



NEW JERSEY

# Association of State Colleges and Universities

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## Senate Budget & Appropriations Committee December 15, 2016 Senate Bill No. 2619

The state colleges and universities support the goal of this legislation to help student save on the cost of their college education. We oppose this specific proposal, however, because it raises questions of academic freedom for the ability of faculty to choose materials for their courses.

About seven years ago, it was estimated that electronic texts represented less than 10 percent of existing textbook sales. According to a [survey of students' use of digital course materials](#) conducted by the National Association of College Stores and released in April 2016, 63 percent of students indicated that they still prefer print materials.

The challenges to wider use of digital, open-source textbooks are (1) the ability to identify high-quality, free materials for the extensive array of course offerings at our institutions, and (2) securing the agreement of faculty members teaching those courses to use such material. Unlike K-12 teachers, college and university professors have the right under academic freedom to choose their course materials course by course, year by year. Section 2.a of the bill, requiring "consultation with faculty members at the institution," does not adequately address this concern.

Quality is a concern over the life of open-source materials. Evaluating the quality must be addressed upfront and can be time-consuming. It is equally important to ensure that the materials do not deteriorate in usefulness, become obsolete, or are removed from circulation completely because of a lack of sustaining funding.

While open-source textbooks are considered low cost, there is a price to maintaining them. There are always requirements and costs beyond the initial development that must be taken into account.

Finally, we agree with the [position of the National Association of College Stores](#), which cautions that open-textbook initiatives "should recognize that economic barriers, limited technical aptitude, restricted access, various disabilities, and differences in learning styles, among other reasons will prevent many students from being able to access, use, or fully benefit from digitally formatted and Internet-only accessible content."

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