

LTCC professor leads charge to bring etexts to students

By Kathryn Reed

Free college textbooks?

Maybe.

Lake Tahoe Community College Professor Larry Green is part of a pilot program that allows students to use a statistics textbook for free. On Tuesday, he was in Sacramento with lawmakers to lend his support representing California faculty to make etexts available to more students.



Larry Green

The average annual cost for textbooks is \$1,260. Often times, new (instead of used) texts have to be bought because publishers change content. This then means at the end of the semester or quarter college bookstores won't buy them back. New texts come out usually every three years, and each time a new edition is published on average it's 12 percent higher than the previous addition, according to the 20 Million Minds Foundation.

The Center for College Affordability and Productivity last month said books and supplies represent the largest cost increase for postsecondary students receiving aid and grants.

"There's a clarion call from students and middle class

families to make higher education more accessible and affordable. Textbook prices are going up four times the rate of inflation, and many students say they drop out of college because they can't afford to spend more than \$1,000 a year on books," state Sen. Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, said in a statement. "If we can use technology to maintain the high quality of materials while cutting the cost, we need to do it. Open source digital textbooks can bring real relief of nearly \$1,000 a year to each college student."

Green was by the state Senate president's side Dec. 13 advocating passage of the bill Steinberg introduced that would allocate money for open education resources (OER) for the UC, CSU and community college systems.

"If all goes as planned, our students at LTCC could save thousands of dollars each year by using these OER textbooks. Since the materials will have a Creative Commons License, all students in the world, not just in California, will benefit," Green told *Lake Tahoe News*.

According to the Government Accountability Office, textbooks for community college students can account for 75 percent of their education costs, while books reflect 26 percent of the cost of attending a CSU.

The idea of the legislation is to have 50 key lower-division textbooks now being used by undergraduates be available digitally – via computer or mobile device. Printed versions would still be available, too. And hard copies would also be in college libraries for students to access. The etexts would be free.

If the legislation passes, then a request for proposals would be sent out. Publishers, faculty or others could respond with an idea for how they will create "high quality digital open source textbooks and related courseware".

Green said, "With over a billion dollars spent on textbooks

each year by our students, the \$25 million proposal makes sound economic sense. For many years, I have taken the lead on this effort.”

Green knows something about numbers. He is a math professor.