

Some universities require students to use e-textbooks

16 August 2012, By Yasmeen Abutaleb

Students don't seem to want to buy e-textbooks. So some schools are simply forcing them.

While several colleges across the country are pushing [electronic textbooks](#), touting them as more efficient and less cumbersome than regular [textbooks](#), [students](#) are reluctant.

E-textbooks still account for only 9 percent of textbook purchases, says Student Monitor, which researches college student behavior.

"How excited can you expect to get about an e-textbook?" Student Monitor President Eric Weil says. "It's not a fashion statement, it's not a status symbol; it has to overcome the advantages that students see (in) a printed textbook."

Typically, students don't save much when opting to buy an e-textbook. For example, an [organic chemistry](#) e-textbook costs about \$100, while the print version of the same book costs just \$15 more.

For University of Wisconsin senior Leslie Epstein, having to buy an e-textbook only added to her expenses. She still found herself printing a copy of her textbooks in the two classes that required an [electronic version](#), and said despite the lower [price tag](#) of an e-textbook, she'd buy the print version of the text "every time."

"I see what (universities) are doing to make textbooks cheaper and less paper-reliant, but I don't think it'll work in the long run," she says.

But universities are looking to combat that mindset with programs that urge - or force - students to adapt to the trend.

Indiana University was the first college to pilot a program three years ago by making students buy the e-textbook in selected courses. Five more universities have adopted similar programs: University of California-Berkeley, University of

Minnesota, University of Wisconsin, University of Virginia and Cornell University.

In Indiana's program, students are charged for the books through their bursar accounts, so they don't have the option of not buying the book. This lets the university negotiate low prices with publishing companies.

An e-textbook through Indiana's program costs about half as much as it would anywhere else, says Nik Osbourne, information technology chief of staff.

IU professor Timothy Baldwin, who used an e-textbook last semester for a management course, says he appreciates some aspects of the book but still longs to hold a book in his hands. He says many of his students felt the same, but he plans to continue using the e-book, anyway.

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