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Date: November 24, 2014

To: Chairs

From: Olive Yonge
Acting Provost and Vice-President (Academic)

Re: Instructor Use of Online Homework Systems

Please transmit this message to all instructors.

It has come to my attention that some instructors currently use third-party "online homework systems" to support instruction in courses, particularly in the computational disciplines. These systems, typically operated by textbook publishers, provide students with access to banks of practice questions and other learning resources. Some instructors specify that student assignments must be completed and submitted through these online homework systems, and the marks for these assignments may form a component of the course grade. Students are required to pay a fee (which varies by service provider and by course) directly to the service provider to access these online homework systems. These fees are usually included in the price of new textbooks, but are separate from the price of used textbooks.

Students have raised concerns about the fees they are required to pay to access online homework systems. Students have asked whether these system-access costs ought to be covered by their tuition fees. This is a complex matter, and the University is undertaking a thorough review of the issue. Pending the outcome of this review, I am of the view that students should not be required to pay additional fees to access systems to complete graded work.

The University will require both short- and long-term responses.

In the short term, **effective for courses beginning on or after January 1, 2015, all instructors using marks from online homework systems as a component of course grades must also offer a reasonably equivalent (academically), no-cost alternative way for students to complete all graded work required for the course.**

Please note the change relates specifically to the use of fee-for-service systems to determine a portion of the grade for a credit course. Students **may also continue** to use these systems for practice or optional study, should they so choose. Where instructors recommend these systems to students as an option, instructors must work with the Office of the Vice-Provost (Information Technology) and the University's Information and Privacy Office on their implementation. **Students expressing concern about affordability may be referred to [Student Connect](#) for information about assessment for financial need and applying for bursary support.**

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Please direct questions to online.homework@ualberta.ca for transmission to the Associate Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction).



Olive Yonge

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Vice-Provosts
William Lau, President, Students' Union

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