

Committee on Priorities and Resources
Meeting Minutes – March 28, 2023

In Attendance: Professor Nusrat Chowdhury, chair; Professor Frederick Griffiths; Professor John Rager; Interim Chief Financial Officer Thomas Dwyer, *ex officio*; Provost and Dean of the Faculty Catherine Epstein, *ex officio*; Chief Human Resources Officer, Kate Harrington, *ex officio*; Chief Financial and Administrative Officer, Mike Thomas, *ex officio*; Interim Director of Financial Planning, Ashley Travis, *ex officio*; Mollie Hartenstein '23; Steven Hegarty, recorder;

Not in attendance: Professor Jonathan Obert; Assistant Registrar Syd Cooney; Assistant Director of Family Giving, Emily Ziomek; Yvette Kiptoo, '23

Guests: Jack Cheney, Associate Provost and Associate Dean of the Faculty, Professor of Geology; Ralph Johnson, Director of Procurement and Shared Services

The meeting came to order at 8:45 am.

Proceedings:

Jack and Ralph presented the goals and progress of the Textbook Task Force (TTF) to CPR.

- Textbooks are an access issue at AC. Currently there are ad hoc departmental solutions, and the college covers costs of course packs but not textbooks.
- Textbook provider options are being priced and analyzed, and a partial cost offset has been identified from financial aid. For the comparison, the estimated cost is \$300/student. Ideas under consideration are a “brick and mortar” bookstore, a pop-up bookstore, or use of mail delivery.
- Under the TTF plan, students will receive textbooks on the first day of class at no cost. (Allowances for add/drop are built into “emergency” delivery services.) The plan would also provide textbooks to Five College students enrolled in AC classes. At the end of the semester, students can sell books back and keep the money. All of the program costs will be incorporated into the comprehensive fee.
- Vendors provide both new and used texts, though the quality of the used books needs to be evaluated. Some vendors will also compile course packets and clear copyright.
- Follette is currently handling AC merchandise, and they are bidding on textbooks. They provide this service to peer institutions.
- The TTF has visited each academic department and AAS. Mollie reported overwhelming student support at the AAS meeting.
- TTF recommendations, if approved, will launch in the Fall of 2024.
- Currently, faculty are making text choices in part due to cost concerns. Post implementation, faculty will need to see the larger financial picture to determine the appropriate requirements.

Adjourned 9:45 am.

Respectfully submitted,
S Hegarty

“Textbook” Task Force info-sheet

Problems we are trying to solve

- Some students are not acquiring required course materials, instead relying on short-term loans from the library or classmates, pirated versions or out-of-date editions, or even avoiding courses because of their cost.
- Some departments run ad hoc financial aid programs to assist students in acquiring course materials. This is despite students’ formal financial aid packages already including a \$1000 per year allowance for books and supplies. Such programs mean that the College is inequitably double-subsidizing certain students.
- Some faculty are prioritizing low-cost or free course materials despite the availability of pedagogically superior materials.
- The College does not have a uniform approach to course materials. Direct payments for course materials vary from complete support for course-packs to none for textbooks.

We need your help

- What course materials do you require and how do students get them now? We’re especially looking for things that might not traditionally be found in a “bookstore”.
- Have you seen an outstanding model elsewhere?
- Invite us to a department meeting for Q&A.

Approaches we are considering

- The College directly pays the cost of all course materials, either for students on financial aid or all students.
- Options for delivery include a brick-and-mortar store on campus or in town, a pop-up bookstore, or the mail.
- The program could be administered by the College, by an independent local vendor like Amherst Books, or by a national partner like Follett or Barnes & Noble. We’ve seen examples of each at other colleges, including Williams, Swarthmore, Morehouse, and Middlebury.

Timeline

We aim to report back this spring for implementation starting the 2024-25 academic year.

Whom to contact

- Chair: Jack Cheney, Assoc. Provost
- Jesse Barba, Dir. Institutional Research
- Prof. Sara Brenneis (Spanish)
- Prof. David Hanneke (Physics & Astronomy)
- Ralph Johnson, Dir. Shared Services and Procurement
- Matt McGann, Dean of Admission & Financial Aid
- Nancy Ratner, Dir. Academic Projects
- Prof. Catherine Sanderson (Psychology)