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Testimony of University Dean Curtis L. Kendrick to the New York City Council Higher Education Committee on Textbook Affordability

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The City University of New York



**Testimony of University Dean for Libraries and Information
Resources Curtis L. Kendrick**

The City University of New York

New York City Council Higher Education Committee

Textbook Affordability

September 30, 2014

Good morning, Chairperson Barron and members of the Higher Education Committee. I am Curtis Kendrick, CUNY's university dean for libraries and information resources. It is a pleasure to be back before this committee to talk about textbook affordability.

Unequal access to high quality education is contributing to growing racial and economic disparities in academic achievement and preventing students from advancing in the world. By 2020, some 65% of all jobs will require postsecondary education¹, but only 41% of the nation's 18- to 24-year-olds are pursuing the kind of postsecondary degrees that will prepare them for the high-skilled jobs that will be in demand.² One explanation for the dearth of students obtaining postsecondary degrees is the prohibitive cost of college, to which the high cost of textbooks is a major contributing factor. Students must spend approximately \$1,200 a year on textbooks and supplies, which amounts to 14% of tuition for students in public four-year colleges, and 39% for students in two-year colleges, according to the College Board.³ The City University of New York's estimates are in line with these figures, with expected textbook expenditures of about 20% of tuition at baccalaureate colleges and 27% of tuition at community colleges.

¹ Lumina Foundation, *A Stronger Nation through Higher Education*. June 2013. URL http://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger_nation/report/main-narrative.html#3 consulted June 30, 2014.

² National Center for Education Statistics, 2013 data. URL http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_302.60.asp consulted June 30, 2014.

³ The College Board. *Trends in College Pricing 2013*. URL <http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/college-pricing-2013-full-report.pdf> consulted June 30, 2014.

These costs are a major issue for CUNY students, 39% of whom come from families with household incomes of less than \$20,000.⁴ Financing the college degree has become an unprecedented burden for students and taxpayers, who must repay their student loan debt with interest. Textbooks contribute significantly to this debt, which, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau exceeds one trillion dollars nationally.⁵ In many cases, students choose not to register for courses that require them to purchase textbooks. In a large study of enrolled students (n=14,221) across the State of Florida, 23% of respondents surveyed had not registered for a course because of the high cost of the textbooks, 10.6% had to withdraw from a course and 7.2% had failed a course because they could not afford the assigned textbook.⁶ The cost of textbooks may prevent students from taking an optimal course load, resulting in more years in college and the reduced likelihood of completion. Some students choose not to purchase books at all, or to use outdated editions or non-assigned books, according to a study at Houston Community College.⁷ A survey conducted by the U.S. PIRG noted that 65% of respondents opted out of buying a textbook because of its cost, and of those students 94% indicated

⁴ Center for an Urban Future, *Completion Day*, June 2013 (nycfuture.org/pdf/Completion-Day.pdf)

⁵ Chopra, Rohit, "Student Debt Swells, Federal Loans Now To a Trillion," Consumer Financial Projection Bureau Newsroom, July 17, 2013. URL <http://www.consumerfinance.gov/newsroom/student-debt-swells-federal-loans-now-top-a-trillion/> consulted June 30, 2014.

⁶ Morris-Babb, Meredith and Henderson, Susie, "An Experiment in Open-Access Textbook Publishing: Changing the World One Textbook at a Time," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, January 2012 doi: 10.3138/jsp.43.2.148.

⁷ Hilton III, J. and Laman, C., "One College's Use of an Open Psychology Textbook," *Internet Reference Services Quarterly*, 11(4) 2007. DOI: 10.1300/J136v11n04_11.

they suffered academically.⁸ And textbook costs are rising. Current textbook prices represent more than an 80% increase from 2002 to 2012, according to the GAO.⁹

As you know, for the past several years CUNY has aggressively been taking action to help offset the burden of the high cost of textbooks for our students. Our libraries have received special funding to purchase textbooks for course reserves, as well as electronic books and other materials to support the curriculum. This past year CUNY invested \$3 million in this program. Our libraries purchased more than 30,000 textbooks plus many more stack and reference volumes, databases, video collections and e-books. Last year alone students borrowed these textbook reserve collections about 380,000 times, and downloaded tens of thousands of selections from e-books. Our libraries also endeavor to level the playing field with respect to providing students with access to technology. Our libraries typically loan sophisticated equipment such as laptops, tablets, ipads or even graphing calculators and digital video cameras.

As much as we've done, however, we recognize that it is not enough. One way to greatly reduce textbook costs is by using free and online open educational resources (OERs). Open content and open access textbooks are instructional resources that can be used, reused, often remixed and customized under an

⁸ U.S. PIRG. Survey Shows Students Opting Out of Buying High Priced Textbooks. January 27, 2014. URL <http://www.uspirg.org/news/usp/survey-shows-students-opting-out-buying-high-cost-textbooks> consulted June 30, 2014.

⁹ Government Accounting Office. College Textbooks: Students Have Greater Access to Textbook Information. June 2013 Report GAO-13-368.

intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others while ensuring authors retain copyright to their work.¹⁰ CUNY took the lead in working with the New York State Higher Education Initiative (NYSHEI) on developing a proposal for the New York State Legislature to fund an open educational resource initiative. Unfortunately, NYSHEI recently ceased operations due to financial difficulties. CUNY is continuing to move forward in the area of OERs. This fall we will be offering an online workshop for faculty to provide them with guidance on how to convert their courses from using high priced textbooks to using open educational resources.

The benefits of OERs go beyond cost-savings. According to the Open Access Textbook Task Force, a group of educators that the State of Florida assembled to study distance learning, the use of OERs fosters student success, if not an improvement over commercial textbooks.¹¹ Students who used an OER math course developed by Carnegie Mellon University's Open Learning Initiative "learned more quickly and at a much lower costs, according to a carefully conducted double-blind study."¹² Across the United States, faculty are expressing their support for open educational resources in great numbers. More than 2,500 faculty members from 750 U.S. colleges have signed the Open Textbooks Statement, which is a manifesto for

¹⁰ <http://www.hewlett.org/programs/education/open-educational-resources>.

¹¹ Open Access Textbook Task Force said that there are "compelling academic reasons to use open access textbooks, such as: improved quality, flexibility and access to resources, interactive and active learning experiences, currency of textbook information, broader professional collaboration, and the use of teaching and learning technology to enhance educational experiences."

¹² Plotkin, Hal. Free to Learn: An Open Educational Resources Policy Development Guidebook for Community College Governance Officials. <http://wiki.creativecommons.org/images/6/67/FreetoLearnGuide.pdf> consulted September 27, 2013.

using high quality open textbooks whenever appropriate.¹³ Faculty and colleges are also joining collaborative ventures such as the Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources, and the College Open Textbooks initiative to develop high quality academic materials. California has established the California Digital Open Source Library to house open source materials and provide a Web-based platform for the academic community to find, adopt, utilize or modify course materials for little or no cost.¹⁴ At Temple University, some 27 faculty members have received awards to develop alternates to the commercial textbook as part of their [Alternate Textbook Project](#). In one course, "[Morality, Law & Advertising](#)," the instructor replaced the assigned textbook with a course pack of new online sources for concepts, laws and weekly readings, resulting in improved student performance. In another successful initiative, the University of Massachusetts-Amherst awards Open Education Initiative grants to faculty members to develop new curricular resource strategies using easily identified digital resources. Faculty create a variety of alternatives, from an online open access lab manual to e-books and media streamed through the University Libraries' numerous databases. The [Open](#)

¹³ Allen, Nicole. [A Cover to Cover Solution: How Open Textbooks are the Path to Textbook Affordability](#). The Student PIRGs, September 2010. <http://www.studentpirgs.org/reports/cover-cover-solution> consulted September 27, 2013.

¹⁴ California Bill Number SB 1053 Enrolled Bill Text, Legislative Counsel's Digest. February 8, 2012. http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120SB1053 consulted September 25, 2013.

[Education Initiative](#) is estimated to have saved students more than \$1,000,000 since 2011.¹⁵

The potential of open educational resources to improve opportunities has also been recognized by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The Hewlett Foundation has been the principal funder of open educational resources, having invested \$21 million annually in online projects since 2001.¹⁶ The foundation's 2010 strategic plan sees the development of OERs as a force that will contribute to "equalizing access to knowledge for teachers and students around the globe."¹⁷ The Houston Community College study found that students perform better when using an open "textbook" compared to a traditional textbook. Summarizing their study of 690 students showed an improvement in GPA from 1.6 to 2.0, a reduction in withdrawal rate from 14% to 7%, and an increase in the final exam average score from 67.6% to 71.1% comparing a traditional textbook to an open textbook.¹⁸

The potential for substantial cost savings for students combine with the evidence of improved academic success make a compelling argument for providing open educational resources to CUNY's student population. According to Hal Plotkin,

¹⁵ UMass Amherst Libraries, OEI Grants Press Release, March 27, 2017. URL <http://www.library.umass.edu/about-the-libraries/news/press-releases-2014/oei-grants/> consulted June 30, 2014.

¹⁶ Kelly, Andrew, "Opening Up the University," *Philanthropy* magazine, Spring 2012, http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/excellence_in_philanthropy/opening_up_the_university

¹⁷ The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, [Education Program Strategic Plan](#), October, 2010. http://www.hewlett.org/uploads/documents/Education_Strategic_Plan_2010.pdf consulted September 27, 2013.

¹⁸ Hilton III, J. and Laman, C., "One College's Use of an Open Psychology Textbook," *Internet Reference Services Quarterly*, 11(4) 2007. DOI: 10.1300/J136v11n04_11.

the senior policy advisor in the Office of the Under Secretary of Education in the Obama Administration, OERs provide “a unique and largely untapped opportunity to improve learning outcomes, reduce costs and improve the quality of teaching.” Consequently, making a modest investment in OERs will have “significant multiplier effects as the quantity of free, high-quality open learning materials steadily increases and the most relevant materials become easier to find.”¹⁹

CUNY’s Office of Library Services has begun preliminary plans to establish an Open Educational Resources Pilot Project. The project would test a model of training and incentivizing faculty and librarians to identify, adapt and adopt open educational resources and deploy them in classroom settings. The project would pilot OERs in 50 courses and in doing so capture the technological, logistical and legal processes undertaken to provide guidance to those considering OERs for the first time in the future. The project would also include assessment by the highly regarded nonprofit, Ithaka S+R to evaluate the pilot’s impact on student learning outcomes (<http://www.sr.ithaka.org>). Most importantly, students will be provided with high-quality open learning materials and save them a projected \$5.8 million over the course of the four-year project.²⁰

The project objectives would be achieved through five concomitant streams of activity:

¹⁹ Plotkin, H., Free to Learn: an Open Educational Resources Policy Development Guidebook for Community College Governance Officials. October 2010. <http://wiki.creativecommons.org/images/6/67/FreetoLearnGuide.pdf> consulted October 18, 2013.

²⁰ Over the duration of the project we estimate that 52,500 students will benefit by not having to purchase a textbook. We are using a baseline cost estimate of \$100 per textbook, and escalating that cost at 6% per year. Average cost of a textbook data from Nicole Allen and David Wiley presentation at Open Education Conference, 2013. URL <http://openeducation2013.sched.org/event/90d9e1c479a944181f771f720ef967db#.UoJHdpQkEaU> consulted July 1, 2014.

- 1.) Identify courses most likely to intersect with high impact of savings for CUNY students with high probability of successful conversion;
- 2.) Create a sustainable program of faculty and librarian training for the identification of OERs and the conversion of courses;
- 3.) Pilot OERs in 50 courses using high quality free educational materials selected by faculty ultimately benefiting 52,500 undergraduate students at CUNY at a savings to students of \$5.8 million and at a return on investment of 480%;
- 4.) Develop and implement an assessment model that includes success in lowering student costs; its impact on student learning outcomes and retention; its evidence of sustainability through measures such as success in extending the converted course from the originating professor to his/her peers on the same campus or elsewhere;
- 5.) Promote collaboration with other institutions by making materials adopted freely available to everyone in New York State and beyond.

In conclusion, I have outlined just two of CUNY's strategies for addressing textbook affordability. One is the short-term strategy of investing in current curriculum materials – textbooks and the like and putting them on reserve so that students may make use of them, as well as providing access to very sophisticated technology for students to borrow. The longer term strategy speaks to addressing the textbook marketplace by providing incentives for faculty to adopt high quality open educational resources rather than using high priced textbooks as their course materials. As more and more faculty at CUNY, and across the country move in this direction, it holds the promise of having a positive effect

on the textbook marketplace. Next, Associate Vice Chancellor and Chief Information Officer Brian Cohen will speak to you about some other initiatives underway at the University to address textbook affordability.

Thank you.