

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Textbooks/Instructional Materials  
Project No. 10-13

To: Prospective Respondents  
From: Houston Community College, Procurement Operations  
Date: February 5, 2010  
Subject: Information Letter #1 - Request for Information (RFI) – Textbooks/Instructional Materials

The following questions regarding the Request for Proposal (RFP) for Healthy Screening Services (#09-30) were received in the Procurement Operations department.

Question #1: What are the recommendations mentioned in the background and rationale section of the RFI - see the statement, "The committee developed several short-term as well as longer-term recommendations"?

HCC Answer: Please see Attachment No. 1.

Question #2: What is the scope of the opportunity? Total number of students involved?  
Entire student body?  
Course/Discipline specific?  
Campus specific?  
Is there a roll-out plan and will this plan be rolled out over a specified time period?

HCC Answer: The scope of the opportunity potentially covers all students and all programs/courses that we offer. We are anxious to learn about what publishers/vendors might have available - that will help us prepare for a later RFP that could potentially begin by Spring 2011. Details would be spelled out in a later RFP.

Question #3: How much of the opportunity will involve the following? -  
Print textbook (%)  
Custom book (%)? What type of customization options is HCC looking for?  
EBook (%)  
How important are other course materials including digital assets?

HCC Answer: Depends upon what is available and what is offered. We do not have pre-set determinations at this point.

Question #4: What are your expectations on pricing transparency in the RFI?

HCC Answer : Full disclosure of costs and expected profits by respondents.

Question #5: What pricing and other proposal details do you expect to be included in this RFI response? What would you expect would not be included until the RFP stage?

HCC Answer: The pricing details would probably not be finalized until the RFP stage. In the RFI stage, we want to know what is "possible" and what are the pros/cons in terms of different options, including relative costs.

Question #6: What role will the bookstore play in this opportunity?

HCC Answer: To be determined - no pre-set decisions.

Question #7: Can you explain a little on the following bullet?

- "Transparent information regarding any costs, mark-ups and profits generated by sale of textbooks/instructional materials to students will be shared publicly."

HCC Answer: The first bullet in the selection/evaluation criteria section regarding Transparent Information is here revised to read as follows:

- "Transparent information regarding any costs, mark-ups and profits generated by sale of textbooks/instructional materials to students will be shared publicly. Submissions should include a breakdown of the formula used to come to the price that the students will be charged for materials to include such factors as cost for production, author, publisher, shipping, broker, etc."

## ATTACHMENT NO. 1

Feb 9, 2009

### Recommendations from the Textbook Committee Houston Community College (HCC)

*Houston, we have a problem* – college textbooks cost way too much! Who's to *blame* for this seemingly out of control situation?

- It's those crafty students! Some of them are not buying the textbooks they've been assigned. Some are buying them for less on-line or worse, pirating copies from friends or unscrupulous web sites! Some of them are sharing books, trading them, or even being so audacious as to read them for free in the library! This lack of purchasing is driving up costs and hampering plans for supplies.
- It's those absent-minded professors who live in ivory towers! Many of them have no idea how much their assigned textbooks cost real world students. They care about quality so much they end up squabbling endlessly over which ones to use (unless it's their own), not deciding until it's too late for students to shop around for used, similar, or online books. Further, they are out to frustrate students completely by asking them to actually read the books instead of simply telling them exactly just what they need to know for the tests!
- It's that monopolistic book store and/or misguided administrators who must be in collusion to make everyone else's lives miserable! Whereas all book stores are fighting to stock copies of calculus and organic chemistry textbooks alongside the latest Grisham potboiler, the college allows one bookstore a monopoly on these high demand volumes with no benefits to the college! As a result, the book store purposely under-orders and marks up prices to an outrageous extent to rake in excessive profits.
- It's those greedy publishers! They spend far too much money luring big name, high-demand authors to produce glossy books with too much stuff in the first place and then turn around and "revise" them before the ink is hardly dry. They then not only sell the textbooks, but insist on bundling them with required CDs, test banks, study guides, and kitchen sinks!

Ever heard a version of one of these theories? While written with tongue in cheek, there's probably an element of truth to each of them. In fact, however, the business of college textbooks is very complex and has gone very much awry in the last several years, in spite of there being no single villain in the tale to scapegoat. Houston Community College (HCC) is certainly not alone in pondering the difficulties and searching for solutions. An online search of the topic brings back similar cries from colleges and universities all across the nation.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the price of textbooks is increasing at more than four times the inflation rate for all finished goods. In 2005, it was estimated that the average student would spend nearly \$900 each year purchasing textbooks, nearly half the cost of tuition and fees at most two-year public colleges and a fifth of the amount that in-state students would pay for tuition and fees at public four-year colleges. These facts and more can be gleaned from the [www.MakeTextbooksAffordable.org](http://www.MakeTextbooksAffordable.org) website sponsored by the State Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs). For community colleges especially, high cost textbooks threaten to squeeze many students out of classes.

### *So – what can be done?*

While there is far from a consensus on immediate answers to the problem, several states have actually turned to legislation and even the US Congress has weighed in on the issue. The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 contains provisions designed to slow rising costs, specifically by:

- Requiring publishers to provide textbook pricing and revision information to faculty members and offer unbundled textbooks and promotional materials.
- Urging colleges to provide lists of assigned textbooks (and prices) to students when they are registering for classes.

### *What are other colleges and universities doing?*

- Southeastern Louisiana University has operated a textbook “rental” program for students since the 1930s. Sounds like a good idea, but when Southern Illinois University considered this option recently, they found the estimated start up costs (\$11.3 million) and operating costs (\$3.75 million a year) prohibitively expensive.
- At UCLA, students can access a website ([bruinwalk.com](http://bruinwalk.com)) for students to buy and sell books among themselves and another ([uclaestore.com](http://uclaestore.com)) by which students can purchase cheaper eBooks. Further, at UCLA, students can check textbooks out from the library overnight as long as they do so within two hours of closing one evening and return them within one hour of opening the next day.
- University of North Texas students have developed [swapsimple.com](http://swapsimple.com) for students there to trade textbooks.
- The Office of Academic Affairs of The University of Texas System requires that faculty turn in textbook lists early enough for bookstores to take advantage of buybacks and the used textbook market and post textbook lists with the 13 digit International Standard Book Numbers (ISBNs) online so that students can shop around for the least expensive alternative. Further, professors are urged to consider multi-semester adoptions; use of older editions if the revised ones are not substantively different; and adoption of associated materials only if they will be actively used.
- The Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina is considering a requirement that all its campuses create a guaranteed rental or buyback program for large, lower-division courses.
- Rio Salado College, part of the Maricopa Community College District in Phoenix, Arizona, has announced a partnership with Pearson Custom Publishing for Rio Salado professors to piece together single individualized textbooks from multiple sources. The college employs only 32 full-time faculty, most of whom are chairs of specific academic disciplines, and they will create individual courses subsequently utilized by the nearly 1,000 adjunct faculty members. The college will shift the 100 largest courses (which cover 80 percent of its enrollments) to the customized textbook program by October 2009.
- Harford Community College publishes a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on its website called “Why are textbooks so expensive?” to help students and their families understand facts about the textbook industry and the roles played by the college, the bookstores, and the publishers.

- An article in the University of Toledo student newspaper referred students to online sites as Google.com, Amazon.com or eBay.com to shop for online books or portions of books. It also noted price comparison web sites as BigWords.com, CheapestTextbooks.com and BooksPrice.com as well as textbook rental services as Chegg.com, BookRenter.com, and CampusBookRentals.com. Noting that international editions of textbooks are often cheaper than US counterparts, it also referred students to AbeBooks.com.
- The University of Wisconsin, along with UT-Austin, Harvard, and Yale Universities, operate “cooperative” book stores whereby any profits earned are returned to the buyers in the form of rebates or lower prices.
- Foothill-De Anza Community College District (Los Altos Hills, CA) won a grant from the Hewlett Foundation in 2008 to plan and pilot the Community College Open Textbook Project. The College has partnered with the League for Innovation in the Community College to create the Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources. Open textbooks are available online at no cost to students, and they can be printed for a low cost in various formats. The purpose of the project is to explore the feasibility of creating high-quality, accessible, and culturally relevant open textbooks at no or low cost for community college students and faculty.
- Rice University hosts Project Connexions (<http://cnx.org> <http://cnx.org>), an open source platform and open-access repository for open educational resources, enabling the creation, sharing, modification, and vetting of open educational material accessible to anyone, anywhere, anytime via the Web. Connexions allows for print-on-demand and accelerates delivery of educational materials into classrooms worldwide. Project Connexions contains a “lensing” feature for the vetting and endorsement of information and uses the Creative Commons attribution license ( <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>) to permit material to be reused by anyone provided that the users attribute their adaptation to the original author.

### *What should happen at HCC?*

While all of the efforts noted above might be helpful, there is no single “silver bullet,” especially in the short term, to help constrain the rising costs of textbooks. We need to consider several actions and we offer the following recommendations, some for the short term and some for the longer term.

#### **Short Term Recommendations:**

- Immediately renegotiate a contract with Barnes and Noble which operates the HCC Bookstores, to limit the retail mark-up on all textbooks to a reasonable, standard, and transparent amount of profit (for example, 20%).
- Enforce the HCC Board Policy of April 2007 that requires that all Textbook materials be unbundled for sale.
- Demand that publishers furnish all faculty members with a potential interest in their textbooks with wholesale price information (the price the Textbook will be sold to the HCC Bookstores).
- Enforce the current HCC Discipline Chair Guidelines, requiring HCC faculty members within academic disciplines and workforce programs to submit all textbook decisions on time (Textbook title, author, edition, publisher, ISBN number) to the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Instruction. Textbook title decisions should not be delayed, as some Chairs

have done, by a perceived need to estimate the numbers of students who will buy the books. The numbers may be adjusted later based on HCC course schedules and enrollment and purchasing patterns. Textbook decisions that are late for new textbooks should result in Bookstore ordering of current “default” selections. The dates for the textbook decisions are as follows:

Spring textbook orders will be due to VCIN Office - October 1

Summer textbook orders will be due - Feb 1

Fall textbook orders will be due - March 15

- Require disciplines/programs to limit adoptions of textbook titles per course to two for use across the district and require such adoptions to last for three years. Disciplines/Programs will designate one of the two titles as the “default selection.” Both of the first two bullet points will enable the Bookstore to acquire significant copies of used books to offer students at lower prices at all HCC locations. While some critics argue that the used book market is a contributing cause rather than result of rising textbook prices, this is one of the fastest and surest ways to provide short-term relief to students.
- Allow disciplines/programs to appeal for exceptions to these recommendations to their appropriate Instructional Deans’ Council. This was an original guiding policy of the Discipline Committee Guidelines, first adopted in 1999, but one that has since been largely ignored. The Committee views this as a return to responsible action rather than a new imposition. Flexibility should be considered for those disciplines that require more timely changes of adoptions due to rapid changes in technology and information, although newer materials should be explored in online, open formats to supplement current rather than require new textbooks. Rather than invoke the original Guidelines requirement for one adoption per course, we support the option of at least two titles per course.
- Create a common checklist (by the Textbook Committee) for the evaluation of textbook options by all disciplines/programs to ensure a transparent process and a balanced consideration of factors related to quality, relevance, comprehensiveness, accessibility, utility, currency, price, and other factors. If all factors related to educational quality are deemed equal, disciplines/programs should select the cheaper alternative for students.
- Allow disciplines/programs to approve additional and unlimited titles or options for adoption that are open resource and free to students. An excellent example is available in terms of what the History Department at HCC-Southeast College has accomplished. The department has created a repository for use by all full-time and adjunct instructors that contains hundreds of electronically stored open resources in a variety of formats (Word, PDF, and MP3). It contains primary source documents, secondary source essays and articles, full-length books and book chapters, as well as audio and video sources. It has links to numerous academic web sites and even a few history-related video games. The project is accessed through the Southeast College’s Learning web and faculty are encouraged to place items from the repository in their respective BlackBoard Vista classrooms. Department member Jim Ross-Nazzal reports that “Feedback from faculty and students has been overwhelmingly supportive of what appears to be a popular mechanism for relaying academic information. Many times throughout the semester I update the repository as new academic sources become available. For example, three Southeast College faculty presented papers at the Fall 2008 East Texas Historical Association’s annual conference. Their papers then became part of the electronic collection. “

- Allow individual professors who have authored complete textbooks or monographs (not portions or supplements) that are not chosen by their respective disciplines/programs for official adoption to continue to utilize the textbooks for the course sections they teach. Authors of textbooks, monographs, and other supplements will not be allowed to chair discipline/program textbook evaluation committees.
- Host an open forum to discuss the implications of both short and long term recommendations from the HCC Textbook Committee as well as the Board policy (April 2007) in terms of academic freedom, ethics, and professional responsibility.
- Increase opportunities for faculty professional development and certification in Instructional Technology and Teaching and Learning Effectiveness so faculty may acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in the Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resource, Project Connexions, and other options.
- Ensure that sufficient copies of all HCC Textbooks are purchased and available at HCC Libraries throughout the system.

On-line textbooks are not new and in spite of the fact that they are typically half as expensive for students to buy, movement toward their adoption by faculty and use by students has been slow. Sales of all electronic college materials represented only \$241 million of the \$3.5 billion college publishing industry in 2007. It is a culture shift that is still only in the beginning stages. Others point out that many students still do not have computers and high speed Internet service at home and only limited access on HCC campuses. Access is expanding, but not to the point where we could entertain an exclusive move to on-line resources. We can begin planning, however, for the longer term when reliance on on-line textbooks and learning resources will be much more pervasive with improved access.

### **Longer Term Recommendations:**

- Include an assessment category in both program reviews and progress reports by all disciplines/programs to evaluate alternative options as Flat World Knowledge, CourseSmart, Project Merlot, the Gutenberg Project, iTunesU, OpenCourseWare at MIT, and other options.

Flat World Knowledge is a commercial textbook publishing company that seeks to cover the costs of producing free textbooks by providing ancillary materials to students at nominal prices. Merlot is a project of California State University that contains a searchable database of peer-reviewed, online multimedia materials. Project Gutenberg offers over 25,000 free e-books, and audio-books for older, out-of-copyright texts, including such classics as *Jane Eyre* and *The Iliad*. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Open CourseWare has placed virtually its entire curricula online – video-lecture, problem sets and exams for more than 1,888 courses in 33 disciplines.

- Join the Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources and provide incentives for HCC faculty to participate fully (including guarantee to faculty of copyright for materials they contribute to such programs). HCC already has many open resource pioneers and champions. At the recent Faculty Senate Conference, Ken Busbee, Computer Science Professor at HCC-Southwest College, demonstrated the learning modules he has created for Computer Science Programming Fundamentals in Project Connexions. Ultimately, Professor Busbee's modules might allow him to use these in lieu of a textbook in one or more courses.

Encourage faculty to sign the Open Textbooks Statement of Intent found at

[www.maketextbooksaffordable.org](http://www.maketextbooksaffordable.org) The statement affirms faculty's "prerogative and responsibility to select course materials that are pedagogically most appropriate" and "to seek affordable and accessible course materials...whenever possible." The statement points out that open textbooks can be the equal to any textbooks that are commercially produced. An example is Caltech Professor R. Preston McAfee's *Introduction to Economic Analysis* which has been adopted at NYU and Harvard.

- As part of the Community College Open Textbook Project, Foothill-DeAnza Community College has partnered with Rice's Project Connexions to pilot the use of the *Collaborative Statistics* textbook. During Fall 2008, this open textbook was adopted for 14 sections from four different colleges and during Winter/Spring 2009 semesters will be adopted for use in at least 20 course sections at six colleges. Plans are underway for a similar pilot with an Elementary Algebra textbook.
- Engage in our own pilot studies in which we compare the use of an open textbook versus a commercial textbook in terms of teaching effectiveness, student learning outcomes, faculty and student satisfaction, etc.

Judy Baker, Director of the Community College Open Educational Resources Project at Foothill-De Anza College and author of "It Takes a Consortium to Support Open Textbooks" in the January-February 2009 edition of *Educause*, notes there will be many challenges ahead, not the least of which is the fact that current student financial aid programs for textbooks are not set up for online commerce. The Consortium has issued a preliminary report with recommendations that encourage:

- Use of Project Connexions as the common repository for open textbook content, in an effort to provide greater national and even international access;
- Using Connexions as the tool for sharing, re-using, customizing, and disseminating open textbook content;
- Examining Flat World Knowledge as a sustainable business model for open textbook production;
- Consideration of corporate funding, in return for branding, to sponsor the development of content for specific disciplines;
- Approaching publishers to donate content that is going out of print;
- And identifying the process for storyboarding the development of open textbooks

The Project will seek to coordinate with other open educational resources projects such as OER Commons, the Global Text Project, LeMill, Curricki, and Wikibooks. As Baker notes, "when educators pool their expertise to foster a culture of shared knowledge, everyone benefits." HCC faculty have much to offer as well as gain by joining this exciting movement.