

## **Textbook Affordability May Need Many Solutions**

9/07/07

In response to consumer complaints that textbooks are becoming increasingly expensive, state and federal legislators and university officials have been taking steps to make course materials more affordable by addressing some publisher and faculty practices they say are raising prices.

However, "a one-size-fits-all strategy in reducing textbook prices probably is not optimal," according to a report released last week by the California State University Taskforce on Textbook Affordability.

"That may be true, but every little bit helps," said NACS Director of Government Relations Rich Hershman. "For students to afford the course materials they need, it's going to take all of us doing what we can in every way."

Three NACS members are on the CSU taskforce: Bill Dickerson, former NACS Board of Trustees member and executive director, CSU Fullerton Auxiliary Services Corp.; Chuck Kissel, bookstore director, CSU Fullerton; and Todd Summer, bookstore course materials director, San Diego State University.

Hershman called the CSU report—Improving Access and Reducing Costs of Textbook Content—"very informative and thought provoking," including its recommendation that CSU continue to move forward with its digital marketplace initiative. Of particular interest is the taskforce's attempt to score the cost savings of various approaches to reduce course material costs.

NACS staff, however, reviewed the report after its release, and noted a few minor inaccuracies attributed to NACS that the taskforce has agreed to correct. Those include overstating the increase in textbook costs in the last five years and incorrectly stating NACS' position on the resale of complimentary textbook copies. NACS opposes the sale of clearly marked complimentary copies.

The CSU report is the latest in a string of federal and state textbook affordability studies in the last two years that have singled out various practices that affect prices of textbooks and other course materials.

NACS has contributed to just about every review and report on the affordability of course materials, even having representatives testify on Capitol Hill on behalf of college stores. NACS' contributions have come from a combination of resources, including the NACS Board of Trustees, the NACS Government Relations Committee, college store managers, and the NACS staff.

From its involvement, NACS has created a summary of some of the suggestions the association has shared with various stakeholders about measures that could help reduce the cost of course materials for students.

#### NACS 10 Steps Toward Textbook Affordability for Students:

- \* Promote Savings through sales tax exemptions and tax credits for textbooks.
  
- \* Promote savings through strong buy-back programs for textbooks.
  
- \* Promote savings through the sale of used textbooks, and work to increase the availability of used books.
  
- \* Work with faculty and educational departments to ensure the earliest and most accurate textbook adoptions feasible.
  
- \* Work with faculty and educational departments to ensure that all bundles are economically sound and necessary.
  
- \* Work with faculty and educational departments to ensure that they only adopt textbooks and ancillary materials that will actually be used during a course.
  
- \* Champion multi-year adoption of textbook editions to ensure a strong used-book market.

\* Promote better communication between faculty and students on textbook requirements and access issues.

\* Establish and adhere to fair and clearly communicated textbook return/refund policies.

\* Work to increase financial aid available for textbooks and course materials.