

# HOW COURSE MATERIAL SELECTION & DELIVERY IMPACT STUDENT EQUITY



# AN OVERLOOKED CAUSE OF LOW STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The heated discussions in higher education about campus inclusivity and student equity often overlook a key pragmatic issue: Many students skip textbook purchases — especially if they cannot afford them. This puts students on two different tracks when the term starts: Those with the money and motivation to buy required materials are prepared and ready to learn, while those without the necessary texts are unprepared, less engaged and less likely to succeed. Even those who manage passing grades without course materials will miss the opportunity to deepen skills in reading, studying and writing that would give them an edge on the job market after graduation.

At one time, colleges and universities could count on students to follow their teachers' instructions and purchase their required texts from the campus bookstore before the term's start, but that's no longer the case. An exponential rise in the cost of textbooks has coincided with a shift in campus culture over the last few decades, prompting an increasing number of students to regard textbooks as optional. Between 1977 and 2015 course material costs rose 1,041 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Although industry innovations have brought down prices in the last few years, colleges that have not explored new avenues for course material fulfillment and delivery may be depriving students of more affordable and effective learning experiences.

In 2018, college students paid just under \$500 on average for course materials compared to \$701 in 2008, according to the National Association of College Stores (NACS). Digital publishing, new fulfillment options like inclusive

access — which usually builds the cost of course materials into tuition or charges — and Open Educational Resources (OER) are among the developments that account for the drop, according to NACS. However, course materials still account for a much higher proportion of college expenses than they did when most current faculty were undergraduates. Many teachers are unaware of how choosing specific formats and editions can impact student equity. Thus, campus administrations that do not pursue new avenues for delivery and fulfillment regularly may deprive low-income students of opportunities to reduce education costs and improve academic performance.

In the past year, 85 percent of college and university students skipped or delayed a textbook purchase at least once, according to eBook platform VitalSource. More than 90 percent of these students said that they did not purchase the book because of cost.

Those who don't purchase materials notice a difference in their class experience, too. 70 percent of students report they learn better in class when they have read assigned material in advance. That wouldn't surprise faculty, who usually plan courses with specific texts in mind. In a recent Nielsen Study, Faculty Attitudes Towards Content in Higher Education, 85 percent of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Students who obtain the required course materials typically achieve higher grades."

For most scholars, teaching a course without a required text to accompany lectures and discussions would be a form of academic heresy. Knowledge emerges from interaction, dialogue and networks.

Students who delayed or skipped textbook purchases in the 2017-2018 academic year:

**85%**

Students who said they skipped a purchase because of the price:

**90%**

Rise in new textbook costs between 1977 and 2015:

**1,041%**

Drop in course material costs since 2008 because of innovations in delivery and fulfillment:

**30%**

Students who reported they learn better with a textbook:

**70%**

Faculty who say students with textbooks achieve higher grades:

**85%**

*\*Sources: VitalSource, Bureau of Labor Statistics, NACS*



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# BARNES & NOBLE COLLEGE INSIGHTS

## BNC Insights on Students and Course Materials

A Barnes & Noble College Insights survey sheds light on the current student population's views of course materials. Nearly 400 undergraduate students responded to our questions about their views of required course materials and their teachers' emphasis on their importance.

Most respondents said they regard course materials as at least "somewhat" important, and the majority said their teachers explain the need for the assigned books. Given the critical role of reading and writing development in higher education, however, the respondents demonstrated a view of required materials that may harm achievement. Nearly half of our respondents indicated that they don't buy required materials for every class and over 10 percent said they either never buy materials or only make purchases sometimes.

### Undergraduates who said they usually get some or all of their course materials:

- 53% — I usually get the required course materials for all of my classes
- 35% — I usually get the required course materials for most of my classes
- 9% — I usually get the required course materials for a few of my classes
- 2% — I usually don't get the required course materials for any of my classes

### Undergraduates who said their teachers explain the importance of course materials:

- 33% — A lot
- 46% — Somewhat
- 3% — I'm not sure
- 15% — Not that much
- 3% — Not at all

### Undergraduates who said they believe having the required materials matters:

- 44% — Extremely important
- 44% — Somewhat important
- 5% — Not that important
- 44% — Somewhat important
- 3% — Not important at all

These numbers suggest administrative and faculty efforts to improve young people's relationship with books and reading could boost academic outcomes for undergraduates. Most students understand that they should have their books for class, despite the decline in reading habits in the Gen Z cohort. Students on campuses that invest in delivery and fulfillment options that reduce costs will be more likely to buy their books.

Meanwhile, just a third of students said their teachers explain the importance of the course materials "a lot." This suggests faculty would benefit from greater awareness of students' reluctance to buy all their required materials. Affordability is the core issue, but an informed faculty and administration will help students grasp the essential role of textbooks in higher education more fully.

# WITHOUT COURSE MATERIALS, STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT SUFFERS

Textbooks remain essential for student success, but cultural shifts have reduced students' appetite for reading in general. Many arrive in college without a strong understanding of why course materials are necessary and why they add value to their education.

Generation Z, those born after 1995, is famously averse to reading. Most spend as much as 6 hours daily on social media, according to Jean Twenge, a psychology professor at San Diego State University who specializes in Gen Z. Twenge researched the changes in how teenagers spend their spare time in the last 50 years. In 1980, 60 percent of high schoolers said they voluntarily read a book or periodical daily. In 2016, only 16 percent said they read anything daily by choice.

What's more, internet-raised young people are reluctant to pay for information. They might choose to do it sometimes, but only for something they really want to know. For someone without experience reading literature like the Norton Anthology of Poetry — which lists at about \$108 — it would be difficult to gauge its value.

Education scholarship moves more slowly than commercial innovation. It only takes a few seconds to interest someone in buying a product like an iPad® or a Chromebook™, but researchers need decades to discover the impact such products have on learning and the brain. Thus, many educators remain unsure about how best to ensure Gen Z students are prepared to meet college-level expectations.

Some faculty have tried to manage the onslaught of new education technologies by eschewing learning management systems and requiring students to submit all papers via hardcopy. But one or two all-print learning experiences will not curtail the influence of smartphones and the internet. Such tactics don't address the value of course materials — digital or print — or the value of reading. Nor do they convey to learners that skipping reading assignments impedes academic achievement and future career success.

A college class meets a few hours a week, but those meetings are only intended to account for a fraction of the learning that occurs throughout

the term. When students aren't buying books, they aren't reading and when they're not reading, they're missing the opportunity to further higher-level skills that are essential for survival in our evolving information economy.

## METACOGNITION:

Awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes; learning to learn.

Reading is among the most essential components in the development of what educators call metacognition — or learning to learn. When students don't interact with challenging reading material throughout college, literacy levels flag, writing skills suffer, and critical thinking atrophies. As a result, metacognitive development is stunted.

Metacognitive skill helped some workers adapt beautifully to the rise of computers and the internet in the workplace in the 1990s. Those who applied metacognition to learning skills like coding and web design became leaders in the new economy. The pace of change has not slowed. Students who don't know how to learn independently — or who believe they cannot grasp a new topic without a teacher present — will have fewer opportunities in the future.

## CHANGE IN STUDENT READING HABITS SINCE 1980

Teens who reported reading voluntarily every day in 1980:

60%

Teens who reported reading voluntarily every day in 2016:

16%

*\*Source: American Psychology Association*

# ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND WORKPLACE SUCCESS

Most Gen Z students want to leave college with concrete workplace skills, according to a 2018 career interest survey by the National Society of High School Scholars (NSHSS). Raised during the Great Recession, this cohort prioritizes financial security, saves more than past generations, dreads debt and expects to see a concrete return on their investment in college.

Nearly 75 percent of Gen Z students expect that a college education will bring them a high-paying job in their chosen field with excellent benefits within the first six months of graduation, according to NSHSS. In 2017, 41 percent said they believed they would have an excellent job before graduating. Only 29 percent did.

In Payscale's 2016 Workforce-Skills Preparedness Report, corporate

managers said that the No. 1 skill college graduates lack is writing. Nearly half of the surveyed managers said they're disappointed with the writing skill students bring from college. Public speaking was ranked the second most-lacking hard skill at 39 percent. The soft skill managers said graduates most need was critical thinking.

A 2017 McKinsey Global Institute report predicted that automation will obliterate as many as 800 million jobs by 2030. Technology will create thousands of new jobs, the study said. But those new jobs will require the current generation to learn and adapt. That will be harder to do if Gen Z students continue to eschew classes — and course materials — that build reading, writing and metacognitive skills.

## STUDENT WORKPLACE EXPECTATIONS:

Students who believed they would have a high-paying job within 6 months of college graduation in 2018:

**75%**

Students who believed they would have a high-salary job at the time of graduation in 2017:

**41%**

## TOP SKILLS CORPORATE MANAGERS SAID CURRENT GRADUATES MOST LACK:

Critical thinking skill:

**60%**

Writing skill:

**44%**

Public speaking skill:

**39%**

\*Sources: Payscale, NSHSS



# COURSE MATERIAL INTERVENTIONS WITH WIDE-RANGING IMPACT

Administrators have paths to helping students attain affordable course materials and understand the importance of reading. It's important to get the message out to faculty that students aren't automatically purchasing required materials as they once did. Teachers need to share why they're valuable not just that they're required.

Inclusive access programs offer a helpful solution by integrating course material costs into tuition or fees. Students need only opt in or out of a purchase when they log into the campus LMS and check for their courses. No separate trip to the bookstore is required — and course materials are given the same priority as other fees students pay for school. When billing requires students to pay for things like recreation fees but not for books, they can easily form the impression that course materials are an optional expense.

Because sales are guaranteed, publishers will typically cut prices on individual books 40 percent or more — providing substantial relief to struggling lower income students and boosting sell-through rates as high as 98 percent.

Some programs have developed inclusive access solutions for both print and digital course materials — ensuring greater selection for faculty, who value academic freedom

highly. Students might be required to pay a rental fee each term that gives them access to materials for all their classes. They return print books to a location like the bookstore after finals and digital eBooks expire after a certain date. Of course, these programs serve all students — not just those from lower-income backgrounds — because they make purchases convenient and reinforce the important role textbooks play in higher education.

Ensuring students have access to affordable course materials is a simple, concrete solution to a problem with wide-ranging impact. As campus demographics shift, the student population will become increasingly diverse. Low-income students don't have the advantage of coming from families where parents paid for their own books in college, and, for them, the course material costs might be alienating. Those who come from underprivileged schools already score lower on reading tests than students from wealthier high schools, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Higher education must evolve in a way that serves all students. By giving attention to course material selection and delivery, administrators can help ensure all students start each semester with the same chances for success — and graduate with the skills they need.

## WITH BNC FIRST DAY™, STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY THAT BOOST SUCCESS

**First Day, Barnes & Noble College's inclusive access model, provides students with the affordability and convenience that facilitate academic achievement. Our inclusive access program has lowered the cost of course materials with an average savings for students enrolled of over 50 percent and an average opt-out rate below 5 percent.**

**Because students are provided with course materials before the first day of class at deeply discounted rates — incorporated as a charge into tuition or fees — they can start the term on equal footing with the texts they need for achievement.**

**First Day can easily integrate into your school's unique learning management system (LMS), registration and financial aid systems. This solution has lowered the cost of course materials and increased preparedness for students on more than 100 campuses. We work with top publishers like McGraw Hill and Pearson so that we can seamlessly deliver course materials through your school's LMS at the time of registration.**

**For more information on how your school can increase student outcomes with First Day or any of our other campus solutions, contact: [request\\_info@bncollege.com](mailto:request_info@bncollege.com).**

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# INCREASE AFFORDABILITY INCREASE ACHIEVEMENT

Administrative focus on course material selection and delivery is likely to improve student outcomes and equity.

Barnes & Noble College is a leading voice in understanding and shaping today's college student experience. We operate 1,400 bookstores and virtual bookstores, serving more than 6 million college students and 400,000 faculty nationwide. Through the Barnes & Noble College Insights platform, we provide information to help better understand the thinking, behaviors and expectations of current and future college students and faculty. Our goal is to serve all who work to elevate their lives through education.

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