



Associated Students of Loyola Marymount University
1 LMU Dr, Los Angeles CA, 90045

July 27, 2020

Dear Loyola Marymount University Faculty,

We the Associated Students of Loyola Marymount University are writing to express the necessity and the urgency of moving toward a model of open and affordable education. This statement calls on our esteemed LMU faculty to further commit to supporting accessibility efforts with consideration for our student body's financial circumstances. The pandemic and subsequent recession has exacerbated the financial situations of our most vulnerable students. While tuition and housing costs remain the main source of financial hardship for students, textbook and learning material costs are often an invisible and overwhelming monetary barrier. Lack of access to these resources disproportionately affects students from low income backgrounds and contributes to a gap in academic performance and retention. Now more than ever, it is critical that our first generation and low income (FGLI) students are at the center of all university operations.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the cost of college textbooks and supplies has increased over 800% in the last 35 years.¹ The average national costs of course materials at 4-year private universities is \$1,240 per year.² At Loyola Marymount University, the estimated average cost for course materials is \$1,917 per year.³ These costs place an undue burden on students, especially as they graduate with debt caused in part by expensive textbooks. Given the current financial climate, these staggering education costs will only further compound the accessibility barriers that low income students face.

We understand that the faculty of LMU curate syllabi and select accompanying learning materials with purpose and expertise. Furthermore, we acknowledge that high textbook and learning costs are the result of structural issues in higher education and not due to individual choice. Despite these circumstances, many colleges and universities are taking advantage of resources that move their institutions closer to accomplishing the goals of Open Education⁴ initiatives. We are confident that faculty across our campus can make this same commitment to affordability and access.

Recent studies show that students using open educational resources do as well as or better than those using traditional textbooks.⁵ Additionally, many successful pedagogical approaches incorporate open or low-cost course content to increase student participation and learning.⁶ The transition toward open and

¹ US Bureau of Labor Statistics. "The Economics Daily".

<https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2016/college-tuition-and-fees-increase-63-percent-since-january-2006.htm>

² College Board. "Average estimated undergraduate budgets by sector, 2019-20".

<https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/college-pricing/figures-tables/average-estimated-undergraduate-budgets-sector-2019-20>

³ Loyola Marymount University. "Undergraduate Cost of Attendance 2019-2020".

⁴ Achieving the Dream: "The Open Educational Resources (OER) Degree Initiative seeks to boost college access and completion, particularly for underserved students, by engaging faculty in the redesign of courses and degree programs through the replacement of proprietary textbooks with open educational resources."

⁵ Hilton, J. Education Tech Research Dev (2016) 64: 573. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-016-9434>

⁶ University of Texas Arlington. "Open pedagogy is the practice of engaging with students as creators of information rather than simply consumers of it. It's a form of experiential learning in which students demonstrate understanding through the act of creation. The products of open pedagogy are student



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affordable learning will require both faculty and students to adapt, but any effort to support our low income Lions is worth the investment. As a student body, we are committed to assisting and exploring new means of engaging with learning materials if the result is increased accessibility for every student in our community, regardless of background. The William H. Hannon library staff has worked to provide tools that will empower our community to accomplish the goals of the Open Education initiatives. On July 15th, [LMU Library posted an open letter](#) which expresses our librarian's commitment to assisting faculty in securing online and affordable materials for students. We ask that all faculty engage with the letter and resources provided by our Library. The Office of the Provost and the Academic Technology Committee have worked alongside our Library to pilot last year's Open and Affordable Textbook Initiative grant, among other efforts. ASLMU is committed to working with these offices and our faculty to continue and expand this project. This student, faculty, and librarian collaboration can amount to a tangible impact that makes LMU a more equitable academic institution.

LMU's highly regarded educators consistently go above and beyond the role of teaching and serve as mentors and advocates for our Lion community. The spring's unprecedented circumstances only deepened our admiration for our faculty's commitment to students. It is our hope that you will continue supporting students by challenging the norms that make institutions of higher education inequitable. Structuring courses around the principles of affordability and access by incorporating low cost materials and resources is how you can stand with and for your students. We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
The Associated Students of Loyola Marymount University