

College instructors and the learning materials they choose.

As the number of challenges facing America's postsecondary education system has grown – including fewer college-ready students, greater student diversity, cuts in state funding, larger classrooms, more adjunct faculty, and rapid advances in technologies and their applications – institutions and faculty have been working together and with other stakeholders to address these concerns.

A critical component of meeting these challenges is maintaining the integrity of academic freedom and college instructors' right to decide which textbooks and learning materials are the most effective for their classes. Course materials can level the playing field for all students, providing the same academic support no matter the size of the institution or the experience of the instructor.

College instructors carefully select course materials, sometimes taking months – even years – to evaluate texts and reach a decision. Professors consider a range of factors when choosing which textbooks and materials are best for their students. Faculty consider price in their choices, but the effectiveness of the learning tools is a much more important factor, according to a Zogby International study of professors conducted in September 2006.

In testimony given at a hearing on textbooks, Dr. David Walsh, professor of political science at Southern Connecticut State University, said, "...there has been a general underestimation of the care with which most faculty make selections about the texts for their courses. ... [I]t is a disservice to faculty to believe that we don't know the prices of most textbooks in advance. We do. ... And I think it is a disservice to believe that faculty members are not aware of the economic constraints of their students. ... We are sensitive to those things, but our first responsibility is to promote learning."

However, there are some who are interested in denying professors the academic freedom to select the instructional materials their students can use. Any attempts to limit this ability may have unintended consequences. As Fred Kleiner, professor and Chairman of the Art History Department at Boston University, has noted, "I am confident that I speak for virtually all college professors when I say that any governmental intervention in the classroom, such as determining whether or not a professor can adopt a new edition, or require bundled CDs or other materials, is a dangerous first step toward determining what can and cannot be taught."

Students choose their schools and their classes, and they, along with their parents, entrust college instructors to provide the best education possible, which includes making decisions about course content and pedagogy. The quality of education relies on these same instructors' ability to choose the learning materials they believe will be the most effective for their students.