

NEWSROOM

[Home](#) / [News](#) / [2023](#) / [December](#) / New Label on Classes Helps Students Navigate Costs

NEW LABEL ON CLASSES HELPS STUDENTS NAVIGATE COSTS

NO-COST/LOW-COST TEXTBOOK OPTION BEGINS NEXT SEMESTER

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | December 18, 2023*Read time: about 2 min*

Knowing that costs in college can add up quickly, Christopher Newport is giving students class options that don't require pricey textbooks.

Beginning with the Spring semester, students will be able to see in advance which classes offer low-cost or no-cost textbook options.

Classes which require either no textbooks or textbooks that cost \$50 or less are noted in the class schedules.

"It's important because the cost of higher education is going up every year, and anything we can do to give students options to lower those costs, we should do," said Provost Quentin Kidd. "This allows students to make their own choices about enrolling in courses/sections where textbook costs will be above or below \$50."

The Commonwealth has required universities to put in place a policy to identify courses with lower textbook costs, Kidd said. As the average cost of textbooks for a college course is \$50, CNU opted to use that price as its threshold.

"We are going to implement this, see how well it does and make adjustments as we can or need to," Kidd said.

Colleges and universities across the state, and throughout the United States, have implemented similar policies.

Dr. Lynn Lambert, who is teaching a [computer ethics](#) class in the spring, said the effort to reduce costs for students

can make a big difference.

“The cost of textbooks can be a significant burden to students, and it is incumbent on professors to consider textbook cost when choosing materials for their students. Having low/no cost textbooks increases access for everybody,” said Lambert, associate professor and associate provost for research and dean of graduate studies. “Students who cannot afford to purchase/rent a textbook may be restricted to borrowing materials from the library for short times, which limits their access to learning compared to other students who may have more resources available to them.”

For Dr. Federica Bono, assistant professor of human geography in the [Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology](#), lowering the cost associated with a class is an important way for her to level the education playing field for students. Her classes offer the low cost/no cost option.

“I think this is important in the context of democratizing higher education and making it more accessible and inclusive,” she said. “There’s not much professors can do about high tuition and room and board fees, but we can at least minimize the costs for students to take our classes. For me, thinking about affordable, low-cost, or open source textbooks serves similar goals of accessibility and inclusivity as, for instance, diversifying the syllabus and reading materials, and designing assignments that cater to neurodivergent students, etc.”

Professors who choose to offer classes that fall into the no-cost/low-cost category are sometimes faced with the challenge of finding learning alternatives that replace the role of textbooks. But, Dr. Rik Chakraborti, assistant professor in the [Department of Economics](#), said the additional work is worth it.

“If I adopt the low cost/open-access option, I have to work hard to make up for the quality gap. I have to be the source of excitement. I have to create engaging assignments and active learning opportunities, and these can be large impositions on a professor’s time, especially the first few times we teach the course. So, it is a lot of work for me. But it’s more of a big upfront cost, rather than a recurrent one.

“Now that I have invested the time to create a course that delivers a rich learning experience and keeps the monetary costs down for my students, I don’t have the big upfront cost anymore,” he said. “I do still have to do more work than what I could get away with by sticking to a pricier option, but I am choosing to shift the cost away from my students onto myself because I consider that a worthy tradeoff to make.”
