



# The Future of Educational Materials & the Role of the College Bookstore

Support by

**AKADEMOS**  
College Bookstore Solutions



## Aligning Bookstore Strategies with the Future of Educational Materials

If you could roll back the calendar five years and ask college leaders to predict how the educational materials market would be transformed by 2017, I'm certain they would have said all their students would be learning from eBooks. In this time we've seen Netflix change from physical to digital distribution, and we've seen unfathomable change in news distribution with the rise of forces like Facebook Live, yet the textbook has changed very little – students still learn predominantly from a printed text.



However, the way in which textbooks are purchased and delivered has been completely transformed by the internet. Traditionally, students shopped for their textbooks at the campus bookstore, and these stores faced few, if any, competitive threats. But with the rise of online used books sales, students now have many more choices as to where they can purchase their materials.

**Print is not dead, but without radical change, bookstore distribution might be.**

Supporting the core educational mission of student academic success in this environment requires institutions to embrace a progressive, future-proof course materials strategy.

The bookstore plays a pivotal role in this strategy – high textbook costs are having a measurable, negative impact on student success. A recent Akademos college student survey revealed that 40% of students purchase some or no required course materials primarily because they're too expensive, and 60% of students that didn't purchase textbooks reported they would have performed better with them.

A bookstore can no longer be just a retail location on campus – it must transform into an educational platform and service delivering value, choice and convenience.

New models have emerged allowing institutions to do just that. These "hybrid" models provide the best of both worlds by enabling institutions to sell low-cost course materials online, while maintaining a profitable on-campus store. Through its experience deploying and supporting online bookstore solutions for more than 120 institutions, Akademos has seen first-hand how these models can significantly lower textbook costs, increase bookstore sales and improve student and faculty satisfaction.

I hope these articles by respected experts provide you with insight into the vital role the college bookstore plays in student academic success, and the importance of aligning bookstore strategies with the changes revolutionizing educational materials.

Sincerely,

John Squires  
Chief Executive Officer  
Akademos, Inc.

# Introduction

Every academic semester, students obtain course materials for their courses. But the norm of a generation ago – going to traditional bookstores and buying books and perhaps selling them back at the end of the semester – has evolved. Today, students may buy books online, use online materials or open education resources, or use an array of materials besides books. And they are likely mixing and matching – obtaining their materials in multiple ways.

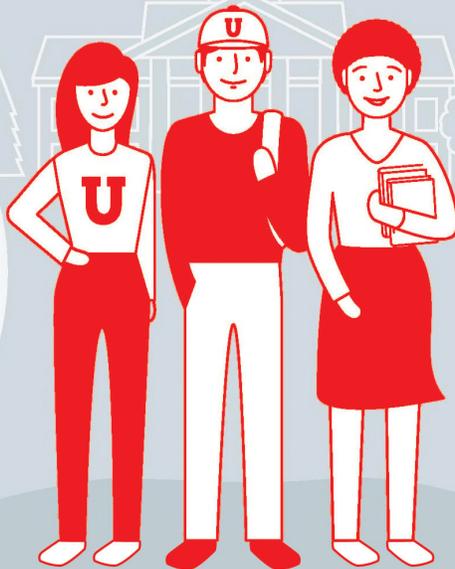
These shifts have changed the way students, instructors and college administrators think about educational materials and the role of bookstores.

This compilation explores some of these trends and changes. *Inside Higher Ed* will continue to cover these issues. We welcome your thoughts on the articles in this compilation and your suggestions for future coverage.

--The Editors  
editor@insidehighered.com



# The New **Hybrid** Bookstore Model



**AKADÉMOS**  
College Bookstore Solutions

[akademos.com](http://akademos.com)

Transform your bookstore  
into an educational platform  
supporting student success

- Lower textbook prices
- Provide a superior student experience
- Increase student and faculty satisfaction

Request our white paper to learn more  
at [info.akademos.com/hybrid](http://info.akademos.com/hybrid).

# Digital Overtakes Print

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

Major publishers report sales of digital course materials surpass sales of print textbooks for the first time. Are the numbers right -- and does it matter?

Several of the largest education publishers say -- as of the spring of 2016 -- that they now generate most of their sales and revenue from digital products, but both analysts and some in the industry disagree on if the shift represents a transformation for the textbook industry or a forced rebranding.

When McGraw-Hill Education reports its finances for 2015, the results will show that the company's digital products -- including learning platforms ALEKS, Connect and LearnSmart and digital textbook service SmartBooks -- for the first time sold more units than its print products. The company already teased that detail in a press release in March 2016, showing healthy year-over-year digital growth.

McGraw-Hill Education isn't alone. A spokesperson for Cengage Learning, whose digital offerings include the MindTap learning platform, said the company is on track for the 2016 fiscal year to see digital sales surpass print sales, both in terms of unit sales and revenue.



Sandi Kirshner, Cengage's chief communications officer, said in a statement that the results demonstrate that digital course materials are catching on in higher education.

"As we see more instructors and students using and wanting the benefits of a digital learning experience -- from greater personalization to improved mastery of concepts

-- the technology-based learning tools are proving their advantages over the static printed page," Kirshner said. "And although learners may still want print in some cases based on the course and how they learn best, the print book is becoming more of an optional purchase because the digital learning experience continues to get better and is more convenient, easy to use and effective."

The results -- if accurate -- represent a major milestone for the education publishing industry. Analysts watching the market have long waited for the revenue streams to cross as a symbolic milestone that the transition from textbooks to digital course materials has entered a new phase.

But the way publishers define "digital sale" raises questions about whether or not their announcements may not reflect the nuance of the sales of course materials. At Cengage, for example, a digital sale can mean selling access to one of its digital products, but also selling

## The Future of Educational Materials & the Role of the College Bookstore

an ebook, a textbook bundled with online components or digital supplementary material.

McGraw-Hill Education does things slightly

differently. It too counts bundles, but it only reports the portion of the sales value that can be attributed to the digital component, said Daniel Sieger, vice president of corporate communications. Digital products generated more revenue than print in 2014 as well, he said, but 2015 marked the first year the unit sales numbers flipped. Sieger declined to go into further detail as the company is in its legally required “quiet period” before going public.

Pearson does not distinguish between digital and print sales, but a spokesperson noted that digital and services revenues rose to 65 percent across its global business in 2015, up from 47 percent in 2010. John Wiley & Sons did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Not everyone agrees that bundles should count toward digital sales, however. Joseph J. Esposito, a management consultant, said in an email that it is “sexier to say that

“

As we see more instructors and students using and wanting the benefits of a digital learning experience -- from greater personalization to improved mastery of concepts -- the technology-based learning tools are proving their advantages over the static printed page.

”

the business is digital” instead of acknowledging that it is still “driven by print.”

“Let’s say that [a publisher] sells a package for \$150, which includes print and online access,” Esposito wrote. “The print is the core textbook, the online material is supplemental questions. I would call that a print sale because the central unit is print. ... Another scenario: a kid buys a used print textbook. A publisher sells online access to the supplemental material for \$40. There was literally no textbook unit sale for the publisher. Is that \$40 print or digital?”

Publishers have shown an eagerness to promote digital course materials, describing themselves as software (in the case of Cengage) and “learning science” companies (McGraw-Hill Education). More importantly, Esposito said, digital course materials would allow publishers to sell directly to students, which could lower both their own

costs and textbook prices for students.

Esposito wrote that “No college publisher likes to talk about this because they don’t want to alienate the retail channel,

which they need right now.”

Other publishers questioned whether or not the transition from print to digital is still a worthwhile narrative for the industry to track. Executives at Macmillan Learning declined to share if the company’s digital or print products generate more unit sales and revenue, saying it’s the result, not the format, that matters.

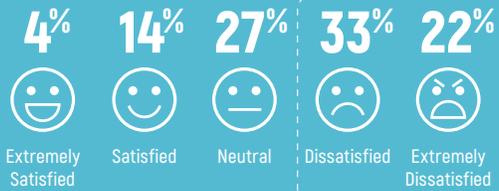
“I am not sure that perpetuating a metric like digital vs. print adds value,” CEO Ken Michaels said in a statement. “Most teaching delivery today and student engagement involves a combination of reading, thinking, research, formative studying and analytical feedback that involves both print and digital tools/services. Learning is hybrid and it demands agility depending on how instructors teach. It is not like the trade world where you read digitally or read print. Education demands multiple forms of engagement in order to optimize learning.” ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/03/30/publishers-report-digital-sales-overtaking-print-sales>



# Solutions for Addressing Textbook Affordability

## STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH TEXTBOOK COSTS



Source: 2016 Akademos College Student Survey



**AKADEMOS**  
College Bookstore Solutions

akademos.com

See how over 120 colleges and universities have lowered textbook prices and won back students

- Textbook savings of up to 60% off publisher list prices
- Deep selection of new, used, rental and eBook options
- Advanced adoption and analytics support

Learn more by requesting the materials from our textbook affordability webinar at [info.akademos.com/textbook-affordability](http://info.akademos.com/textbook-affordability).

# Scaling Up OER

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

New initiatives at university systems show the maturation of efforts to increase the use of open educational resources.

The effort to replace textbooks with open educational resources (OER) is gaining momentum as colleges move past pilots to expand the use of free or inexpensive course materials across states and systems.

In states such as New Hampshire and New York, university systems are building undertaking new initiatives that build on years of lessons learned about using OER in the classroom. At the same time, organizations such as Achieving the Dream are investing millions of dollars to help community colleges in 13 different states build OER-based degree programs.

Those initiatives join others in progress in states such as Arizona, for example, where Maricopa Community College has used OER to save students more than \$5 million in textbook costs, and Virginia, which is expanding Tidewater Community College's idea of a zero-text-

book-cost degree program to 15 other institutions.

While OER advocates aren't yet prepared to say these initiatives represent a new phase for the proliferation of free or low-cost course materials, they acknowledged that the focus appears to be shifting away from individual courses and toward centralized efforts aimed at helping faculty members create alternatives to commercial textbooks or to think about opening up their teaching and research.

"It's institutions thinking more broadly about what 'open' means and how open connects to a variety of different areas," said Nicole

Allen, director of open education at the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition, known as SPARC. "We've seen for the last decade institutions working to open up access to scholarly research. As that has gained momentum and OER has gained momentum, there's been a convergence of openness in all these areas."

The State University of New York System has since 2012 operated its own OER publisher, known as Open SUNY Textbooks. The publishing initiative, which is based at SUNY Geneseo, has produced 17 titles, including textbooks on college-level writing and end-of-life nursing care,



## The Future of Educational Materials & the Role of the College Bookstore

as well as more specialized titles.

Open SUNY Textbooks in 2016 announced that it would expand beyond publishing with the launch of SUNY OER Services. Structured as a membership organization, the initiative will offer professional development for faculty members, instructional designers and librarians, a publishing platform, and a support network for participants at different campuses to connect with one another.

“In order for this to scale effectively, faculty have to be involved -- it has to be coming from them,” Katherine Pitcher, Geneseo’s interim library director, said in an interview. “The drive for us is to get the pieces in place so the faculty can do it. It’s their courses. It’s their content. ...

We’re just providing the network and the platform and the services to get them started.”

Pitcher said that SUNY OER Services was created in response to some of the challenges Open SUNY Textbooks has encountered -- particularly the frustration faculty members sometimes feel when searching for open content to include in their courses.

Awareness and discovery continue to be major issues facing the growth of OER. While faculty members who are aware of OER are generally enthusiastic about the quality and ease of use of such course materials, even they admit to some-

times struggling to find the content they are looking for. Additionally, many faculty members know little to nothing about OER.

“We want to make sure we develop services that address that,” Pitcher said. “We need to develop faculty champions who can go out and advocate for faculty.”

Other university systems are including OER in a broader push to reshape how faculty members teach and conduct research. The University System of New Hampshire in 2016 kicked off a yearlong open education initiative that, in addition

tion where anybody can Google anything and get the right answer, we’re seeing the shift from the content to the process.”

The four-campus system holds an annual Academic Technology Institute, where participating faculty members workshopped their plans to teach using OER, redesign courses and pursue new scholarly publishing outlets.

The projects vary in scope, Robison said; one faculty member, for example, plans to encourage students to share their course work publicly, while another will rebuild a course from the ground up with input from students.

The system selected 10 projects from each campus -- 15 from the University of New Hampshire.

Throughout the 2016-17 year, the system will assess how students feel about open education -- including their experiences with OER -- and decide how best to expand the initiative. SUNY will look at similar measures, using a framework already in use by Open SUNY Textbooks.

Like SUNY, the New Hampshire system’s initiative builds on previous experiments with OER. In 2015, faculty at UNH participated in an OER pilot, saving students about \$148,000 in the process.

“Over the past several years we’ve been building on what we’ve done and expanding it,” Robison said. He

“

The drive for us is to get the pieces in place so the faculty can do it. It’s their courses. It’s their content. ... We’re just providing the network and the platform and the services to get them started.

”

to OER, encompasses collaboration between instructors and students and open-access publishing.

Together, the three components of the initiative make up “what it means to be a faculty member at a public institution,” said Scott Robison, co-director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Plymouth State University. The initiative, he added, will challenge faculty members to rethink “the way you teach and how you share your research with the public.”

“What we’re seeing is a pretty dramatic shift in the way higher education is progressing,” Robison said in an interview. “In an age of informa-

said he'd like to see the open education initiative expanded beyond its one-year duration, perhaps by inviting more faculty members or by eventually establishing a system-wide OER center.

"Whatever it is, we'll at least continue what we're doing."

Both SUNY and USNH used system funding to provide money for their initiatives.

SUNY OER Services received funding to hire an administrator, while USNH nearly tripled the \$100,000 budget of its Academic Technology Institute to support participating faculty members' projects.

“

In an age of information where anybody can Google anything and get the right answer, we're seeing the shift from the content to the process.

”

Some of that funding will find its way to faculty members in the form of incentives. Faculty members in the New Hampshire system receive a \$2,000 stipend for participating, and some additional funding has been set aside in case they need to hire outside help, such as a designer, Robison said.

Pitcher agreed that there need to be incentives in place for faculty

faculty members who participate in open education initiatives.

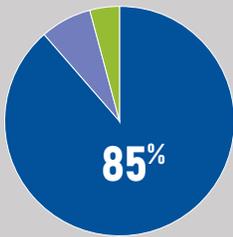
For others, she said, the "intrinsic motivation" of creating their own textbooks may be enough.

"Partly what we're saying is this is the time for faculty to take back their content and license it the way they want," Pitcher said. "That's what the academy's about -- sharing knowledge." ■

members in order for OER to take root on the campuses in the SUNY system. She said the most powerful incentive could be to change tenure and promotion requirements to reward

# Why Students are **Leaving** the **School-Sanctioned** Bookstore

WHAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON STUDENTS ARE SHOPPING OUTSIDE OF YOUR INSTITUTION'S BOOKSTORE?



- Price
- Convenience
- More inclined to purchase online

Source: 2015 Akademos College and University CFO Survey



Students are abandoning the bookstore in favor of more affordable alternatives – now win them back

Akademos' advanced eCommerce solution has helped more than 120 institutions win students back to their bookstores by delivering value, convenience and a superior ordering experience.

Request our white paper to learn more at [info.akademos.com/win-students-back](http://info.akademos.com/win-students-back).

**AKADEMOS**  
College Bookstore Solutions

[akademos.com](http://akademos.com)

## A Textbook Market Strategy That Moves Beyond Professors

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

Major textbook publishers are exploring direct-to-student marketing and sales as a means to increase the adoption of digital course materials.

Don't be surprised if major publishers show up on campus. In an effort to increase awareness -- and sales -- of digital course materials, publishers are pitching and selling their products directly to students.

The ongoing transition from print to digital in the textbook world is providing publishers an opportunity to learn more about students as consumers and, over time, gain greater control of how course materials are sold, analysts say. Several of the major textbook publishers, Cengage Learning and McGraw-Hill Education among them, have already begun that process by expanding the scope of their marketing.

In the golden era of the print textbook, publishers relied on a business-to-business marketing model. They targeted faculty members, who then assigned the books to students.

"Those days have changed," said Dawn Keller, senior vice president of consumer and digital marketing at Cengage. Keller said the compa-

ny recognized it needed to expand its marketing efforts to include its end users -- students.

"We have to develop relationships and engage them and understand them as consumers as much as we engage with faculty," Keller said. "It's not an 'or' strategy. It's an 'and' strategy."

Similarly, McGraw-Hill Education is "expanding [its] communication strategy out to the marketplace to be more inclusive of students," said Dennis Mulato, director of consumer and digital marketing. Students are showing interest in digital course materials, Mulato said, and the publisher is looking for ways to "construct a message" that will grab their attention.



Students now have more options than ever when it comes to the different types of course materials at their disposal and the companies providing them. A used or rental textbook may be found for a fraction of the cost of a new copy. Open educational resources can supplement or in some cases replace required readings for free. And some students may opt to ignore professors' recommendations and skip a purchase altogether.

It's in this position that publishers find themselves as they work to per-

## The Future of Educational Materials & the Role of the College Bookstore

suade students to pay for access to digital learning platforms such as McGraw-Hill Education's Connect, Cengage's MindTap and Pearson's MyLab. They are making that argument through on-campus events, social media, email blasts and student ambassadors, among other newer marketing strategies.

The expanded marketing scope is one example of how publishers are repositioning themselves in the market. After emerging from bankruptcy in 2015, Cengage said it "is much

closer to a software company than a traditional publisher." McGraw-Hill Education has styled itself a "learning science company." A Pearson spokesperson recently said the company is "squarely a learning and education company," and not one focused exclusively on either technology or publishing.

In addition to direct-to-student marketing efforts, publishers are also exploring direct-to-student sales through online outlets such as CengageBrain. But as publishers, the companies have to be mindful of the needs of their resellers, such as college bookstores. If a publisher were to get too aggressive, it could risk cutting into one of its partners'

profits.

"We purposefully work to strike that balance," Keller said. She described CengageBrain as the "first frontier" of learning about student behavior. If, for example, sales data from CengageBrain shows more students are buying access codes to digital course materials, then the



Our hope is we can do some things on CengageBrain to ... make it easier for students to find, buy and register products.



company can inform resellers of that trend, she said.

"It's not in our best interest or the students' to limit the access points or the purchase opportunities for our stuff," Keller said. "Our hope is we can do some things on CengageBrain to ... make it easier for students to find, buy and register products."

McGraw-Hill Education, which runs its own online shop, said the website caters to students who may be searching for the publisher's titles online.

"If students choose to conduct transactions on our website, we want to give them an alternative," Mulato said. "We're not looking to do

this at the expense of our partners."

Analysts such as Joseph J. Esposito, a digital media, software and publishing consultant, see the direct-to-student marketing and sales efforts as part of a long-term strategy to take control of the textbook supply chain, however.

"These are all tactics that grow out of the strategy of establishing end-customer relationships," Esposito said.

If more students buy their course materials directly from publishers, Esposito said, the companies

will have an easier time increasing the adoption of digital products, cutting out resellers and building a customer database.

That data can in turn be used to market more effectively to students, he said.

Esposito said publishers have shown themselves to be "shrewd" by how they have maintained their standing in the textbook market.

"People keep talking about how digital textbooks will kill publishers, open educational resources will kill publishers," Esposito said. "If you look at the publishers' numbers, they're pretty good. They have learned to adapt to a challenging marketplace." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/09/09/textbook-publishers-explore-direct-student-marketing-and-sales>

## Can a Professor Be Forced to Assign a \$180 Textbook?

BY SCOTT JASCHIK

Reprimand for faculty member who assigned less expensive options than his department's preference (book by two of its own) sets off debate on academic freedom and expensive books.

The choice of a single textbook for one section of a course at one university might seem like a decidedly local issue. But a dispute in the fall of 2015 over whether an academic department may impose such a selection on all faculty members in a multisection course set off a large debate over how textbook choices should be evaluated, who should select textbooks, whether price should be a factor, and academic freedom.

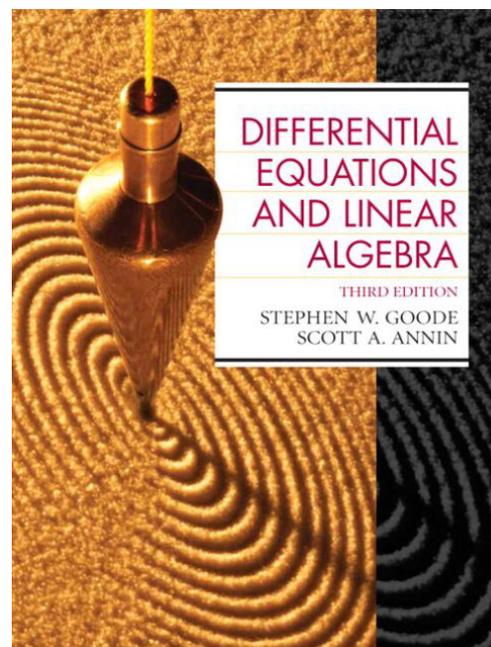
These issues came to a head when Alain Bourget, an associate professor of mathematics at California State University at Fullerton, appeared before a faculty grievance committee to challenge a reprimand he received for refusing to use a \$180 textbook his department had determined was the only appropriate text for an introductory linear algebra and differential equations course. Instead, he used two textbooks, one that cost about \$75 and the other consisting of free online materials.

Bourget maintains that his choices are just as effective educationally and much less expensive -- so he should have the right to use them.

But the university says that it makes sense for courses that have multiple sections to all use the same textbooks. Both Bourget and the university say their positions are based on principles of academic freedom.

The case is being closely watched by advocates of open educational resources (free online materials, commonly called OER) who see the dispute as a sign that they need to challenge not only traditional textbooks but traditional methods of selecting textbooks.

"This case is just one manifestation of a broader trend in academe that the marketplace often evolves faster than campus practices," said Nicole Allen, director of open education at the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition, known as SPARC. "Ten years ago long-term departmental adoptions were considered good for affordability since it allows a strong local used-book market to develop. Now it can work against students by perpetuating the traditional publishing industry's stranglehold on the market, which keeps new innovations like OER out."



To Bourget, the wide attention his battle is receiving -- he reports receiving hundreds of emails from people he doesn't know -- is surprising. But so is the reality that he is having to fight for permission to use the textbooks he wants. "I wasn't trying to be a rebel. I thought I had academic freedom," he said in an interview.

### The Text in Dispute

The Fullerton text in question is *Differential Equations and Linear Algebra*, published by Pearson with a

## The Future of Educational Materials & the Role of the College Bookstore

suggested price of \$196, but available at the Fullerton bookstore for \$180 (used editions for much less). The authors are Stephen W. Goode and Scott A. Annin, the chair and vice chair, respectively, of the mathematics department at Fullerton.

The textbook is currently in its third edition and Pearson is preparing to bring out a fourth edition. Goode, via email, said he has been asked to “suspend communication” about the issue until the Bourget grievance is resolved.

Sensitive to the idea that the university could be promoting the book because its authors are faculty members, Fullerton issued a statement noting courses at other colleges (Bard College, Denison, Lehigh and New York Universities, among others) that assign the text. Further, the statement pointed out that when the department considered and declined to approve Bourget’s request to deviate from the norm of assigning Goode and Annin’s textbook, the authors did not participate in the decision.

The university’s statement also quoted Goode as saying that the book was specifically designed to help Fullerton students meet the department’s learning objectives.

But Bourget’s stance is receiving backing from faculty colleagues,

nearly 70 of whom have signed a letter saying that his reprimand should be withdrawn.

Mahamood Hassan, a professor of accounting at Fullerton who is president of the campus chapter of the California Faculty Association (the faculty union for California State University System), has been helping Bourget with his grievance. In an interview, Hassan stressed that Bourget provided evidence that his suggested textbook along with the free online materials covered every topic in the syllabus for the course, and every substantive area

which a department may mandate a textbook for all sections of a course -- promote academic freedom in ways that follow principles of the American Association of University Professors.

Fullerton points to the AAUP’s 2013 Statement on the Freedom to Teach, which starts off by saying that this freedom includes “the right of the faculty to select the materials” for their courses. But the statement qualifies, “In a multisection course taught by several faculty members, responsibility is often shared among the instructors for

“In a multisection course taught by several faculty members, responsibility is often shared among the instructors for identifying the texts to be assigned to students. Common course syllabi and examinations are also typical but should not be imposed by departmental or administrative fiat.”

identifying the texts to be assigned to students. Common course syllabi and examinations are also typical but should not be im-

posed by departmental or administrative fiat.”

covered by the department’s preferred textbook. Hassan said that it is one thing for a department to set general standards for a course, but another to dictate exactly how an individual faculty member should teach it.

And he said the reprimand could be significant -- and could limit raises for Bourget in the future and make it more difficult for him to win promotion to full professor.

### **Academic Freedom of the Department or the Individual?**

The university’s statement said that Fullerton’s procedures -- in

posed by departmental or administrative fiat.” The statement affirms the right of faculty members “to assign supplementary materials to deal with subjects that they believe are inadequately treated in the required textbook.”

The AAUP statement adds: “Although, under these circumstances, the decisions of the group may prevail over the dissenting position of a particular individual, the deliberations leading to such decisions ought to involve substantial reflection and discussion by all those who teach the courses.”

## The Future of Educational Materials & the Role of the College Bookstore

The California Faculty Association is affiliated with the AAUP (as

Hassan said he believes faculty members should first evaluate text-

textbooks and should be open to using more OER.

	All Faculty Members	Full-Time Faculty Members	Part-Time Faculty Members	Tenured Faculty Members	Nontenured Faculty Members	Technology Administrators
Thinking now about the cost of textbooks and other course materials, in your opinion, are course materials including textbooks priced too high, or not?						
% Priced too high	93	93	91	93	92	98
% Not priced too high	7	7	9	7	8	2
Should faculty members make cost a significant concern when assigning course readings?						
% Yes, should	82	83	78	81	81	92
% No, should not	18	17	22	19	19	8
Should faculty members assign more free open educational resources?						
% Yes, should	92	91	95	91	92	97
% No, should not	8	9	5	9	8	3
Should faculty members use publishers' content platforms that deliver textbooks online?						
% Yes, should	76	75	82	72	79	72
% No, should not	24	25	18	28	21	28

well as with the National Education Association). But Hassan said flatly that he rejects idea that Bourget gives up his right to pick a textbook. "It's his academic freedom," he said. When faculty members teach, he said, a central principle should be that they select the readings that they think are most effective. He called the idea that Bourget should defer to others on textbook choice "a bureaucratic attitude" not consistent with faculty rights.

Bourget said he views the case as important not only to his courses, but to all faculty members -- many of them, unlike him, adjuncts -- who are responsible for teaching but can't select class materials. "If the university thinks you are good enough to teach the course, they should let you pick the materials," he said.

### Should Cost Be a Factor?

books on quality. "That should be the prime criterion," he said.

But once a faculty member has ascertained that various textbooks meet quality standards for a course, it should also be the professor's right to consider cost as a factor, Hassan said. He stressed that in this case, Bourget believes that his selections are better educationally and less expensive. (The Fullerton statement on the dispute, while backing the right of the department to select a textbook, discusses how the university has embraced a variety of efforts, including textbook rentals and online materials, to reduce the costs of course materials.)

Large majorities of faculty members surveyed by *Inside Higher Ed* for the 2015 Survey of Faculty Attitudes on Technology agreed both that faculty members should consider price as a factor in assigning

### The Impact of OER

Several experts on free online resources said the dispute at Fullerton is particularly important because of the growth in OER. In past generations, the choice of one textbook or another generally would have had a minimal financial impact on students. Now, they say, it's different.

Allen of SPARC said, "Today there are high-quality open textbooks available in many of the highest-enrollment courses, and it's more important than ever before for these options to be on the table for consideration, whether the decision is being made by an individual faculty member or a department. In some cases that may mean changing policy, but in others it's simply practice. But as more and more students are unable to afford their required textbooks, the importance of considering cost as a factor in these

## The Future of Educational Materials & the Role of the College Bookstore

decisions should be a matter for every professor. At the end of the day, students can't learn from materials they can't afford."

David Wiley, who runs the Open Education Group at Brigham Young University and is co-founder and chief academic officer of Lumen Learning, which works with schools and colleges on using OER, said via email, "I understand and appreciate the benefits that come from adopting a common textbook across multiple sections

“Today there are high-quality open textbooks available in many of the highest-enrollment courses, and it's more important than ever before for these options to be on the table for consideration, whether the decision is being made by an individual faculty member or a department.”

of the same course. However, when faculty identify a textbook of equal quality that is significantly less expensive than the textbook currently in use, that creates an ethical imperative for department leaders to revisit their previous adoption. Failure to do so, especially when department leaders are benefiting finan-

cially from the status quo, raises ethical questions.” Bourget said faculty members need to remember that “our students aren't rich and we have a responsibility to look for inexpensive materials.” He said he has long been frustrated by the way textbooks issue edition after edition, with professors requiring the latest edition, making it more difficult for students to buy used books. “My students aren't rich,” he said. “We need to stop accepting this racket.” ■

cially from the status quo, raises ethical questions.”

Bourget said faculty members need to remember that “our students aren't rich and we have a re-

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/10/26/dispute-required-math-textbook-escalates-broader-debate-about-costs-and-academic>

# No Rush to 'Go Digital'

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

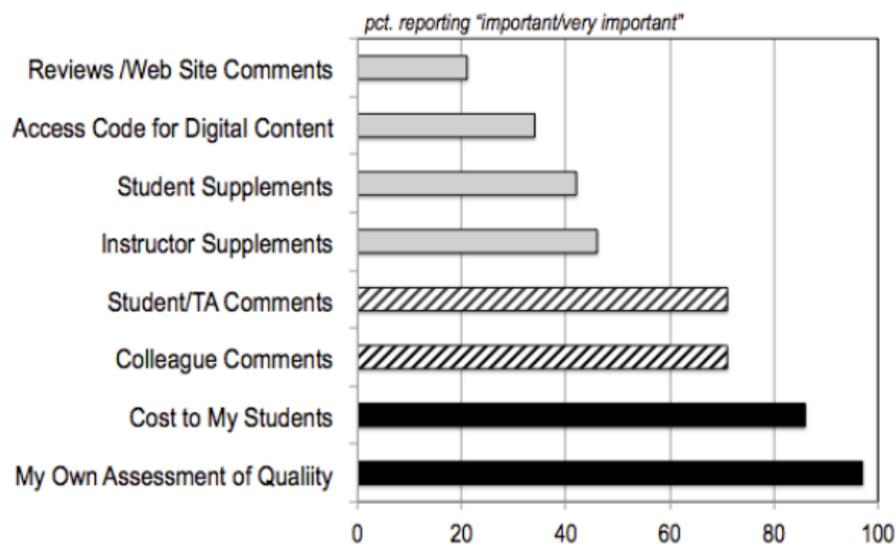
Study shows faculty members remain skeptical of digital course materials and generally unfamiliar with open educational resources.

Quality, cost, reputation -- in that order. Those are the top three factors that influence how faculty members pick which textbooks and course materials they assign, according to the results of a survey of faculty at two- and four-year institutions.

Virtually every faculty member surveyed (97.1 percent) for "Going Digital," a report presented in February 2016 at the Independent College Bookstore Association retail conference in Orlando, Fla., said their own assessment of the quality of a textbook is an important or a very important factor influencing their course material selection process, followed by the cost (86.3 percent) and a near tie between comments from colleagues (71.2 percent) and students or teaching assistants (71.1 percent). Less than one-third of respondents (31.6 percent) said the availability of digital supplements played an important role in that process.

But responses to the central question of "Going Digital" suggest fac-

## What Factors Influence Faculty Decisions About Course Materials?



ulty members are in no rush to get rid of physical textbooks. Only 15.1 percent of faculty members said they used primarily digital materials last fall. Of those who are still using print, 7.4 percent said they intend to make the switch this fall, while 27.3 percent and 17.1 percent see themselves switching in the next three or five years, respectively. Nearly one-quarter of all respondents (24 percent) said they will never pri-

marily use digital materials in their courses.

Open educational resources, meanwhile, remain unknown or unused by all but 15 percent of faculty members, raising further questions about the lack of awareness about free or inexpensive alternatives to commercial textbooks.

Kenneth C. (Casey) Green, who conducted the survey on behalf of the ICBA, said publishers and course

material providers that are investing in and counting on a transition from print to digital should not reconsider their priorities. “The issue is not a matter of if,” Green said in an interview. “It’s a matter of how.”

Faculty members gave plenty of reasons for why they prefer physical textbooks. A majority of those surveyed said digital course materials are more difficult to use (59 percent), offer lower quality (80.9 percent) and don’t provide any academic benefits compared to textbooks (72.3 percent).

But faculty members also indicated that there are issues beyond their control that are holding back widespread use of digital course materials. More than one-quarter of faculty members (27 percent) said their students don’t have easy access to laptops and tablets -- devices they would need to access those digital readings, videos and other resources. The issue is particularly prevalent at community colleges, where less than half of surveyed faculty members (47.2 percent) said students have access to those devices.

Faculty members aren’t universally negative toward digital course materials, the survey results show.

On the issue of cost, for example, instructors clearly prefer them; nearly four out of five respondents (79 percent) said digital course materials are more affordable for students.

Even though the surveyed faculty members said they take the cost of textbooks into account, digital materials do not appear to be priced low enough to offset their perceived

tal in their classrooms.

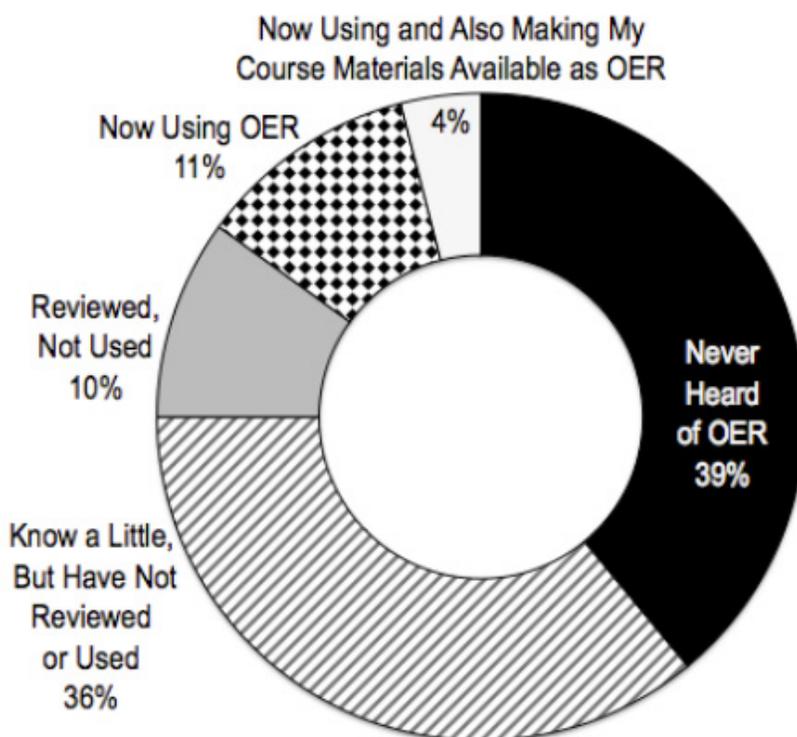
“Despite speculation or sound bites that faculty don’t care about the cost of materials for students, it’s clear that they do,” said Green, founding director of the Campus Computing Project, a higher education technology research organization.

The findings come with an important caveat, Green pointed out: the survey demographics are not representative of higher education as a whole. Of the 2,902 faculty members surveyed, only 9 percent represented two-year institutions. Many community colleges have focused more on textbook affordability than other types of institutions, since such expenses make up a larger share

of college costs for their students. Full-time faculty members were also overrepresented, making up 81 percent of the survey respondents.

The results still corroborate what other surveys of the college bookstore and textbook market have found. Ed Schlichenmayer, deputy CEO of the National Association of College Stores, said the findings are

### The Faculty Experience with OER



shortcomings. Digital materials should be “significantly less expensive” than print textbooks, 89.5 percent of respondents said. In a hypothetical scenario where faculty members were guaranteed digital materials would save students 40 percent on textbook costs, slightly more than half of respondents (54.4 percent) said they would go all digi-

## The Future of Educational Materials & the Role of the College Bookstore

in line with what the organization is seeing. A recent survey of administrators, faculty members and staffers conducted by NACS also found that the use of digital course materials is growing slowly.

"We found that the potential for increased learning outcomes will come from more enhanced digital offerings such as adaptive learning courseware and platform-based products," Schlichenmayer said in an email. "Moreover, institutions will need to consider a comprehensive learning content strategy if the transition to digital learning content and courseware is to proceed smoothly among both faculty and students."

Much like a 2014 survey conducted by the Babson Survey Research Group, the ICBA survey shows that most faculty members know little to nothing about open educational resources.

Only 4 percent of respondents said they both use OER in their courses and make their own course material available to other instructors. An additional 11 percent said

they have used OER, and another 10 percent have reviewed content. The remaining respondents had either never heard of OER (39 percent) or said they were aware of OER but had never reviewed any open content (36 percent).

Since so many respondents said they were unfamiliar with OER, 41.2 percent of faculty members said they will never primarily use open content in their courses. Asked what



Institutions will need to consider a comprehensive learning content strategy if the transition to digital learning content and courseware is to proceed smoothly among both faculty and students.



kind of open content they could see themselves using, faculty members were more likely to say videos (62 percent) than alternatives to commercial textbooks (47 percent).

The small share of respondents from community colleges could explain the lack of awareness of OER, since those institutions have been at the forefront of creating degree programs with zero textbook costs. OER providers have also largely targeted lower-level courses in order to

serve as many students as possible.

OER have also made headlines at four-year institutions, such as a recent case at California State University at Fullerton where a faculty member was reprimanded for assigning two textbooks -- one listed at \$76 and the other free -- instead of a \$180 textbook co-written by two of his colleagues in the math department.

Brian Jacobs, CEO and founder of the OER platform panOpen, said faculty members are waiting for the "right combination of quality content and technology" to emerge before they feel comfortable leaving print

books behind.

"This survey helps make clear that in order for digital educational materials to enter mainstream practice they cannot simply mimic physical textbooks and only modestly reduce costs," Jacobs said in an email. "They must offer a compelling experience that is fundamentally different, available only in the new medium, and they must change the economics dramatically in favor of the user." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/02/22/study-faculty-members-skeptical-digital-course-materials-unfamiliar-oer>

# Triaging Textbook Costs

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

Even as free and low-cost textbook initiatives grow, most efforts are still focused on introductory courses. Options are far more limited in upper-level courses, where a single textbook can now cost \$400.

When the University of Michigan at Flint took inventory of the textbooks used by students during the winter 2015 semester, it found what American Enterprise Institute scholar Mark J. Perry called a “new milestone” in the textbook affordability debate: a \$400 textbook.

The outrage is not new. Perry, professor of economics and finance at the university, noted in a blog post that textbook prices increased by 161 percent between 1998 and 2014 -- more than the cost of medical care and new homes. Going back to 1978, prices are up 945 percent. With the fall semester weeks away, stories about college bookstore “sticker shock” and listicles on how to save money on textbooks are sure to pop up.

But in this case, the culprit was a textbook used in a 400-level chemistry course, which does not leave students many opportunities to find a less expensive alternative. While efforts to contain costs and increase access to course materials are well underway, those initiatives rarely target upper-level courses. And because of the advanced sub-

ject matter, fewer students have likely taken those courses in the past, meaning fewer used textbooks on the market.

Faced with the prospect of paying several hundred dollars for a single textbook, some students may choose not to buy. A 2014 survey conducted by the United States Public Interest Research Group found 65 percent of students have done just that, even though virtually all of them feared it would hurt their academic performance.

“That’s the danger,” Perry said in an interview. “I don’t see how it can be sustainable.”

Open educational resources are also harder to come by in upper-level courses -- at least for now. Many OER and affordable textbook providers, seeking to gain a foothold in the market, have targeted large lecture courses. Creating affordable alternatives to the most expensive textbooks may save an individual



student the most money, but for a company, such a strategy doesn’t make financial sense, publishers said.

OpenStax College, a textbook publishing initiative out of Rice University, exemplifies that approach. The publisher offers free textbooks meant to be used in introductory courses in biology, chemistry and sociology, among other disciplines.

“Right now what [OER providers are] trying to do is reach the greatest number of students,” said David Harris, editor-in-chief of OpenStax College. “As you move up into those upper-division courses, the enrollments are going from hundreds

## The Future of Educational Materials & the Role of the College Bookstore

of thousands -- perhaps millions -- of students to tens of thousands. It's a different need."

OpenStax College published its first textbook in 2012. This fall, its titles will reach an estimated 200,000 students at 2,000 institutions, Harris said.

The publisher relies on foundational support to operate, however, and is at the moment funded through 21 titles, Harris said. Its backers include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Twenty Million Minds Foundation, among others.

Other publishers have experienced the limits of free. Flat World Knowledge, an affordable textbook provider, in 2013 replaced its free access tier with a paid electronic access tier. At the time, the move was billed as a way to "make our business healthier."

"We decided from a business point of view that having an affordable option at \$24 was more sustainable than just having a bunch of free PDFs out there," CEO Christopher Etesse said. "They were sort of static, not getting updated. It was just not a good learning experience."

Flat World Knowledge began with large lecture courses, but has since expanded into upper-level courses. Its catalog now contains about 110 titles, including books covering advanced topics in business and man-

“The ability to measure learning across an entire degree program is really where we’re headed in the future rather than just on a course-by-course basis.”

agement courses. Etesse said the textbooks, which are also offered in print for \$89 or \$139, are used by about 250,000 students, 6,000 faculty members and 2,000 institutions a year. Those numbers have nearly tripled over the last two and a half years, he said.

Instead of tackling one upper-level course at a time, OER and affordable textbook providers may over time focus more on degree programs with zero textbook costs, Etesse and Harris said.

"The ability to measure learning across an entire degree program is really where we're headed in the future rather than just on a course-by-course basis," Etesse said.

Tidewater Community College in Virginia worked with OER providers to launch such a program in fall 2013. Known as the Z-Degree, the associate degree program in business administration has so far enrolled more than 2,500 students and accumulated \$253,400 in savings on course materials, said Sharon Morrissey, vice chancellor for academic services and research at the Virginia Community College System.

"Students who are trying to scrape together enough money just to pay

tuition and go to colleges are living on the edge," Morrissey said. "This is a way to make all learning materials available to all students from the very first day of class, so it's a significant change in thinking about student preparation."

Morrissey said the community college also saw gains in retention, as well as in faculty awareness of how course readings connected to desired student outcomes.

In May, the VCCS received a \$200,000 grant from the Hewlett Foundation to expand the effort to other institutions. The goal, Morrissey said, is to support the creation of textbook-cost-free degrees at 15 community colleges in Virginia.

But Morrissey stressed that she did not think courses that trade textbooks for online course materials are a good fit for every faculty member and student.

Some faculty members may not want to put in the effort of evaluating and customizing free resources, she said, while some students may be more comfortable with a physical book.

"OER classes are successful because the faculty who teach those classes have bought into the OER strategy," Morrissey said. "Some faculty have bought into that, others have not.... Our end goal over all is to drive down textbook costs across the VCCS, and we're trying to reach that through multiple avenues." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/08/04/era-400-college-textbook-affordability-initiatives-take-utilitarian-approach>

# Views

A selection of essays and op-eds

## Students, Keep Your Books

By PAUL T. CORRIGAN

Paul T. Corrigan urges professors to educate their students about how the value and power of textbooks can endure long after graduation.

"We can give you three dollars," the clerk at the campus bookstore told me.

"That's all?" I asked. I had hoped to get more for the book I wanted to sell back, given what I had paid for it just months before.

"Sorry. It's not assigned next term." She shrugged.

"Well," I decided, "for three dollars, it will look good on my bookshelf."

That was the moment I kept my first college book.

At the end of every term, college students lug piles of books across campus to sell back to the bookstore (or post the books online to sell directly to next term's students) for a fraction of what they paid for them. Selling back books is so ingrained in college culture that it

seems natural, inevitable. Strapped for cash, most students accept the few dollars joyfully.

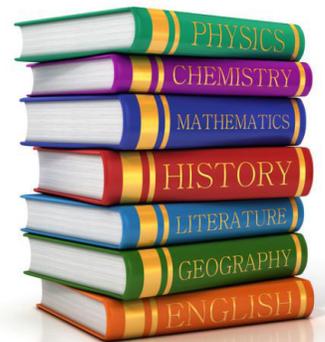
But there's something to be said for keeping books, too. In the years since my own small beginning -- just the one book, just three dollars, just to look good on my bookshelf -- I have developed a lasting commitment to having books around.

These days, as each semester nears its end, I find myself on the losing side of a friendly argument with my own students. I tell them they should not sell their books back. They raise objections:

"The book's not in my field."

"I already read it, and I remember what it says."

"I can always get another copy if I need it."



"I can find the same text, or the same facts, online."

"The information will be outdated soon."

"The edition will be replaced with a new one soon."

"I want to put this class behind me!"

## The Future of Educational Materials & the Role of the College Bookstore

"It's too expensive to keep. I need the money."

I do my best to respond. Then, of course, the students make their own decisions. I'm afraid I'm not very convincing. And I understand why. Most of the reasons to sell back books are quite reasonable. In certain cases, I have to concede the point.

Yes, I do agree, some books are just fine to sell back. I have little fondness in particular for stereotypically textbookish textbooks: repositories of facts, good for

exam prep but not for actually reading, likely to be replaced by a new edition in a year or two, apparently written by a committee or a machine, duplicating material available online for free. By all means, students should sell those back.

And, yes, I also agree, some books are too expensive to keep. Costs for textbooks are the primary reason students sell textbooks back, rent them instead of buying, pirate them or simply don't get them at all. Each year, costs for books increase faster than tuition. A multibillion-dollar industry, bookstores and publishers for college textbooks take advantage of a rather trapped student market. For many students -- particularly students with multiple jobs, loans and responsibilities to young children or aging parents -- just getting books each semester can be a

Herculean (indeed, Sisyphean) task. And not selling books back, even if they would love to keep them, can sometimes simply be out of the question. By all means, if it's keep the books or pay the rent, students should pay the rent.

Accordingly, colleges and universities must recognize that not being able to keep books is a disadvantage

can do more. Just as we would like students to remember what they learn in our courses and to continue learning after the courses have ended, so should we also care that they keep the very books that can help that remembering and learning along.

With the loudest voices (including bookstore advertisements) telling

students to sell their books, it's up to us to teach them otherwise. We can assign books worth keeping. We can help students connect with the books for them-

selves. We can talk to students about keeping books, telling them something like this:

Keep your books. Not every single one, necessarily, but keep many. Keep most, if possible. Do not let a book go without deliberation. Be- grudge the ones truly not worth keeping. Grieve the ones you truly cannot afford. Keep books from your field and from other fields as well. Be well-rounded in your keep- ing.

Yes, appreciate what the internet can offer (through sites like Project Gutenberg), but also appreciate what books can offer. Yes, some books contain nothing but informa- tion with a short shelf life, but keep the books that are not of this sort. Keep books with ideas, argument, voice -- books in which writers say something to readers. Keep books

“

Colleges with growing enrollments were suffering, and those losing enrollment managed to keep money they weren't supposed to have.

”

colleges with growing enrollments were suffering, and those losing enrollment managed to keep money they weren't supposed to have. faced disproportionately by stu- dents from poor and working-class backgrounds. We need to take steps to make books affordable as a mat- ter of social justice. Some have suggested switching to ebooks as a solution. But ebooks can cost just as much or more than used print books and offer less. (Moreover, most students prefer print.) Better ideas include increasing financial aid, reducing the overall cost of col- lege, including books in the cost of tuition, assigning more affordable books and writing our own books and giving them to students for free, among other strategies.

Even with these caveats, I still in- sist students should keep books. As college teachers, we usually fo- cus more on what students do (or do not do) with books during our courses, not after. But I think we

you know you will use again and books you think you won't, just in case.

Start small, if it helps: keep one book you otherwise would have gotten rid of. Next time, keep two. Keep keeping books until you've built a library. Why? There's value in having books and being the sort of person who has them. This value often outweighs the cost. Sometimes books are even worth a little sacrifice.

Finally, while asserting there's value in having books, we teachers can also explain just what that value is. We might communicate to students the following points:

**Having books around can make a difference in students' lives.** Analyzing decades of data from dozens of countries around the world, sociologists found that the number of books in a home correlates strongly with academic accomplishment for children in the family. Specifically, the more books around, the farther in education the children go. That holds true across time, culture and socioeconomic status. The connection between books and academic accomplishment is so strong, the researchers comment, that there almost seems to be "an intrinsic advantage in growing up around books."

Of course, merely having books around is "not enough," they add. One does not imagine books that are just sitting there unread, unnoticed and ignored doing much good. But there is a high "correlation between owning books and reading." Books offer "skills and knowledge."

Having books around demonstrates "a commitment to investing in knowledge." Having books around indicates that people in the house "enjoy and value scholarly culture, that they find ideas congenial, reading agreeable, complex and intellectually demanding work attractive." In a home that has books, it is likely "conversations between parents and their children will include references to books and imaginative ideas growing out of them."

Students who are (or hope to become) parents should certainly keep books for the sake of the children. But if children benefit from books, no doubt adults do as well. It's not that books are magical (at least, not in the strictest sense of that word). It's that deciding to have books and to be the sort of person who has books can change a person's life and the lives of those closest to them.

**Students might want to read certain books in the future.** Sometimes students feel finished with a subject once they complete the final exam. Maybe they are, maybe they aren't. They do not know what they will want to read or reference in 10, 20, 30 years. But if they have built up a library over that time, it will be all the easier for them to grab the right book when they want it.

**Students might want to lend books to someone someday.** It is easy for students to ask, "Will I use this book again?" But building a library allows students to be a resource to others. One of my fellow professors calls it a "joy" to have the

right book on hand to give to someone. He compares it to the proverbial "word fitly spoken."

**Books can serve as physical reminders of what students have read.** Reading doesn't end when one puts a book down for the last time. Reading ends when one thinks about a book for the last time. When students read enough, they will likely forget not just what they read in certain books but even that they read certain books. "Out of sight, out of mind" applies here.

But so does the opposite. Books as physical objects sitting in plain sight on a bookshelf, glanced at regularly and browsed through from time to time, can remind students of what they have read, keeping that reading alive, active in their minds. (For this to work, of course, books can't stay boxed up in storage.)

**Books can serve as physical reminders of what students have not read.** As Umberto Eco and Nassim Nicholas Taleb know, unread books remind people of what they do not know. Some unread books eventually get read. Others don't. In that way, sitting on bookshelves, unread books can remind students to be both curious and humble.

**Books shape the meaning of a place.** According to place theory, places are not mere locations; they are laden with meaning. The physical environment of a place shapes its meaning (including walls, doors, furniture, the lack thereof, etc.). What happens in a place also shapes its meaning. So do names, memories, objects and so on. A grass field

marked by the lines and plates of a baseball diamond means something different than a grass field marked with tombstones and flowers. The apartment wall lined with books means something different than the apartment wall lined with family photos, band posters, sports memorabilia, works of art, bottles of wine or nothing. Having books around says, "This is a place where thinking and learning are valued."

**Books shape students' identities.** Of course, people are more than their books, degrees, careers, relationships or experiences, more than their thoughts, feelings, even bodies. And yet, these all shape how one lives in the world, the kind of person one appears to be, one's identity. Having books around says, "I am the sort of person who values thinking and learning."

**Keeping books allows students to return to them over the years.** The most meaningful connections people can have with books play out over a lifetime. The weeks or months during a course count as an introduction. That's enough for some books. Others offer more. Students can return to a book after 10 or 20 years, reread the notes they wrote in the margins the last time

they read it, observe how their thinking has changed, see what new layers of meaning they can find in the text at different times in life.

**Books are a tangible investment in lifelong learning.** College students' finances vary vastly. It's not my place to tell students whether they can or cannot afford books. At the same time, I know many students already sacrifice a lot to attend college, as an investment in something that matters to them. All I can add to that is that books are a good investment, too, a real commitment to continue learning long after graduating.

Distinguished scholar bell hooks testifies to this final point. Growing up poor in a patriarchal, segregated town, she learned the value of books from her mother, who had never graduated high school. "Against my father's wishes," hooks recalls, "she was willing to spend money on books, to let me know the pride of book ownership and the joy of possessing the gift that keeps on giving -- the book that one can read over and over and over." Reading books, she continues, "empowered me to journey to places with the mind and imagination ... expanded my consciousness ... made the impossible

possible."

At the end of each semester, when the line at the bookstore to sell back books is at its longest, one of my dear friends and fellow professors walks by crying out, "Traitors! Traitors!" His joke -- and, of course, he does this playfully -- contains a historical pun.

The Latin root of the word traitor, traditor, was the name given to those early Christians who under persecution handed over their sacred texts to be burned by the Roman authorities. The Latin cognate literally means "to hand over." To hand over one's books is a betrayal of our common purpose -- although if it's that or die (or miss the rent), one will surely be forgiven.

We hope students leave college with memories, friends, knowledge, skills and a diploma, and we do well when we remind students to obtain them. We need to add a library to the list. When students sell back their books, they sell back part of their education. I care much more about what books students keep, and what notes they wrote in them, than what courses they passed or what grades they earned. Students' bookshelves say much more than their transcripts. ■

### Bio

*Roger Martin is president emeritus and professor of history at Randolph-Macon College. He is the author of Off to College: A Guide for Parents. This essay is based on a presentation at the Council of Independent Colleges' Institute for Chief Academic and Chief Advancement Officers.*

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/06/03/enduring-power-textbooks-students-lives-essay>

# A Smarter Approach to College Textbooks

BY NAOMI S. BARON

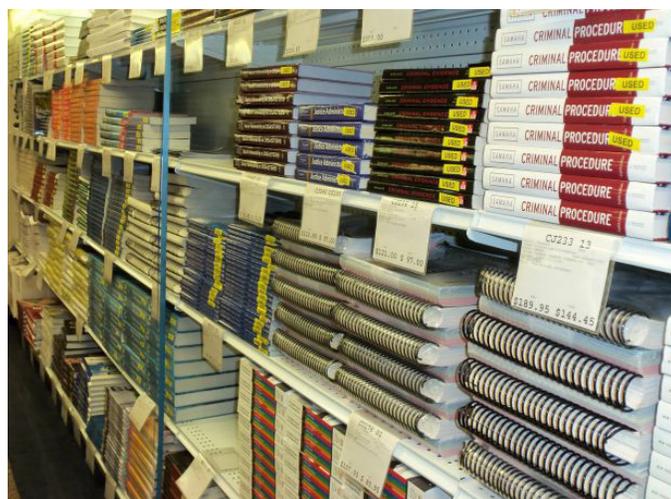
Faculty members need to recognize the gaps between students, publishers and professors, and push for change, writes Naomi S. Baron.

The Book Industry Study Group just reported that 52 percent of college students surveyed agreed that “I would rather pay \$100 for a learning solution that improves my result by one letter grade and reduces my study time by 25 percent than \$50 for my current textbook.” As a professor, I am troubled by declines in the effort many in my classes are willing to put into doing the reading I assign. But as an administrator, I also recognize students’ concerns with scoring high grades, juggling internships and part-time jobs, and minimizing expenses.

Multiple factors are at play here: grade inflation, social pressures, student debt, the iffy job market. Further relevant is the time students report studying each week (now an average of 15 hours, down from about 24 in the 1960s). Yet one of the major culprits is the price tag on textbooks and other course materials, estimated at around \$1,200 a year -- assuming you buy them.

Faculty members and students alike are in a quandary over how to handle textbook costs, especially for those hefty tomes often used in introductory courses. Increasingly, students are opting not to purchase these books -- not even rent them. Digital formats (and rentals of any kind) tend to be less expensive than buying print, though frequently the decision is not to acquire the materials at all. The U.S. Public Interest Research Group reports that two-thirds of students have refrained from purchasing at least one assigned textbook because of price.

Recently, American University ran focus groups with our undergraduates, looking to get a sense of how they make textbook decisions. For courses in their major, they are will-



ing to lay out more money than for general education classes, which they perceive (often wrongly) not to require much work anyway. Over all, the common sentiment is that spending more than about \$50 for a book is excessive. And of course there are plenty of college textbooks with prices that exceed \$50.

This message was reinforced by an anecdote shared with me by Michael Rosenwald, a reporter for *The Washington Post*. While interviewing American University students

for a story on college reading and book-purchasing habits, Rosenwald asked, “Who buys course materials from the campus store these days?” Their answer: “Freshmen,” revealing that once students settle into campus life, they discover less expensive ways to get their books -- or devise strategies on how much reading they’ll actually do.

For faculty members, the challenge is to find a workable balance between the amount of reading we would like those in our classes to complete and realistic expectations for student follow-through. While some full-length books may remain on our required list, their numbers have shrunk over time. These days, assignments that used to call for complete books are being slimmed down to single chapters or articles. Our aspirations for our students to encounter and absorb substantial amounts of written material increasingly rub up against their notions of how much is worth reading.

The numbers tell the tale. That same Book Industry Study Group report noted that between 2010 and 2013, the percentage of students indicating that classes they were taking required “no formal course materials” rose from 4 percent to 11 percent.

Student complaints are equally revealing. When Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* came out, I assigned the book to a group of honors undergraduates, eager for them to experience careful, hypothesis-driven, data-rich social science research. One member of the class balked.

In fact, she publicly berated me, demanding to know why I hadn’t told the group about the “short version” of the book -- meaning an article Putnam has written years earlier, before his full study was completed. She went on to inform the class what she had learned from a teacher in high school: books aren’t worth reading, only articles. The rest of what’s in books is just padding.

The author and teacher in me cringed at how this young woman perceived the intellectual enterprise.

For students, besides the understandable limitations on time and finances, there is the question of value proposition. If the objective is learning that lasts, maybe buying the book (and reading it) is worth it. But if the goal is getting a better grade, maybe not. All too often today, it is the grade that triumphs.

One player that faculty members generally leave out of the equation is the publishing industry, including not just the companies whose names are on the spines but the people who print the books, supply the paper and ink, and operate the presses. Recently I spoke at the Book Manufacturers’ Institute Conference and was troubled by the disconnect I perceived between those who produce and distribute textbooks and those who consume them. As students buy fewer books, publishers do smaller print runs, resulting in higher prices, which in turn reinforces the spiral of lower sales.

A potential compensatory financial strategy for publishers is issuing revised editions, intended to

render obsolete those already in circulation. In reality, students often take a pass on these new offerings, waiting until they appear on the used book market. Yes, sometimes there is fresh, timely material in the new versions, but how often do we really need to update textbooks on the structure of English grammar or the history of early America?

When speaking with participants in the book manufacturers’ conference, I became increasingly convinced that the current model of book creation, distribution and use is not sustainable. What to do?

There is a pressing need for meaningful collaboration between faculty members and the publishing industry to find ways of producing materials designed to foster learning that reaches beyond the test -- and that students can be reasonably expected to procure and use. I would like to hope that textbook publishers (who I know are financially suffering) are in conversation not just with authors seeking book contracts but with faculty members who can share their own assignment practices, along with personal experiences about how students are voting with their feet regarding purchasing and reading decisions.

To help foster such dialogue, here are some suggestions:

- Gather data on shifts in the amount and nature of reading that faculty assign, say, over the past 10-20 years.
- Reconsider publishing strategies regarding those handsome, expensive, color-picture-laden texts,

## The Future of Educational Materials & the Role of the College Bookstore

whose purpose is apparently to entice students to read them. If students aren't willing to shell out the money, the book likely isn't being read. Focus instead on producing meaningful material written with clear, engaging prose.

- Rethink when a new edition is really warranted and when not. In many instances, issuing a smaller update, to be used as a supplement to the existing text, is really all that's needed. (Think of those encyclopedia annuals with which many of us are familiar.) Students -- and far

more of them -- will be willing to pay \$9.95 for an update to an older book than \$109.95 for a new one. McDonald's learned long ago that you can turn a handsome profit through high volume on low-cost items. The publishing industry needs to do the math.

- Make faculty members aware of the realities of both textbook prices (some professors never look before placing book orders) and student reading patterns. I heartily recommend hanging out in the student union (or equivalent) and

eavesdropping. You will be amazed at how cunning -- and how honest -- students are about their study practices.

- Encourage professors to assign readings (especially ones students are asked to pay for) that maximize long-term educational value.

- Educate students about the difference between gaming the assignment system (either for grades or cost savings) and learning.

The results can yield a win-win situation for both the publishing industry and higher education. ■

### Bio

*Naomi S. Baron is executive director of the Center for Teaching, Research, and Learning at American University and author of Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World.*

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/08/18/essay-calls-new-approach-college-textbooks>

Images provided by  
[gettyimages.com](http://gettyimages.com)

**INSIDE**  
HIGHER ED

Inside Higher Ed  
1015 18th St NW Suite 1100  
Washington, DC 20036  
[insidehighered.com](http://insidehighered.com)