



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

November 5, 2019

To: Gonzalo Campos Dintrans, Chair
University Academic Affairs Committee

From: Steven A. Greenlaw, Moderator,
OpenUMW

Subject: Defining Low-Cost Course Materials

MOTION:

Beginning with the registration for Fall 2020 courses, the Registrar will identify courses as low-cost if they require students to spend no more than \$40 on all textbooks and other materials required for the course.

RATIONALE:

Earlier this year, the Virginia House of Delegates passed HB 2380, which reads in part:

*The registrar or another appropriate employee of each public institution of higher education shall identify conspicuously (i) in the online course catalogue or registration system or (ii) as soon as practicable after the necessary information becomes available each course for which the instructor exclusively uses no-cost course materials or **low-cost** course materials. [emphasis added]*

<https://legiscan.com/VA/text/HB2380/id/1840166>

As part of the Spring 2020 registration materials, the Registrar's Office has already identified courses that do not require students to purchase any course materials. Instructors indicate which of their courses to be offered in the coming semester do not require students to purchase any course materials, and departments forward this information to as part of the course scheduling process.

The task remaining is to define "low-cost" materials. The OpenUMW group investigated the practices at Virginia academic institutions, and found that the most common definition was \$40 total. A national survey conducted by OpenStax shows a range of \$25 to \$50 where institutions have established a definition. The OpenUMW group recommends that UMW use \$40 as the benchmark, and the University Academic Affairs Committee agrees to this amount.

The process to be followed will build off that for no-cost course materials. If the course materials have a cost, they must be available through the Bookstore. Whatever the Bookstore charges is what defines the cost. Instructors will identify the texts and/or other course materials they plan to adopt, indicating that the materials do not exceed the \$40 threshold. The Bookstore will confirm, to the Registrar's Office, the price and the designation as low cost. The Registrar will then include this information as part of the registration materials, in the same way as they indicate no-cost course materials. This process

will be followed for every course, every term. The University Academic Affairs Committee will revisit what constitutes “low cost” every five years.