“Most college financial officers expect tuition increases to continue outpacing inflation…” [This was among] the key findings of a report … describing the opinions of senior financial officers at 100 private colleges. The report was based on a survey by Independent 529 Plan, a prepay tuition program sponsored by the nonprofit Tuition Plan Consortium.”

“While 78 percent of respondents said they expected tuition increases to keep rising faster than inflation, they had differing opinions on how this would affect students at their institutions. Respondents were nearly evenly split on whether rising tuition would change the makeup of their student body. More than half said containing tuition increases would expand college access, and 61 percent said students’ debt load limits their post-graduation choices.”

According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, “As many as 3.2 million college-ready students will forgo a bachelor’s degree this decade because of financial barriers, says an update to a 2006 report by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. The panel, which advises Congress and the U.S. Education Department, had projected a loss of college access for 2.4 million such students in its original report, “Mortgaging Our Future: How Financial Barriers to College Undercut America’s Global Competitiveness.” The updated figure is based on new data showing that students who graduated from high school in 2004 enrolled in four-year colleges at lower-than-predicted rates, resulting in higher cumulative losses for the decade. According to the new data, four-year enrollment rates among low-income students who took Algebra II dropped to 40 percent in 2004, down from 54 percent in 1992, while enrollment rates among low-income students who took trigonometry fell from 73 percent to 55 percent over the same period.”

However, tuition is not the entire cost of a college education. College students across the country are experiencing sticker shock at their bookstores. According to Pauline Vu, “At the University of Maryland, a new Understanding Business book sells for $139. At the University of North Carolina, Tar Heels could shell out $153.35 for Principles of Economics. And at the University of Wisconsin, Chemistry and Chemical Reactivity goes for $109.90 – used.”

According to Stephen R. Acker writing for Campus Technology, ‘Jim Sayer, Wright State University’s (OH) faculty senate president, is a master rhetorician and teacher of that fine art, too. Leading a discussion among the faculty senators on the relentless rise in the cost of text books, …, he set the stage: “I’ve taught Aristotle for 38 years. Every three years I do so from a different textbook, and it always is more expensive for my students,” and then posed this set of questions: “Why? What’s going on here? Do we have a strategy for getting these costs under control?”
“Textbooks are fundamental to modern education. But until recently almost all textbooks have been published for profit by huge corporations, keeping prices artificially high, limiting access, and subjecting content to hierarchical control.”

“Textbooks cost students an average of $900 per year, which is a quarter of tuition at an average four-year public university and nearly three-quarters of tuition at a community college, according to a study conducted by the Government Accountability Office [8](GAO).”

“The cost of college textbooks has become a major affordability issue for low and middle income students, adding to the potential that these students will either drop out, take on additional loan debt to pay for textbooks, or undercut their own learning by forgoing the purchase of textbooks.”

“Textbook publishers have not responded adequately to these concerns, but have continued to exacerbate this problem by raising prices and employing practices such as unnecessarily issuing new editions of textbooks.”

“Frankly, the textbook situation is wreaking havoc on teaching and learning practices on our campuses, with as many as 43 percent of students foregoing the purchase of required textbooks due to financial considerations (Crane, 2004). When less than three in five students in a class have the materials they need to support their learning, there must be an acute impact on educational effectiveness.”

These perceptions have spawned the open textbook movement.

“Open textbooks "are textbooks that are freely available with nonrestrictive licenses. Covering a wide range of disciplines, open textbooks are available to download and print in various file formats from several web sites and OER (Open Educational Resource) repositories. Open textbooks can range from public domain books to existing textbooks to textbooks created specifically for OER. Open textbooks help solve the problems of the high cost of textbooks, book shortages, and access to textbooks as well as providing the capacity to better meet local teaching and learning needs" according to a Module created by Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME).”

The movement itself is beginning to be noticed at the system and state level and has the eye of concerned foundations.

“The Community College Open Textbook Project begins … with a member meeting in California. At the meeting, representatives of institutions around the country will start reviewing open-textbook models for “quality, usability, accessibility, and sustainability,” according to a news release. They will initially review four providers of free online educational resources [6]. The Open-Textbook Project was paid for by a $530,000 grant to the Foothill-De Anza Community College District from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.”
Unfortunately, there is little hard data on the relationship between the cost of textbooks and retention. The anecdotal evidence is typified by:

"'I've always wanted to go to college, but after my first year, I am already thousands of dollars in debt, so I am unsure if I can continue," said Courtney Morse, a Portland State University student and Board member for the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group'.  

According to a recent blogger on the Chronicle of Higher Ed’s site: “I have worked at Ivy and Big 10s and West Coast Ivy-look-alikes and the picture is grim on all of these campuses…the price tag is so outrageous at this point that only the Bushes, Clintons, McCains and Obamas will be able to send their kids to college. Who’s to blame? …one thing is certain, if schools don’t grab the reigns of the tuition dragon, the residence hall tabs and the cost of books and lab fees, all the outside programs offering scholarships and other financial aid will NEVER be enough.”

Another blogger writes, “The cost of textbooks is one of my main concerns when I choose a class. Financial Aid students do not receive a check until we collect all the signatures from instructors. So many of us who can't afford textbooks on their own show up to class without them. By the time we receive the check, it is too late to buy them on-line, where they are much cheaper.”

Still another (keenanjam) writes: “Anything that can lower the textbook costs to students needs to be considered. I believe that there have been a number of students who have dropped classes on the first day because of discovering the textbook costs. This is not right. It's harmful to the students, and it's harmful to the institution.”

My query to Educause’s CIO list on this subject elicited no actual responses, not one. This probably indicates that this is issue is not on the CIO’s radar screen. And why? Maybe they just don’t feel like they own the problem. Might it also be that it’s well known that few individuals prefer eBooks (as read on computer screens) and that eBooks are largely ridiculed as print waiting to happen.

According to Stephen R. Acker, writing for Campus Technology, “It is easy enough to find examples of failed eBook experiments, but it also is easy to trace the reasons for their failure. Typically, user dissatisfaction revolves around the technology (fatiguing screens, single purpose display device, material slow to load), organization (linear “page turners,” poorly indexed content), inconvenience (I hate being tethered to an on-line text, can’t read my book under the buckeye tree), and lack of flexibility (can’t take notes, can’t seamlessly jump to new content, search and navigation are weak). Faculty who don’t really make use of the required eText (or print texts for that matter) also annoy students.”

‘Koch’ is pragmatic writing, “Electronic textbooks, then, are more attractive in theory than in practice. Interestingly, electronic scholarly journals appear to hold greater promise than electronic books for institutions to achieve cost economies and enhance
access.” All campuses are aware that students often print excerpts from electronic journals, copies of digital documents, and selection of Web pages. The volume of print, reported reaching several thousand pages per student per term, has forced colleges and universities to charge for printing. This suggests print remains a preferred alternative.12

Print remains an alternative because eReaders have not yet penetrated the market. Print remains because eReaders are not in the hands of the faculty. Print remains because the eBook purveyors have not yet connected the dots. Print remains because Apple Computer has not yet addressed the issue from the grass roots direction as, perhaps, only it can do (a la the iPod and iPhone) Students might consider a peaceful revolt and demand these costs be addressed with available technology. Foundations might consider accepting proposals for eBook/eReader pervasive campuses.

Acker continues, “Mark Nelson, digital content strategist for the National Association for College Stores, buys into the vision of a digital future, but puts the tipping point another five years down the road. The twin forces for change he sees are retirement of the baby-boom faculty, many of whom will never quite embrace non-print, and full emergence of the digital native population, described by Nelson and supported by Project Tomorrow data as students currently squirming in their seats in a sixth grade classroom. Content born digital meet learners born digital…but do we have to live through a five-year gestation? Perhaps; but by then the eBook reader may finally have achieved its promise for portability, contrast, and navigational richness.”15

Retention is today’s problem. I don’t believe we can afford ignore this for five years waiting for some ideal future. Let’s do grab the reigns and halt runaway costs. Good enough eReaders are now available. Of course there are barriers. Some are obvious, but some are more subtle. Acker writes, “Many universities [including Pacific] supplement their operating budgets by defining the college bookstore as a profit center as well as a student service. Consequently, the university tries to balance increasing revenue at the bookstore with reducing textbook costs for the student. Roughly half of bookstores serving college markets now operate under revenue-generating licenses granted to national bookstore chains.”15 Of course Bookstores argue that they add value in other ways, but it’s increasingly clear that schools can’t have it both ways.

Worse, with state governments recognizing the problem, many new laws are being introduced across the country to attempt to regulate all the parties involved in a variety of ways. If faculty are to maintain reasonable control of their teaching materials, free of complex restrictions and new layers of bureaucracy, then they might be well served by moving quickly. They don’t have Mark Nelson’s five years.

At Pacific, we are about to give all the Deans an Amazon Kindle loaded with the Provost’s annual retreat material. The Information Strategies and Policies Committee, at the CIO’s suggestion, has charged the Technology Education Committee with approaching the faculty on this subject. I hope to be able to report further on this in the days ahead.
Meanwhile at the other UOP:

“These days, [John] Sperling [chairman of the Apollo Group Inc., a Nasdaq-traded holding company with a market cap of $7.5 billion, and founder of the University of Phoenix,] can barely contain his excitement over a new high-tech experiment that could turn out to be as revolutionary as the university's distance-learning effort. .... at a dinner party for San Francisco venture capitalists, Sperling saw his first demo of an electronic textbook: "I was fascinated by it, although I didn't know what the hell to do with it." He brought the e-book idea to Adam Honea, the university's dean of information systems and technology, and used it to issue a challenge: Brainstorm a way to eliminate all of the system's textbooks and replace them with customized learning materials that exist entirely in digital form.”

“At first, it doesn't seem that revolutionary. But think about it: We become publishing's version of a general contractor," says Honea. "We contract authors and experts to create course materials exactly to our specs. That lets us bypass textbook publishers. It eliminates the fixed costs of moving 140,000 books every five to six weeks. John Sperling reinvented the traditional model of the student, the instructor, and the classroom. And now he's reinventing the textbook.”

There is a light at the end of the tunnel. You know what it is.

1. **College Finance Chief say Tuition Increases Will Keep Rising Faster than Inflation.** Beckie Supiano, Chronicle of Higher Education 4/30/08

2. **Preamble Statement, Maketextbooksaffordable.org**


5. **Community College Open-Textbook Project Gets Under Way, Catherine Rampell, Chronicle of Higher Education 4/29/08**

6. Connexions, run by Rice University; Flat World Knowledge, a commercial digital-textbook publisher that will begin offering free textbooks online next year; the University of California’s UC College Prep Online, which offers Advanced Placement and other courses online; and the Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources, which was founded by the Foothill-De Anza Community College District and the League for Innovation in the Community College.
7. 1,000 PROFESSORS FROM 300 COLLEGES DECLARE PREFERENCE FOR AFFORDABLE TEXTBOOKS, April 15, 2008, Maketextbooksaffordable.org

8. The GAO report, requested by Congressman David Wu last year, found that textbook prices have risen at twice the rate of annual inflation over the last two decades, an average of 6 percent each year since 1987-1988, compared with overall price increases of 3 percent per year. The report also found that textbooks and supplies are a significant college cost. Specifically, the GAO found the cost of textbooks and supplies as a percentage of tuition and fees is 26 percent for a fulltime student attending a 4-year public institution, 72 percent for a fulltime student attending a 2-year public institution and 8 percent at a 4-year private” GAO Report Finds Textbook Prices Skyrocketing Publishers' practices contribute to rise in textbook costs, Courtney Morse and Merriah Fairchild, Aug. 16, 2005, Maketextbooksaffordable.org


10. [http://www.p2pfoundation.net/Open_Textbooks](http://www.p2pfoundation.net/Open_Textbooks)


12. *Making College Textbooks More Affordable: Part II*, Published by Jim Farmer, June 5th, 2007 in Higher Education


15. Textbooks: A Value Proposition, Campus Technology, 11/13/20, Stephen R. Acker

16. Chigusa, responding Tuesday, April 10, 2007, to Affordable Textbooks for College Students? - Bills Pending in the State Legislature, Jennifer Wu, North Seattle Community College [www.factc.blogspot.com](http://www.factc.blogspot.com)

17. Pauline Vu, Stateline.org Staff Writer, Tuesday, August 28, 2007 States, Colleges Work to Cut Textbook Costs.

18. *The Hard Life and Restless Mind of America's Education Billionaire*  