

Proposition: 01-25/26

Proposal Type: ☐ Bill ☒ Resolution ☐ Memorial ☐ Joint Proposition ☐ Other
(If Joint proposition, also select type)

Title: Request for an Internal Estimate of NMSU Students' Textbook Costs

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Proposed Committee: Curriculum and Planning

Prior Approvals: N/A, none needed.

Proposal: We ask the NMSU Administration to effect the production of an internal¹ estimate² of the recent³ typical cost of textbooks and supplies⁴ for which undergraduate students at the NMSU-Main campus are responsible before committing to an Exclusive Access textbook acquisition program. We also ask that the NMSU-Main Administration support comparable but separate analyses at each of the branch campuses, if requested.

- (1) By "internal" is meant that the estimate should be performed by NMSU employees who are not conflicted through a close connection with the NMSU Bookstore. Un-conflicted entities might include, for example, NMSU Library faculty or staff, or members of an appropriate academic unit.
- (2) "Estimate" means a reasonably-defined cost that students have likely been paying. This should be *the minimum of prices that cost-conscious students might be able to find in a reasonable period* including current prices at the NMSU bookstore, the price charged by vendors online (either new or used), or the publisher's cost.
- (3) "Recent" means any combination of academic terms beginning in fall 2024.
- (4) "Textbooks and supplies" include textbooks (hardcopy and digital), software subscriptions, laboratory equipment, and other resources required for at least one class.

Goal: This Resolution seeks to (i) clarify what NMSU-Main Campus undergraduates currently pay for textbooks and resources; and (ii) ensure that they experience a cost savings in the event that a campus-wide Inclusive Access or Equitable Access textbook program is initiated.

Rationale: The ongoing shift from hardcopy textbooks to digital resources offers students the possibility of improved convenience and decreased costs with respect to a traditional model in which students locate and purchase all textbooks using out-of-pocket funds. In support of this promise, Inclusive Access (IA) and Equitable Access (EA) programs have grown widespread since 2016. Within such programs, students agree to purchase all required textbooks and materials from a for-profit entity (such as Barnes & Noble, Follett, Redshelf, or Vitalsource) for a set fee on a course-by-course (IA) or term-by-term (EA) basis. When implemented within an opt-out framework, 96% or more of students may remain within the program, guaranteeing that (absent technical issues) most students begin each term prepared. This can increase course

completion and reduce D/F/W rates. Moreover, the reliable program volume enables program administrators to negotiate lower costs with publishers and pass the savings on to students¹.

Follett, which runs the NMSU Bookstore, implemented the IA-style *Follett Access* program at NMSU after 2021 with the promise of reducing cost, stress, inequity, and poor student outcomes. More recently, they have proposed to replace *Follett Access* with an EA-style *Books4Success* program, with essentially identical motivation. The proposed pricing is \$28 per credit-hour, or \$448 per term for a student enrolled in 16 credits of coursework. *At present, it is difficult to assess whether this represents a cost savings.* As of September 22, 2025, NMSU's Financial Aid website² quotes a cost of \$645 for “Books, Course Materials, Supplies, Equipment” for 15 credit hours (or \$43 per credit-hour), but this simply reflects “national averages obtained from The College Board and/or the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)” and may have little connection with what NMSU students actually pay. A crude review of the estimated textbook for a sample of ten undergraduates performed by the lead sponsor (KF) led to a typical cost of \$13-\$15 per credit hour (data compiled below). This estimate may not be representative, but as assembling it required roughly four hours, expanding the sample is beyond the limited resources of individual faculty. An EA program at Ivy Tech Community College quotes a cost of \$18 per credit-hour³, significantly cheaper than *Books4Success*, but it is difficult to determine whether the required materials at this institution are comparably expensive.

Follett indicates that their proposed pricing offers a cost savings compared to the actual cost at NMSU, but neither their internal estimate of that actual cost nor the analysis and supporting data are available. The obvious conflict of interest associated with their estimate raises additional concern.

In order to ensure that any future IA or EA programs offer actual cost savings to NMSU students, we therefore ask NMSU to do the cost analysis itself. We also ask the NMSU-Main administration to be prepared to facilitate comparable analyses at the branch campuses, where typical costs are likely to vary with course offerings. In addition to serving our students better, this effort will yield an estimate that may be folded directly into NMSU's public-facing webpages, improving the accuracy of—and possibly reducing—our students' estimated costs.

¹ <https://tytonpartners.com/course-materials-in-higher-education/>

² <https://fa.nmsu.edu/cost-of-attendance/>

³ <https://www.ivytech.edu/student-services/campus-stores/ivy-textbooks/>

