W. Charles Kerfoot, Chair, Research Policy Committee: below was submitted to the Research Policy Committee for comments.

The Research Committee recommends establishment of a senate ad hoc committee to address the issue of high textbook prices and institutional responses. A recent U.S. News Report "High Textbook Prices Have College Students Struggling" discusses how book costs have grown by 82% over the last 10 years. In a survey of 2,000 college students in 33 states and 156 different campuses, an average student spends $1,200/yr on textbooks and supplies. Because of high costs, 65% of students chose not to purchase a book assigned by the professor, and 50% said the cost of textbooks affected how many classes they chose to take each semester. A second survey found that 30% of students use financial aid to cover textbook costs.

The high textbook prices are a symptom of the rise of publishing house monopolies that are also instituting high prices for on-line publishing and limiting access to on-line publications (creating "pay walls", which cost $40-80 for downloads). The Senate Ad Hoc Committee membership would include representatives from pertinent Senate committees plus representatives from other MTU groups (Textbook Strategy Study Group, Van Pelt and Opie Library) working on related issues. The Committee aims would be 1) to institute immediate measures designed to reduce textbook costs and access, 2) to explore curriculum changes that would offer alternatives; and 3) to educate faculty and students about potential options. Some potential options include urgent, timely responses, whereas other measures include reflection on curriculum changes and infrastructure required to accelerate changes. For example, the ramping up of textbook costs by publishing houses with each edition can be countered by making earlier versions available to students at the library (establishing textbook "caches"). Students can also be encouraged to sell and purchase last year's textbooks from Amazon. Alternatively, faculty can be encouraged to switch to open-source (on-line) textbooks, free to download, at a savings of around $100/course per student per semester. A curriculum issue is pioneering efforts by certain schools to establish Z-degree programs, i.e. "zero" textbook curricula. Another effort involves library transition to "in-house" digital operations, currently underway at MTU that include creative options. Some institutions (e.g. University of Michigan Library) have suggested that libraries evolve to support "in house" publication, working with resident faculty to develop local course-tailored "textbooks" of their own.