



Bill Number:	W-25-02	Sponsored By:	Chair Alec Palumbo
Introduced On:	February 20th, 2025		
Voted On:	March 13th, 2025		
Result:	PASSED		
Vote Count:	33-0-0		

A BILL TO: Recommend Optional Course Marking Procedures to Increase Classroom Transparency.

Recognizing, that over 64% of students have chosen at some point not to buy a required class textbook due to its high-cost¹; and

Recognizing, as of October 2024, the average student at a public, four-year institution spends \$340 on course materials and \$950 on other supplies during a full academic year²; and

Recognizing, from 2000 to 2022, the average price of textbooks increased by approximately 162%, which far outpaced the average inflation rate of goods and services over that period of time, which was 74.4%³; and

Recognizing, nearly 50% of students acknowledge that their selection of classes was impacted by the textbook costs that were attached to them⁴; and

Whereas, the increasing prices of textbooks and other class supply fees can cause students to make financial decisions that directly affect their education outcomes; therefore, it should be recognized that cost transparency is a key priority in the classroom; and

Recognizing, the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 requires, among other things, that universities disclose the retail price and International Standard Book Number (ISBN)

¹ [Watson & Rush-Marlowe \(2023\)](#)

² [College Board \(2024\)](#)

³ [Perry \(2022\)](#)

⁴ [Senack \(2014\)](#)

of required textbooks at the time of registration “to the maximum extent practicable,” in order to address transparency and timeliness concerns⁵; and

Whereas, although this law has helped students significantly, the University or professor still retains the right to mark assigned textbooks as “To Be Determined” in cases of uncertainty, which may cause confusion among students in the registration process; and

Whereas, to counteract high book costs and unpredictability during registration, the implementation of Open Educational Resources (OER) should be encouraged throughout all classroom experiences; and

Recognizing, OER are textbooks, learning objects, and other learning materials which are free for all to use and customize⁶; and

Recognizing, besides the inherent cost benefits, OER has been shown to significantly improve the final grade outcomes of students, in comparison to the same courses that do not use OER. This includes fewer D, F, and W (Withdrawal) letter grade rates for students in OER-based courses⁷; and

Recognizing, OER has also been shown to decrease the dropoff in grades for classes that students consider more difficult than the average⁸; and

Recognizing, the burden of textbook costs is much greater on historically underserved students, but the increased use of OER provides the opportunity to create more equitable outcomes. Research points to underserved populations, including Pell Grant recipients, receiving even higher grade improvements than non-Pell students as a result of OER use in the classroom⁹; and

Whereas, the increased promotion and awareness of OER across campus would bring these benefits to GVSU Students, which is one of the potential outcomes of a course-marking system; and

Recognizing, in April 2024, The University Libraries Academic Committee (ULAC) proposed a change to the Senior Leadership Team’s Textbook and Course Materials Policy that would add the clause, “When possible, the University strongly encourages that these quality educational resources should be open educational resources that are a no-cost option for students”, which was passed in University Academic Senate (UAS) in December 2024¹⁰; and

Whereas, a new policy of course marking in the registration process would help to fulfill the commitment of this statement; and

⁵ [UMich-textbooks-faq](#)

⁶ [GVSU OER Page](#)

⁷ [Colvard, Watson, & Park \(2018\)](#)

⁸ [Fischer et al. 2021](#)

⁹ [Jenkins et al. 2020](#)

¹⁰ [W Open Education Resources Memo.docx](#)

Recognizing, course marking can be defined as: clearly labeling or branding classes that contain required course materials amounting to no-cost or low-cost, during the registration process. A label is typically in the form of a distinct icon. A course that is “low-cost” is typically one that has materials that amount to below \$50, but there is no standardized definition of “low-cost”; and

Whereas, course marking empowers students in the decision-making process to factor in their financial needs and create responsible planning¹¹; and

Whereas, course marking encourages the increased use of OER among professors and students, which would provide GVSU students a higher likelihood of receiving the benefits of OER that were previously discussed; and

Recognizing, course materials, in this sense, are typically defined as textbooks, workbooks, homework systems, and software, while other technology and supplies are unincorporated¹²; and

Whereas, although classroom supplies are left off the course material cost sheet, this bill, W-25-02, recommends that the utmost transparency is used for those supplies that are required; and

Recognizing, some colleges are mandated by state law that recommends or requires schools to identify courses that use OER or low-cost materials, in states such as Oregon, Colorado, Texas, and more¹³; and

Recognizing, the State of Michigan does not have any laws pertaining to course marking. Regardless, the State Constitution grants autonomy to public universities, and therefore can only request rather than require a university to implement any programs¹⁴; and

Whereas, the lack of state law provides GVSU with the opportunity to set a precedent regarding cost transparency standards and course marking across the state; and

Recognizing, the University of Kansas uses course marking in order to increase cost transparency and allow students to better plan for total course costs. Their system uses recognizable icons to clearly distinguish zero-cost and low-cost classes in the Registrar’s list of courses. They respectfully define low-cost as below \$45¹⁵; and

Recognizing, the University of Colorado Boulder, in accordance with a recent state law, has implemented a search filtering method which allows students to view classes that use OER or low-cost materials, which they define as less than \$20¹⁶; and

¹¹ [LeMire 2024](#)

¹² <https://sites.psu.edu/coursemarkings/>

¹³ [UTA Libraries](#)

¹⁴ [MASU Policy](#)

¹⁵ <https://marking.ku.edu/>

¹⁶ <https://libguides.colorado.edu/coursemarking>

Recognizing, Louisiana State University, in accordance with state law, has implemented a course marking system that clearly distinguishes classes that use no-cost (OER) or low-cost (referred to as “Affordable Educational Resources”) materials, which they define as four times the federal minimum wage (approximately \$29 or less)¹⁷; and

Whereas, every university takes a unique approach in determining how the course marking looks and what they define as low-cost, but they all strive toward a common goal of assisting students in their financial planning; and

Whereas, defining low-cost materials as at or below three times the Michigan minimum hourly wage would not only reflect wages for on-campus employees, but it would also be valuable to other working students; and

Recognizing, Oakland University is the one Michigan university that has, by far, done the most extensive job in promoting OER and establishing a course marking system. Through their Affordable Course Marking Initiative, established by the Provost, OU has implemented course markings for no-cost and low-cost classes, defined as below \$50. The initiative also includes OER education and training for faculty¹⁸; and

Whereas, aligning our work with the OU standards would encourage other Michigan universities to improve student and faculty access to OER, improving course transparency and accessibility overall; and

Recognizing, a small study in the Oakland University Psychology Department showed that 84% of students were somewhat or extremely likely to register for a course that uses OER, after taking part in a course that had done so¹⁹; and

Recognizing, students who participated in a no-cost or low-cost class were more than two times likelier to graduate compared to students who did not participate in one of these classes, with a significant impact on older students²⁰; and

Recognizing, GVSU’s Reach Higher 2025 Program includes a commitment to “A culture of educational equity” that strives to “...eliminate disparities and obstacles for student success, especially those that have historically been along the lines of color, race, socioeconomic status, sex/gender...” through a strategy of “Removing systemic barriers to educational access, retention, and persistence”²¹; and

Whereas, the implementation of a course marking system would work to directly address this commitment and encourage the use and promotion of OER, which have been proven to combat educational inequalities; and

¹⁷ <https://guides.lib.lsu.edu/c.php?g=1081524&p=7882292>

¹⁸ Zoom interview with Marion Brumer, OU Student Congress Vice President. 21 January 2025.

¹⁹ [Malatesta Final report Fall 2022](#)

²⁰ [Solodukhin et al 2025](#)

²¹ [GVSU Reach Higher 2025](#)

Therefore, Let it Be Resolved, the Grand Valley State University Student Senate, acting on behalf of the student body, requests that the University establishes an optional course marking system in the class registration process that conspicuously highlights or creates an icon for the course options that require materials amounting to no-cost or low-cost, with low-cost being considered at or below three times the Michigan minimum hourly wage; and

Furthermore, Let it Be Resolved, that Grand Valley State University takes all possible measures to ensure that students are made aware of any additional supply costs associated with the courses that they choose to partake in; and

Furthermore, Let it Be Resolved, that Grand Valley State University provides all necessary support to the Registrar's Office and University Libraries in order to create a sustainable course marking program that provides unique educational alternatives and bolsters classroom engagement.