

CoPIRG Students - CU Boulder

The Financial Impact of Textbook Costs



Who we are

CoPIRG Campus Action is a student training and action program started by the Student PIRGs. Our program prepares college students to become leaders in tackling some of our world's biggest issues like climate change, public health, hunger, education, and civil rights.

Student PIRGS has been running for 50 years and currently has chapters and clubs, spanning nearly 100 campuses across 25 states



“Fixing the Broken Textbooks Market 3rd Ed.”

- National report conducted in September 2020
- Sample of 500 college students
- Findings show that students were significantly impacted by COVID-19 in being able to afford textbooks
- Since this report was conducted in the beginning of this school year, the long-term impact may be even more significant than the stats show
 - 65% of students surveyed reported skipping buying a textbook due to cost
 - 82% who reported missing meals due to the pandemic also reported skipping buying textbooks
 - 10% of students reported not having access to reliable internet

CCHE - Progress with OER

- Granted over \$1.5 millions to institutions for OER initiative
- Saved \$3.9 million for 30,000 enrolled students in Colorado
- Addressed over 100 courses
- Trained over 120 faculty, staff, and advocates through the Open Education Ambassadors Program

About Our Textbooks Campaign

The cost of higher education has always been a problem, and it's only getting worse. Over the past decade, textbook costs have substantially increased by a total of 88%. This has led to two-thirds of students omitting from purchasing textbooks because they simply can't afford to do so. With the increased usage of required online access codes over traditional textbooks, the problem only worsens.

Through our campaign we want to support the work that's already being done in Colorado, and ensure students have access to affordable and accessible materials. No student should be burdened by these hidden costs of higher education.

CU Boulder Student Stories

Textbook prices are financial barriers that can directly impact student success and performance.



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Kerouac Awbrey, Sophomore, International Affairs

Last summer I took a Microeconomics class online as a way to get some credits out of the way. The class required an online textbook to do all homework, quizzes, and exam. The textbook cost 200 dollars for the code but it had a 2-week free trial. Covid has been hard economically so to save money **I did all the work for a 6-week class in 2.** I really **wish professors offered more affordable ways to complete assignments.**



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Alexis Atayde, Sophomore, Environmental Studies

All three of my required foreign language courses have required online access codes. In total I have paid **over \$300 for these access codes** for just two out of the three courses. I chose to **sacrifice 15 percent of my grade** for one of these courses because I couldn't afford the \$230 online access code.

Taylor Rick, Junior, Environmental Studies

Over the course of my 3 years at college so far, I have no doubt paid more than a \$1000 in total for textbooks. I am a student that relies on financial aid and because of the rising cost of textbooks and access codes I have been **forced to take on more loans** in order to get the most out of my education. What is most frustrating about this is that for some classes a book or access code is required for homework or some other assignment that is graded meaning **if I were to choose to not get the books I would be diminishing my chance at the best grade possible**. We already pay so much for the chance at higher education at all and expensive textbooks should not be something to hold those on financial aid back any further.

Quintin Waring, Senior, Environmental Studies

Over the course of my 4 year degree I have had to spend hundreds if not thousands of dollars on textbooks. The price of textbooks and online access codes are a major expense at the beginning of each semester that **shouldn't be required to obtain a grade** as we are **already paying thousands of dollars** a semester to be taught.



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Finding more
affordable
alternatives is not
easy and oftentimes is
still very costly and
very time-consuming.



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Alex Schulz, Junior, International Affairs

Throughout the course of my college career I have been fortunate enough not to have to spend an exorbitant amount money on textbooks every semester. However beginning this semester, across 4 classes I was required to buy or rent 11 different textbooks and novels. This was a huge jump from my previous years at CU where on average I spent no more than \$60 on textbooks. I believe this is a result of remote learning; professors are attempting to **compensate for the lack of in person learning experiences with an increase in reading materials**. Unfortunately this has not translated well and has resulted in my most **expensive semester yet** in terms of book prices.

Beth Rossman, Freshman, Environmental Engineering

At the start of the fall semester, I was shocked to see the prices of my required books as I registered for college classes for the first time. These costs built up quickly and it seemed that out of nowhere, **I had suddenly spent over a thousand dollars and wasted hours searching for cheaper ways to access my textbooks.** The pandemic has only made this problem worse; with most classes switching to remote learning, costs of materials skyrocketed as I was forced to purchase materials for remote labs that I wouldn't have had to purchase if the course had been offered in person. Access to cheaper textbooks is important to me, because I never want to have to choose between paying for school and paying for things like going home to visit family.

Anna Haigh, Sophomore, Ecology and

Textbooks are incredibly expensive, and many universities across the country boast a textbook buy-back program. My first semester at the University of Colorado, I paid nearly **\$200 for a calculus textbook I used for one semester**. I tried to sell that textbook, which was still in perfect condition, back to the bookstore and only **received \$7** for it.

Thomas, Freshman, Environmental Studies

I can still remember during my junior year of high school. I was so incredibly stressed about my finals, and I remember the feeling of relief when they were over. But, my feeling soon evaporated as I received an email that told me I wouldn't be able to officially finish the semester until I paid an **exorbitant fine** for supposedly losing one of my text books. I remember being lucky enough to find the book and turn it in, but if I would not have been able to find it I would have been **handicapped by the excessive price.**

Joey Landeryou, Sophomore, Political Science and Sociology

My freshman year just for one class I had 6 books. Plus 5 other textbooks for other classes. This **total expenditure was over 500 dollars** because most textbooks run about 80-160 a book. I personally ended up paying for my books and struggled the rest of the semester to pay for other things. After that I learned my lesson and began to search for cheaper options through my school libraries and other free online libraries. This **does not always have what I need and I still end up spending money** on books each year.



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Amber L Carey, Junior, Sociology and International Affairs

The most I have had to pay for a textbook would probably be in my language classes where they are around \$160. They are **always online** already, so it doesn't make sense to me why we would have to pay so much for programs that are online and have probably already been paid for. They could easily be reduced in price with changes in copyright laws that would have a significant impact on the financial burden that textbooks can cause—**especially students who are lower-income.**

**Beyond just saving
students money, open
textbooks can actually
enrich a student's
education.**



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Ian Bergschneider, Sophomore, Economics and International Affairs

The classes I have taken at the University of Colorado Boulder use a wide variety of literary materials. Some classes require textbooks and access codes with very high costs. Other classes have used Open Education Resources as well as other free materials. I am always **extremely grateful for the classes that utilize OER** and allow me to save money. Although it may not seem like much, **textbook prices really add up** and OER make a positive impact towards the costs associated with higher education.

Daniel Perrone, Senior, Environmental Studies

These days, there are so many educational resources open to the public. When an individual has experience using these online resources, **they are often more effective than textbooks**. The amount of times I have been stuck on an economics problem or having trouble using a certain Excel function, it is way more convenient to turn to youtube or other online sources rather than a textbook. In my experience the mandatory textbooks I have been forced to buy are over-wordy and complicate common knowledge. The fact I am forced to pay for something sub-par to youtube is absurd.

Connor Siruta, Junior, Political Science and History

Since my first semester in college, I have had to buy 10 or more books, with more recent semesters involving over 15 at times. This results in textbook bills of upwards of \$300. Needless to say, this is uncomfortable expense for me, and I am one of the fortunate ones. I can actually make the payments. **Classes that have relied more on open-source materials or free-access have not only been cheaper, but often more academically enjoyable and effective.** Rather than using a textbook with one point of view, these **free sources force students to get more points of view** and form their own perspectives. While this is not possible for every class, the baseline should be that we work towards cheaper (or free) textbook access.

Actions for Change

- Continue to support Bill SB21-215: Use of OER in Higher Education
- Consider ensuring the longevity of this Bill and what else can be done to further grow it beyond five years from now
- Continue to listen to student voices
- Reconsider the way our school system should approach education