I. Background

In the effort to alleviate the burden placed on students by the rising costs of textbooks, the University of Wisconsin System has undertaken a number of activities designed to keep textbooks affordable. Some institutions within the System have encouraged their faculty to adopt textbooks early to enable students to purchase books from competitively priced sources, while others have established textbook rental programs. To date, seven UW institutions, including the UW Colleges, have textbook rental programs: UW-Eau Claire; UW-La Crosse; UW-Platteville; UW-River Falls; UW-Stevens Point; UW-Stout; UW-Whitewater; UW-Barrou County; and UW-Richland. Pilot textbook rental programs have been established at UW-Marshfield/Wood County and UW-Sheboygan. Despite these efforts, the unabated rising cost of textbooks continues to be a major concern for the University of Wisconsin System. In order to maintain access and affordability for UW System students while ensuring the quality of the educational experience, this concern needs to be addressed.

This proposed policy takes into consideration several factors including: 1) the UW System governance structure; 2) primary role or responsibility of the faculty and instructional academic staff in selecting textbooks as an integral element in curriculum development; and 3) market forces that involve bookstores and textbook publishers.

II. Federal Requirement

In addition to the urgency felt by UW System institutions and their students to alleviate the burden placed on students by textbook costs, the Federal Government is also proposing action. By July 2010, all institutions within the University of Wisconsin System will need to comply with Section 133 of the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act which, among its provisions, requires that “to the maximum extent practicable, each institution of higher education receiving Federal financial assistance shall:

1. Disclose on the institution’s Internet course schedule and in the manner of the institution’s choosing, the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and retail price information of required and recommended college textbooks and supplemental materials for each course listed on the institution’s course schedule used for preregistration and registration purposes.

2. If the ISBN number is not available for such college textbook or supplemental material, then the institution shall include in the Internet course schedule the author, title, publisher and copyright date for such college textbook or supplemental material. If the institution determines the disclosure of the information required above is not practicable for a college textbook or supplemental material, then the institution shall so indicate by placing the designation “To Be Determined” in lieu of the information required.”
III. Policy

A. All institutions within the University of Wisconsin System will work towards developing and implementing schedules for the early adoption of textbooks in ways that are effective in allowing students time to order textbooks from competitively priced sources. It is expected that all institutions will achieve this goal by the end of 12 months from the effective date of this policy.

B. Each bookstore owned by a UW institution shall provide faculty and instructional academic staff who are placing book orders with current information about the retail price of selected course materials. A bookstore not owned by a UW institution, but granted a contract to operate on a campus prior to the development of this policy, shall, to the extent possible, also provide faculty and instructional academic staff who are placing book orders with current information about the retail price of selected course materials.

C. To the extent feasible and appropriate, faculty and instructional academic staff teaching the same course for multiple semesters are encouraged to use the same textbooks and course materials for multiple semesters.

D. Whenever appropriate within the goals of the course, faculty and instructional academic staff are encouraged to order new editions of textbooks only if older editions are not of comparable educational content. In such cases, instructors are encouraged to list information pertinent to previous editions which are acceptable for use.

E. When available, and economically advantageous to students, faculty and instructional academic staff shall request unbundled versions of textbook and course materials.

F. To the extent possible, if bundled materials are assigned, bookstores owned by UW institutions shall make available both bundled and unbundled versions of the materials for purchase. In situations where bundled materials are assigned, institutions and bookstores should clarify on the bookstore website whether students should purchase either the bundled package or all required portions of the bundle individually.

G. When appropriate and available, faculty and instructional academic staff shall encourage students to purchase electronic versions of textbooks or textbooks available for purchase online.

H. All UW institutions shall look for creative ways to lessen the financial hardship of college textbook purchases, such as: targeted scholarship and financial aid funds, exploration of economically viable textbook rental programs for selected courses, consideration of placing selected course materials on reserve in campus libraries, using information in the public domain (custom publishing), and encouraging student-managed initiatives such as textbook swaps.

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\[1\] This policy was developed using UW System BOR approved Guidelines for making textbook more affordable. The BOR approved Guidelines were developed using input from UW Faculty and Academic Staff Representatives, UW Provosts, UW Chief Business Officers, Section 133 of the HEOA of 2008, and the University System of Maryland Textbook Policy of 2009.