



KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TEXTBOOK AFFORDABILITY SURVEY

2019 RESULTS & REPORT

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Executive Summary:

The Kansas Board of Regents 2018-2019 Student Advisory Committee created a survey with the intention of disseminating it to as many students within our system as possible. The purpose of this survey is to provide concrete data behind the burden of textbook costs that students attending our universities are facing.

We hope the analytical data accompanied by excerpts from the free response sections will supply sufficient evidence that the cost of textbooks and other course materials is unsustainable. More than that, we have incorporated our own set of solutions for how best we see to tackle this problem. Many of these best practices were researched and observed from other states where progress in the way of textbook affordability has been significant.

The breakdown of the survey itself is very simple, with 16 close-ended questions followed by one free response question where students could share any thoughts they had with regards to their experience in college with textbooks. After combing through the data, we searched for main themes and trends that we listed below in our Key Insights page. While we hope these insights will provide you a quick glance into what the survey showed us, we encourage you to look further into our results to determine your own conclusions and find other insights that we may have missed.

The survey results we gathered were never intended to live in a vacuum after this report is delivered. We hope these results can be tested against future survey responses so that we can track our progress over time. We would also like to encourage you to share this survey with anyone you think could benefit from having access to this information. We will detail this in the methodology section, but since every response is anonymous, this information can be disclosed at your will and as you feel necessary.

We appreciate your support thus far in focusing on textbook affordability and hope that this survey is just a starting point for proposing tangible solutions to this real issue facing students in higher education today.

Summary of Key Insights:

Key Insight 1: Students are buying a lot of their required textbooks, but that's not necessarily a good thing. Well over half of students surveyed said that they are buying most of their textbooks. This shows that students recognize just how important purchasing a textbook is to their success in a course. That being said, this means they are stuck with the burden of cost no matter what textbook is assigned.

Key Insight 2: Textbooks are a significant financial burden for students. Though this is something that was already assumed, it is nice to have the data points to support the claim. Based on our numbers, there are many students spending well over \$500 on textbooks each semester. Given that it is difficult for students to budget ahead of time for these costs, many students are stuck scrambling for cash during the first week of classes to try and accommodate these purchases.

Key Insight 3: Access codes are only making this problem worse. Programs like Cengage Open Access are certainly driving costs down for students; however, the long-term impact is that students actually have less purchasing power when it comes to buying their books, exacerbating the problem. Access codes are now common across many different majors, which makes it increasingly difficult for students to pass the course without purchasing the textbook. This is mainly because these codes usually are required in order for students to turn in assignments and even view the materials.

Key Insight 4: K-State is ahead of the curve on offering free online/download textbooks. Every school in our system has a long way to go in terms of disseminating OERs in our courses, but one school in particular is already well ahead of the pack. K-State consistently ranked higher in the data on access to and awareness of open educational resources. Their plan should be used as a model for the rest of our institutions on how best approach the issue of textbook affordability.

Key Insight 5: Students are uninformed on OERs. Similar to Key Insight 4, we have much to do in the way of making students, faculty, and staff aware of what OERs are. Just 34.8% of students surveyed and responded cited that they had heard of open educational resources. Particularly from the student perspective, we have a lot of bargaining power when it comes to encouraging schools to adopt new policies. We have found that in order to tap into that collective power, we need to first do a better job of letting students know what OERs are and why they can be beneficial. The same goes for faculty and staff.

Key Insight 6: Students are fine with all-online OER material. One quick and easy way to cut costs on textbooks is to remove the physical aspect of the book and move to a fully digital platform. While there has been some hesitation with this because it is a new style of learning that teachers and administrators might worry students are accustomed to, the data seems to tell a different story. We are getting to a point where many students arriving at our institutions of higher education have spent most of their elementary, middle, and high school experience on digital platforms. They grew up reading their textbook on their school-issued iPad or laptop, so continuing that experience for them in college seems to be just fine for them at this point.

2019 Textbook Affordability Survey Breakdown:

This section of the report will detail the list of questions and the responses to each of them. Footnotes at the bottom are designed to explain perceived errors or discrepancies in the data that we wanted to clear up.

Questions:

Q1 – Please select your classification.

Q2 – How many courses are you taking this semester?

Q3 – How many textbooks did you purchase or rent this semester?

Q4 – How many required textbooks did you FORGO purchasing or renting this semester?

Q5 – Did you use financial aid to help pay for textbooks? (Grants, scholarships, government loans; DO NOT include money borrowed from parents or family)

Q6 – Approximately how much did you spend on textbooks this semester?

Q7 – Have you ever used the internet or sites like Torrent to download a digital copy of a textbook for free instead of buying it?

Q8 – Have you ever photocopied substantial parts for a textbook or used a photocopied textbook instead of buying it?

Q9 – Did you purchase any of your textbooks in e-textbook form?

Q10 – Were you required to buy an online supplement or access code to any of your course materials?

Q11 – If yes, was it for: (choose all the apply)

Q12 – Did you have the option to buy the access code (or supplement) separately from the textbook?

Q13 – Have you ever been assigned a textbook that is free online and free to download?

Q14 – Have you ever heard of “open textbooks” or “open educational resources?”

Q15 – If your textbook was free online and a hard copy was only \$20-\$40, would you prefer to use the textbook online or buy the hard copy?

Note: Some questions that were disseminated in our survey to students were thrown out of the analysis and report because they were deemed not relevant or incapable of being aggregated across the different schools. An example of this is a question where we asked what the student’s major is. Since every school has variations of major names, this question could not be aggregated and was deemed irrelevant.

Survey Methodology:

In November of 2018, the student body presidents of the Kansas Board of Regents Student Advisory Committee (SAC) decided to pursue the collection of data with regards to textbook affordability. All year, we had discussed issues that each of our campuses faced, and one that we consistently found we all had in common was that the cost of textbooks were really hurting our students. The first problem we then encountered was that we had little recent data between our campuses that isolated this issue of textbook affordability and conveyed just how serious it was. We felt the best and most accurate way to solve this issue was by sending out a survey to the student body at each of our respective campuses.

We wanted the survey to be a comprehensive questionnaire that dove into the problems of textbook affordability but also gauged how we as institutions were doing in promoting solutions like OER. Over the next 4 months, we collaborated to craft questions that we felt were best worded to ensure we were capturing the best data points possible for our purpose. We spoke with several assessment experts, librarians, nationally recognized OER experts, and campus administrators alike in order to make sure our process was vetted and of proper quality.

By early February of 2019, our survey was completed and ready to be sent out. The next move was for each Student Body President to work with their administration to ensure that we were given clearance to send out the survey to the masses. After that, we began emailing them out to students.

The software used for the survey varied depending on the school. There was a mix of Google Forms, Qualtrics, and other inhouse software. That being said, the surveys were nearly identical and captured the same data points. There were some issues in aggregating the data across platforms, and those discrepancies are detailed in the response breakdown later in the survey.

Our goal was to have each school leave their survey open to the students for one month in order to allow a generous response time. While we each released our survey at different times between February and April, we all allowed that one-month window in order to garner the most responses possible. Some schools used incentivization tactics like offering a bookstore gift card in order to draw in responses. Others focused on using push reminders via email to ensure that students were aware of the survey and had easy access in responding.

By the end of the data accumulation period, we had reached just short of 7,000 responses. While we recognize the lack of statistical significance that 7,000 responses that a system of nearly 95,000 students holds, we still feel like the data measured here is free of biases that would cause the data to be skewed. The sample responses were random, and while there might be some response bias given that students were not required to respond, we feel that this is still great data to have on hand as we look to solutions to textbook costs in the future.

The responses themselves were intended to be anonymous so that students would answer honestly and provide accurate data. The data points we have provided here cannot be tracked back to any particular student, and as far as we have looked into it, do not violate any of our university privacy policies. That means that you are free to share this information as you please moving forward.

Survey Responses:

Q1 – Please select your classification.

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
Freshman	686	94	315	37	98	*	96	1326
Sophomore	607	105	366	44	91	*	96	1309
Junior	587	131	408	72	172	*	123	1493
Senior	423	163	419	48	167	*	108	1328
Graduate Student	522	255	332	24	142	*	74	1349
Total	2825	748	1840	225	670	160	497	6965

Note: WSU responses did not capture specific data points on classification and focused on overall response totals instead.

Q2 – How many courses are you taking this semester?

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
1	89	60	52	6	33	2	17	259
2	194	143	82	8	104	11	40	582
3	248	48	112	12	91	27	45	583
4	726	80	496	26	134	53	164	1679
5	1057	177	616	63	171	40	169	2293
6+	502	240	469	110	137	27	60	1545
Total	2816	748	1827	225	670	160	495	6941

Q3 – How many textbooks did you purchase or rent this semester?

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
0	171	50	58	11	47	10	37	384
1	243	79	229	14	73	16	61	715
2	406	122	321	36	94	29	76	1084
3	476	114	366	47	116	25	97	1241
4	544	132	280	38	111	45	84	1234
5	381	120	176	33	90	17	48	865
6	212	53	115	13	54	9	32	488
7	127	26	65	33	36	9	22	318
8	94	22	34	*	18	*	5	173
9	46	9	19	*	10	*	5	89

10+	124	21	52	*	21	*	14	232
Total	2824	748	1715	225	670	160	481	6823

Note: the asterisks in the PSU and WSU responses are listed because 8, 9, and 10+ were not listed as options. Instead, their surveys stopped at 7+ as their highest option.

Q4 – How many required textbooks did you FORGO purchasing or renting this semester?

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
0	1266	493	381	106	416	91	325	3078
1	555	119	384	43	103	27	75	1306
2	489	71	295	34	68	20	42	1019
3	226	32	132	19	33	9	20	471
4	136	19	74	10	17	7	14	277
5	70	8	44	6	14	2	13	157
6	31	3	22	1	7	2	1	67
7	8	0	5	6	3	1	0	23
8	13	2	6	*	2	*	0	23
9	5	1	1	*	1	*	9	17
10+	12	0	18	*	6	*	0	36
Total	2811	748	1362	225	670	159	499	6474

Note: similar to Q3, PSU and WSU stopped their options at 7+, so the last 3 options were left blank in their response set.

Q5 – Did you use financial aid to help pay for textbooks? (Grants, scholarships, government loans; DO NOT include money borrowed from parents or family)

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
Yes	925	254	528	145	320	58	175	2405
No	1881	494	1220	80	350	102	321	4448
Total	2811	748	1748	225	670	160	496	6858

Q6 – Approximately how much did you spend on textbooks this semester?

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
\$0-\$100	426	155	351	31	135	33	84	1215
\$100-\$200	612	168	426	45	153	30	107	1541
\$200-\$300	716	188	378	63	157	41	116	1659

\$300-\$400	469	127	264	40	109	26	72	1107
\$400-\$500	305	57	142	19	60	18	48	649
\$500-\$600	166	27	67	16	21	7	32	336
\$600-\$700	71	11	35	5	18	2	17	159
\$700-\$800	25	6	12	2	6	0	7	58
\$800-\$900	18	5	5	4	4	3	7	46
\$900-\$1000	9	1	11	*	3	*	4	28
\$1000+	6	3	0	*	4	*	3	16
Total	2823	748	1691	225	670	160	497	6814

Note: PSU and WSU options stopped at \$800+, so the last two options were left blank in their response set.

Q7 – Have you ever used the internet or sites like Torrent to download a digital copy of a textbook for free instead of buying it?

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
Yes	934	341	*	50	157	74	189	1745
No	1690	388	*	164	464	77	288	3071
Not Sure	197	19	*	11	49	9	19	304
Total	2821	748	0	225	670	160	496	5120

Note: KSU responses could not be aggregated in excel and were unable to be accurately recorded in the response set.

Q8 – Have you ever photocopied substantial parts for a textbook or used a photocopied textbook instead of buying it?

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
Yes	887	184	*	63	128	49	92	1403
No	1933	564	*	162	542	111	402	3714
Total	2820	748	0	225	670	160	494	5117

Note: same as Q7.

Q9 – Did you purchase any of your textbooks in e-textbook form?

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
Yes	1926	251	386	107	388	79	248	3385
No	896	497	947	118	282	81	247	3068
Total	2822	748	1333	225	670	160	495	6453

Q10 – Were you required to buy an online supplement or access code to any of your course materials?

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
Yes	1996	261	779	146	401	78	317	3978
No	776	471	1002	75	250	82	180	2836
Not sure	51	16	53	4	19	0	*	143
Total	2823	748	1834	225	670	160	497	6957

Note: Washburn did not include 'Not Sure' as an option choice, so that option was left blank in their response set.

Q11 – If yes, was it for: (choose all the apply)

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
Homework assignments	1802	277	*	141	*	70	285	2575
Completing Tests	819	150	*	45	*	6	122	1142
Readings in general	1236	206	*	5	*	11	185	1643
Total	3857	633	0	191	0	87	592	5360

Note 1: KSU data could not be aggregated in excel, and their responses were therefore not reflected here.

Note 2: FHSU cut off their survey at 10 questions and therefore did not capture any further data points. Their responses sets are marked with asterisks from here on out to reflect this.

Q12 – Did you have the option to buy the access code (or supplement) separately from the textbook?

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
Yes	956	186	*	100	*	62	190	1494
No	1016	562	*	125	*	54	191	1948
Total	1972	748	0	225	0	116	381	3442

Note: see Q11 Note 1 and Note 2.

Q13 – Have you ever been assigned a textbook that is free online and free to download?

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
Yes	984	262	1371	78	*	45	106	2846
No	1745	486	372	147	*	107	388	3245
Total	2729	748	1743	225	0	152	494	6091

Note: see Q11 Note 2

Q14 – Have you ever heard of “open textbooks” or “open educational resources?”

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
Yes	738	260	867	65	*	59	133	2122
No	1992	488	878	160	*	95	361	3974

Total	2730	748	1745	225	0	154	494	6096
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Note: see Q11 Note 2

Q15 – If your textbook was free online and a hard copy was only \$20-\$40, would you prefer to use the textbook online or buy the hard copy?

Answer	KU	ESU	KSU	PSU	FHSU	WSU	Washburn	Total
Online	1389	376	1012	108	*	87	180	3152
Hard copy	836	314	590	92	*	41	196	2069
Hard copy and online	500	58	145	25	*	25	115	868
Total	2725	748	1747	225	0	153	491	6089

Note: see Q11 Note 2

Recommendations:

After reviewing the data and proposing key insights, the 2018-2019 Kansas Board of Regents Student Advisory Committee (SAC) feels that there are certain measures we can take in order to lessen the burden of textbook costs and increase access to open educational resources on our respective campuses. We offer these points below as options to start the conversation on how best to move forward.

Recommendation 1: Incorporate OERs as a priority in the KBOR Foresight 2020 plan. This has been proposed to the board previously, but we wanted to reemphasize it here because we really think this will be the driver behind every other one of our recommendations below. It will set the tone that this is a priority for our campuses, system wide, and will ensure accountability between us all to make progress on textbook affordability.

Recommendation 2: Continue surveying students on textbook affordability and open educational resources in the future. The data points we provided were simply meant to provide a snapshot of the experience of purchasing a textbook for a student in 2019. The experience will surely change in the coming years, and we want to track that progress. By continuing to send out surveys to students, we can track (hopefully) positive progress and highlight best practices from institutions where serious positive impacts are occurring.

Recommendation 3: Centralize OER work into one steering committee at the KBOR level. We want progress on open educational resources incorporation to be collaborative across all of our campuses, housed under the Kansas Board of Regents. This means that we cannot take a splintered approach to awareness and implementation. If we keep all the progress housed under our recently created KBOR OER steering committee, then we can better ensure that best practices can be incorporated collectively across our different institutions.

Recommendation 4: Create a centralized OER resource page on the KBOR website for all KBOR schools to refer to. One webpage that any professor, administrator, or student from our system with questions about OER can go to would be immensely beneficial. Many of our schools already have their own page for their university, but having a page on the KBOR website that details progress from the OER steering committee, rules and guidelines around implementing OER in courses, and resources to aid those looking to expand OER at their school would only speed up OER implementation.

Recommendation 5: Encourage all state universities to show which courses use OERs in the course selection process. Though this would not be easy between university policy changes and software modifications, we believe this recommendation is especially critical in advancing OER course numbers at our school for a few reasons. The change would allow low-income students a visible path to a degree that ensures low costs for course materials. For students who struggle to budget ahead of time for costs of textbooks, this could ease their fears that they might have to skip a meal or go without gas in their car for a few days while they save up for their textbook or access code.

Recommendation 6: Encourage innovative solutions like OER, but do not require them. While we would love for every class's textbook to be zero cost, we recognize that this is not realistic. There are classes where incorporating OERs would actually be detrimental to the learning experience. Professors

deserve to decide for themselves how they can best teach their course, and we do not want to take that autonomy away. We hope that through awareness and encouragement, we can convince professors to opt into things like OER themselves, rather than be forced into it.

Recommendation 7: Encourage Provosts from each state university to send out semiannual reports on the number of OER courses offered at their respective university to COCAO. Simply supplying a number of OER courses once or twice a year would allow for everyone in the group to have a baseline on progress and figure out which universities are making more progress and why. It is important to note that this would require coming up with a strict definition of what qualifies as OER within KBOR.

Recommendation 8: Continue to include students in these conversations and proposals. SAC has been so thankful in that we have had a supportive Board of Regents who have listened to our concerns and worked diligently to find solutions. We want this to continue in the coming years, with students at the center of the conversation. At the end of the day, our universities exist at their core to educate students. We therefore need to continue listening to our students to find out what is working and what is not for them.

Free Response Excerpts:

In each of our surveys, we allowed for one open-ended question at the end where students could tell us anything about their experience with regards to purchasing textbooks at their school. Some of the stories we read were so interesting that we felt we needed to include them in our report. The students' names and schools from which they study are both not reported here. These responses are meant to be anonymous. We included these stories so as not to offend anyone, but rather to paint a more realistic picture of what it's like trying to afford textbooks for a student today.

"It's expensive, anything that could be done about getting free e-textbooks would be amazing."

"Free textbooks are always an option but professors use textbooks that costs hundreds of dollars when only 10 pages are used in the book.

"It is ridiculous. If I haven't been able to rent a textbook, I have gone without. I can't afford to pay over \$150 for a book I may or may not use..."

"I have loved how little I am paying for textbooks. A lot of my classes have offered the book online for free which is very helpful!"

"I just started sharing textbooks with other students to save money"

"I think that the colleges of Agriculture and Sciences have done a very good job reducing costs for students through online textbooks."

"It is terrible. I often have to spend about a third of my disposable income I use for medical expenses, things that aren't food or rent, and everything else [on textbooks]. It causes me significant issues."

"I think having our textbooks [should be] provided to us for free...that way our success isn't based upon if we can afford the books or not..."

"There have been semesters where textbooks costed so much that I couldn't afford groceries for that month. Textbooks are a huge cost for me as well as access codes. Access codes are especially hard because you usually have to get them through [name of institution] so there is no discount available."

"I have dropped 2 classes prior to the beginning of the semester due to the cost of the textbooks."

"The [REDACTED] School has some of the most over the top textbook prices, and in addition to course fees, has almost priced me out of my education"

"SO SO EXPENSIVE."

"purchasing textbooks this semester cost me so much money that I had to ask family for money in order to cover the cost of them"

"As an instructor, it is very disappointing to have to assign students a very expensive textbook that my department requires us to use."

"I just feel that it's kind of ridiculous that I have to pay almost \$200 for an access code JUST so I can do my required homework assignments"

"It sucks."

"It's not affordable."

"It's not affordable at all."

"It's not affordable at all." - (different person)

"I had to go without textbooks because I couldn't afford them. I just got lucky the teachers who I was able to get a book for their class has one that they keep in class."

"Access codes ruin my life. Usually I can find a decent rental for most textbooks (unless it's a new addition which would also ruin my life...), but this semester my access code for one class cost more than the books for my other 4 classes combined..."

“...Some of my general ed classes have adopted an OER policy (supplementing textbooks with notes). If I had to buy 4-5 textbooks a semester, I would have to take out a loan. It is not a sustainable model financially.

“The cost of textbooks is very overwhelming. I need to use my money to pay for rent and canned soup to get by. I miss some assignments in the beginning of the semester because I don't have the money for a \$200 access code.”

“Too expensive. I do not get much help from parents and FASFA only gave me loans. Barely can afford.”

“I paid almost half a semesters tuition in textbooks for one semester because of access codes. Pitt state pays for canvas teachers need to stop being lazy and utilize that you can make quizzes and assignment on there instead of making us fork out more money for an access code.”

“I literally dropped classes because I couldn't afford the book. I'm going to take forever to graduate because I can't spend 1000 a semester on books.”

“I wish that textbooks were more affordable. I would love to buy my books and actually read them, but they are too much money.”