Pay One Price brings affordability and predictability to student textbook costs

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University of Arizona BookStores is looking to make textbook costs for students more affordable and predictable through the launch of Pay One Price, a program that will provide access to required textbooks for a flat rate of $250 per semester, no matter how many courses a student takes or what their major is.

"This is all about helping students," said Cindy Hawk, assistant director for the book division at the BookStores. "Previously, we've seen some students taking fewer courses each semester, some not signing up for courses based on book costs and some taking courses that they may be less interested in. Pay One Price lets students plan ahead and streamlines the process."

The program will replace the current Inclusive Access system for all undergraduate students enrolled at main campus. Inclusive Access, which offers digital access to required course materials through D2L at a reduced price, was begun in 2016.

Despite the lower prices offered with Inclusive Access, students were having to make difficult choices about their classes based on finances, Hawk said.

Pay One Price will take effect in the fall semester for all main campus undergraduate students. Most materials will be digital and will be available to students through their D2L accounts a week before classes start each semester. The $250 is billed to their bursar account at the same time as tuition and other fees. If a student decides that participating isn’t the best option for them, they have until about two weeks after the start of classes to opt out. That deadline for the fall semester is Sept. 3.

Increasing accessibility

Like Inclusive Access, Pay One Price is a "digital preferred" program. If materials are unavailable digitally or not feasible in a digital format, print options will be included. While faculty members are not required to use digital course materials, Hawk says many students prefer digital to print because they have easier access and like the usability features that come with digital materials.

Digital materials often are more accessible for students who need accommodations due to disabilities or other reasons.

"By having digital textbooks, a good majority of students who would request e-texts or digital texts as an accommodation can now have that instantaneously by having the electronic version of the textbook from the start," said Dawn Hunziker, associate director of the Disability Resource Center.

Since the push to use digital materials began with the implementation of Inclusive Access in 2016, textbook accommodation requests have dropped from approximately 800 per semester to about 120, she said.

Digital materials offer text-to-speech capabilities, meaning students can listen to their textbooks. Students who use screen readers can still work with the DRC to obtain materials that support them.

Students with physical disabilities also benefit from not having to carry textbooks, Hunziker says.

"We used to scan textbooks and save them as PDFs for students who weren't able to lift or carry physical textbooks," she recalled. "We no longer have to do that with digital textbooks."

What it means for faculty

For faculty members, the program provides some certainty by ensuring that all students will have their textbooks on the first day of class. This is especially helpful for an instructor like Bill Neumann, professor of practice in the Department of Management Information Systems, who teaches about 3,000 students each year in his MIS 111 class. Neumann has worked with the BookStores on developing the program and is a big supporter.

"I won't have to wait until everybody gets their book to be fair to the class," Neumann said. "I can engage academically with students in the first week of class."

For the most part, faculty will continue to operate as normal when it comes to assigning textbooks. Instructors are being asked to submit their course material requirements, even if their course does not have any, by June 15. The deadlines are set to ensure compliance with transparency requirements set by the Higher Educational Opportunities Act and to give University Libraries and the BookStores time to acquire the materials.
"Faculty will still choose whatever materials they want to use," Hawk said. "They choose the materials, we deliver the materials."

One way the BookStores is trying to keep costs down, Hawk says, is by working with University Libraries.

"Part of what we do is try to find unlimited licenses for e-books that can then be made available to students for free," said Cheryl Gerken, course content initiatives manager for University Libraries.

The BookStores and University Libraries, she said, have partnered on textbook affordability initiatives for more than 10 years.

About 20% of the titles faculty members request can be acquired and provided by University Libraries, Gerken said. Instructors can use the University Libraries website to check if their requested titles are available through University Libraries as e-books.

Additional information and resources

- The Pay One Price flat rate for summer courses will be $125 and cover the entire summer.
- The deadline for faculty members to submit textbook selections for the fall 2023 semester is June 15. The deadline for the spring 2024 semester is Oct. 10 while the deadline for summer 2024 is Feb. 14.
- See the Pay One Price faculty FAQ and student FAQ.
- Those with additional questions about the program can email payoneprice@arizona.edu.

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