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Texas State courses to participate in e-book pilot program

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Students taking part in a new pilot program will have a lighter load to carry around campus this spring.

A software platform called Courseload will be introduced to seven classes next semester. Students enrolled in the selected courses will access online textbooks and notes, or eTexts, for a fee of \$25 per class. The eTexts will come with a number of features including the ability to highlight, share notes and make study guides.

Debbie Thorne, associate vice president for Academic Affairs, said assessments and surveys will be taken by both faculty and staff after the pilot program ends. The surveys will show how effective the eTexts were and if Courseload should be used in different classes.

Courses using the platform during the pilot program are Editing the Professional Publication, two sections of Specializations in Technical Communication, two criminology classes, Sociology of Sport and Leisure and Business Statistics.

Thorne said Courseload was chosen over several other platforms for its ability to open texts on any device or computer with Internet access. Students can also download portable documents for offline viewing.

Thorne said studies show eTexts are 50-60 percent cheaper than new textbooks.

"There are discussions in Texas and across the United States regarding the cost of college, and one part of those costs is textbooks," Thorne said. "Textbooks are pretty expensive, and if you start adding that together over the course of a college career, it's thousands of dollars. One of the solutions is electronic textbooks."

Nick LaLone, lecturer in the Department of Sociology and systems support specialist, said he was "staggered" during a meeting where he was shown textbook statistics. The statistics said only 40 percent of students buy textbooks for their classes.

"If 40 percent of a consumer base is buying a product, that 60 percent is a loss, and textbook prices are going to keep going up," LaLone said. "If the cost of your books is \$25 per class, versus \$100 to \$200 per class, it's a big deal."

Tahir Ekin, assistant professor in the McCoy College of Business, will be using Courseload in his Business Statistics class next semester. He said Courseload's ability to incorporate textbook material on top of class notes will help him emphasize important points for students. Its immediacy is also a major selling point, Ekin said.

"We can ensure (students) have material from day one, so that's a big plus," Ekin said. "Generally in the first few weeks we have trouble ensuring everyone has the textbook, and it eats up class time."

LaLone said he plans on using Courseload for his Sociology of Sports and Leisure class. LaLone's job as a systems support specialist is to raise the technological literacy in his department.

"The way we understand and access information is changing, and we need to start changing with it," LaLone said.

LaLone said the availability of the eTexts on wireless electronic devices would provide students with easy access to study materials and lighten their loads of things to bring to class.

LaLone said Courseload will allow professors to view what students are reading and what reaches them more easily, which is a good way of getting feedback.

"It's really exciting because you can customize your course and know your students are receiving the information you're giving them," LaLone said. "The ease of delivery and the cost are the things that are most exciting for me."

Adrian Omar Ramirez News

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