

CREATED BY:

THE STUDENTS TAKING
ON POVERTY CAMPAIGN
(HARVARD CHAPTER)

THE HARVARD
UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL

The C-CAP Petition

THE VOICE OF OVER 1000 STUDENTS FOR THE
COURSE-COST ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

C-CAP Description

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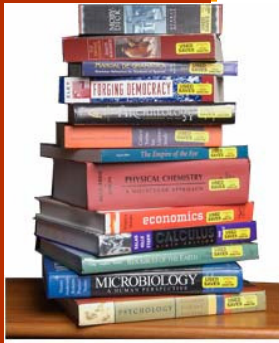
This semester, Harvard undergraduates from unique student groups, academic interests, and socioeconomic backgrounds have come together to voice their resounding support for the Course-Cost Assistance Program (C-CAP).

As students, we pay an average of over \$600 per semester on textbooks and other course-related literature. If one uses the estimate of personal expenses used by the Financial Aid Office, this is nearly half of annual personal expenses for the typical undergraduate. Because of this, buying books can be particularly burdensome, and often prohibitive, for students from low-income households.

C-CAP addresses this issue through book stipends, which would be provided to low income students every semester. Each student whose family income falls below \$40,000 would receive \$125 per semester for the purchase of books, while students with family incomes between \$40,000 and \$60,000 would receive a \$75 per semester. This amount, though covering only a few classes, would go a long way in helping students with the cost of books.

The movement to make C-CAP a reality comes directly from the student body, and undergraduates have led the fight to make it a reality. Over the past year, C-CAP has garnered widespread support from students, faculty, and local Harvard affiliates. Not only has **C-CAP secured a confidential and accountable mechanism for its implementation**, but it also has a **sponsor interested in subsidizing half of the \$200,000** annual costs needed for the program.

Students now call on the College to take action against the burden that high book costs place on low-income students by implementing C-CAP as soon as possible.



The average Harvard student spends over \$600 per semester on books.

“If this initiative can assist a large portion of our undergrad population then it’s illogical not to have it.”

— C-CAP Signatory

Petition Text

Whereas the purchase of books, sourcepacks, and other types of course-related literature is necessary for the academic well-being of Harvard undergraduates; and

Whereas the cost of course-related literature is an unavoidable expense for every student; and

Whereas the increasing cost of course-related literature has particular impact on the lowest income students; and

Whereas the cost of necessary literature should not be prohibitive to, nor impede the academic progress of, any student attending this College;

Be it therefore resolved that we support the establishment of the Course-Cost Assistance Program (C-CAP), to be administered through the Financial Aid Office, which will provide a per semester stipend of \$125 for undergraduates with family incomes of less than \$40,000 per year and a \$75 per semester stipend for undergraduates with family incomes of between \$40,000 and \$60,000, towards the purchase of books, sourcepacks, and other types of course-related literature.

Student Group Sponsors

Harvard Undergraduate Council
www.uc.fas.harvard.edu

Students Taking on Poverty (STOP) Campaign
www.stopcampaign.org

Black Men's Forum
www.hcs.harvard.edu/~bmf

The Harvard College Democrats
www.harvarddems.com

Fuerza Latina
www.hcs.harvard.edu/~fuerza

The Kuumba Singers of Harvard College
www.kuumbasingers.org

Harvard Islamic Society
www.digitas.harvard.edu/~his

Harvard Progressive Jewish Alliance
www.hcs.harvard.edu/pja

Harvard RAZA
www.hcs.harvard.edu/~raza

Harvard Society of Black Scientists and Engineers
www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hsbse

Harvard-Radcliffe Christian Fellowship
www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hrcf

Association of Black Harvard Women
www.hcs.harvard.edu/~abhw

Personal Testimonials

“Our family farm complicates the financial aid application process.”

Although my parents' yearly income totals to not much more than the median American income, our family farm complicates the financial aid application process since it counts as an asset. As a result, my parents pay half of their yearly income--our family tuition contribution comes out to be over \$30,000 after financial aid--to Harvard. Due to the steep cost of tuition, my parents cannot contribute to my personal, academic, and travel expenses (including cross-country flights). I am work-study eligible, and work during the semester and over summers in order to pay for books, flights home, and any summer internship experience I may want to partake in. However, the savings I have accumulated often do not cover the costs of all the books I need. Generally, I buy the books that I can from discount websites, take classes with friends to borrow books, and check out reserves. However, working 20 hours per week and living in the library in order to do my readings can make it difficult to participate as actively in campus social life and student organizations, or even in class, as my peers. C-CAP's \$125 (or for me, \$75) stipend will not cover all my costs, but it would be a tremendously helpful start.

“I receive a generous amount of financial aid.

“A good education was my ticket out of that lifestyle.”

I've lived in poverty all my life. I was raised by a single mother who gave up work to take care of three children; my father left upon the birth of my two sisters and I (identical triplets). By the time my sisters and I were independent enough that my mother didn't have to watch over us every second, she had contracted a serious case of both osteo and rheumatoid arthritis, which has left her debilitated for the past 10 years. Currently she is legally handicapped and will be unable to work for an indefinite amount of time. My family and I were only able to live in a town like (blank) and gain access to such a great education through governmental assistance, which inevitably relegated us to the lowliest of apartments, where we are still forced to put up with poor conditions, as complaints will likely get us evicted (as once before, when we spent a summer in the homeless shelter).

However, the fact that this does not anticipate the cost of books ... makes life still tough financially.”

— C-CAP Signatory

My mother told me all my life that a good education was my ticket out of that lifestyle. I worked diligently in school so that I could reach Harvard, and now that I'm here I find that poverty doesn't end. I received a good deal of financial aid for which I'm very grateful, but I'm still responsible for my portion of the tuition as well as about \$1,000 worth of books per year. I worked all summer to earn the money for this year, and I'm in constant turmoil over my expenses. I work a part-time job in my spare time, and as soon as Reading Period rolls around, I work two jobs. Sometimes I'm so exhausted that I can't keep up with my schoolwork, but I know that without earning money for my finances, I won't be here next year. I'm already slated to work all summer again, forfeiting any summer plans. Making the decision to travel over Spring Break--the first time I've ever had the chance to travel in my life--has set me back financially. I feel that I should be able to take part in activities such as this and experience life like any other student who has money can, but any time I try I'm put into even more anxiety over whether or not I'll be able to pay for my expenses, including my books.

While I realize that finances are just a part of life for students, I still feel it more deeply than most I know, since every single expense I have here is paid out-of-pocket, with no assistance from either parent. I find the prices of books to be exorbitant, and even a hindrance to the classes I'll apply to. I'm hoping to try applying to 5 classes next semester, but I balk every time I think about how much more that will cost me. I feel that I should be able to carry with my education to the furthest extent possible, without being held back by the high costs of living. Any amount that the financial aid office could give to assist with book expenses would be highly appreciated and definitely put to good use. I know that my mother's right--a good education is the way out of poverty. I just hope that the poverty doesn't get the best of me before I can even experience the higher quality of life I've forever dreamt of.

Personal Testimonials

“Trudges to the library are painstaking, and the books needed are not always available.”

I have been living in poverty for the last eight years of my life. I am one of six children born to an American woman and a foreign father. Eight years ago, my father left my mother, who had dropped out of high school, and returned to his native country. My family lost our house, and we were almost homeless. We lived in a small trailer, without even any beds to sleep in. My mother has been working nonstop, well over 100 hours a week at some points, in order to afford us our school supplies and to pay the rent. My mother has been telling me since eight years ago that I need a good education, and she said she was the prime example why. I was motivated to study not only to avoid my own poverty, but to be able to take care of my mother who has been working so hard. Harvard's Financial Aid Initiative has provided me with an excellent opportunity. My mother used to apologize profusely when I was in high school, saying that it would be her fault if I could not go to a quality school for financial reasons. I arrived at Harvard with not a lot of money, \$170 my mother had saved up to give me, and I could not afford to buy all of my books. I resolved that I had to make some sacrifices, and life is not fair to everyone. Nightly trudges to the library are painstaking, and the books needed are not always available. I could never blame Harvard, since they have given me the opportunity to even study here, but I feel like I am not on level playing ground with the majority of students. I know that Harvard tries hard to give equal opportunities to their students, and I feel that even a small amount of money would make a huge difference on the lives of some students here.

“You don't have to be impoverished to be greatly effected by the incredibly high cost of books.”

You don't have to be impoverished to be greatly effected by the incredibly high cost of books. My family is middle class-- according to Harvard we can afford to pay almost 1/4 of my tuition probably because I have a single mother and there's only one income. I appreciate the financial aid that I do receive, but after my family pays for my younger brother's college tuition and mine, there isn't much left for expenses like crimson cash, room decorations, and most importantly school books. Harvard offers a lot of assistance but it doesn't take into account that what is determined for my family to pay is the very most that we can without not paying other bills. No one explains that books can be \$200 a semester, that many times you have less than a week to purchase them during shopping period (less time to shop for the best deal), and that for many classes you just cant do without them. Problem sets require textbooks (half of the time new editions are required each year and cost more), literature classes can go through 10 novels in four months, and coursepacks--forget about it, there's no bargain hunting for those. I have resorted to splitting photocopy costs with 10 other people to make my money back on an overpriced coursepack. I have borrowed textbooks from other students and from the professors. I work at Lamont Library and try to read reserve books that I would only use for 2 weeks and as such couldn't see buying. In the end, I get it done because I have to. But if I don't go above and beyond, then I do poorly based on my finances and not my intellectual ability. I'm not one to avoid hard work—that's how I got into Harvard in the first place. But if Harvard has the means to build another campus, then why cant it do what it can to let its students concentrate on what they should be concentrating on—learning and achieving rather than scraping and scamming?

Personal Testimonials

“Coming to Harvard and being offered so much money was truly God’s miracle.”

I come from a lower-middle class family in ---. Both my parents run an NGO that works amongst the poor in the city of ---. Even together, they are far from making anything even close to \$40,000. My coming to Harvard and being offered so much money was truly God's miracle, but financially it has been very stressful for our family since there are other members back home that my parents support as well.

The cost of books in this country completely shocked me when I first came here, and it still continues to do so. Some of the courses I ended up taking were new and there wasn't the option of using another student's book. With running a job on campus, there is only so much I can do to meet my expenses and in the end my parents end up paying for the books that I have to buy. The figures go into hundreds every semester and it has been very difficult for us.

I do pray that this proposal comes through because I am sure there are many people like me who are facing such financial struggles. I would appreciate it if you could keep this testimonial anonymous. Please do let me know if I can do anything else.

“The small bit of happiness and relative prosperity we had accomplished...crashed down around us.”

I grew up in a poor rural town and lived in a single-wide trailer next to a small farm. As everyone I knew was poor, I never thought that my family was particularly bad off. Most of the clothes I wore until high school were hand-me-downs from my older female cousins who lived next door. Our land had been in my mother’s family for years, but my parents couldn’t afford to have anything built on it. Eventually, my mother (who worked at a chemical plant) and my father (who only has a GED) saved enough money over twelve years to purchase the supplies to build a house ourselves. My mom did the electrical. My dad did the plumbing. My uncles hung the shingles. I helped put up sheet-rock. We finally finished the house as I was entering high school.

During my senior year, the small bit of happiness and relative prosperity we had accomplished by “pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps” crashed down around us. My mother was fired from her job. One of my uncles got out of prison. Another uncle and his three children were evicted. The four of them moved into the largest room in our home. My mom became very ill and could not work. My father’s very small salary supported our extended family plus the expenses of my move to Harvard. By the summer before freshman year at Harvard, most of my extended family found other accommodations (although one went to jail). Throughout all of this, my parents were still able to give me just enough money for my freshman year roommates to not pity-pay for my dinners when we all went out together. However, when my grandmother died and my mentally-ill uncle moved in to our home, my parents were no longer able to contribute to my living expenses at Harvard.

Thankfully, HFAI prevents my parents from having to assist with my tuition. Now, the remainder falls on my shoulders. For the past two years I have worked two jobs at during the school year. The majority of this money is used to pay for my living expenses at Harvard as well as tuition payments. During shopping period, I spend hours scouring the internet in search of at least one cheap incorrect edition of each book I am supposed to read for class. Many times I can’t find one that is affordable. Then it comes down to decision-making time. Should I put myself on the same academic playing field as the rest of the students in my class or should I pay my house dues? What about a new wool sweater since mine was just torn? Sometimes soap and prescriptions are more important than a \$100 Roman Games coursepack. All I can think is that if I could get a refund for that outfit the socialite girl across from me in the library is wearing right now, I would be in my room reading my course books instead of checking to see when my 3-hour Lamont limit is up. As a student of this fine academic institution, I shouldn’t have to make these kinds of decisions. If the school were to step up and cover this, they would be so much closer to the reality of everyone on this campus being academically equal, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Until then, I will probably be the high-strung kid actually using her CVS coupons to buy off-brand washing detergent in front of you in the checkout line.

Personal Testimonials

“In reality there has been a parent contribution in spite of my mother’s \$21,000/year income.”

I am a junior here at Harvard and am extremely grateful for the financial aid packages I have received every semester thus far. Thanks to the initiative announced by former President Summers shortly after my early acceptance to Harvard, my family--due to low income--does not have to contribute (on paper) to my education. I, of course, do. Therefore, although Harvard gives me a close to full set of aid in addition to federal funds, it leaves me as an individual with a large amount of expenses to attend this university. The cost of textbooks, coursepacks and the printing of online course resources is exorbitant. This past semester, I have totaled my cost of materials to be over \$700, which is a fair average of what I have paid each semester I have been here. That forces me to come up with over \$1,400 each year that I don't really have. I have an on-campus term-time job to try to cover my living expenses in Cambridge and work for at least some portion of the summer months (although I have been pursuing internships in the DRCLAS-funded programs, which last two months and do not leave much time for work at home). My income supports me. This past semester, my mother had to strain her finances to help with my books. Thus, in reality, there has been parent contribution in spite of my mother's \$21,000/year income as a sales clerk. And it has certainly added the amount I have to come up with on top of the "self-help" portion.

Harvard is a very generous institution when it comes to financial aid. However, it needs to look at the perhaps less obvious needs of its financial aid-receiving students, who already carry financial burdens and hardships most Harvard students do not.

“I have been working since I was 13 to support myself and my family.”

As a Social Studies concentrator, I have to purchase an average of 11 books per semester for my tutorial, not to mention my other three classes, along with an insanely expensive sourcebook (The great irony is that many people associate Social Studies with fighting poverty). These books are all on reserve at many Harvard libraries, but the nature of the tutorial is such that you are required to own the books--you can't very well write papers without underlining/highlighting, as I found out the hard way this past semester.

Even with being here over intersession--I can't afford to fly home, and almost wasn't able to see my family for Christmas--it's not easy to find good deals on books; the COOP doesn't list their book prices online, and if you don't go early in the week you're almost guaranteed not to find any used books. Therefore, after three painful semesters of going without things that my friends don't think twice about--birthday dinners, for example, or a new dress for formals (my choir requires dress shoes, so I had to buy those)--I've figured out some sort of strategy for purchasing books. That strategy is: (a) go to the COOP and buy as many things "used" as possible, (b) look online and find better prices, and (c) return books to the COOP.

The problem with this strategy is that it involves having approximately \$500-\$600 on hand, which is an entire semester's salary from choir. I may end up saving \$100, or, if I'm lucky, \$200, but in the meantime I have to work two jobs to ensure that I have enough money to buy other things like clothing and toiletries. I can't rely on my parents; my father is retired and in very poor health, and both he and my mother (they are separated) live well below the poverty line. I've been working since I was 13 to support myself and my family, and it is only because of Harvard's amazing Financial Aid Initiative that I was able to come here. I really believe that any assistance Harvard might offer would be of great benefit to many of my fellow students; I'd certainly appreciate it.

Personal Testimonials

“If I worked more hours so that I'd be able to buy my books...then I'd lose time I could be studying.”

Just wanted to share that a book stipend would have definitely made my life easier during college. Most of the credit card debt I racked up in school was to pay for books (and trips home on breaks). In fact, one semester I didn't even buy books, and just attempted to survive off of the books on reserve. Having to trek to the library nightly in blistering cold and wake up at the crack of dawn to return books was certainly a disincentive, so I ended up doing less work and attempting to get as much done in as little time as possible. Besides, two hour time limits make using reserves extremely inconvenient--not to mention that not every professor puts their books on reserve. At any rate, I tried every alternative, including sharing books with friends, photocopying readings from the library (certainly cheaper than buying the book!), and all in all, I probably spent more time figuring out how not to buy the books than actually reading them.

While being a first generation American means my life is rich with a wealth of opportunities, it also means that I am constantly reminded of how close I am to poverty. Neither of my parents speak English very well, and this has meant that they've spent the last twenty years in America working in one Chinese restaurant or another. Between reading the mail for our parents and carrying on with our own lives at school, my older brother and I have done well enough to be able to gain entrance into respectable universities such as UCLA and Harvard. We are both very lucky to be receiving substantial financial aid from both the government and our respective institutions, without which we simply would not be able to attend anything better than a two-year community college. The \$15,000 dollars a year that my parents collectively make is just enough to sustain the livelihood we have in our low-income apartment. If my brother and I had to pay our own way through college, our family would be in debt by \$50,000 dollars a year.

In spite of the aid that we currently receive, things are still difficult. Money is tight, and shopping week is a painful period as I walk down the aisles of the Coop and see books I need that cost in excess of \$150. Because of my finances, I am forced to buy online, where new editions are cheaper than the Coop's used ones and used editions are cheaper still. Shipping takes time, however, and I am often forced to buy books and then return them multiple times just to get through my first problem sets before my books arrive. It is a humiliating exercise as I hope to avoid cashiers that I've bought from before. It's terrible waking up in the morning and trying to remember which books I had planned to return that day and which ones I needed to do my work. I chuckle as I try to pass off that I dropped Economics and then changed my mind all in the same day. It's a relief to see a goldenrod slip in my mailbox indicating that my very own copy of a book has arrived.

The time I spend in trying to get my books no doubt negatively influences my academic performance. But there seems to be no way around it. If I worked more hours so that I'd be able to buy my books at the Coop, then I'd lose time I could be studying. If I bought my books online earlier, then I'd have to decide on my classes before shopping week even began.

My parents are getting older, and I am sure that pretty soon they will no longer be able to work. Just the other day I had a phone call come from my mother saying that our doctor (who we can afford only because of California's Medi-Cal program) diagnosed her with arthritis. My father, though a diligent man, is also bound to be unable to continue manual labor much longer. Thus it would be in my best interest to take extra classes at Harvard and try to graduate in 4 years with a BA and an MA to secure a job where I'd be able to support both them and myself. Any other plan would require that I pay for my own education, and is highly unlikely. I am stuck: books are expensive but I'll need to be learning a lot to accomplish what I need to.

A little extra help would go a long way in helping students like me whose parents are not college professors, doctors, lawyers, or professionals. Harvard promises to meet the demonstrated need of every undergraduate it admits, but has neglected the high cost of textbooks and the challenges it presents to its low-income students.

Contact:

Amadi Anene <anene@fas.harvard.edu>
Chaz Beasley <cbeasley@fas.harvard.edu>
Co-Authors, C-CAP Bill
www.ipetitions.com/petition/ccap

Kyle de Beausset <beausset@fas.harvard.edu>
Kedamai Fisseha <kfisseha@fas.harvard.edu>
Co-Directors, Students Taking on Poverty (STOP)
www.stopcampaign.org

The Students Taking on Poverty (STOP) Campaign is a united effort of several organizations dedicated to the fight against poverty at the local, national, and international levels. The STOP Campaign is founded upon three avenues – information, motivation, and action. We believe that informing people about the effects of poverty in society, motivating people to want to help alleviate poverty in a personal way, and providing opportunities for people to take action will allow us to help those affected by it. By helping increase access to opportunity and social mobility, the STOP Campaign works for those who need the attention and economic assistance of society.

C-CAP: The voice of over 1000 students.



www.ipetitions.com/petition/ccap

Petition Signatures — Total: 1,092

To sign the online petition at www.ipetitions.com/petition/ccap, signatories were required to enter a name and valid email address. A filter was enacted such that no duplicate email addresses could be used to sign the petition more than once. Signatories could choose to withhold their names from the public, though they remain in the petition account's internal database, accessible to the STOP leadership team. Of the 1,092 signatories:

1,014 identified themselves as undergraduate students at Harvard College.

23 identified themselves as graduate students at Harvard University.

11 identified themselves as alumni.

3 identified themselves as faculty.

The remainder did not indicate their affiliation.