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FAQ on Textbook Rental Programs

How many schools offer rental programs?

As of spring 2005, textbook rental services were offered by only about 1% of NACS member stores in the U.S. and Canada. Some campuses provide a hybrid model of rental program where only a limited number of titles are available for rent, often entry-level courses.

NACS is not aware of many schools contemplating a move toward rental programs because of the prohibitive start-up costs, and also because a successful rental program requires that faculty members commit to their textbook choices for four to six semesters before changing.

How much can students save on textbooks through rental programs?

More research on this question is needed, but the savings may not be as great as many expect since it's difficult to account for all of the various factors that are involved. For example, some students already opt for used books or participate in buyback events to realize greater savings on their textbook purchases than the norm. In some cases, students using rental programs are also required to purchase supplementary, consumable materials which can add significantly to baseline costs. It's also difficult to measure the less tangible costs inherent in rental programs.

What are the start-up costs associated with rental programs?

Exact figures for starting up a rental program today are difficult to estimate. The initial capital outlay would need to include money for administration, maintenance, inventory, and the cost of additional space for storage.

Do college stores support rental programs?

NACS does not have a formal position on rental programs because each situation is unique.

Generally, textbook rental programs have worked well under particular circumstances when strong local community support and leadership exist, and where faculty members are willing to make long term commitments to their adopted course materials.

However, college stores also recognize each professor's right to choose the materials they feel will best educate their students. In some cases rental programs may violate state contracts between college boards and faculty associations regarding faculty's right to select instructional materials.