



# UCalgary Bookstore Survey

Students' Union, University of Calgary

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## Summary

This survey, administered by the Students' Union, was made available to undergraduate student respondents from April 20<sup>th</sup> to May 14<sup>th</sup> 2021, and received a total of 1,961 responses.

The survey received a diverse respondent population of undergraduate students. The survey received responses from students across all years of their programs and from all undergraduate program faculties (excluding students from the Qatar campus). The survey also collected basic demographic information, including ethnic, gender, and sexual identities, living arrangements during the academic term and typical cost per term of textbooks/required course materials. Collecting demographic information helps to ensure that the survey data is representative of the University of Calgary's diverse student population. Further, doing so allows the Students' Union to identify trends in the data to ensure advocacy can be targeted where it is most needed to support students in need.

This data from the survey has been broken down into two primary categories. First, the survey looks at how respondents use the Campus Bookstore and how they use textbooks and other required course materials. Over 68% of respondents purchase the majority of their textbooks and required course materials from the Campus Bookstore. The primary use of the Bookstore amongst respondents who made purchases there was to buy textbooks, but respondents also identified buying UCalgary branded clothing/accessories, items needed for labs, tutorials or art courses, and buying stationary items as other major uses of the Bookstore.

The largest share of respondents (30%) indicated they spend approximately \$200-299 per academic term on required course materials and textbooks, with roughly consistent expenses across all faculties (with Law being a notable exception, where most respondents spend at least \$300-399 or more per term). While the data from the survey may suggest students at the University of Calgary pay less than other Canadian undergraduates for their textbooks per term, it likely indicates that students are choosing not to purchase all assigned materials to manage their costs, as 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the cost of textbooks and required materials is a source of hardship and stress. The data also indicates that 54% of respondents have been enrolled in at least one course that made use of Open Educational Resources (OERs); again, with consistent data across faculties (Veterinary Medicine saw no OER use reported in the survey, but also the largest "unsure" response category).

Overwhelmingly, respondents do not support the privatization of the Campus Bookstore (89% of respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with its privatization). Respondents identified the continued operation by the University of Calgary as their first-choice solution, with the SU being contracted to operate it as a close second choice: 93% of respondents support the SU taking over operations of the Bookstore, if the University of Calgary is unable to continue operating it.

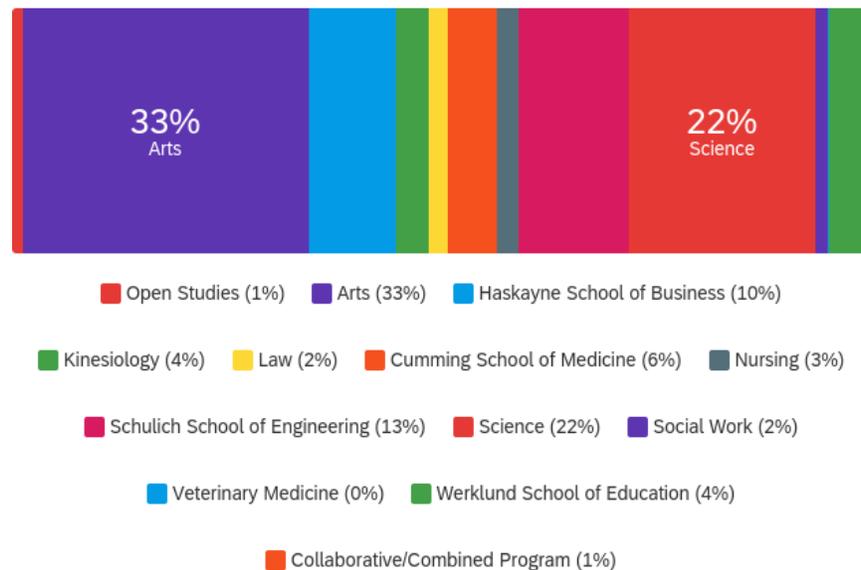
The survey also received an abundance of written responses from respondents. A small number of archetypal responses have been highlighted and are included in an appendix.

## Respondent Demographics

Of 1893 respondents to the SU’s survey, 97% were undergraduate students at the University of Calgary. Of these students, there was a roughly equal division amongst students in the first three years of their program (24%, 23% and 26% in their first, second and third years), with slightly smaller representations of students in their fourth (18%) and fifth or higher year of program (9%).

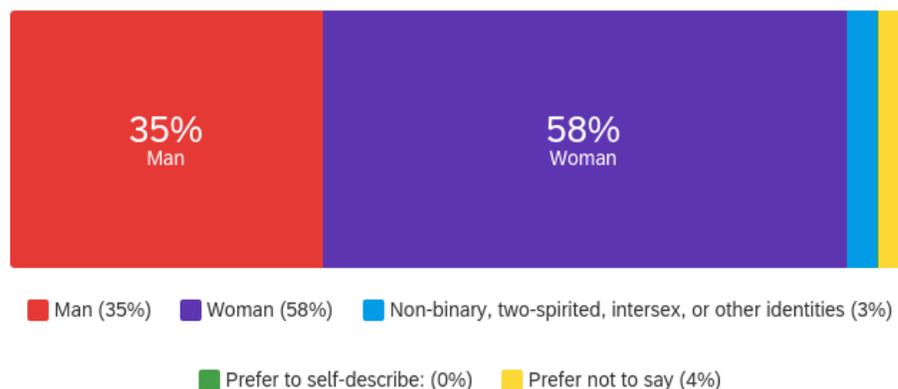
The survey received responses from students enrolled in each faculty (except for the UCalgary Qatar campus), with the largest portion of representation coming from the largest faculties, Arts (33%) and Science (22%), with notable representation from Engineering (13%) and Business (10%).

Faculty of Enrolment (N=1685)

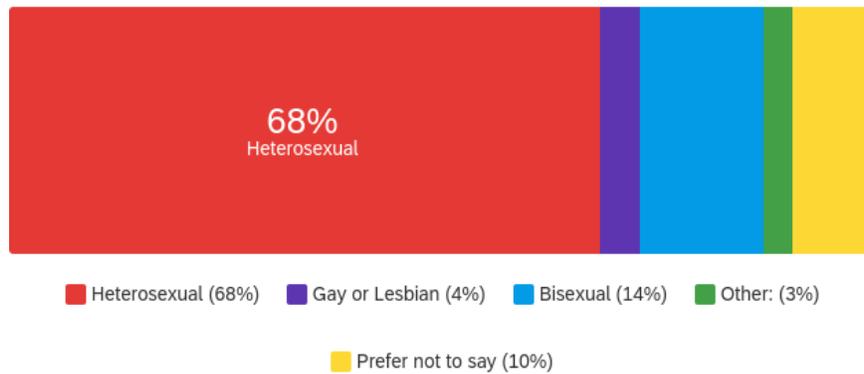


The survey also received responses from a diverse range of gender, sexual and ethnic identities. 58% of respondents identify as women, 35% as men, and 3% as non-binary, two-spirited, intersex or other identities. Women-identifying respondents are consistently overrepresented in SU surveys. In a separate question, 1% of survey respondents (N=1679) identified as transgender.

Gender Identity (N=1683)

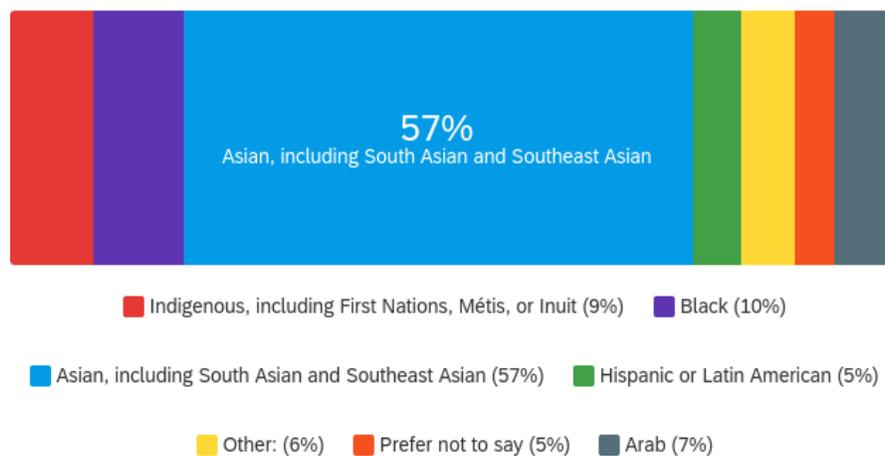


Sexual Orientation (N=1672)



24% of survey respondents identified as Indigenous or as a visible minority (with an additional 6% preferring not to say or being unsure). Of this 24%, a diverse mix of ethnic identities were identified in the survey:

Ethnic Identity (N=446)



The survey also received responses from students with a diverse range of living situation for the 2020-2021 academic year. Most prominently were respondents living in the City of Calgary but off-campus (82%). Of the remaining 18%, 11% lived outside of Calgary but within Canada, 5% lived in on-campus residences, and 3% lived outside of Canada during the 20/21 academic year.

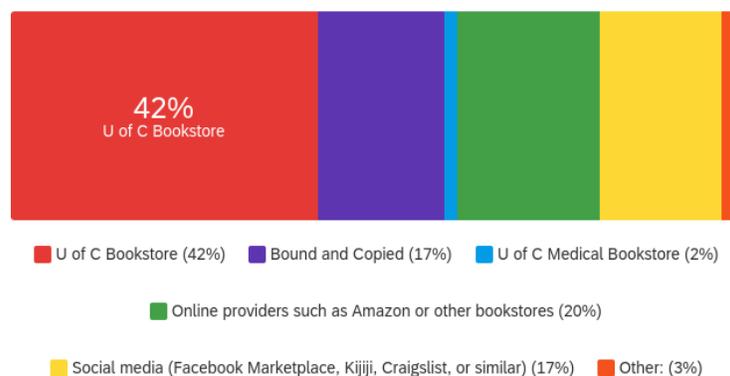
Cross-analysis of demographics data did not identify any trends in the survey questions related to the privatization of the Campus Bookstore. Students from all backgrounds were largely against the privatization of the Campus Bookstore. Specific trends relevant to demographics data have been identified in each data highlight below, as needed.

## Data

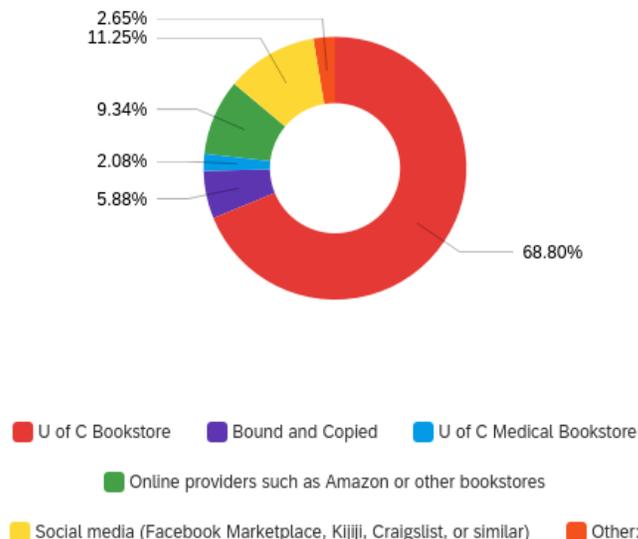
### Use of the Bookstore, Textbooks & Required Course Materials

Students often purchase textbooks and other course materials from a variety of providers. When asked to identify all of the providers that they had purchased textbooks and course materials from, the largest portion of respondents (42%) identified the Campus Bookstore as their choice for buying textbooks and required course materials, with other prominent options including online retailers like Amazon (20%), the SU's Bound and Copied (17%) and social media such as Facebook Marketplace, Kijiji, Craigslist and others (17%). Student respondents who self-identified as Indigenous or visible minorities were 4.25% less likely than other respondents to make purchases at the Campus Bookstore.

Required Course Material Primary Source (N=1742)



When asked to identify the provider that they purchased the majority of their textbooks and course materials, over 68% of respondents identified the Campus Bookstore as their primary provider, followed by social media (11%), online providers such as Amazon (9%), and Bound and Copied (6%).

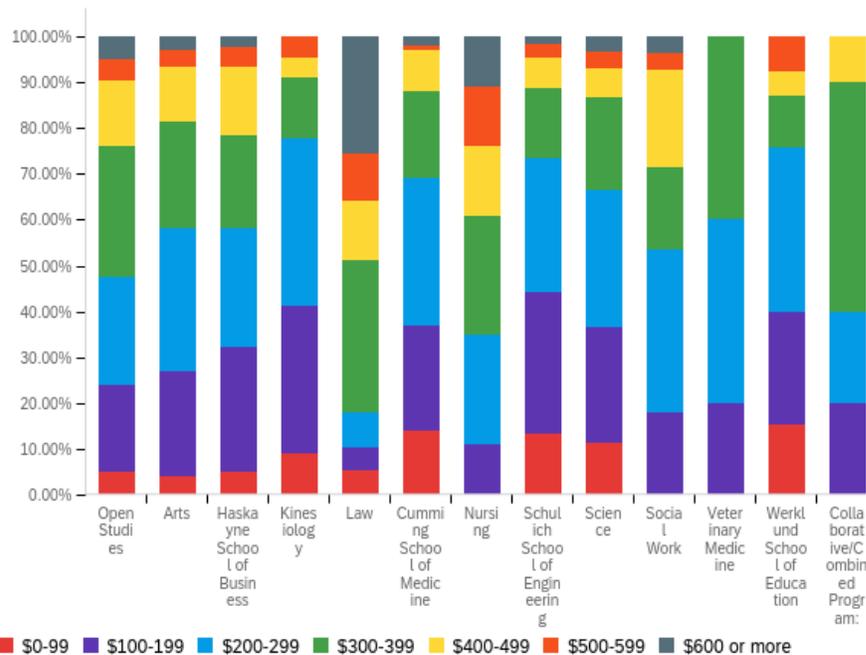


Respondents indicated that the most common services they used the Campus Bookstore for included buying textbooks (88%) and UCalgary branded clothing and accessories (63%), or items needed for labs, tutorials and art courses (55%). There was a wide variety of other services provided by the Campus Bookstore making up the remainder of common use by respondents:

1	Buying textbooks	88.28%	1536
2	Buying items needed for labs, tutorials, or art courses	55.80%	971
3	Buying stationary items such as pens, notebooks, highlighters, etc.	48.33%	841
4	Buying UCalgary branded clothing or accessories	63.39%	1103
5	Buying snacks	4.37%	76
6	Using the Book Loan Program	12.07%	210
7	Using the Book Buyback Program	11.84%	206
8	Other:	1.49%	26
9	I have never accessed any services through the U of C Bookstore	2.07%	36

Respondents also indicated their typical amount spent on required course materials and textbooks per academic term. Across all faculties, 30% of respondents indicated they spent \$200-299 per term. 24% spent \$100-199, and 21% spent \$300-399. The below graphic indicates the average breakdown of required course material expenses by faculty:

Average Amount Spent on Required Course Materials, Per Term (N=1698)

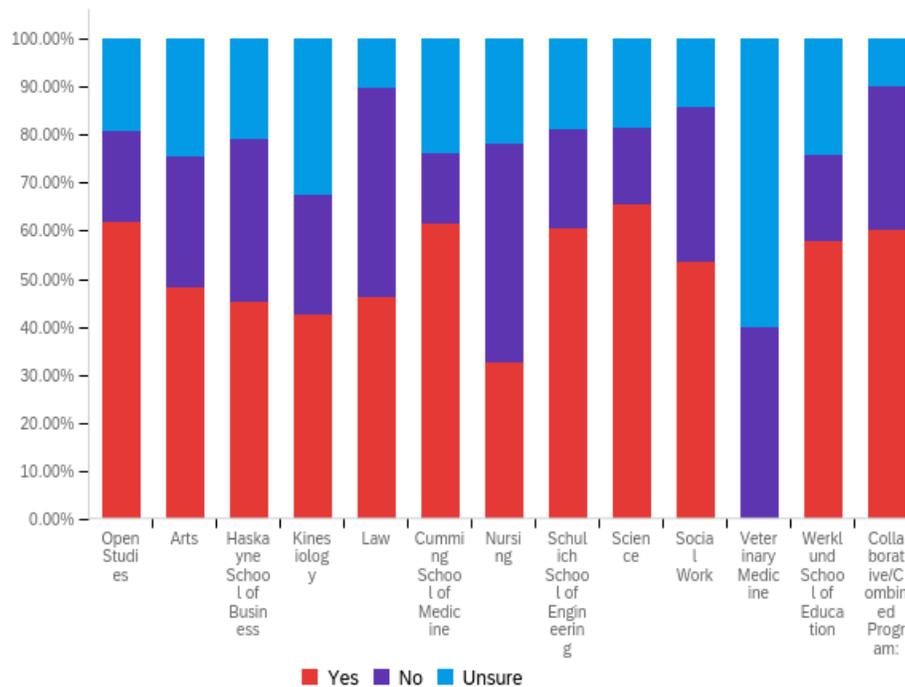


It is important to note that the data received for this question is an outlier from wider research trends in the costs paid by Canadian undergraduate students for textbooks and other required course materials.

This may suggest that University of Calgary students are assigned less or more affordable textbooks, but could also indicate that students are not purchasing all suggested materials due to the cost, or finding alternate ways to access materials without purchasing them. For context, Maclean’s Magazine found the average undergraduate student spent over \$750 on textbooks alone (2018)<sup>1</sup>.

Additionally, 54% of all 1698 respondents to the question indicated that a course they had taken made use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) in place of traditional textbooks or course materials. Below is a break-down of OERs’ prevalence across each faculty:

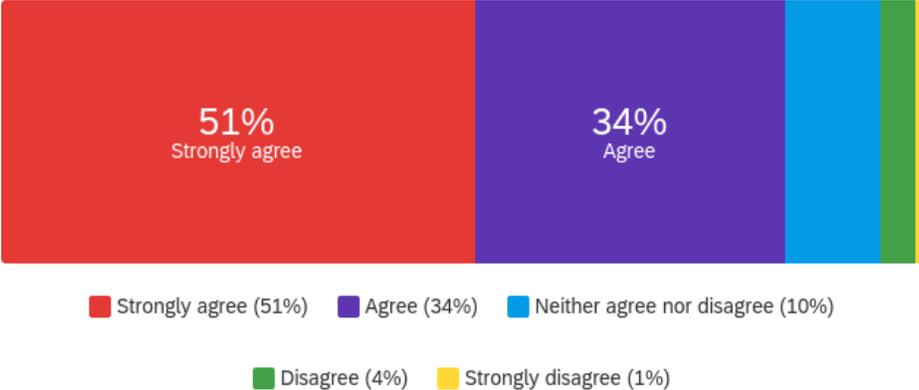
Have any of your courses used Open Educational Resources (OERs) in place of traditional textbooks and course materials? (N=1698)



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.macleans.ca/education/the-cost-of-a-canadian-university-education-in-six-charts/>

Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that the cost of textbooks and required materials is a source of stress and hardship (85% indicating they strongly agree or agree). Only a combined 5% indicated they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the costs being a source of hardship or stress:

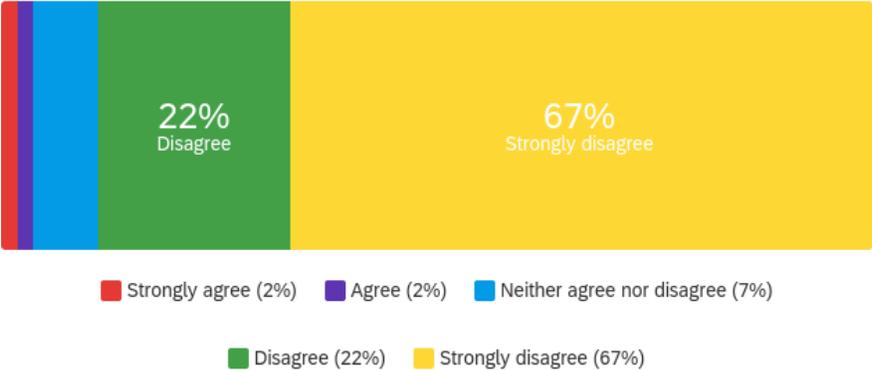
"The cost of textbooks and required course materials is a source of stress and hardship for me as an undergraduate student." (N=1699)



### Operations and Privatization of the Bookstore

89% of 1717 respondents either disagreed (22%) or strongly disagreed (67%) with the privatization of the bookstore:

"I support the privatization of the University of Calgary bookstore." Responses (N=1717)

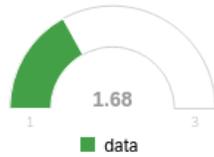


Respondents were asked to rank their choices for preferred model of operations for the Bookstore between the University of Calgary continuing to directly operate the store; operations being contracted out to the Students' Union; or having the Bookstore be run by a private company.

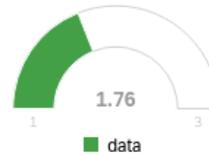
The below graphic displays each choice with the mean average of responses, with 1 being the most preferred choice and 3 being the least preferred.

Preferred Bookstore Operations Choice, 1=Most Preferred (N=1704)

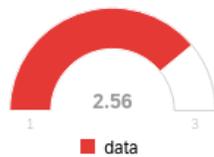
University of Calgary directly operates the campus bookstore



Operations of the campus bookstore are contracted out to the SU



The campus bookstore is run by a private company



The above graphic indicates that, on average, the preferred choice of respondents is that the University continue to directly operate the bookstore, with a close second choice being that the SU be contracted to run it. On average, the privatization of the bookstore was the least preferred choice by a significant margin.

Respondents overwhelmingly supported (67% strongly agree, 26% agree) the SU taking over operations of the Campus Bookstore in a not-for-profit model, if the University is unable to do so:

"I support the Students' Union taking over the operations of the campus bookstore to maintain a not-for-profit model, if the University is unable to continue operating the bookstore directly." (N=1716)



Strongly agree (67%) Agree (26%) Neither agree nor disagree (4%)

Disagree (1%) Strongly disagree (2%)

## Appendix A: Selected Open-Ended Response Feedback

This appendix includes highlighted responses from the survey's open-ended feedback question, which allowed respondents to identify their priorities pertaining to the potential privatization of the UCalgary Bookstore. The survey received a total of 293 responses to the open-ended question. The highlighted responses below have not been edited or altered in any way (except to remove any identifying information) and were selected as representative of commonly recurring themes amongst all responses.

### Highlighted Responses

<p>"It is extremely important for the bookstore to not be privatized as it affects our quality of education, and the development of knowledge as time progresses at UCalgary. The administration says they want to be entrepreneurial, and yet displays their conflicting intent considering the university's direction in this sale to an American corporation for no good reason. They say they care about student mental health by initiating programs and flaunt progress, but they actively make policy decisions that spite that and add on the already bleak prospect for students in Alberta under the UCP's governance. This restricts learning and stifles innovation, while concurrently affecting the livelihoods of UCalgary students and faculty after an already challenging year. The Student's Union has the capacity to take over if necessary, so an American private company should not even be on the table as an option for business relief."</p>
<p>"The bookstore is more than just an abstract source of profit or deficit, its an important part of the university, and provides students support, security and pride in the U of C."</p>
<p>"Thank you for everything you guys are doing to try to stop the privatization of the Bookstore to happen! I know people who used to work with Follett and it was the absolute worst experience for them. They are very prejudice and money hungry and do not care for the well being of students. Textbooks will increase by so much and that will be much more added stress to us especially with the increase in tuition."</p>
<p>"In my opinion the system is already taking advantage of students in every possible way (in Europe, post secondary education is FREE!) and often students are the members of society with the fewest financial resources. We are required to either take on debt, compromise our grades by working, or to have been born into a rich family who will pay for everything. Therefore, the bookstore should always remain Not for profit. Even if certain books are not explicitly required, depending on the course, students still need to purchase certain books to be able to succeed in the course... privatisation of the bookstore is not worth the risk of students being taken advantage of in this aspect as well."</p>
<p>"I absolutely do not support the privatization of the bookstore. If anything, the opinions of students should be taken into account and weighted highly- as we are the people who use the space. It is unethical of the university to pursue this and as a result if this happens both I, and my alumni family members and friends have decided we would cease any monetary or other support of the University. I hope the university is able to reconsider this decision and put the patrons they serve first, rather than their own self interest. For a university that prides themselves on entrepreneurship, this directly opposes those goals. Many students I know, myself included would not continue to use the bookstore if it becomes private. I'm disappointed in the administration's handling of the situation and I hope they are able to reflect on the error of this situation"</p>
<p>"I am a seasonal employee with the University of Calgary bookstore. Due to the pandemic it is the only employment opportunity I have and the privatization of the bookstore concerns me regarding that employment."</p>
<p>"Textbooks are brutally expensive and we do not need an American corporation come over and make the problem worse. OERs are the future."</p>
<p>"Please don't let them privatize. As soon as one thing goes, another is sure to follow. Costs at the university are already astronomical. They say they will not raise the prices "unreasonably" but what does that even mean? What students see as reasonable is usually the opposite of what privatizers see as reasonable. University is already becoming less and less accessible to the majority, it does not need to be more so."</p>