

*(The information below was taken from an article from National Association of College Stores – NACS and their legislative representative, Rich Hershman. Nov/Dec 2009)
Followed by “initial action steps” from Laurie Bales, Bookstore Manager.

Compliance with the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 is a fact of life and the July 2010 deadline is getting closer every day.

Every institution receiving federal financial assistance—whether student loans or funds from accreditation, teacher education programs, campus safety, or file sharing—must provide accurate course material information for each course listed on the college course schedule that is used for preregistration and registration purposes. The law mentions college bookstores because they are a logical source for that information.

Textbook Provisions for Bookstores

The key provision of the law for bookstores is making sure students have access to ISBNs and retail price information on the textbooks for each course listed on the school's schedule. Institutions can satisfy the requirement by having a link to an appropriate web site, such as the college store's, as long as that link is prominently located on the college's online course schedule and printed schedules. Also, institutions are encouraged to inform students about campus-based initiatives to reduce costs, such as used books, guaranteed buyback, rental programs, e-books, and print-on-demand.

The law also:

- Promotes the idea that all parties to the provision—administrators, faculty members, bookstores, and publishers—work together to reduce course materials costs.
- Requires institutions to inform campus stores of enrollment and adoption information.
- Expands campus-based financial aid program formulas for books and supplies from \$450 to \$600.
- Requires more reporting of book and supply costs among other education costs.

While the Department of Education has no regulatory or enforcement authority at present, the law does mandate that a new study by the Government Accountability Office, the independent investigative arm of Congress, take place in 2013 to review the progress being made by institutions, bookstores, and publishers, as well as the cost and benefits to institutions and students of the provision.

Questions Remain

Ambiguities in the provision's language open up various avenues for bookstores to satisfy compliance requirements. That all institutions receiving federal financial assistance must comply by July 2010 is clear enough, but some wording in the law, such as "maximum extent practicable," offers leeway for interpretation.

"Some things are very clear, but with some flexibility," Hershman says. "The law specifies providing retail price and ISBN numbers. Other areas are more gray, like

the timing of when things need to be posted. Institutions have to do what they can to reliably provide students information. "There is a natural tension between getting information out early and getting it out accurately, so an institution should take care to provide reliable and accurate information that has been vetted."

The biggest concern is when textbook information needs to be posted: at the beginning of registration—or even as early as preregistration? And how accurate can that information be months before the class actually begins?

Get the Word Out

One place to begin the conversation is with the faculty. Conversations with the departments and explaining how early adoptions help the students.

It's important to remember that the HEOA has flexibility built into it because Congress recognized that one size does not fit all and that calendars differ from school to school. But the law also requires that good-faith effort on your part to make sure booklist information is appropriately linked, that it meets the requirements for information disclosure, and that the information is presented to students in a user-friendly way.

July will be here before you know it.

Laurie Bales' Recommendation:

RECOMMENDED ACTION TO BE TAKEN AT PCC:

- Communication to faculty and departments regarding timely and accurate textbook adoption information. (Currently, timelines are adhered to by about 55% of the college departments.)
- Collaboration with ITS to integrate registration with the bookstore's MBS system. Up to date textbook information is available, once the bookstore has verified requested information.
- Clear communication to students regarding course materials. Last minute text changes by departments, could lead to students purchasing incorrect books from other sources. (Books may not be available to purchase at time of posting.)
- Consideration given to "guaranteed buyback opportunities". This option requires departments to guarantee use of a particular book for a specified period of time, allowing the bookstore to buyback all books that have been guaranteed without regard to current supply or demand.