

Estimating First Day Access Usage from Fall 2023 Textbook Purchasing

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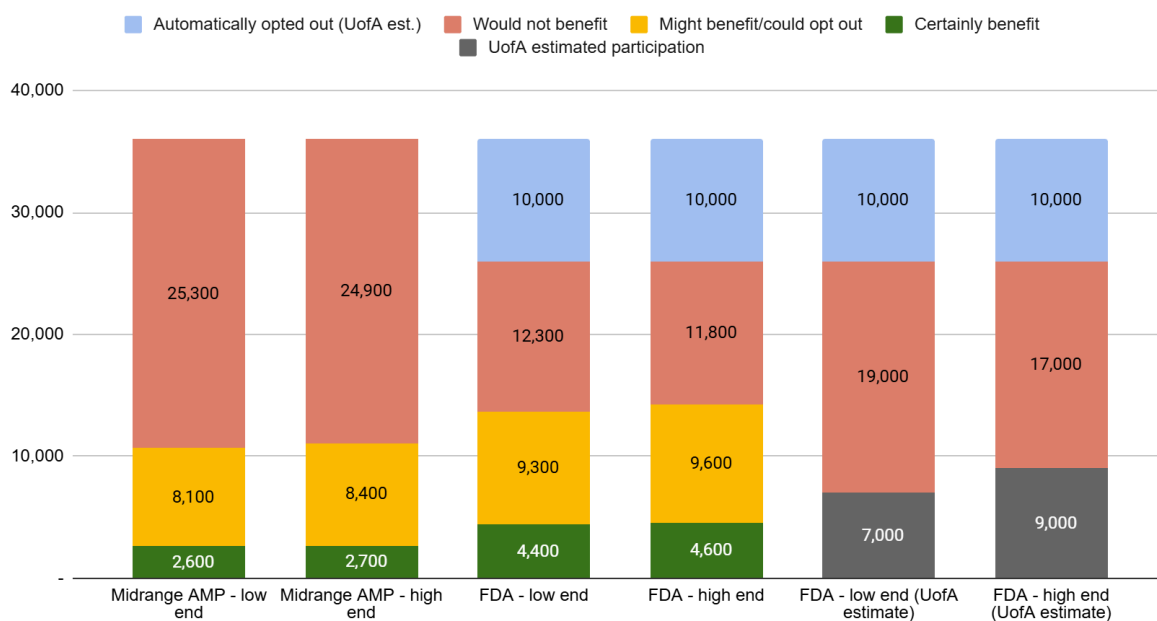
Overview

This project revisits data from the UASU's 2023 Annual Survey to estimate usage patterns for the proposed First Day Access (FDA) program. The core question here is how many students would find the program beneficial versus how many would want to opt out.

As currently understood, the program has benefits and drawbacks other than the relative dollar value. As the available Annual Survey data focuses on cost, this project models the choice to opt out as a matter of sticker price only — the proposed \$250 FDA fee compared with students' other purchasing choices and the self-reported cost of recently required textbooks.

All numbers approximated (e.g. rounded to nearest 100)

Data source: UASU 2023 Annual Survey (n=2,668)



The high proportions of students who probably or certainly would not benefit (and would need to opt out), in all forms and projections of this program, reaffirm student leaders' longstanding reservations.

Annual Survey Questions and Summary Statistics

This survey ran in November-December 2023, around 2.5 months after most textbook purchasing. Ideally, this is long enough to capture delayed textbook purchases, but short enough to let students recall their choices clearly.

Q1: "This semester (Fall 2023), how much did you actually pay for textbooks?"

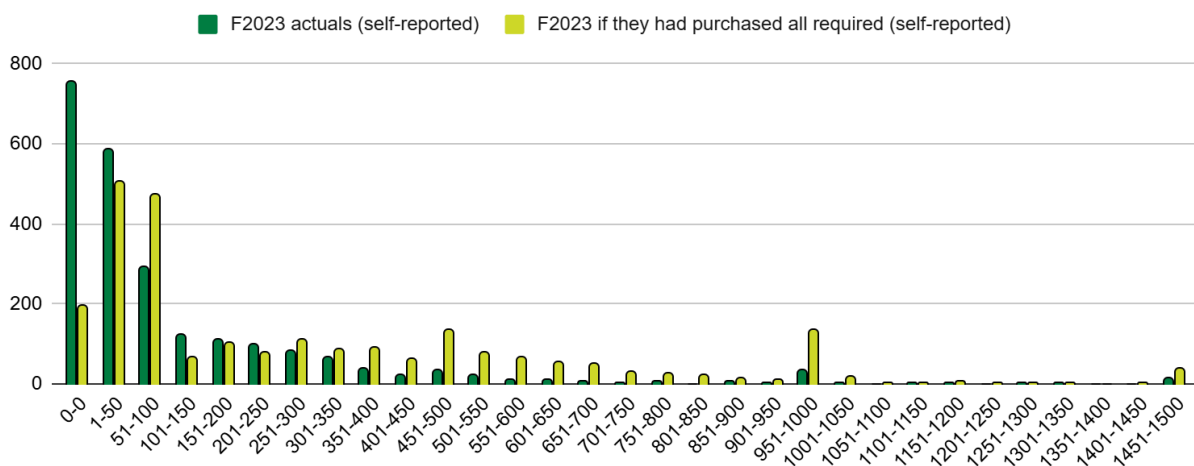
- Average: \$174, mostly decreasing by year of study and varying widely by faculty.
- 47% of respondents answered \$0.
- Average without \$0 responses: \$252.

Q2: "This semester (Fall 2023), if you had purchased all required textbooks, how much do you think you would have paid?"

- Average: \$431, decreasing by year of study.
- 7.4% answered \$0.
- Average without \$0 responses: \$465.

Histogram of self-reported undergraduate student textbook costs in Fall 2023

2023 UASU Annual Survey (Nov/Dec 2023, n=2668)



Who Benefits?

For students who actually paid significantly more than the FDA fee (Q1), FDA would certainly be beneficial, all else being equal.

As students would not be eager to 'flip' to such an expensive fee, but would choose FDA if it presented a clear advantage, we estimated 'significantly more' as the \$301-\$350 block of our histogram (for Q1) and everything above it. In Fall 2023, 12.3% of respondents actually paid over \$300. 12.3% would be equivalent to around 4,400 of the 36,003 individuals on the most current UASU voter roll.

This Annual Survey sample was not randomly selected. If it had been, the margin of error would have been around 2%. Doubling that, for the sake of argument, would give a range of around 4,200-4,600. As professional faculties were somewhat underrepresented in this survey, some of which (e.g. Nursing) tend to have higher textbook costs, we favour the higher end of the range. We estimate 4,400-4,600 out of around 36,000 undergraduates would certainly benefit.

For students whose required textbooks were significantly more than the FDA fee (Q2), but who did not actually pay significantly more (Q1), FDA *might* also be beneficial. Using the same approach and threshold (>\$300) as above, we estimate another 9,300-9,600 *might* benefit.

This approach also allows us to compare FDA with its predecessor, the failed Academic Materials Program (AMP) proposal. While firm cost numbers were never available for AMP, midrange estimates were around \$600-700 for Fall/Winter, so around \$325 per semester. At this price point, around 2,600-2,700 students would certainly benefit, and around 8,100-8,400 more might benefit.

Automatic Opt-Outs

One of the clear successes of 2023/24 student advocacy is the automatic opt-out feature of FDA, which makes it a very different program than AMP. All students who are only registered in classes without mandatory materials are automatically opted out. It is not clear how many individuals would be automatically opted out. Estimates vary widely.

- [At the January 15th Academic Planning Committee](#), the University estimated that "Over 10,000 students enrolled exclusively in ZTC or OER courses are automatically exempt from program fees." This number is being taken as reasonably reliable.
- [At the January 21st Students' Council meeting](#), the University provided verbal estimates that 18-19,000 students would be automatically opted out.
- In a January/February UASU Perks survey, around 15% of respondents stated that none of their Winter 2025 courses had mandatory textbooks, which would be equivalent to around 5,400 students.

The 2023 Annual Survey data (Q2) offers another point of reference. 7.4% (equivalent to around 2,700-2,800 undergraduates) said that, if they had purchased all required materials, the cost would have been \$0. However, understanding that students may not recall exactly which materials were technically required, we looked at Q2 with latitude. 15.4% (equivalent to around 5,500-5,800 students) believe they would have paid \$25 or less, and 28.4% (equivalent to around 10,200-10,600 students) believe they would have paid \$50 or less. These estimates align with the Perks survey data and the 10,000 figure provided at APC. This is still a broad range of potential answers, suggesting that many students may be at risk of paying a fee that is much larger than their required textbook costs.