complete* proposal was opposed by all attendees (see below).
- The Studio for Teaching & Learning Innovation (STLI) was proposed as means to improve course materials affordability in connection with W&M Libraries.

[See Appendix C for more faculty listening tour documentation.]

Campus Infrastructure

Financial Aid for Course Materials

Textbook costs are covered explicitly only for fewer than 10% of students, those receiving aid for full cost of attendance (e.g., scholarships based on financial need, athletics, or merit). These can involve a financial aid refund for textbooks and other materials. However, for most students, financial aid is estimated by financial resources in relation to cost of attendance, with no special assignment of financial aid to textbooks and other course materials.

Recent and ongoing meetings on changes to financial aid have involved the Bursar's Office, Auxiliary Services, First Year Experience, and Financial Aid. These are exploring, among other topics, an opportunity to add an anticipated financial aid refund for textbooks and supplies to a student's W&M Express account on their Tribe Card prior to the start of classes rather than waiting on a refund processed

after financial aid is dispersed on the first day of classes. Adding an anticipated refund to a student's W&M Express account is currently an opt-in process, but W&M may be in better compliance with federal regulations and better address textbook affordability by moving to an opt-out process. [See Appendix D: Summary from the Federal Student Aid (FSA) Handbook, Provisions for Books and Supplies]

Student Support Services

The need for greater understanding of services available to William & Mary students prompted interviews by members of the task force staff sub-committee with Academic Enrichment (AE) and Student Accessibility Services (SAS) leadership. AE and SAS play a critical role in assisting student with a variety of academic needs. SAS is uniquely positioned to ensure students with ADA accommodations receive the proper supports to assist in their learning. AE, on the other hand, is tasked with ensuring students stay in good academic standing to successfully graduate from W&M. AE and SAS served as important gateways into understanding student support services related to course materials at W&M.

Interviewees were asked the following questions:

1. What do you believe is the biggest challenge students face with textbook affordability and William & Mary?
2. Within your department, what is being done to assist students with the issue of textbook affordability?
3. In terms of William & Mary as an institution, what other services exist to help students with issues of textbook affordability?
4. What data exist that can help inform the issue of textbook affordability?
5. What data are needed to help inform the issue of textbook affordability?
6. Is there anything else that you believe is important that we might not have covered?

Representatives of AE and SAS agreed that the cost of textbooks is one of the biggest barriers for students. For students served by SAS, further barriers include timely notifications to students and information on which edition of the textbook is required for the course. Students with ADA accommodations may face additional hurdles due to accessibility concerns as alternative formats for students are important factors for consideration by this population.

Increasing the use of OERs was repeatedly cited as a solution to these concerns. AE also discussed the importance of faculty considering cost-effective versions of textbooks when assigning materials. While emergency funds or loans do exist to help students in unforeseen circumstances, the concern of textbook affordability is one that cuts across the entire W&M campus. As one representative stated, "*Students should have choice as it pertains to their style of learning.*" It became clear that most members of the TATF, and presumably the campus community at large, were at best only partially aware of the importance of course material costs and formats to students.

Task Force Findings

I. Course Material Adoptions Reported to the W&M Bookstore

In each semester, Barnes & Noble tracks the timing of textbook adoption submissions from instructors. Compared to other institutions using B&N as campus bookstore, the reported rates of submission have been low until just weeks before classes begin, well after the formal deadline. Delayed adoption is an issue that needs to be corrected. Students reported seeking course material information immediately after course registration in order to begin searching for low-cost books and other materials. Delayed posting of required texts increases costs because prices tend to rise over time as a new semester approaches. At present, too few instructors are meeting deadlines for on-time reporting. Instructors need to be (i) aware

of the importance of timely reporting, (ii) aware of the deadlines, and (iii) educated about the seriousness of the mandate for on-time reporting.

The low reporting rate is partially an artifact that can be removed. Some courses routinely have no books or materials, and these categories have in the past often been unreported. Reported adoption rates would rise if these categories of courses are routinely assumed to have no required materials. These courses include, for example, research courses or music performance courses. In some departments, there are large numbers of sections of these courses. In one department in A&S, for example, each instructor may be assigned one section for each of four undergraduate research courses (freshman research at the 200-level, research at the 300-level, research at the 400-level, and honors research). In addition, faculty may be assigned sections of directed readings on special topics, which are often not designed until early in the semester, and which use only W&M library resources. In the department noted above, 60% of courses listed for the department fall in this category. A mechanism should be created to routinely class such courses as “No course materials required.” This change would provide more accurate information on timely reporting of required materials. It would not fully solve the problem of late reporting.

As part of the campus-wide discussion of course material affordability, W&M staff working with the campus bookstore have been addressing some of the issues above. Under “**Recommendations**” (below), we include cultural changes to improve awareness and compliance of reporting adoptions to the bookstore.

II. Evaluation of First-Day Complete: No Support

A specific charge to the task force was evaluation of Barnes & Noble’s proposal for a pilot of “*First-Day Complete*”, a program offering students access to all of their textbooks by the first day of class in exchange for a fee based on each student’s enrolled credit hours. This fee would be assessed by the W&M Bursar along with tuition, room & board, etc. Per federal law, students would have the ability to opt out of the program. Course materials could be in any format (print or online) and would be specified at the institutional level. Steep discounts were promoted by the program, with the deepest discounts available for ebook format and textbook rentals. However, there are very few instances of other higher education institutions having participated. We found no firm documentation of savings that might be realized.

Barnes and Noble’s *First-Day Complete proposal* was discussed independently in multiple settings: (i) by the full task force, (ii) by each of the three subcommittees (*faculty perspectives, staff perspectives, and student perspectives*), (iii) by Faculty Listening Tour attendees, and (iv) with student representatives. The proposal received no support.

First-Day Complete received little to no support for several reasons. The program was viewed as merely shifting costs from students taking courses with high-cost materials to students in courses with lower-cost materials. As a result, for example, English majors would subsidize books for business or STEM majors. *First-Day Complete* would also do nothing to address rising costs of course materials, and would create so-called ‘perverse incentives’ that could encourage higher costs. First, this system would discourage instructors who might otherwise adopt or produce OER, because benefits would be spread diffusely across all students, with little benefit accruing to individuals in the courses using OER. Second, instructors could adopt high-cost texts with confidence that their own students would be spared nearly all of the cost. Third, the task force believed that the mandated provision to allow students to opt-out would cause a well-known economic problem termed ‘adverse selection’ whereby students anticipating low costs for course materials would opt out, thus making the program more expensive and unattractive for those participating, and causing further opting out in the next period. Fourth, *First-Day Complete* would require 95% of faculty fall-semester adoptions be submitted by June 1 in order for W&M to participate. While W&M faculty adoption rates are improving, they are too low to consider this option, especially as some courses (e.g., some of those taught by visiting instructors) are created after the adoption deadline.

Finally, the student survey indicated that a majority of students prefer hard copies: 78% indicated that they preferred hard copies for required texts, and data from the campus bookstore indicated that 98-99% of current sales to students were hard copies. To incur savings in the *First Day Complete* program, many students would receive textbooks in an electronic format that they do not prefer. For all of these reasons, the *First-Day Complete* proposal was not considered viable.

III. Evaluation of Other University Inclusive Access Programs: No Support for Models Considered.

Other inclusive access models exist, such as controlled prices on a course-by-course basis, and the task force briefly reviewed these models as a general category. The additional models considered by the TATF all suffer from many of the problems already mentioned for *First-Day Complete*.

IV. Specific Recommendations.

The TATF recommends an initial goal of reducing course material costs for undergraduates by 10%, amounting to a savings that could be \$750,000 per year for W&M students. Adoption of the recommendations listed below could achieve this target. As part of their implementation, the TATF might be continued or reorganized/renamed and charged with additional consideration of recommendations and aiding implementation of those recommendations adopted by W&M.

1. Outreach to instructors by the university administration to increase compliance with deadlines for reporting textbook adoptions to the bookstore.

Meeting deadlines for submission of required course books and materials would allow the bookstore to obtain more copies of used materials. Earlier adoption and posting of information would inform students earlier about course materials, giving students more time to seek low-cost materials.

Implementation. See Recommendation 3 below.

2. Standardize a means for students to report their (i) use of and (ii) opinion of course materials to instructors.

Instructors rarely gather systematic feedback from students on how and how often students are using textbooks and other course materials. They gain no systematic feedback on whether students feel the textbooks and materials are viewed by students as necessary for success in a course. While acknowledging that students can be poor judges of the value of books and materials, the TATF found that the few instructors on the TATF who sought systematic feedback had sometimes chosen to make a textbook optional rather than required. In one example, an instructor was surprised to find that 80% of students felt they had not needed the required text, though a minority of 20% felt it was essential for their success. In that example, the *required* text was redesignated as *optional*, and soon after course registration all enrolled students were sent information through Blackboard on how to decide whether to purchase the textbook. In the next offering of the course, students reported that the information had been sufficient to allow them to make good decisions on whether or not to purchase the textbook. Student feedback on the value of textbooks and materials has potential to help reduce costs.

Results from TATF discussions and the student textbook survey indicated that some instructors mark textbooks as 'required' when students report that they don't find the textbook necessary or useful for enhancing success in the course. Some students reported that they could find all necessary information from the lectures and other course materials. For some courses in which information outside of lectures and other materials was necessary, students reported they could easily find free information of equal quality to the content of required textbooks. Some students reported that they had learned strategies to find resources in free online materials that provided information they found more useful than content in required textbooks and materials. Others reported that some faculty did not assign any

readings from the textbooks they required their students to purchase, simply telling students that the textbook should be used as needed.

In most courses, the only student feedback on textbooks or course materials is derived from formal course evaluations. On course evaluations in Arts & Sciences, a decades-old question in common use is limited to the very broad category of ‘readings’: “*Were assigned readings valuable to this course?*” TATF members perceived this question as too vague and broad to be useful. It encompasses not just a textbook or other materials, but also any free content posted on Blackboard, as well as content assigned from free sources on the web. Furthermore, this outdated question excludes interactive course and study materials such as *WebAssign*. Relatively few instructors at W&M appear to gain significant feedback on how textbooks and course materials are (i) perceived by students, (ii) valued by students, or (iii) used by students as instructors intend.

Implementation. We recommend that wording be developed to assess the utility of textbooks and other course materials. The task force was unable to develop universal wording that could apply to any course. A starting point might be, as a first step, a replacement question(s) on W&M A&S course evaluations: “*Do you feel the required textbook(s) was/were worth the investment in helping you to learn?*” A second question could be, “*Do you feel any required non-textbook materials for which you paid was/were worth the investment in helping you to learn?*” We suggest development of sample wording for a variety of questions that might be added by departments to standard course evaluations. Questions might be offered by individual instructors as routine end-of-semester surveys for all/most courses at W&M. To reduce implementation costs, instructors might be given access to sample surveys in Qualtrics or on other platforms. There may be options to institutionalize these surveys such as, for example, a student-run survey open to all students at the end of each semester. If even 5% of instructors gained information that prompted shifting a *required* textbook to *optional*, savings to students could be above \$100,000.

3. Promote cultural change at W&M by increasing faculty awareness on the repercussions of high course materials costs and offering outreach on OER and strategies to reduce student costs.

Instructors might be motivated to increase sensitivity to costs upon being educated on the connection between course materials affordability and educational access and equity. Instructors reported in the listening tour and anecdotally that they didn’t understand why they were asked to adopt textbooks so early. They were unaware of the strategies students use to find low-cost materials. Instructors were unaware that significant proportions of W&M students were sometimes avoiding classes due to high cost of textbooks and other course materials, or were performing poorly because of inability to purchase materials. This information could be circulated by dissemination of summaries from the student textbook survey.

Messaging from a highly visible university champion, such as the Provost or the Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs, could help to encourage faculty to submit course adoptions early. Messaging and ongoing support from leadership champions should include: information on textbook costs and requirements for bookstore adoption deadlines to instructors, spotlighting instructors and departments already using OER or other free-to-use materials, information on the ability of W&M Libraries to help faculty identify OER for potential application in their courses, and identifying a standing committee to monitor and to address new opportunities for implementation of these policies. For example, W&M might designate ‘Textbook Days’ when conversations and attention are focused on the issue of course materials adoption and affordability. They might also foster conversations on how to best use the forthcoming (spring/summer 2020) Barnes & Noble Adoption Insights Portal (AIP), which will replace the woefully outdated B&N *Faculty Enlight* for instructors to report textbook adoptions.

AIP will correct deficiencies in *Faculty Enlight*, and instructors should be educated on these corrections. Problems with *Faculty Enlight* reported on the listening tour included uncertainty because adoption submissions were not automatically confirmed, reports of serious delays in ordering textbooks because adoptions submitted on time had not been accepted by the portal, and failure to inform students about availability of free downloads of OERs. For example, a recent OER textbook + link to a free download submitted to the bookstore was presented on the bookstore website only as a print copy of the text available to purchase. No mechanism existed to add a text box with the free download link, with no mention of a free download. Based upon reports from the campus bookstore, these problems should be eliminated in the forthcoming AIP. AIP will, for example, allow faculty the option to include notes with their selections, including links to sites to download free versions of materials. Instructors could include in a textbox brief advice on why or how a textbook or other materials will be useful to students. All instructors should be made aware of these options.

Instructors should be educated on state legislation requiring Banner identification of courses as “low cost” or “no cost.” Beginning in 2020, the legislation mandates this information for students to allow them to estimate course materials costs at the time they register for classes. W&M will implement this “low cost” identifier when instructors adopt course materials costing \$1-\$40. Instructors should be educated on the new labeling, and encouraged to consider whether they can gain these labels while still maintaining appropriate course quality.

Motivation to cut costs should not be pushed to excess. There are many strong reasons for most instructors to use non-OER texts, and to adopt useful course materials that have costs to students. While new OER in more subjects are becoming available, particularly for courses with high enrollment, the great majority of courses still lack readily available OER. Even when OER are available, the low cost may not be justified by the quality of content. The TATF certainly does not advocate blanket adoption of OER or older editions. However, outreach to instructors with information on the pros and cons of OER or of adoption of older editions of texts could significantly reduce costs to students. We recommend targeted outreach to instructors teaching high enrollment courses in subjects that have OER of good quality. Particularly effective outreach might incorporate advice and mentoring by instructors of high enrollment courses who have adopted OER successfully. Even a few additional instructors who find they can adopt OER, offer a course without a required textbook, allow older editions, or apply other strategies could produce significant savings.

Implementation. One consistent theme that emerged from the work of the task force was a lack of cross-campus understanding of resources and behaviors that affect textbook affordability. Change will require coordinated effort by existing or new staff who can develop an advertising/informational outreach campaign that catches attention and engages instructors. This campaign would include regular messages from administration at the level of chairs and program directors, deans, and the Provost. Next, there could be a centralized location where faculty, especially new hires, can access important information about resources to make their course more affordable to a wide range of students. This might be the most costly implementation, but without faculty awareness and cultural change, other efforts will have poorer outcomes.

4. Development and delivery of further support for OER from STLI and W&M Libraries

Continue the VIVA OTN/OER workshops offered through W&M Libraries, and develop additional workshops and institutional support through W&M Libraries in partnership with the Studio for Teaching & Learning Innovation for making OER adoption easier. New workshops should address topics such as how to replace costly textbooks with OER or how to teach a course without a textbook. Workshops should target high-enrollment, high-cost courses. Examples include introductory-level STEM, economics, and mathematics courses that are not already using OER, as well as courses offered through the law school.

W&M Libraries can expand methods to support use of OER and free access to textbooks. First, it can better promote its abilities in identifying OER specific to courses by faculty request. Second, it can continue to promote its ability to license ebooks which become free-to-use course materials accessible through the library catalog. Third, it can continue to devote a portion of the collections budget to funding targeted purchases of print course materials for high-enrollment, high cost courses. These print materials are placed as course reserves at the Circulation desk and offered a limited-time check out, frequently two hours. During that time, students can read or copy the material for their use. Fourth, W&M Libraries can promote faculty course reserves. While the libraries offer the ability to make available course content which faculty deliver to be placed on course reserve, many faculty reported in the listening tour that they forgot the option or that they did not have a copy to spare, as they only had one copy of the textbook. It may be that faculty can be reminded about the option and rationale to place course materials on reserve. Finally, the libraries can espouse and support development of its public-facing staff on the principles of and rationales for using OER as well as on best practices surrounding OER authoring. Competencies in support of OER authoring might include technical development on OER authoring tools, placement and optimization in repositories such as W&M ScholarWorks and OER repositories, and expertise on intellectual property issues such as licensing.

Support may also involve the following from STLI: convening small-scale development groups, offering assistance with course design, supporting LMS integration with OER and other free-to-use course materials and more.

Implementation. Additional funds could be applied to targeted purchase of textbooks to be made available on course reserve. W&M Libraries already has a staff position intended to help support OER development and adoption. This recommendation could be furthered simply by continuing that position, but we recommend additional time and resources for this effort. The existing VIVA-OTN/OER workshop program has had relatively low cost, and just over the past three years, our estimate of the return is saving W&M students \$85,000 per year. We feel that additional savings of \$100,000 per year may be possible, with a potentially high return on investment.

5. Offer funding for instructors to use and/or produce and share OER books and course materials

Instructors identified the greatest barrier to adoption of OER as the time to find the materials and modify a course to use OER materials. At present, there is no funding or incentive for instructors to invest extra time to adopt or develop OER when non-OER textbooks are better known and adequate. Reasonably, why should an instructor give up a useful textbook and supplemental materials when the option is an unknown OER, often with fewer associated resources?

W&M should provide funding to reduce barriers for adoption of OER that might produce equivalent or better student outcomes. Funding could involve sponsoring an independent competition for efforts toward course design innovations employing fee and low-cost materials. W&M might offer course buyouts and provide financial incentives to develop leadership in producing and using OER. W&M could offer cost matching with VIVA or other OER grants. An easy-to-implement option would be to promote the semi-annual W&M Libraries Writer's Retreats as opportunities to work on OER resources. These retreats provide to participants quiet space, protected time and daily breakfast and lunch for a week when classes are not in session.

Implementation. Incentives could best support OER through two existing groups: the STLI and W&M Libraries. The TATF recommends a program of small grants in the following two areas: (i) Supporting instructors for the time required to find, review, and adopt OER in a pilot program with two rounds of funding totaling \$10,000, and (ii) Supporting the time and costs of producing new OER

that could replace costly texts or course materials at W&M as a stand-alone competition and/or by cost matching of proposals to the existing VIVA OER small grant competition (anticipated cost less than \$10,000/year).

In support of these efforts, the Studio for Teaching & Learning Innovation (STLI) is already committed to helping faculty, students, and staff in these efforts. STLI will collaborate with faculty and learning partners through professional learning and resource sharing opportunities. Specifically, we recommend the following pathways:

A. STLI can provide a platform and structure for learning from colleagues and sharing successes with OER via its instructional case repository. Using this platform allows interested instructors to gain insight and test recommended tools and resources in their own courses.

B. STLI plans to offer a Course Design Institute beginning in Fall 2020. This institute will explore lesson design, student assessment, and instructional materials accessibility to promote faculty awareness of design approaches and best practices. As part of this institute, STLI can commit to including an OER integration and use module to better equip instructors for implementing OER in their courses.

6. Support for students most vulnerable to high cost course materials.

Students on financial aid receive varying amounts of support for course materials. Some receive full support for costs of course materials, but most do not. Many students work part-time (or even full-time) to help cover costs of college. One TATF member currently advises a student who is at risk of failing to graduate because of missed study time (and sometimes missed classes) due to a heavy, inflexible, and unpredictable schedule of part-time work. For this student, a semester in which textbook costs are \$300 higher requires an extra 2 hours/week of work for the entire semester, time that then becomes unavailable for study. This is a significant issue for many students.

There may be opportunities to identify groups of students and publicize opportunities for assistance with purchasing textbooks. On a limited basis, the Office of the Dean of Students has been able to purchase course materials for students who have been unable to do so (e.g., covering the cost of *WebAssign* for a student who has a textbook, but has been unable to purchase access to the *WebAssign* problem sets). Based upon the student survey, we estimate that approximately 10-20% of students may have poor learning outcomes in some semesters because they feel they cannot afford textbooks or other course materials, or they struggle to meet the costs.

Implementation. We recommend that W&M explore mechanisms to identify and support textbook and materials purchases for these students. There are existing efforts in Financial Aid and the office of the Dean of Students for this support. Additionally, W&M might develop a portal through which advisors could identify such students and provide supporting information on financial needs to Financial Aid or Student Affairs. There may be development opportunities to seek a donor(s) for a named *Course Materials Support Fund*.

Funding initially at the level of \$10,000 per year should be added to existing support, with the goal focused not just on meeting financial needs of students in this category, but also on data collection about the demand and outcomes when support is provided. If students with these needs can be identified, this might be the most effective way to minimize the number of students who perform poorly or decide to avoid or delay courses because of the high cost of materials.

7. Used Textbook Exchange

Faculty and students identified options for making course materials accessible and affordable outside of purchasing them from the campus bookstore. These options include supporting the development of

a textbook exchange or cooperative. Anecdotally, students reported the availability of a Facebook site where they can buy and sell their textbooks. Such a resource could be further promoted by students, though not by W&M. Barnes & Noble has the exclusive right under the current contract through 6/30/2021, to operate retail locations for the sale, rental, and/or distribution of textbooks and course required or course-recommended materials and supplies, including custom publishing services and delivery of digital content. Under this contract, W&M agrees to remove any and all electronic links to third parties that directly compete with the core business of the bookstore. However, this option might be possible as an independent, student-run exchange.

Implementation. Under the current contract with B&N, any such exchange would need to be managed independently of W&M. A proposal for a physical textbook exchange location on campus appeared logistically difficult, given limitations on campus facilities space, resources and staffing. An exchange would likely need to be an independent, potentially student-run, organization.

Appendix A. Textbook Affordability Taskforce Charge and Composition

Charge: The textbook affordability task force is charged with examining the issue of textbook affordability, and developing and delivering near-term and long-term recommendations for making textbooks more affordable for W&M students. The task force will submit recommendations, and description of current affordability efforts underway at the university to the Provost by February 14, 2020. Recommendations should reflect W&M shared university values and aspirations.

The Task Force will consider the following to guide their work:

1. Work with university offices to capture existing data, and conduct surveys and focus groups to gather data on textbook and course resources costs and use, including financial aid support and accessibility requirements.
2. Conduct outreach with undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff to engage them on the issue, and to inform the Task Force's understanding of current concerns and perceptions within the campus community.
3. Review best practices and activities at W&M peer institutions which have participated in textbook affordability efforts.

Task Force Members

Jess Hall (TATF Co-Chair, undergraduate student, library ambassadors)

Paul Heideman (TATF Co-Chair, faculty)

Marian Taliaferro (TATF Co-Chair, library)

Adam Barger (Studio for Teaching and Learning Innovation)

Joe Dobrota (Financial Aid)

Nancy Everson (Academic Enrichment)

Lauren Garrett (First Year Experience)

Cindy Glavas (Auxiliary Services)

Lesley Henderson (Student Accessibility Services)

Robert Metaxos (student)

Shené Owens (Center for Student Diversity)

Asia Randolph (Subcommittee Co-Chair, graduate student, School of Education)

Peter Savelyev (Economics faculty)

Task Force sub-committees

Faculty/instructors sub-committee (Paul Heideman, chair)

Infrastructure & staff sub-committee (Asia Randolph, chair)

Student sub-committee (Jess Hall, chair)

Appendix B. Student Textbook Survey Results

Student Textbook Survey Results February 2020

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Jessica Ramey

William & Mary Libraries



WILLIAM & MARY

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Executive Summary

In the 2018-2019 academic year, several conversations with key administrators and staff were held on textbook affordability and the need to address it at William & Mary. These meetings served as the start of a cross-campus discussion. An effort had begun a few years earlier with the Library which presented Open Textbook Network (OTN) workshops sponsored by the Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA) with the goal of increasing awareness of Open Education Resources (OER) and exposure to them.

As seen in conversations held at higher education institutions across the country, the increasing cost of attending W&M has become a significant challenge and a major policy issue at the highest level of W&M governance for the past several years. Textbooks play an important role in this cost challenge. National estimates of textbook costs indicate that students pay on average \$1,200 annually, with implications as barriers to student success, particularly college completion. This effort to understand more about W&M textbook spending was closely aligned with the larger conversation on costs and how they impact student success.

The main objectives for issuing the textbook survey in fall 2019 were to understand the textbook spending practices as well as related preferences of W&M students so that the campus administrators would have information useful for programs designed to increase course materials affordability. Specifically, survey objectives were to:

- Understand current costs of textbooks and course materials for W&M students
- Understand methods W&M students take to lower textbook costs
- Understand the viability of implementing an “inclusive access” textbook pilot
- Identify student suggestions for reducing textbook costs

Summary of Key Findings

Key Finding 1 | Spending (textbooks + course materials)

Overall, students are not purchasing all of the textbooks required for their classes. Overall, 48.3% of students (46% of undergraduates, 53% of graduates) reported that their textbooks cost more than \$300, whereas only 24.2% of total respondents (20% of undergraduates, 35% of graduates) reported actually spending that much. Course materials (excluding textbooks) were an additional layout. Over 30% of respondents indicated that they spent more than \$100 on required course materials that semester. Further, while a majority (56%) indicated that for the past year, they “always” (80% of the time or more) purchased the required textbooks assigned, a surprising 39.2% of students indicated that they purchased required materials less than 80% of the time.

Key Finding 2 | Financial aid

Of those indicating that they received financial aid, only 9% of them said that it covered all of their textbook and course materials costs. Nearly 36% said that financial aid did not cover *any* of their textbook and course materials costs.

Key Finding 3 | Repercussions of high textbook costs

Students acted in a variety of ways to deal with high textbook and course materials costs. More than a third (37.1 %) indicated that in their academic career, they did not purchase a required textbook due to the cost. A surprising amount (11.7%) indicated that they did not even register for a specific course due to textbook costs. Further, 7.8% dropped a course, 6.6% earned a poor grade, and 3.4% of students indicated that they took fewer courses due to textbook costs.

Key Finding 4 | Strategies students take to deal with costs

W&M students reported that in the past year, only 55.4% “always” (more than 80% of the time or more) purchased the required textbooks and course materials. As for strategies for addressing textbook costs, students’ most commonly reported method (20.3%) was purchasing their textbooks from a source other than the campus bookstore. This was followed by purchasing used copies (12.8%), downloading books from the Internet (12.9%), and renting printed textbooks (12.5%).

Key Finding 5 | Print preference

Repeatedly, W&M students indicated a strong preference for print format. When asked, 78.4% of students said that they prefer a “physical hard copy” when accessing required textbooks. This trend was less pronounced for optional textbooks (48.3%). Half of undergraduates stated that they had no preference between print or digital formats for a textbook rental program if it saved them money, but graduate students were again strongly in favor of print format if they were even open to a rental program in the first place (Undergraduates stated that 82% of them would be willing to rent whereas only 47% of graduate or professional students would be willing to rent.).

Key Finding 6 | Student suggestions for reducing textbook costs

Students offered a number of suggestions for ways to bring down textbook costs. The top 5 categories of suggestions reported were (in order from most to least mentioned):

- Faculty reconsideration of content marked as required (Distinguish between “essential” vs “useful”)
- More faculty adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER)
- Faculty acceptance of use of older textbook editions
- Greater availability of inexpensive options at the campus bookstore
- Use of library services (course reserves and general circulating collection, interlibrary loan)

Appendix C. W&M Faculty Listening Tour Summary

W&M Faculty Listening Tour Executive Summary November, 2019

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William & Mary Libraries



WILLIAM & MARY

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In fall 2019, William & Mary Libraries embarked on a concerted effort to learn more about course materials adopted on its campus. In order to perform an environmental scan, staff from the libraries participated in several activities: administering a student survey, conducting a series of faculty focus groups and running a cross-campus task force on textbook affordability. This document explains the faculty focus group activity known as the “textbook listening tour.”

The listening tour was structured largely based on an earlier effort that took place at Temple University Libraries. Bell & Johnson (2019) used the tour as an opportunity to gain insight into challenges and issues around faculty selection of course materials. The “tour” at W&M offered faculty a forum to inform library staff on their views on and approaches to course materials adoption, including awareness of Open Educational Resources (OER), where to find them and perceived barriers to their adoption. It should be noted that while the effort was sometimes referred to as “textbook adoption” since that is the terminology faculty are more familiar with, we were clear to indicate from the outset of each session that our scope included the broader “course materials adoption.”

In total, 18 faculty met with us as part of the listening tour. While they were predominantly from Arts & Sciences, we had two faculty from the School of Education. The Mason School of Business, Virginia Institute of Marine Science and the law school were not represented. Sessions had been promoted repeatedly through the daily *W&M Digest* email. Faculty were also recruited by library liaisons and the Digital Scholarship Librarian. Departments represented included: Economics, Education, English, Linguistics, Government, Biology, Psychological Sciences, Chemistry, Math, History and Physics.

Several themes, as bolded and described below, emerged through the sessions.

Faculty with which we spoke were **very concerned about textbook costs for their students** and aside from introductory-level courses, they had structured their courses around the learning goals rather than around the content. They frequently reported continually refining their courses when new scholarship was identified, and prioritized affordable course materials (articles and eBooks) which were sometimes obtained through library subscriptions, or that they personally considered to be affordable. Many also reported telling their students that earlier editions of texts were acceptable to use in order to keep costs down.

For intro-level courses, textbooks are much more commonly used than they are in upper-level courses and responses to commercial textbook packages were varied. In these as well as upper-level courses, some faculty appreciated incorporating diverse perspectives via article readings, which they indicated they wouldn’t have been able to do if using strictly a textbook. Other faculty wanted to offer students a foundational text as a reference that they could refer back to as needed. Some STEM faculty indicated appreciation for having access to graded problem sets or other homework services (Web Assign or Sapling) to accompany their lectures, whereas others in STEM said they didn’t need all the “bells and whistles” in the commercial textbook packages.

Faculty generally reported being satisfied with their course materials after reviewing them extensively and changing things up over time. In some cases, they had developed lecture slides and other ancillary materials, particularly problem sets, to compensate for what they saw as shortcomings or gaps in textbooks. With regard to course materials formats, faculty sometimes mentioned others’ policies against using laptops and mobile devices in class which could be a barrier for adoption and use of eBooks. Faculty format preference also appeared to be more specific in classes involving textual analysis, such as in the English department.

Most faculty selected materials independently but there were some cases where the decisions were made collectively. For example, some reported that they used the same text as the last person who taught the class, or that the instructor assignments were regularly rotated among faculty in the department. In courses which need to be taken consecutively (such as in Modern Languages & Literatures), there was a good degree of coordination needed between faculty teaching those courses to ensure the learning would be continuous for the students and there was a strong desire to come up with something more affordable than what is on the commercial textbook market.

Despite having a strong desire to save their students money and thinking a lot about them, most faculty we spoke with **weren't gathering feedback on their course materials.** Reportedly, the standard course evaluation forms for both Arts & Sciences and the School of Education don't ask specifically on this topic. There were, however, one or two faculty who indicated that they would ask verbally in class for student feedback on the readings.

Almost without exception, faculty knew to individually report adoptions through Faculty Enlight. (The faculty which expressed interest in the tour, however, were strictly from the School of Education and Arts & Sciences. Reportedly, law school professors work with administrative staff to communicate their adoptions.) Respondents indicated that they knew to report adoptions through Faculty Enlight from having participated in faculty orientations through their school. In some cases, faculty didn't report any adoptions because they were using course materials which were free-to-use (either OER or library subscriptions) and they weren't aware of any guidance on reporting them. One faculty indicated that they didn't report any adoptions to the bookstore because their students had bad experiences and the faculty didn't want the business to go to them. (The procedure is that the adoptions are reported to the bookstore but students can purchase most materials- aside from custom coursepacks- anywhere.)

Typically, faculty did not put books or other print course materials on reserve but many did use e-reserves. Many said that they forgot that they could do that, while some reported that they only have one copy of the material from which to work. Some faculty indicated that they didn't think it would be terribly useful to put the more extensive readings on reserve since they felt students need to have "the books at hand" to write their papers or to go over assignments or they felt that the 2-hour circulation period was too short. On the other hand, many faculty indicated that they employed linking to articles in the library collection and to other digital content via Blackboard.

Most faculty were able to identify OER as "free online textbooks" and some were savvy to their being licensed to share. There were, however, a few areas of need. The first was faculty reported **not knowing where to find OER and other low-cost materials.** Another is that they **weren't aware of the VIVA grants** to fund adoption, adaptation or authoring of OER. Generally speaking, **time** to find OER and to redesign courses around low-cost materials was by far the biggest barrier to faculty incorporating OER. Another barrier reported was the **lack of suitable OER** for the level of course or for a "high quality" text.

Those who did use OER said that they were generally happy with them in that the students had free access on the first day of class and that as faculty, they could better customize how the course unfolded in the semester, by switching around the order that topics were presented and creating links in Blackboard to the precise sections or articles needed. They also appreciated that the students could access their OER anywhere, and that they (faculty) have the ability to communicate specific edits to OER and have their feedback be readily incorporated. Another positive aspect of OER reported was that online materials can lend to making the content more engaging and helpful toward effective learning.

Cultural factors and other barriers were also mentioned as highly relevant to adoption of reduced-cost course materials. For example, a “fear factor” in junior faculty was described as potentially being problematic in switching those high-enrollment courses to OER. According to the participants who mentioned it, this is because a lot of the intro-level courses are taught by non-tenured faculty. Another barrier is a lack of incentives to create these materials.

William & Mary Bookstore opportunities for improved collaboration were reported throughout the process though faculty weren’t queried specifically about working with the bookstore. (The questionnaire appears as Appendix A to this report.) Faculty reports included: problems with the bookstore obtaining earlier editions of books; not having enough books for courses; communication gaps; customer service; and a lack of confirmation for bookstore orders received. A few faculty indicated that their students couldn’t cancel backorders. Subsequent follow-up with the bookstore on these points indicated that in at least one instance, faculty from all courses or sections requiring a text hadn’t submitted their adoptions. Overall, faculty expressed a need for improving bookstore-campus community relations.

With regard to the recent incarnation of the **Studio for Teaching & Learning Innovation (STLI)**, potential support for course materials was discussed. Specifically, faculty reported being interested to learn about case studies, workshops and course materials discussions and support for OER available from STLI. For example, some thought the STLI could be helpful to advise on weaving in selection of course materials, including multimedia, when teaching a new course. Further, several respondents reported that they would be more involved in working on OER if there was compensation for their time in adapting OER or identifying and creating new content in areas where gaps (in the market) exist. It may be that W&M could identify some funding beyond the VIVA funding to operationalize course materials investigations in connection with W&M Libraries and STLI.

The takeaways from this activity, in conjunction with the [Fall 2019 student textbook survey](#), will be used as a background to the upcoming recommendations for W&M leadership on ways to address better textbook affordability at W&M.

Source cited:

Bell, Steven J.; Johnson, Annie. We’re listening: Try a textbook listening tour to advance an OER initiative. **College & Research Libraries News**, v. 80, n. 6, p. 317, June 2019. Available at: <https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/17780/19598>>. Date accessed: 25 Oct. 2019. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.80.6.317>.

Appendix to the Faculty Listening Tour Summary: Discussion Script and Questions Asked

Introduction

This academic year, the university is embarking on an initiative related to textbook affordability. In order to inform our understanding of how faculty approach textbook adoption, my colleagues and I would like to meet with a few faculty in your department to get your feedback on what factors regarding textbooks are important to you, how you approach their selection and your views on course materials generally.

Questions

- Tell us about the textbooks that you use in your courses.
- When you select course materials, do you decide first on your course content and learning goals and then look for course materials to support the content and goals, or do you choose course materials first and then build the structure of your course and its content around them?

If they say they do NOT use a textbook

- Why have you chosen not to use a textbook?
- What do you use as an alternative?
- How did you find or develop the alternatives you use? (For example, through colleagues, at a conference, with the support of W&M Libraries, etc.)

If they say they DO use a textbook

- What is the textbook adoption process like in your department?
- What do you like best about your current textbooks?
- What concerns do you have about your textbooks?
- How do you find out about the latest textbook offerings in your field?
- Do you solicit formal feedback, such as through a course evaluation, from your students on the required course materials?
- Do you routinely put a copy of your textbook on reserve in the library? Why or why not?
- What do you know about alternatives to textbooks? If you know about alternatives, have you sought them out? If yes, how have you sought them out (e.g., by visiting a librarian, exploring online, etc.)?
- What resources would facilitate you transitioning from a textbook to an alternative source?

Questions for everyone

- Can you describe what an Open Educational Resource (OER) is?
 - Do you know where to find them?
 - If you have ever used an OER in a course, can you tell us the resource you used and how you used it, e.g., as a primary or supplementary text.
 - Have you ever considered using an OER, but then decided against it? If so, why did you decide against it?
- Are you aware that VIVA offers grants of up to \$30,000 to faculty to adopt alternatives to textbooks?
- If you knew but did not apply, why not?
- What could the Studio for Teaching, Learning and Innovation offer you that could assist you in the selection of or creation of course materials?
- Would you like to make any additional comments about this topic that we haven't yet discussed?

Appendix D: Summary from the Federal Student Aid (FSA) Handbook, Provisions for Books and Supplies.

In order to academically succeed in a program, a student must be able to purchase books and supplies at the beginning of the academic period. Therefore, by the seventh day of a payment period, a school must provide a way for a student who is eligible for FSA funds to obtain or purchase the books and supplies required for the payment period if:

- Ten days before the beginning of the payment period, the school could have disbursed FSA funds to the student; and
- Disbursement of those funds would have created an FSA credit balance.

A school has the flexibility to choose the method or methods to satisfy this provision based on its administrative needs and constraints or an evaluation of the costs and benefits of one or more methods. For example, the school may issue a bookstore voucher, make a cash disbursement, issue a stored-value card, or otherwise extend credit to students to make needed purchases.

A school must consider all the FSA funds a student is eligible to receive at the time it makes the determination, but the school need not consider aid from non-FSA sources.

A school that includes the costs of books and supplies in the tuition charged and provides all of those materials to the student at the start of his or her classes meets the requirements of these regulations.

The amount a school must provide is the lesser of the presumed credit balance or the amount determined by the school that the student needs to obtain the books and supplies. In determining the required amount, a school may use the actual costs of books and supplies or the allowance for those materials used in estimating the student's cost of attendance for the period.

A school's policy must allow a student to decline to participate in the process the school provides for the student to obtain or purchase books and supplies. If a student uses the method provided by the school to obtain or purchase books and supplies, the student is considered to have authorized the use of FSA funds, and the school does not need to obtain a written authorization for this purpose.]