

## **Resolution on Automatic Textbook Billing**

**WHEREAS** Barnes & Noble Booksellers and the textbook vendor industry at large are transitioning from a bookstore model to an automatic textbook billing model, where one fee will cover a semester of textbook rentals.

**WHEREAS** different estimations of the price range from \$320-\$414 a semester for a typical 16 credit course load<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, the Fall 2022 semester's median textbook spending was roughly \$120 per student<sup>2</sup>. This change would represent a large increase in student money automatically spent with Barnes & Noble booksellers.

**WHEREAS** the switch to automatic textbook billing has been criticized for further removing student choice, acquiring exorbitant profit margins, and undermining the faculty, staff, and student efforts to lower course material cost barriers towards access.

**WHEREAS** Macalester College Student Government has spent roughly \$130,000 on funding textbook reserve over the lifetime of the program to alleviate the financial barriers caused by textbook requirements. These investments into textbook affordability are rendered useless by the adoption of an automatic textbook billing model.

### **SECTION 1**

**We, the Macalester College Student Government, request that the Senior Leadership Team does not move forward with an automatic textbook billing model.** Macalester's community has voiced considerable criticism of the program on the grounds of higher costs for most students and an inequitable increase in profits for Barnes & Noble Booksellers. Automatic textbook billing will further decrease the market control of students in the textbook market. This already-low market control has resulted in textbook prices growing in price far beyond purchasing power, exacerbating issues of inequity in course material access.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bncollege.com/academic-solutions/first-day-complete/>,  
<https://themacweekly.com/80099/news/proposed-textbook-payment-program-critiqued-for-high-price-tag/>

<sup>2</sup> ■ Fall 2022 Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey Results.pdf

## SECTION 2

Some of the advertised goals of the automatic textbook billing program are commendable, such as the ability to place course material expenses in the category of tuition and fees, which are paid progressively through Macalester's financial aid mechanisms. Additionally beneficial is the advertised ability for students to immediately have access to course materials at the start of the semester. Moving to the automatic billing system would function effectively as a handout to Barnes & Noble booksellers, allowing them to increase their profit margins and also detracting from and undermining the work already being done on campus to mitigate the high costs of textbooks and to share and reuse free or affordable materials across the Macalester community. The Academic Affairs Committee of MCSG has budgeted the textbook reserve program from the progressively-charged student activity fee to share course materials since 2009. Library staff have both worked to find and distribute materials available in our collection and helped create pathways to open-access publishing. Professors are increasingly compiling and seeking out freely or cheaply available resources. The Textbook Solutions Committee was created to analyze the cost burdens and opportunities for course materials. Faculty, staff, and students collaborated inside and outside of Macalester to create the open-access *Grenzenlos Deutsch* textbook, which is available to all, even outside of Macalester. The implementation of the stated goals of automatic textbook billing is not worth undermining that has been done to save student money and increase course material access equity.

## SECTION 3

Macalester is well-positioned to bring students, staff, and faculty together to create better course material solutions. Our faculty and staff have worked considerably on finding, creating, and compiling alternatives to traditional course materials. Past iterations of MCSG have worked hard to creatively allocate the student activity fee to economically share course materials. **We humbly ask to collaborate on an improved course material solution, not to accept increased corporate profits and decreased student market control.**