

FRM: VSA Council
TO: Catherine Bond Hill, President
Jonathan Chenette, Dean of the Faculty
CC: Steve Rock, former Acting Dean of the Faculty
Chris Roellke, Dean of the College
Eve Dunbar, Acting Dean of the College
RE: Transparency in Textbook Information
DTE: March 2nd, 2014

The Students' Class Issues Alliance (SCIA) is a VSA organization that seeks to foster dialogue about socioeconomic class and classism among students, as well as advocate for institutional changes to address the specific needs of lower-income students in their Vassar experiences. While Vassar has opened its doors to an increasingly diverse student body, the policies of the College must reflect this changing composition. We believe the Faculty are in a unique position to implement small changes that can have a significant impact on Vassar's accessibility.

In November 2013, the Students' Class Issues Alliance (SCIA) began actively exploring possibilities for textbook information to be released as soon as possible for the Spring 2014 semester. In conjunction with the VSA VP for Academics Shruti Manian '14 and then acting Dean of the Faculty Steve Rock, SCIA constructed an outline (attached below) that was read at a Faculty Meeting in December 2013.

This outline reviewed the issue of textbook costs, especially at an institution heavily focused on providing the financial means for students to access educational resources. \$900 per year is allocated for textbooks, but the source of these funds lie in work study earnings, much of which is ultimately put toward textbook expenses. A major concern regarding textbooks is the time constraints first year students are under upon arrival at school, limiting available time between class registration and start of classes. This time is essential for first year students, who are likely less aware of Vassar Bookstore alternatives, to compare cheaper options in purchasing course materials.

Solutions proposed in the outline focus primarily on providing students early access to information on course materials, as well as clarifying the necessity of those materials. We believe it is important for professors to list course materials earlier and through various mediums. In addition, the Faculty should implement a policy whereby professors provide registered students at least a partial listing of course materials. Lastly, professors should state more explicitly which materials are required and which are only recommended, and by precisely what time materials are needed, so that students have ample time to explore cheaper sources for their materials.

The reading of this outline at the December 2013 Faculty Meeting seemed to receive mixed feedback, as some professors informed their students of course material listings and some materials were posted on the Vassar Bookstore website. However, the implementation of this policy suggestion was inconsistent.

We feel that in direct response to the widespread concerns of students, it is essential that the Faculty make small changes to expand students' ability to access to more inexpensive course materials, and implement internal policies that are more favorable to students of limited financial resources at Vassar.