

To: Dr. Valerie Ashby, Dean of the Trinity College of Arts and Sciences, and  
Dr. Ravi Bellamkonda, Dean of the Pratt School of Engineering  
From: Kristina Smith, T' 19  
Re: Course cost transparency

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### **Many courses are cryptically expensive, and students cannot avoid some costs**

For the 2017-18 academic year, the Karsh Office of Undergraduate Financial Support estimated that the average Trinity College student would spend [\\$3,466](#) on “books, supplies, and personal expenses.” They estimate that Pratt students should expect additional book costs of \$348 per year. The Karsh Office subsidizes a portion of these costs for some students receiving financial aid, but many students can attest to the burden of course-related expenses that persists even with financial aid.

While older editions, rentals, and used copies of textbooks can substitute for the expensive newest editions often listed in syllabi, other course materials often require exorbitant up-front costs. These include online lab subscriptions, clickers for in-class interactive learning, and course-specific textbooks and workbooks, some of which are created by the professor and thus available only through the Duke Bookstore. On top of this, course costs are typically hidden from students until the first day of class, hindering financial planning for low-income students.

### **Listing all course costs on DukeHub enables better financial planning**

When bookbagging in DukeHub, students should be able to see a total cost associated with each course. The cost should include the going rates for the specific edition(s) of textbook(s), any online subscriptions, miscellaneous materials (goggles, clickers, calculators, modeling sets, etc.) required for the course. Professors should update their course costs each semester to reflect changes to their syllabi and the costs of the required materials.

Listing course costs provides valuable information to budget-conscious students, especially those of us who are low-income and/or work part-time to sustain themselves in college. We plan our finances around the things that matter most, and being able to attend and fully engage with our courses matters greatly. For example, if I know that I am going to have two expensive online portfolio subscriptions required in completing my education minor, I might choose to take those courses in different semesters (rather than at the same time) to balance my costs.

Also, if professors consistently and universally report course costs, the Karsh Office of Financial Support will have better data on the actual average cost of course materials. This would help with optimizing financial aid packages and improving the accuracy of the estimate cost of attendance at Duke.

### **Next steps**

I will work with your offices to arrange a meeting to hear your questions and concerns and to discuss how to move forward with improving the transparency of course expenses. We should discuss a timeline for implementing the changes to DukeHub, perhaps with Associate Vice Provost Frank Blalark from the Registrar's office. I also know it will be important to get the faculty onboard, so I will work with you to create a presentation to the Academic Council regarding these improvements. I look forward to our collaborations on this small step that will make a big difference in students' financial wellness.