

CSU Textbook Initiative Praised by Congress

California State University's (CSU) "groundbreaking work" through its digital marketplace initiative was singled out last week in a Congressional study as a model for long-term solutions in textbook affordability. The report, *Turn the Page: Making College Textbooks More Affordable*, was delivered to Congress June 1 by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance.

The report pointed to CSU initiative programs currently being developed, such as electronic versions of books, e-text, and interactive web-based text and textbook options, as a starting point for the implementation of a "national digital marketplace" to address textbook affordability.

"We were quite impressed with the investment and progress made thus far by CSU," said Advisory Committee Vice Chair Claude Pressnell in a press statement released by the Secretary of Education's office. He also stated that the CSU model could be used for a national pilot program that could be launched within a few years.

Among the most important findings in the report was that "rapid increases in the prices of college textbooks are symptoms of a structural flaw in the market for textbooks and learning materials – a market driven by supply rather than demand." In addition, to address the growing cost of textbooks and the "underlying cause" of market failure in the short term, the report states that "steps must be taken to increase affordability for all students, especially for those from low- and moderate-income families."

The CSU's digital marketplace initiative began in 2003 to increase student and faculty success by cutting the costs of educational information, hardware, and software, while serving the technological needs of students, faculty, and staff. However, many of the latest programs currently being considered by the CSU have been brought forward by the CSU Textbook Affordability Task Force, which commenced a series of meetings in January 2007.

"We are prepared to recommend a number of initiatives designed to lower textbook costs," said Cal State Stanislaus Provost William Covino, who serves as chair of the task force. "These include web-based textbook delivery, textbook rental programs, the adoption of common textbooks for multiple course sections at discounted prices,

and custom publishing, which tailors textbook content and reduces cost. We are also recommending campus-based presentations that will inform students and professors about the options available for lowering textbook cost.”

Another CSU project praised in the report was MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching), a web-based resource implemented in 1997. MERLOT is a digital library and interactive collection of 16,000 online digital course materials designed for a variety of learning styles that invites faculty collaboration on teaching and learning materials.

More information (.pdf) on Turn the Page: Making College Textbooks More Affordable. Scroll to pages 51-54 to find information regarding CSU’s digital marketplace initiative. Also see pages 7-9 of the Executive Summary to read the report’s recommendations of using the CSU textbook initiative as a template for the implementation of a national digital marketplace for textbooks.