

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-368](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The rising costs of postsecondary education present challenges to maintaining college affordability. Textbooks are an important factor students need to consider when calculating the overall cost of attending college. In an effort to ensure that faculty and students have sufficient information about textbooks, Congress included requirements in HEOA concerning publisher and school disclosures, as well as publisher provision of individual course materials. HEOA directed GAO to examine the implementation of the new textbook provisions.

This report addresses (1) the efforts publishers have made to provide textbook information to faculty and make bundled materials available for sale individually, and how these practices have informed faculty selection of course materials; and (2) the extent to which postsecondary schools have provided students and college bookstores access to textbook information, and what the resulting costs and benefits have been. To conduct this study, GAO interviewed eight publishers representing over 85 percent of new U.S. higher education textbook sales, administrators at seven schools, four campus bookstores, two national campus retailers, faculty and student groups at three schools, and others with relevant expertise. GAO also reviewed websites of a nationally representative sample of schools, complaint data from Education, and relevant federal laws.

GAO makes no recommendations in this report. The Department of Education provided technical comments, which were incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-13-368](#). For more information, contact Melissa Emrey-Arras at (617) 788-0534 or emreyarras@gao.gov.

COLLEGE TEXTBOOKS

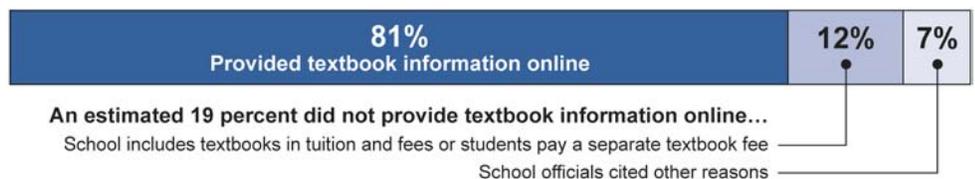
Students Have Greater Access to Textbook Information

What GAO Found

Publishers included in GAO's study have disclosed textbook information required by the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), such as pricing and format options, and made components of bundled materials available individually, but stakeholders GAO interviewed said these practices have had little effect on faculty decisions. While most publishers in GAO's study provided all relevant textbook information, two smaller publishers did not provide copyright dates of prior editions, and one did not provide certain pricing information. Publishers communicated information to faculty online and in other marketing materials, and in most cases the information was available to students and the public. In addition, publishers said they began making bundled materials available for sale individually before HEOA was passed. Faculty GAO interviewed said they typically prioritize selecting the most appropriate materials for their courses over pricing and format considerations, although they said they are more aware of affordability issues than they used to be. Changes in the availability of options in the college textbook market that are not related to HEOA, such as the increase in digital products, have also shaped faculty decisions about course materials.

Based on GAO's review of a nationally representative sample of schools, an estimated 81 percent provided fall 2012 textbook information online, and stakeholders GAO interviewed said implementation costs were manageable and students have benefited from increased transparency. HEOA allows schools some flexibility in whether and how they disclose information and an estimated 19 percent of schools did not provide textbook information online for various reasons, such as including textbook costs in tuition and fees or not posting a course schedule online. Representatives of most schools and bookstores, as well as others GAO interviewed, said implementation costs were not substantial. In addition, there was general consensus among students and others GAO interviewed that students have benefited from timely and dependable textbook information. Specifically, representatives of student organizations said they had sufficient information and time to comparison shop for their course materials before each academic term.

Estimated Percent of Schools That Provided Textbook Information Online



Source: GAO review of a nationally representative random sample of school websites in fall 2012.