

# CANADIAN ROUNDTABLE ON ACADEMIC MATERIALS

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## Report 2018

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**CRAM**

Canadian Roundtable on Academic Materials

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of CRAM (Canadian Roundtable on Academic Materials) is to initiate a national discussion on academic materials between all stakeholders within our institutions with the purpose to understand and to develop a holistic and comprehensive institutional approach for the long-term sustainability of academic materials.

## CRAM PRINCIPLES

In 2007, CRAM was founded at the University of Alberta as a partnership between the Bookstore and the student's union. It was created as a collaborative effort to address the rising costs of course materials and was built on nine key principles. A summary of the key principles is available on the [CRAM website](#).

## CRAM 2025 VISION

Reflecting on the changes of nearly a decade since CRAM was inaugurated; Campus Stores Canada (CSC) saw an opportunity for advocacy and taking a leadership role in continuing the conversation. In May 2017, CSC brought together institutional stakeholders in a forum to identify current issues, trends and opportunities to position as a collective voice for the institutions we serve. CRAM 2017 resulted in elements of a 2025 vision being developed. These include:

- Establishing a national collaborative standard for determining course materials
- Adopting an adaptive, flexible and rigorous approach to course materials.
- Fostering critical relationships with faculty to ensure resource decisions are made with a complete understanding of available options.
- Ensuring all stakeholders within institutions are working together to deliver the best value to the student.
- Promoting an institutional vision and strategy for course materials.

## ATTENDEES – CRAM 2018

CRAM 2018 was held on October 23, 2018 in Ottawa at the Lord Elgin Hotel. The session was led by Tony Ellis of the National Association of College Stores (NACS) with support from Campus Stores Canada. There were 33 attendees representing faculty, libraries, bookstores and students. Key stakeholder associations represented included, Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), Society of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE), Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), Universities Canada and Campus Stores Canada (CSC).

## WHAT WE CAME TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE AT CRAM 2018

CRAM 2018 focused on the following two CRAM Principles:

### 1. CRAM Principle #7

*“The academic materials delivery process at each participating school should incorporate joint bookstore, student, academic community members and library committees that foster communication, promote enhanced relationships, and facilitate the sharing of ideas and concerns.”*

- Access and Affordability - How can we establish a collaborative standard for ensuring accessibility and affordability of academic materials?
- Communication and Ideation - How do we bring stakeholders at each institution together to discuss affordability and accessibility of academic materials?
- Model/Process Development - How do bring stakeholders together at each institution to develop the right model that ensures students have access to affordable academic materials?
- Student Awareness and Engagement - How do we engage students in this conversation and keep them informed of the diverse course material delivery options?

### 2. CRAM Principle #8

*“Establish monitoring and feedback mechanisms in order to measure and enhance the quality, affordability and accessibility of academic materials.”*

- Data - Brittany Conley, Research Analyst for the National Association of College Stores (NACS) presented highlights from the NACS Student Watch / Faculty Watch Survey. Attendees discussed the survey results and discussed what information is needed in Canada to enhance conversations on academic materials at each institution.

# DISCUSSION OUTCOMES

## ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

- The challenge of price point is a huge issue for students, but not necessarily for faculty who adopt the course materials. Most faculty are not aware of price points, or their power to negotiate prices with vendors prior to adoption.
- The strength of the student voice and student grassroots movements to enact policy changes was discussed; specifically using examples of legislation in some provinces to remove paywalls from assessment tools, as well as the creation of student funded textbook lending programs.
- The mental health and social impact on students who are unable to afford course materials was highlighted.
- The procurement of large adoptions of digital resources like Top Hat or Turn-it-In at an institution level and handling these requests through an RFP process instead of as individual requests. In an example from one institution, guiding principles were put in place to assess the viability of the adoption and pricing was negotiated at a higher level than the Bookstore. In the discussion, it was considered which organizations could facilitate these negotiations at each institution whether they are at the national, provincial or institutional levels. This involves including the different stakeholders that are not in the room, such as publishers, ancillary services and registrars.
- The need to understand the motivation of the various departments on campus regarding affordable course materials and the impact on different stakeholder groups.
- The need to define what “required” course materials means to each stakeholder. When faculty requisition course materials noted as “required” and students report that the material was not used in class, this calls into question the interpretation of “required”. What is the measurement of “required”? Is it 10% of the course, 50% or 100%?

## COMMUNICATION AND IDEATION

- The importance of leveraging relationships between all stakeholders—bookstores, libraries, students, and faculty to collect data and share options for affordable course material selection. In order to do so effectively, misconceptions must be cleared up through honest communication regarding mandates and institutional expectations of individual departments.
- Textbook revenue must be viewed as a separate entity from other retail items sold in campus stores. Emphasizing the contributions from textbook sales in supporting student services changes the way sales are viewed on campus.
- Student success and the mental and social well-being of our students was recognized as a common thread among all stakeholder groups. With these shared values, institutions can focus on developing a strategy to address the needs of students.
- Awareness is key - Is everyone aware of the motivations and/or mandate of the individual departments/stakeholders? How do we communicate the needs and share understanding of conflicting priorities?

## MODEL/PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

- Institutions can work towards creating an efficient adoption process for faculty and a clear communication process for students to navigate the variety of options now available in course materials delivery (e.g. funneling ALL adoptions, paid or unpaid, through the bookstore).
- Planning long term institutional processes to address challenges, such as the impact of some course material delivery models on faculty choice, as well as the growing challenge of sessional instructors and late hires, must also be developed. Bookstores should leverage relationships with faculty members and/or librarians to get added to faculty council meeting agendas. This could be useful in initiating steps to develop such processes.
- An example of a new model was discussed at Queen's University where the library is working on a pilot program to develop OER courses with the participation of faculty. To fund the pilot, the grant money offered by the library is matched by the department of the participating faculty to further fund the projects. In the discussion, it was questioned whether grant funding alone was sustainable due to the constraints of institutional budgets.
- Discussion around Sustainable Business Models:
- Researching whether funds could be requested through Heritage Canada's Public Lending Right to offer remuneration to creators of OER content or use a similar system to incentive creators. This would encourage faculty to create content in OER and get other faculty to use what has been created to benefit the authors.
- Introducing a fee-based system to fund sustainability costs of OER course materials that comes from students or from publisher content.
- Safe guarding funding for OER from budget cuts with a strong value proposition for keeping the funds available, especially if it's dependent on departmental budgets.

## STUDENT AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

- Stakeholders at institutions would benefit from partnerships and a unified communication delivery to keep students informed of diverse course material options.
- Continuity of student engagement on campus is challenging because students cycle through and student government changes frequently. Continuous conversation and requesting to be placed on student council meeting agendas were suggested as possible strategies to keep students' involvement current.

## DATA

- Questioning of data collection: It's important to ensure that data collected is from reliable sources and measures the actual outcomes, not desired outcomes. The bias of publisher data is they act as entities that must maximize profits for their shareholders was emphasized. For example, many academic publishers cite digital as being the more popular format, where data collected at institutions shows the opposite.
- It was suggested to look at existing data associated with similar models prior to adopting new delivery models. For example, inclusive access models offered by publishers show many similarities to journal licenses held by libraries.
- Challenges that libraries have faced with licensing include the impact of CDN/US exchange rates; bundling of journals (much like cable), and exorbitant increases in subscription costs.
- The challenge of aggregating data in a meaningful way across departments was noted.
- Bookstores are viewed as being transactional in purpose with a focus on profits. There is a difference between stores that are institutionally owned compared to those that are contracted out and run by a 3rd party. Bookstores are a resource of information to assist faculty with the selection of academic materials, information that most faculty may not be aware of or partake in. Such business decisions impact access for students.
- Documentation should be developed and maintained (e.g. adoption process) and could be shared to help build awareness and knowledge of all stakeholders.

## NEXT STEPS FOR CRAM

### WE WANT YOUR OPINION!

CRAM was designed to be a conversation between all stakeholders within our institutions to provide shared input for equal benefit. Campus Stores Canada (CSC) re-initiated the conversation in 2017 and 2018 and would like to see this evolve into a broader national discussion; however, we can't do it alone and there are many more voices to add to the conversation. We would like your feedback on how we can share the ownership of CRAM across all stakeholder groups interested in the long-term sustainability of academic materials. Please contact me directly with your ideas, questions or suggestions.

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## KEY TAKE-AWAYS

1. The relationship between course **material affordability** and **student mental health** and **well-being** has the potential to **bridge gaps** in relationships as this is a **shared value** across all stakeholders.
2. There needs to be a **shared understanding** of **mandates** and/or **motivation** of each individual department/stakeholder. Working from this perspective, information can flow easier and students will benefit.
3. **Libraries and bookstores** each hold **useful data** that, if shared, could enhance the student experience on each side. The challenge for most institutions, however, is that these departments tend to **hold seemingly competing mandates**.
4. **Faculty are not always aware** of the impact of their choices and librarians/course material services/bookstores need to engage in conversations with faculty.
5. **Students are not against using textbooks**; if value is demonstrated, they will purchase the materials.
6. As the Student Watch survey results revealed, **students prefer print**, but purchase digital because it's more affordable.
7. **All stakeholders have a genuine interest in lowering costs** for students, whether through the creation/support of OER, trying to combat rising prices, and trying to convince faculty to only adopt **REQUIRED** texts and/or less expensive (or open) alternatives.
8. **It is important for ALL stakeholders to work together** on campus to address the issues around the access and affordability of academic materials.