

Tech Snacks: Textbooks and the MSUN Bookstore

The textbook adoption deadline for next semester comes up quickly and always seems to catch instructors off guard. What aspects of textbook selection should you start considering now and keep thinking about as you plan for future semesters of teaching? We'll cover the process, timeline considerations from Sue Solomon, common student barriers, course packs, and LTI Integrations with Brightspace.

The Process

Sue Solomon, Bookstore Manager, will send out an email with a textbook adoption deadline and instructions for how to choose your materials. These deadlines are typically:

- March 15 for summer semester
- March 30 for fall semester
- November 1 for spring semester

Timeline Considerations from Sue

- When ordering, she only orders a percentage of the actual course enrollment.
- She places orders numerous times before the start of class. When sections get added, she may have to place late orders, which can cause delays in students getting their books.
- Once she has started placing orders, you can not change textbooks unless the department authorizes you to do so. If the department authorizes you to change textbooks, she will charge the department shipping both ways for the changed text.
- If you were hired after the textbook selection was made for your course and the books were already ordered, you will need to speak with your dean about whether you are authorized to change the book.
- She will always email you about any necessary edition changes or out of print issues. When selecting a textbook, please always double-check to make sure the edition isn't "out of print."
- If a course has low enrollment, she waits to place the orders and offers e-texts if available.
- When courses get canceled, she has to send texts back to the vendor. Some vendors do not take returns or charge restocking fees.

Common Student Barriers

Cost — Many students rely on financial aid to pay for their textbooks. Students are typically only allowed to charge their textbooks to financial aid for the first 5-6 days of the semester. It's important to consider that a student taking five classes could easily have to pay \$500+ per semester in textbooks.

- Note: Even if you are allowing used textbooks, some students won't be able to afford the cheaper textbook rentals online (Amazon, Chegg) and will still require the use of financial aid or a refund check to purchase textbooks.

Optional Textbooks — If you choose a textbook that is optional or recommended, the majority of students will not buy it. Therefore, if the textbook is recommended or optional, the bookstore will usually not purchase the text, but will offer e-texts if they are available.

- If you're unsure how often a textbook will be used in your course, make it optional. If students purchase a "required" textbook that they don't end up using, they are more likely to not purchase required textbooks (for any classes) in the future.

Miscommunication — Students will get confused if the syllabus doesn't match what the bookstore information indicates.

- Do not tell the bookstore that a textbook or access code is required if you plan to tell students that it is optional.
- If you are requiring a textbook but allowing students to use an older edition, make this extremely clear in your syllabus/announcements so students know what they need to be purchasing prior to the start of class.

Coursepacks

A coursepack is a curated collection of course material that you wish to make available to students in hard copy. Coursepacks can include published materials, published creative commons materials, public domain material, and self-published material. For instance, you may want to assemble 5 published short stories from different volumes and 5 short stories that are in the public domain. Creating a coursepack would prevent the students from having to buy 5 different books to access the modern short stories. It would also provide convenience because everything would be bound together. Sometimes there is a significant cost difference and sometimes licensing adds up to more than you'd expect. Contact publishers for a cost estimate.

LTI and Brightspace Integration

“LTI” is short for “Learning Tools Interoperability,” which refers to technology that is used to help learning systems communicate with external systems. In the context of Brightspace, this can mean a few different things. LTIs often provide publisher-created homework, quizzes, and resources that students pay extra for when purchasing their textbook. Please note that all LTIs are different and require different setup processes.

Brightspace Integration — Some LTIs can integrate directly into Brightspace, giving students a direct link from their Brightspace course shell to the external system (the publisher’s site). This allows students to sign in to Brightspace directly rather than having to open a separate website.

- If you plan on using an LTI that integrates with Brightspace, OTLE can help facilitate the setup process. The process requires us to work with the publisher to get the integration set up properly. Please inform OTLE that you plan to use LTI by the following deadlines:
 - July 1 for Fall Semester
 - November 15 for Spring Semester
 - March 15 for Summer Semester

Access Codes — Not all LTIs integrate with Brightspace; some of them provide special codes for students to use to activate the publisher’s site and gain access to their homework. Access codes can typically be purchased bundled with brand-new textbooks, and in some cases they can be purchased separately on their own.

- When possible, Sue will use RedShelf to power classes that just use an access code (connect, mymathlab, mindtap, etc) and refrain from purchasing the physical cards. This is more convenient for the bookstore and students.
- If you choose to use an access code, it is helpful when instructors know how to help students get logged in.

Considerations — All LTIs are different, and we encourage faculty to do their own research before deciding to use an LTI. There are a few things to consider before making your decision:

- OTLE has no way to get “behind the curtain” on publisher sites. If something goes wrong on the publisher’s end, we have no control over fixing it (or helping students).
- Access codes can be spendy for students. If a student has to retake a course with an access code, they are required to purchase the access code twice.
- Publishers are trying to sell to you. If the LTI sounds too good to be true, it might be!

Tips for choosing a good textbook

- Reach out to publishers and ask for “desk copies.” This allows you to preview the textbook and ensure it suits your needs before ordering the textbook for your course.
- Vitalsource.com often allows instructors to view ebooks without dealing with the publisher.
- Look at your course outcomes when reviewing a textbook. Does the textbook align with your learning objectives? You may consider peer-reviews with faculty in your program.
- Consider textbook longevity. Will students use it as a resource after graduation?