

Textbooks vs. Food:

Students, Financial Hardship, & OERs

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Faculty and Student Surveys

Over the course of two years, two separate surveys were conducted to examine:

- Textbook requirements in classes at Stockton;
- Textbook (and course materials) purchasing and usage habits of students.

The librarians wanted to determine what the average cost per semester for textbooks at Stockton, how many students were actually purchasing textbooks, and, if they weren't, how they obtained their course materials.

A faculty survey was conducted from September through October 2018. Its aim was to poll faculty members regarding how they assigned and used textbooks and related instruction materials in their courses. It was conducted using Qualtrics and was distributed via email through the faculty listserv. It consisted of 5 questions using multiple choice, yes/no, and numeric scale options for answering.

A student survey was conducted from September through November 2019. Its aim was to poll Stockton students regarding their purchase and usage of textbooks and related course materials. It was also conducted using Qualtrics and responses were gathered via public tabling and a direct emailing to all undergraduate and graduate students by the Student Senate. It consisted of 9 questions using multiple choice, yes/no, and numeric scale options for answering.

According to the Office of Institutional Research, Stockton University Fact Sheet for Fall 2018, there were a total of 690 faculty, of which 142 (21%) responded to our survey.

School	Number of Responses	Percentage	Requiring Textbook by School	Yes	No
Arts & Humanities	18	13%	Arts & Humanities	15 (83%)	3 (17%)
Business	14	10%	Business	12 (86%)	2 (14%)
Education	10	7%	Education	7 (70%)	3 (30%)
General Studies	25	17%	General Studies	18 (72%)	7 (28%)
Health Sciences	19	13%	Health Sciences	18 (100%)	0 (0%)
Natural & Mathematical Sciences	34	24%	Natural & Mathematical Sciences	31 (91%)	3 (9%)
Social & Behavioral Sciences	21	15%	Social & Behavioral Sciences	19 (90%)	2 (10%)
Other, N/A	1	1%	Other, N/A	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
University-Wide	142		University-Wide	122 (86%)	20 (14%)

University-wide, 86% of faculty require students to purchase textbooks for their courses; only 14% do not. Respondents were also asked about any use of supplemental materials in their courses. Many instructors used some combination of materials from among the listed options.

Costs According to Faculty

According to survey data, on average, a Stockton student spends **\$109 per textbook**. However, as the chart below demonstrates, average textbook costs will vary considerably between schools.

Average Textbook Cost per School	
Arts & Humanities	\$75
Business	\$131
Education	\$79
General Studies	\$61
Health Sciences	\$158
Natural & Mathematical Sciences	\$130
Social & Behavioral Sciences	\$100
Other, N/A	\$63
University-Wide	\$109

“I try hard to find affordable textbooks for my students and supplement with articles and online readings and lecture. I also use public domain text books.”

-Stockton faculty member

Interestingly, of all supplemental materials used in courses, **79% of the materials are free/no cost** to students, whereas only **20% required students to purchase an additional resource**. This suggests there are few courses that require students to purchase materials in addition to the course textbook.

An Alternative to High-Cost Textbooks

We believe that **open education resources (OERs)** have the opportunity to have a major impact on student success at Stockton.

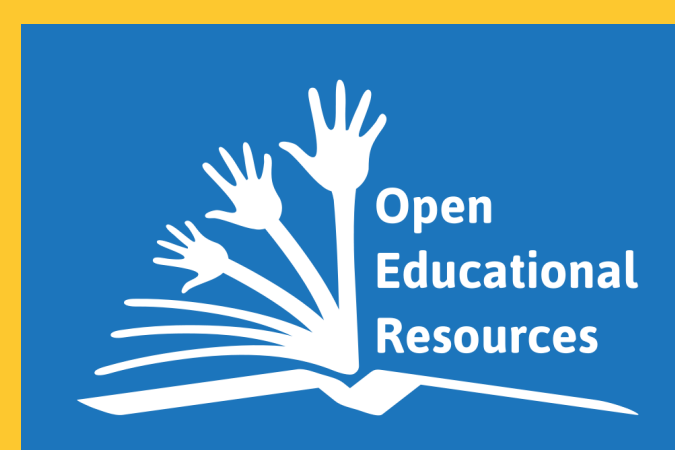
We define OERs as those materials that are freely available at no-cost to the student. OERs may include open access textbooks, ancillaries, or other material that faculty assign as required coursework.

Comments from our faculty survey suggests that Stockton faculty are aware of the impact of textbooks costs on students, though they may or may not be aware of the full extent to which students struggle with textbooks costs, some of which are reported in our survey findings. The adoption of OERs could help alleviate student's financial difficulties, and often prove more adaptable resources that those provided by publishers at cost.

If you are considering an OER or other no-cost materials for your course, we encourage you to **contact a Stockton librarian!** We are dedicated to supporting the growth of OER adoption and use on Stockton's campus — and we would be happy to discuss options for integrating them into your classes.

Interested in finding out more about OERs at Stockton and in NJ? Check out the library's OER Guide

<https://library.stockton.edu/oer>



Student Impact of High-Cost Textbooks

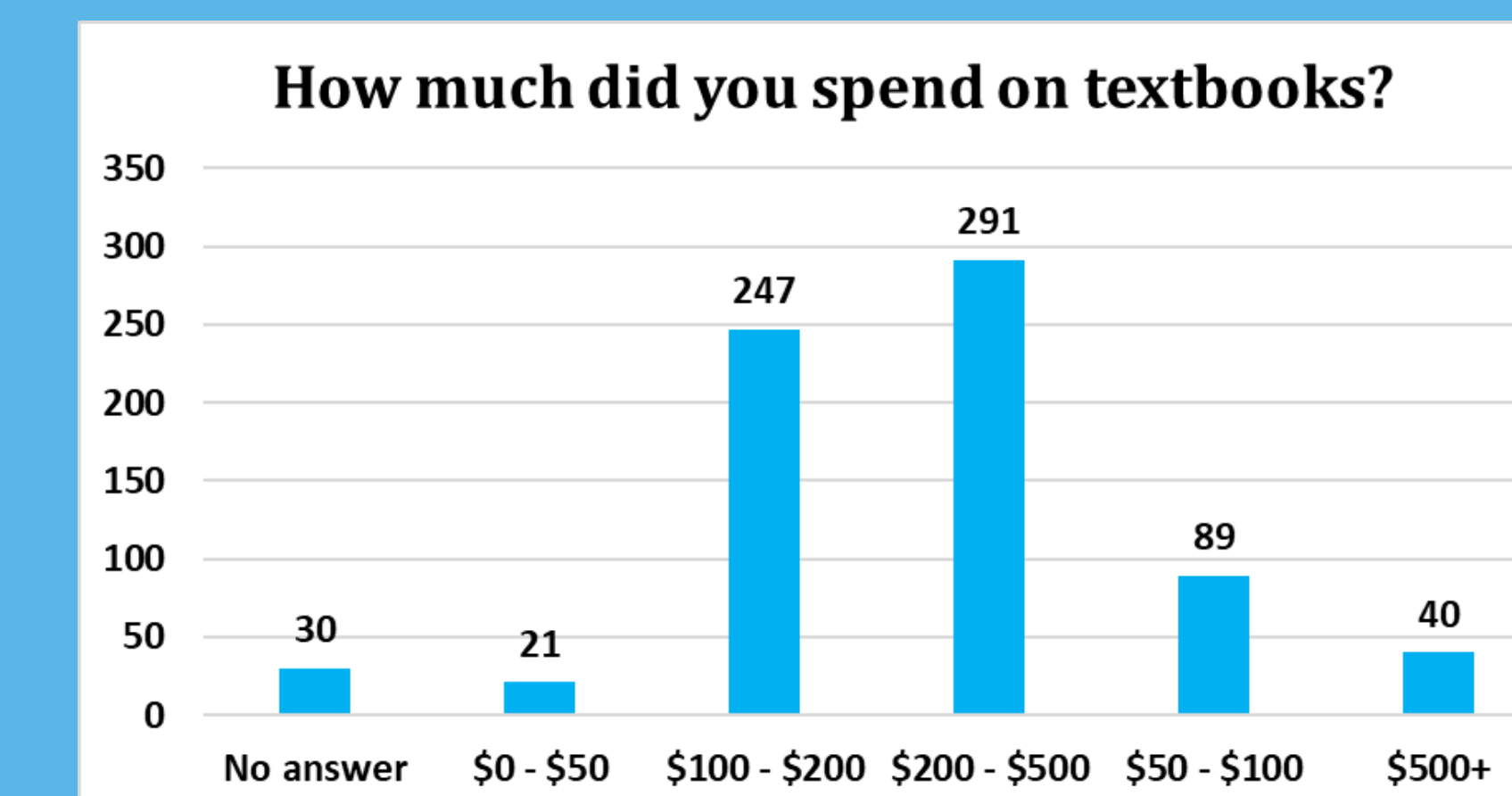


“It breaks my heart spending money on required books knowing we only use them 5 times throughout the year and I can't buy more than 2 days of grocery...”

-Stockton undergraduate student

21% of respondents to our survey on textbook purchasing could not afford to buy groceries because of the money they used to purchase textbooks. Not only do textbooks have a financial impact on students, but they also have a physical aspect on students who deferred purchasing groceries in order to purchase their class textbooks.

According to the Office of Institutional Research, there were 9,934 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled during Fall 2019. 718 students, 7.2% of the entire student body, completed the full survey. Of these students, 688 of them spent money on textbooks for the Fall 2019 semester and 29 of them reported not spending any money on textbooks. The following chart shows how much each of those 688 students spent on textbooks for Fall 2019.

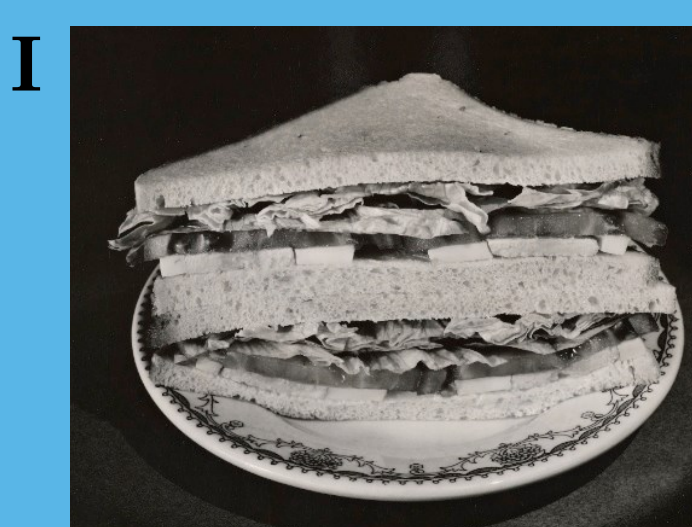


506 students responded to the question “During the semester, did the cost of required textbooks ever cause any of the following? Check any that apply.” The remaining 182 respondents did not indicate any impacts from purchasing textbooks.

Effect	Number of Responses	Percentage
Unable to buy groceries	152	21%
Late rent/mortgage payment	63	9%
Unable to buy gas	175	24%
Overdrawn bank account	131	18%
Delayed purchasing textbooks due to	369	51%
Delayed purchasing textbooks	123	17%

“Many times I end up not purchasing the book because I literally do not have the funds for it. So then I'm stuck in the situation where the professor assigns homework that's in a book that I don't have. It becomes a problem where now the professor thinks I'm lazy or I just plain don't want to do the work but in reality it was because it was between either buying [the] book or buying groceries.”

- Stockton Undergraduate Student



Supplemental Course Materials

- Articles, book chapters, etc. (via BlackBoard)
- Publisher-provided instruction materials
- Online homework manager requiring access code purchase
- Free online homework manager
- Public web resources (YouTube videos, blogs, online news, etc.)
- Self-designed instruction materials
- Textbook supplemental materials requiring access code purchase
- I do not use additional materials

