

## **Abstract**

“Implementing Cheaper Alternatives to Expensive Textbooks at Tarrant County College: A Recommendation Report.”

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On March 25, 2019 Dr. Stacey Stuewe, professor at Tarrant County College, approved a proposal by a group of students at Tarrant County College to carry out a research study on implementing a cheaper alternative to expensive textbooks at TCC. The group of students began by performing research to better understand the advantages and disadvantages associated with alternatives to textbooks. Then they assessed student insight regarding alternatives to textbooks at TCC, determine the criteria by which alternatives to textbooks might be evaluated, and perform the evaluations. Among the students who were surveyed at TCC and other universities, the majority of students reported in favor of cheaper alternatives to textbooks.

Keywords: Tarrant County College, community college, textbooks, cheaper, alternatives, students, money, academics.

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## Executive Summary

In our research to replace textbooks with cheaper alternative at Tarrant County College, Professor Dr. Stacy Stuewe asked us to propose what we thought would be the best outcome for the students of Tarrant County College. To complete our recommendation, we agreed on researching textbooks and scholarly articles containing information about alternatives to textbooks, surveying students who pay full price for textbooks, and students who use free resources or textbooks, and interview professors, analyze our data, and present our findings and recommendations.

The problem currently aggravating us as students is that many professors require students to purchase or rent expensive textbooks and the the professor does not use it at all during the semester. By doing this students are wasting their money that could have been used for a better cause.

Our group wanted to find out whether or not there is enough evidence that students would benefit from free or inexpensive alternatives for textbooks. To come up with an answer to this question, we developed a plan to perform five tasks:

- Research information about the alternatives to textbooks and the effect they have on students.
- Survey TCC students to determine what they think about the idea of cheaper alternatives to textbooks.
- Interview professor Stacy Said, who has implemented a non-textbook course.
- Survey students at other colleges who offer alternatives to textbooks.
- Analyze our collected data and prepare a recommendation report.

Through all of our extended primary and secondary research we found substantial evidence that would support finding a cheaper alternative to expensive textbooks. We also weighed the possible problems that would exist with finding alternatives.

We recommend one course of action:

We recommend that TCC invest money into open online textbooks and resources, which are far less expensive than traditional textbooks. By doing this TCC will be saving each of their students hundreds of dollars every semester.

## **Introduction**

To determine the best course of action for implementing free or cheaper alternatives to expensive textbooks, at Tarrant County College, Dr. Stacy Stuewe, professor at Tarrant County College, asked us to propose a solution to an issue that we have experienced as students at Tarrant County College. In construction of our recommendation report, we decided to research scholarly resources regarding information about alternatives to textbooks, conduct primary research through student questionnaires and administration interviews, examine our research, and present our findings and recommendation.

The current price to buy or rent textbooks is outrageous considering there's a chance it may not be used. Students at Tarrant County College are wasting their money on these books. Instead they could use that money to enroll in more classes or many other needs.

Therefore, our group wanted to determine the benefit of free or cheaper alternative to textbooks at Tarrant County College. Specifically, we developed a plan to perform five tasks:

- Research information about the benefits of free or cheaper alternatives to textbooks.
- Survey TCC students to see what they think about an cheaper alternative to textbooks.
- Interview Stacy Said, professor applying for a grant to have all classes us free resources, to understand why TCC does not use alternatives to textbooks, and how effective alternatives are.
- Survey students who use free resources at other colleges and see if they have benefited from it.
- Analyze our collected data and prepare a recommendation report.

Through primary and secondary research we found that the majority of college students are in favor of alternatives to expensive textbooks. We surveyed students at TCC, almost 90% stated that they would benefit from cheaper from alternatives to textbooks. Considering this we found this trend common among both students who attend a community college and students who attend universities.

At some colleges it is common to have cheaper alternatives to textbooks. This is because professors do not use the textbook directly and provide other resources. We also found this trend common through our primary research, among students that we surveyed at universities with cheaper alternatives to textbooks, such as Texas State University (TXST) and Oklahoma State University (OSU), more than 93% of students reported that having a cheaper alternative to textbooks was very beneficial to them.

Our principal findings regarding alternatives to textbooks conclude that students typically show alternative to textbooks allow students to have less stress financially. We surveyed students at Tarrant County College, 89% of students say they already use alternative resources instead of textbooks. . Unfortunately, implementing alternatives to textbooks for students at TCC could be problematic for some courses. According to one article, many professors believe that “the challenge is sometimes not with textbooks themselves, but with the lack of related materials and updated text available to sources.” (McMurtrie). But students at Cal State have been given the option to rent textbooks online for one fourth of the price of the hard copy textbook. M. Keith Claybrook Jr. a professor of African studies at California State University states, “my role as an educator is to make sure students have the tools and resources needed to maximize learning. I don’t want to penalize my students who have financial hardships or limitations that prevent them from getting course materials.”(Rodriguez). Professor Claybrook also scans articles, chapters from textbooks, and creates customized e-books available for free through their campus library. A national survey released by the U.S. Public Research Foundation found that 65% of students said they did not purchase a textbook because it was too expensive. Even though they feared that their grades would suffer. Here is concrete evidence proving that alternatives to textbooks actually works at the University level. Also in 2015 U.S. PIRG reviewed open programs at five colleges: The University of Massachusetts Amherst, Kansas State University, Tacoma Community College, University of Minnesota, and the University of Maryland. They report,” at UMass Amherst, for example, the university spent \$60,000 on faculty grants to produce open textbooks and students ascend roughly \$1 million. On average, students at the five schools saved \$128 per course.” This study shows how by spending a little bit of money the school can save their students a ton of money.

## **Research Methods**

We started our research by interviewing Stacey Said, Professor at Tarrant County College, who stated that she sent a grant for all classes to use free resources, but it got denied. We still gained a lot of information on how her classes benefit from being able to use free resources such as, how the grades have improved and how her class attendance is.

Early on in our research, we found an article that showed how students at New Zealand universities also used free resources. Both Stacey Said and the article we found mainly focused on how the students benefit from not having to buy textbooks financially and educationally.

To perform the analysis requested by Stacey Said, we broke the project into six tasks:

1. Obtain basic information and understanding on textbooks and their alternatives.

2. Survey students who pay full price for their textbooks.
3. Survey students who use free resources or textbooks.
4. Interview professors about the proposed solution.
5. Assess how students could benefit from free resources or textbooks.
6. Analyze our data and prepare a recommendation report.

In the following discussion of how we performed each task, we explain the reasoning that guided our research.

**Task 1 . Obtain basic information and understanding on textbooks and their alternatives**

We have already begun our research by looking up articles online over this topic. While researching we have found out that other universities are looking for other textbook alternatives. We found one study at the University of Otago (New Zealand), held a survey that showed the percentage of students that felt like they were greatly affected by the cost and lack of textbooks (Stein).

At the University of Kansas, they started teaching with an OAER in between the years of 2014-2016 students saved \$1.61 million. Students then found other resources, in which could help them save money. The university continued to use this program in order to help the students financially (Lashley).

**Task 2 . Survey students who pay full price for textbooks**

During the first week of our research, we will survey students who pay full price for textbooks. The survey will be conducted in person/online. Flyers with a URL to the survey along with a QR code will be present on site, so students can more easily complete the survey. We will attempt to obtain a laptop from the library for students to use. The survey will take approximately one minute to complete. The survey will open with a question to verify the students have purchased their textbooks. If the students are renting, or purchased used, they will be able to indicate this along with a rough percentage of how much they saved.

**Task 3 . Survey students who use free resources or textbooks**

Students who used free resources, rather than textbooks, will be surveyed on a separate day. The process will be similar: students will be prompted to fill out surveys on campus, with QR codes/URLs to visit the survey website. The survey will take approximately two minutes to complete. The survey will open with a question to verify the student obtained their information for free. We will then inquire further, and attempt to obtain the source of the information. We will not collect incriminating data on the student, in the event they illegally downloaded a textbook online. Instead, we will ask more creative questions to lead to the same result. We will later compile the results and attempt to determine the quality of mentioned sources.

**Task 4 . Interview professors about the proposed solution. The questions will be:**

1. What's your plan with the grant?
2. How effective do you think this program will be?
3. What kind of open resources do you think would be most useful? (online, or free open textbook)

**Task 5 . Assess how students could benefit from free resources or textbooks**

1. How much do you spend on textbooks per semester?

2. How many of your textbooks do you use frequently?
3. Do you feel as though you would greatly benefit from open resources?

**Task 6** . Analyze our data and prepare a recommendation report

Compile the data we learned during our research, and report on the potential success or failure of switching from textbooks.

## **Results**

In this section, we present the results of the research that we conducted. For each task that we accomplished, we show the most important data that was acquired.

**Task 1:** Obtain basic information and understanding on textbooks and their alternatives.

When we began our research, we first started looking for articles in the database about other campus and professors who use only open resources. We found a university and a professor at TCC that was already using other alternatives, such as online resources. Not many campuses have this program, most require textbooks to succeed in their education. But students that do have free resources have benefited from it.

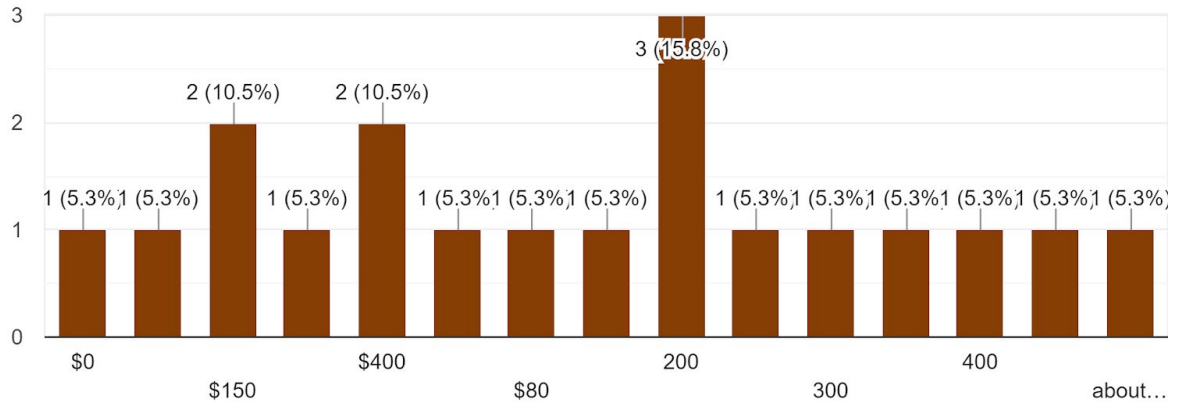
From the start of our research it was very clear that majority of students felt that they could benefit from free resources or textbooks. One article that we found about the University of Otago (New Zealand) is that the cost of textbooks has a great impact in the choice of courses students take, as well as the quality of their learning. The lack of use of paid textbooks has influenced students making them question the value of textbooks. Majority of students have begun looking for alternative resources or searching for lectures that will not be as expensive as purchasing a textbook would be. Having alternatives has changed the behavior of students and they have benefited from this program.

**Task 2:** Survey students who pay full price for textbooks

The second part of our research was to determine if students in universities in general felt that they would benefit from having access to free resources and textbooks. The first question we asked students is how much they spend per semester on only textbooks. 10.5% of the students surveyed said that they spend at least \$400 per semester on textbooks. While the lower percentage paid less than \$400. The higher percentage was 15.8% that stated that they pay \$200 per semester. Results show that majority of students are paying a high amount per semester for textbooks.

## On average, how much do you spend on textbooks each semester?

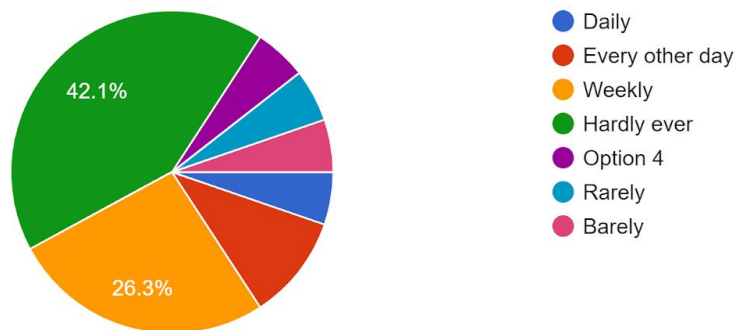
19 responses



Results show that 42% of students at TCC hardly ever use their textbooks, and only 5.3% of the students use their paid textbooks daily.

## How often do you use paid textbooks?

19 responses



### Task 3: Survey students who use free resources or textbooks

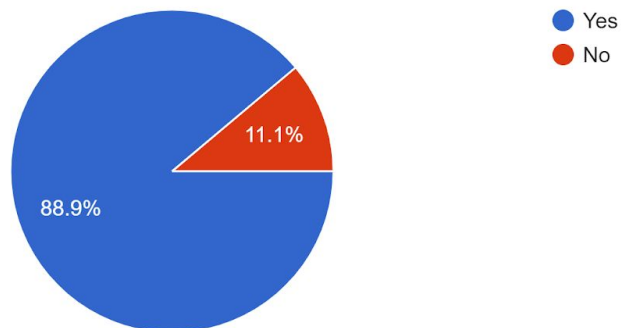
We interviewed professor Stacey Said, who helped us with one part of the research. But we also needed results and feedback from those students who already benefit from free resources and textbooks. Here we will discuss the results.



One of the questions asked was how often students at TCC use free textbook alternatives, results showed that 88.9% of students use alternatives instead of using their textbook, and only 11% of students do not use other alternatives. 94.4% of students at TCC use YouTube as their main resource as an alternative.

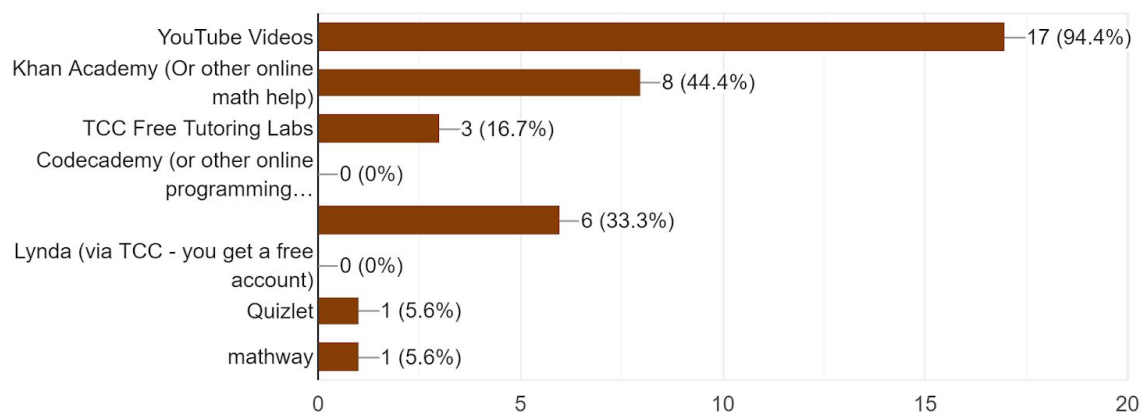
### Have you ever used college textbook alternatives? (YouTube videos, Khan Academy, etc.)

18 responses



### Of the following list, what resources have you used?

18 responses



Having free resources or textbooks makes it easier for students to always have a resource to use, it increases the academic work done. Having free resources or textbooks helps those students that also need help financially and the amount of students that enroll for college will increase. More students will be able to finish their career if they have free textbook alternatives, the amount of students that use free alternatives is already a high percentage.

**Task 4:** Interview professors about the proposed solution

We interviewed professor Stacey Said, our main goal with this interview was to find out what her plan was with her grant, how effective does she think her program will be if it gets approved and what kind of resources she has in mind for students to be able to access. Stacey Said has a great knowledge over this topic, she knows how much students pay per semester for text books and she decided to start her own program where students have free educational resources.

One of the first questions Stacey Said was asked is what her plan with the grant is, unfortunately her grant along with her plan for her program was not approved. Although her program was not approved, she continues to teach her students with alternative resources. She does not require a textbook for her classroom. She informed us that she doesn't like to require a textbook because she knows how expensive it is and majority of the time the textbook won't be used.

For the program to even be considered an option, we have to know how effective the program could be and if students would really benefit from this. According to Stacey Said, she believes the program could have really made an impact in students. She stated that more people would definitely enroll in college if they had free access for their education and grades would overall improve.

Stacey Said has discovered free resources for her students, these resources help her students and they work just as good as a textbook would. She finds that YouTube is a very easy site to use, and it is informative. She will also get her information from her own textbooks, she will print out these notes and give her students a copy.

As we ended our discussion with Professor Said, we learned that there are many free sites that could replace our textbooks. She agrees that textbooks are very expensive, they are hardly ever used and some students are not able to afford them which affects their education. We decided that having free resources or textbooks would really benefit students overall.

#### **Task 5: Assess how students could benefit from free resources or textbooks**

Our group created a survey to get clear results on the average amount of money people spend per semester on only textbooks. The main questions asked in our survey was how much students spend per semester, how frequently these textbooks are used and if students could possibly benefit from having free resources or textbooks. Results given by the survey helped us decide if having other alternatives was a good idea for TCC.

Our results show that 50% of students pay full price for their textbooks or rent them. Out of those students who buy and rent their college textbooks, 42% of them say they hardly ever use them. Throughout our surveys we found evidence that shows finding an alternative for textbooks would greatly benefit students.

Students at TCC believe that having alternative resources for expensive textbooks would benefit their education in general. More students would attend their classes, and their grade score would increase. 50% of students are already doing their own research and using their own alternatives to help with their

education. Such as using YouTube, tutoring labs, quizlet, and more sites that provides them with the same information a textbook would.

**Task 6: Analyze our data and prepare a recommendation report**

All of our data has been collected, and now we have begun the process of putting together our recommendation report. The data collected by the surveys all show that most students would find having alternatives for textbooks beneficial. Money that is being spent on textbooks could be used to open online textbooks and resources.

All the data support that TCC should have online textbooks and resources, spending less on textbooks and using that money on alternatives will benefit students. These resources will make a drastic change in education. Majority of students are already significantly using free resources more than they are using their textbooks.

**Conclusions**

In this section we present our conclusion based on our research related to the 5 tasks we researched.

**Task 1: Obtain basic information and understanding on textbooks and their alternatives.**

During our research we found that universities that have more professors letting the students use free resources were being more successful in their work. We didn't find anyone that opposed granting schools to giving students access to free resources instead of making them pay for textbooks so there wasn't an argument over this situation.

**Task 2: Survey students who pay full price for textbooks**

While surveying students at TCC we found that 42% of the students hardly ever use the textbooks they paid for. And that 5.3% used their textbooks daily. If we would've surveyed more students that number probably would've gone up, but for how many we did survey that's pretty close to half of them.

**Task 3: Survey students who use free resources or textbooks**

The results of this survey from students at TCC demonstrated an opposite effect to paid textbooks. While a large majority of college students hardly used their paid textbooks, students using free alternatives used them daily and weekly. TCC students mostly used free YouTube videos and Khan Academy to help them study. Few students made use of the free tutoring labs on campus. These free study alternatives were used significantly more than paid textbooks, and saved students anywhere from \$100-\$400 each semester (compared to purchasing textbooks).

**Task 4: Interview professors about the proposed solution**

When we interviewed Stacey Said we found some interesting things she wanted to do with her grant she purposed. She understood the struggles college students go through financially and adding the cost of textbooks on top of that is even more stressful for most. Even though her grant was rejected, she continues to give her students the opportunity to have access to free resources. She has seen grades and the attendance of her students improve because of the way she teaches her classes.

**Task 5: Assess how students could benefit from free resources or textbooks**

College students can, and currently do, benefit from free resources and/or textbooks. Based on research conducted online, we found university professors allowing students utilize free alternative resources had far more successful students than who relied on textbooks alone. Our in-house surveys conducted on TCC students demonstrated a similar outcome, where students who paid anywhere from \$100-\$400 (on average) hardly used their expensive textbooks, where students who watched free YouTube videos used them daily or weekly to help them study. We interviewed Stacey Said and based on our research, we have found that students benefit largely from free resources, and should be encouraged to use them in place for paid textbooks. Paid textbooks are costly to in-debt college students, and hardly impact the grades of those students, where those who utilize free resources see an improvement in grades.

**Recommendation**

We recommend that Tarrant County College administration pursues this option

**Option: TCC invest money into open online textbooks and resources.**

Our recommendation would be to have students not have to pay for textbooks and have the opportunity for every class to have free resources. A lot of students who come to Tarrant County College are there because they want to save money or can't afford to go to a university. Having free resources for the students will use will allow students to have one less thing to stress about financially. We, students at Tarrant County College, think this will be effective for everyone and wouldn't be a waste of money because a lot of students rely on resources to get information for whatever class they are in. Considering this, it is important to acknowledge this new change be applied to all classes starting August 2020.

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## Appendix

### Logic Box

