

Attachment 6
FSCOT Statement of Opinion
Addressing K-State IT Support for Costly Student Subscription-Based Educational Learning Platforms

The Kansas State University Faculty Senate Committee on Technology (FSCOT) was asked to seek input and render judgement on whether it would recommend to Kansas State University IT to downgrade, keep at current levels, or enhance contract terms and/or support levels with TopHat-Monocle Corp regarding supporting TopHat and other student subscription-based educational learning platforms (ELPs) on K-State campuses.

FSCOT supports academic freedom, where faculty are trusted to make decisions on how best to support the pedagogical goals of their courses;

FSCOT recognizes the importance of Kansas State University's IT to create and sustain a technology environment on K-State campuses that supports faculty's exercise of academic freedom;

FSCOT understands that educational learning platforms and ecosystems, like TopHat, can and do provide value, often in unique and significant ways, to faculty and students as faculty seek to drive course engagement, create, store and provide access to course content, and provide tools for student assessment;

FSCOT recognizes the benefits of TopHat for the following reasons:

1. **Cost:** When students enroll with TopHat, the cost is not based on the number of classes in which the students are enrolled; rather the students pay one price and may use the platform across multiple classes.
2. **Convenience to Students:** Students have consistent access to their grades, course content, and know which assignment they are missing through integration between the platform and Canvas.
3. **Platform Independence:** Students can access TopHat on a variety of devices.
4. **Pedagogy:** Through TopHat's assessment tools, it offers the opportunity for faculty to learn where students are lacking in learning the material, can ask questions for real time responses from students, and helps align course objectives with learning outcomes.
5. **Faculty Endorsement:** "One of the best engagement platforms used in the classroom. Students are engaged through questions that are written directly before/after the PowerPoint slide. As students respond to questions, the faculty receives real time responses/feedback (anonymously) what students are learning. As a faculty who used TopHat for the first time, I have observed how students are more engaged with class discussions versus the traditional textbook discussions." - *Faculty testimonial on the benefits of TopHat.*

FSCOT recognizes the need for faculty to have readily available technology tools to aid in the taking of attendance and a response system to measure and drive engagement in their courses;

Prices for college textbooks and academic journals have been rising dramatically because students, colleges, and universities are captive markets for those publishers. Captive markets result in higher prices and less diversity for consumers due to the fact the only choices that exist are to purchase what is

available or to not purchase at all. Use of higher education learning platforms and content ecosystems, like TopHat, is an emerging area that threatens students, colleges, and universities with platform lock-in, and which may contribute to captive market environments in higher education. Leaning further into a captive market environment by institutionally supporting education learning platforms and content ecosystems exacerbates rather than lessens the underlying causes of the textbook affordability crisis;

FSCOT recognizes the importance of being strategic in working to lowering costs incurred by K-State students through the course of their education. Institutionally supporting education learning platforms and content ecosystems, especially supporting one platform over another, presents challenges to the goal of strategically working to lower costs to students;

Digital content paid for by students such as required materials and readings for courses, accessed through an educational learning platform like TopHat is likely not owned by those student consumers, merely rented or licensed to them. In contrast, physical course materials and readings may be purchased and owned by a consumer, in perpetuity. Purchased, licensed digital content therefore provides less value to student consumers in certain circumstances;

Therefore, FSCOT's opinion is as follows:

Section 1: FSCOT supports the Kansas State University Student Governing Association's (KSU SGA) resolution 19/20/63, Opposition to TopHat and Other Costly Educational Platforms.

Section 2: FSCOT encourages faculty, where possible and practical, to explore free, low-cost, or already available technology tools that could be used to replace or supplement more expensive tools having comparable uses.

Section 3: FSCOT strongly encourages faculty who have employed free, low-cost, or already available technology tools to aid in the taking of attendance, provide student assessment, and/or drive engagement in their courses to engage with the Teaching & Learning Center and University IT to support knowledge sharing and to aid in the goal of driving down course related costs to students.

Section 4: Instructors should only utilize student subscription-based educational learning platforms or services, such as, but not limited to, TopHat, etc., when the increased quality of student learning greatly outweighs the financial cost to students.

Section 5: Those faculty who choose to use TopHat within their courses are highly encouraged to do the following in order to maximize the tool's value to student users:

1. Take every effort to be trained in TopHat and to be effective users of the tool to its fullest extent.
2. Ensure TopHat's integration with K-State's learning management system, Canvas, in transporting grades, attendance, and assignments for their courses.
3. Where warranted, consult with the Student Access Center and work to ensure content stored and delivered through the TopHat Platform meets required standards for accessibility.

Section 6: In support of those faculty who choose to use TopHat within their courses, FSCOT supports and requests University IT to engage in the following:

1. Where necessary and to a reasonable degree, dedicate resources and enter into agreements with appropriate parties to support training for interested faculty on how to use the TopHat platform.
2. Maintain the integration of K-State's LMS, Canvas, with the TopHat platform.
3. Maintain the same no-cost contract terms (active as of 2021-05-12) with TopHat-Monocle Corp regarding support for the TopHat platform on the K-State campus. FSCOT recommends against enhancement of contract terms.

Section 7: The TopHat platform is one of many current and emerging educational technology tools used in K-State classrooms. FSCOT supports and encourages University IT, where possible and practical, to maintain a technology environment that supports faculty's exercise of academic freedom, exploration, and use of various educational technology tools which may meet the current and future needs of K-State faculty and students.

FSCOT wishes to provide a copy of this statement to Faculty Senate for their information.

Contributions also from: Ryan Otto and Be Stoney, past FSCOT members