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FAQ on Textbook Rental Programs

How many schools offer rental programs?

As of spring 2008, textbook rental services were offered by 2.23% of NACS' member stores in the U.S. and Canada. Some campuses provide a hybrid rental program in which only a limited number of titles are available for rent, often for entry-level courses.

Recent legislative activity has spotlighted rental programs because of their potential savings to students. However, start-up costs for such programs are considerable. In addition, a successful rental program requires that faculty members commit to their textbook choices for four to six semesters before changing, which is often a difficult proposition.

How much can students save on textbooks through rental programs?

Students can generally rent a textbook for approximately one-third the cost of a new text; however, the savings may not be as great as expected, 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 sell their books to realize greater savings. In some cases, students using rental programs might still be required to purchase supplementary, consumable materials, which can add to baseline costs.

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

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.