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To: University of Calgary Academic Staff  
From: Members of the GFC Teaching and Learning Committee  
Regarding: Learning Materials Costs to Students  
Date: March 25, 2015

Faculty invest considerable efforts in recommending high quality learning resources that are closely aligned with the learning outcomes for each course. However, the cost of learning materials has become a concern for both students and faculty. The [Alberta government](#) estimates that postsecondary students spend between \$1,307 - \$1,717 on books and supplies each year. In the face of rising costs, many of us are making efforts to reduce the costs of learning materials associated with courses. Members of the GFC Teaching and Learning Committee ask that colleagues consider ways to reduce costs and optimize access to learning resources for all students.

### Recommendations

There are a number of ways we may be able to enhance the cost-effectiveness of our choices to students.

- **Consider using open-access learning resources.** Open-source resources may include peer-reviewed textbooks available for use and adaptation as primary learning sources, as well as supplementary textual and multimedia materials. These materials may be available through Open Access or Creative Commons licensing at no cost to our students. For more information on options that may be available, please refer to <http://open.ucalgary.ca>. In addition, the Government of Alberta has launched a new [Open Educational Resources \(OER\) Initiative](#). Expressions of interest for new resources are presently being adjudicated, and new OER resources for learners and teachers will be available in the near future.
- **Be explicit about how learning resources will help students achieve intended course learning outcomes.** Students take our recommendations seriously and ask that we clearly indicate which texts are required (essential to success in the course and used frequently) versus those that are recommended (secondary resources that are not as frequently used and could be accessed through the Library's reserve readings service). This clarification helps students prioritize which resources to buy and will minimize student resentment about resources they perceive as under-utilized.
- **Remind students that they can access many *required* textbooks through the Library's print or electronic reserve service** (<http://library.ucalgary.ca/reserve-readings>). When an instructor orders a required text through the bookstore, that textbook is also purchased for the Library through a program funded through the Students' Union and the Office of the Provost.
- **Work at a program level to use the same learning resources across sections, courses and years** to increase opportunities for buy-back and used book options for students. In contrast, the

selection of a new or alternate edition will preempt opportunities for buy back, so the added value of these sources should be weighed carefully.

- **Consult with publishers and/or the Bookstore for ways to reduce the cost of learning materials to students** through alternative formats or customized texts for a course.
- **Consider utilizing a customized selection of readings presented in a print course pack.** Course packs are often the optimal learning resource and the Bookstore, Bound & Copied, and Copyright Office will work with instructors to create cost effective packages.
- **Make copyright-cleared electronic course packs and direct links to electronically held library resources available in a learning management system (LMS).** The ARES copyright clearance system administered through the copyright office (<http://library.ucalgary.ca/copyright>) offers an efficient service to faculty and has access to funding for sources not covered by University of Calgary licensing agreements. All third party materials need to be submitted to [copyright@ucalgary.ca](mailto:copyright@ucalgary.ca) for review.
- **Make effective use of the impressive array of learning resources associated with many textbooks.** Students appreciate the added value of these resources when they are used purposefully. Please ensure that these resources fall within the [General Principles of Supplementary Fees](#). It is also important to note that these associated learning resources will not be available for textbooks made available through the library's reserve system.
- **Consider advantages of electronic learning resources, but ensure students are aware of potential limitations.** Electronic learning resources feature advantages for effective studying, especially for students whose first language is not English or who require adjustable print. However, the lack of a buy-back option and possible limited-term access to many e-resources mean that they may not always be an ideal choice.
- **To allow students maximum purchasing options, make course material lists available as early as possible, through course outlines or alternate means** (such as text books listed on the bookstore web page). Purchasing course materials online or from other students can be a good choice for students looking to save money, but time to research and compare options is necessary. Additionally, certain sources become more difficult to access on short time lines (e.g. online purchasing requires time for delivery, purchasing from other students requires time to get in contact and coordinate meeting up, etc.).
- **Encourage students to provide feedback about textbooks or other learning resource purchases.** Feedback solicited from former students about the learning value of a textbook is useful, not only to professors, but also to future students. The University of Calgary Bookstore is currently collecting feedback from students on textbooks when they look up a book on the buyback website, and that feedback is available to academic staff on request. The plan is to integrate students' textbook feedback from 20 universities across Canada so that students and academic staff can access this information when making textbook choices.

The selection of learning resources is a critical aspect of planning effective learning experiences for our students. The growing diversity of options makes this responsibility more complex, and more interesting, every year. Students respect your expertise in choosing learning resources and appreciate the efforts you make to provide the best value to them.