

Textbook for one of most-taught community college courses available free

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Rice University's Connexions, one of the most-visited online sites for open-educational resources, today announced it is making a popular textbook available free this fall for one of the country's most-attended transfer-level community college courses -- elementary statistics. The book, "Collaborative Statistics," has been used for more than a decade in California community college courses accepted for transfer credit by one of the nation's premier public university systems, the University of California. The online version of the book has already been chosen as the primary text for fall classes enrolling more than 700 students.

"'Collaborative Statistics' helps reduce the cost of education for students while providing them with the highest-quality educational content," said Connexions' Executive Director Joel Thierstein. "The release of the book in Connexions makes it possible for students all over the world to study this subject for free."

Rice acquired the rights to the book through the generosity of the Maxfield Foundation, which was founded by Rice alumnus and trustee Robert Maxfield to support scientific research and education.

More than 90,000 U.S. students take a statistics course at a community college each year and many pay \$100 or more for a traditional statistics textbook. According to the nonprofit MakeTextbooksAffordable.org, the average U.S. college student spends about \$900 per year on textbooks, and textbook prices are increasing faster than inflation. The problem has attracted increasing attention from policymakers since the

U.S. Government Accountability Office reported on it in 2005, and legislation aimed at curbing textbook costs has been introduced in at least nine states and the U.S. House.

"Collaborative Statistics" is already available online at <http://cnx.org/content/col10522>. One of the book's co-authors, Barbara Illowsky, professor of mathematics and statistics at De Anza College in Cupertino, Calif., said about a dozen instructors at community college campuses in California have already selected the book for their courses this fall.

Illowsky and her co-author, recently retired De Anza mathematics professor Susan Dean, had noticed that more and more students were struggling to pay for textbooks, and sometimes dropped out because they could not afford books. The two were drawn to the idea of making "Collaborative Statistics" freely available online as an open textbook, both to cut college costs for students and provide more instructional options for teachers.

"Open textbooks reduce the cost of education so students can stay in school," Illowsky said. "They also allow faculty to customize text to address the needs of their students. It's a win-win situation."

Connexions worked closely with the Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources (CCCOER) in publishing the online version of "Collaborative Statistics." The CCCOER was established by California's Foothill-De Anza Community College District and is made up of more than 70 community colleges in California, Iowa, Maryland, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Washington and Ontario, Canada.

"In Connexions, the content is completely adaptable and thus can meet the needs of the particular state or instructor," Thierstein said. "In Connexions, instructors, schools and/or states can rearrange the lessons,

reorder the chapters, add their own materials and modify lessons, and thus every instructor at every school in every state can have their own version of this book."

The book is available online for free. Students can print their own PDF versions of all or parts of the book from their own printers. If they prefer to have a bound copy, they can order one online through Connexions and have it shipped to their home or office. Bound copies cost just \$31.95. The printed books are produced by Mill Valley, Calif.-based print-on-demand vendor QOOP Inc., which signed a print agreement with Connexions in 2006.

Lesson plans and videotaped lectures that comprise Illowsky's statistics course, as well as suggested homework, quizzes and exams, will also be available for free online in Connexions in the months to come.

"There is a tremendous need for high-quality open textbooks created specifically for use in community colleges," said Martha Kanter, chancellor of the Foothill-De Anza Community College District, which is leading a feasibility study of different textbook models through the Community College Open Textbook Project. "The tools to publish free books and courses are available, and obtaining the rights to existing texts, as Rice and Connexions have done, is one way to quickly make more textbooks for high-demand courses available for free."

Source: Rice University

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