ABSTRACT

We asked four campus administration areas for their thoughts on course materials issues and the challenges they face: provosts, library, IT and academic technology, and auxiliary services. We also included a fifth group of educators and content providers to share their views.

“Viewpoints on Learning Content” is a supplemental piece to the “Mapping the Learning Content Ecosystem” research project—which included both primary and secondary research and culminated in a definitive project report or White Paper. The White Paper and two companion reports (that provide key findings from the NACS-sponsored surveys of leaders from its college store members and faculty from a selection of campuses) as well as other project information and resources are available online at www.nacs.org/ecosystem.

THE VIEW FROM THE PROVOST

What issues, challenges, or concerns from your role on campus keep you up at night?

For most provosts and other administrators in their cohort (senior vice provost, associate vice provost, senior vice president, vice president for academic affairs), the first worry that comes to mind involves budgetary and funding issues. As state support shrinks, they’re concerned about the impact on their institutions’ staffing and the ability of their schools to hold the line on tuition.

Managing day-to-day operational issues eats up a lot of their time and attention, something they lament, as they’d prefer to focus more on strategic issues and academic innovation. They want to facilitate faculty engagement and encourage professors to think beyond the traditional classroom but aren’t sure of the best ways to do so.

The provosts expressed considerable interest in the potential of digital technologies to improve student success and possibly trim costs. Although online education doesn’t top their list of challenges, they are closely watching developments in this area and trying to figure it all out for their schools. They recognize that higher education is changing, but they still believe there is substantial value in a liberal arts education delivered on a physical campus.

How would you describe the evolution of teaching and learning in the digital age? What are the salient issues?
What is your vision for the future role of instructional technology?

The provosts have witnessed some rapid changes in teaching and learning due to digital technologies. They point to the proliferation of hybrid courses (classroom instruction coupled with online elements) as proof of that. At the same time, they feel faculty—and, to some degree, students—aren’t jumping on board as fast as they could.

There is still some reluctance among instructors to incorporate new technologies into their course work, sometimes because faculty don’t know what to do. Other faculty look to their peers to test the waters and provide guidance on what works. Some professors, however, don’t seem to feel any pressure to try something new unless the school offers incentives.

The way students consume information exacerbates the challenge. They can access plenty of information right from their phones at any time, and faculty need to understand how that impacts the way students approach their classroom studies.

On the positive side, provosts say that digital technology has facilitated more integration between academic departments and allowed professors to build more primary sources and research into their course content. Provosts see the use of digital tech growing substantially in the next few years, although it may take time to determine what works and what doesn’t in terms of student outcomes. Funding will be a barrier, too.
Do you or your deans discuss issues related to undergraduate students’ course materials?

At most schools, course materials only occasionally come up for discussion among the provosts and academic deans. Most often, it’s in the context of affordability. Provosts are concerned about the cost of materials for students, but they leave content issues up to faculty.

Sometimes copyright issues are discussed in relation to affordability, often in conjunction with library reserves, accessibility, custom materials, digital content, and open educational resources.

What are your thoughts on textbook affordability at your institution?

The majority of academic leaders still regard textbook affordability as an important issue on campus. Some acknowledged there have been efforts to improve the situation, such as rental programs and, in some cases, digital options. As long as students continue to express concern about the cost of their materials, provosts think the institution should pay attention.

They see faculty as taking more care in choosing affordable materials or finding free resources as a substitute. At the same time, provosts think their campus bookstores could do more to lower the price tag for students. They mentioned free shipping for online orders and altering the store's business model to be less profit-driven.

Does the campus store come up in your conversations?

Some provosts admitted that they don’t think about their campus bookstore very often, saying that more pressing matters demand most of their attention. The rest conceded the bookstore comes to the forefront only when there’s a problem with the availability of books.

However, most provosts regarded having a bookstore on campus as a positive. They saw a role for the store in furnishing information about course materials to faculty and to students. The store might also be able to provide tools or data that would be helpful in academic planning.

Several provosts felt the campus bookstore needed to spend more time educating faculty about their course materials operations and what the store contributes to the school, possibly by attending faculty meetings.

Perceived Level of Interest on Campus in Digital Course Materials—Campus Store Reported (N=188)

![Perceived level of interest chart]

THE VIEW FROM THE CAMPUS LIBRARY

What issues, challenges, or concerns from your role on campus keep you up at night?

Those who manage campus library services all seem to share the same recurring nightmares about cost and access.

Fees for books, journals, and databases are steadily rising, yet most campus libraries say they have fewer funds for acquisitions and subscriptions. Directors want to make sure their dollars are spent on the right content, but can’t always ascertain which materials will get used. Many libraries are forming or joining consortia to pool their resources or taking advantage of shared services such as OhioLINK.

Libraries worry about ensuring that students and faculty have access to all the information they need, especially for research. They’re concerned some publishers are overly stringent about digital rights management and unwilling to negotiate prices, making some digital content too costly to acquire or simply unavailable. To enhance the searchability and discoverability of their existing collections, some of which include historic materials, most libraries want to migrate their print assets to digital, but don’t have the budget to do so.

Library chiefs report more faculty are posting content into the school’s learning management system and then linking to it from the syllabus. More professors are placing content in library e-reserves as well. In both situations, librarians suspect instructors may not be fully aware of the fair-use stipulations in copyright law. Students, too, often don’t understand copyright, and end up making illegal copies or unwittingly plagiarizing.

Other issues involve making collections accessible to the disabled, updating the library staff’s technical skills, and rebranding the library as it moves from paper to digital.

How would you describe the evolution of teaching, learning, and course content in the digital age? What is your vision for the future role of the library?

Faculty are now taking advantage of more digital tools and resources to augment—or sometimes replace—the traditional classroom lecture and discussion. Library managers see resistance to using digital technologies fading among instructors, but they may need assistance in discovering the right materials for their courses.

A great deal of course content and research materials is now available digitally. Although students still find it easier to work with paper documents, libraries have noticed they will opt for digital if they can access information more quickly and save money. Students are seeking shortcuts to instant knowledge; they see no point in reading an entire book if the professor can provide a list of key points.

Library directors have noticed more faculty using primary sources for teaching in lieu of standard texts in order to allow students to directly experience the course topic. Yet students lack the skills to conduct searches (print or digital) on their own and to process the findings.

In this milieu, libraries see a number of roles for themselves: serving as a gathering place and study site, helping faculty and students find materials, acting as a repository for campus research, locating and digitizing content to place in the learning management system, and possibly working with the campus store on print and digital course packs.

What do you and your colleagues think about and discuss in relation to undergraduate students’ course materials?

Course materials aren’t necessarily top of mind for campus libraries. Some, as a matter of policy, don’t acquire textbooks and their directors confess they rarely even discuss student course materials, focusing more on serving faculty needs.

Those libraries that do make textbooks available, or have partnered with the bookstore on reserves, are more likely to hear from students struggling with the cost of their education. While concerned about students being unprepared for their classes because they can’t buy the materials, librarians don’t see book reserves or lending textbooks as an answer. Copies are limited, and sometimes the savvier students snap them up ahead of the most needy.
What do you see as the future of course materials on campus? What are the most important enablers or barriers in the path of this anticipated future? Who are the key players?

The future lies in digital technologies, the chief librarians agree. But for the time being, course materials will continue to have one foot firmly in the print world while the other foot gingerly toward the digital world.

The transition from mostly print to mostly digital may be a rough go. Librarians recognize many barriers at their own schools, including: limitations placed on computer systems by campus IT; the difficulty of determining the copyright-holders on older print content; consumer expectations for digital content functionality; lack of computer access for some students; ascertaining the quality of self-published or open digital content; and ability to find the right digital content for specific purposes. Students also lack the skills needed to use digital technology for study and research.

Campus libraries expect to continue to advocate for open content, especially for materials used in research. Some already devote a portion of their budgets to helping professors curate existing materials or produce original content to provide to their students at no cost, essentially taking over the role of publisher.

When it comes to naming the key players in the evolution of course materials, librarians seldom mention the campus store. More often, campus IT, faculty, and the library top their lists, along with instructional/academic technology and top administration. Some say their board of regents, state legislators, and campus counsel will play pivotal roles.

Does the campus store come up in your conversations?

Whether the campus bookstore shows up on the library’s radar seems to depend on the existing relationship between the two. Campus librarians that already partner with their institution’s store say they’re open to future joint ventures such as print on demand or preloading tablets with course content. One library chief even enthused about how great the store was to work with.

On the other hand, when there’s no working connection with the campus store, the potential for partnership doesn’t even occur to the library.

College Store Established Relationships or Had Conversations Regarding Course Materials—Campus Store Reported (N=188)

![Chart showing relationships between campus store and key players]

THE VIEW FROM CAMPUS IT AND ACADEMIC TECHNOLOGY

What issues, challenges, or concerns from your role on campus keep you up at night?

Those heading up campus information technology services and academic technologies aren’t counting sheep at night, they’re tabulating the number of rapid changes they must keep up with in hardware, software, accessibility issues, and user expectations.

They’re concerned about being able to support students’ needs, given the growing array of devices and platforms they’re bringing to campus each year. The IT budget doesn’t allow for 24/7 support services—even though students try to contact them for help after hours—or system upgrades. Bandwidth often falls short; students complain about sluggish speeds compared to what they’re used to back home.

Campus IT chiefs and managers, especially those directly involved with academic tech, are genuinely excited and challenged by the potential role of digital technologies to enhance teaching and learning. Yet, at many schools, faculty don’t seem prepared to make the switch from courses taught in traditional lecture-based classroom formats to those that incorporate a variety of collaborative technologies and which may be delivered online.

Some campuses, often at the behest of younger instructors, are dabbling in new tech for courses. However, few professors seek out IT’s guidance in developing such courses or evaluating new technologies, and there are worries about ensuring adequate support across multiple platforms and delivery systems.

How would you describe the evolution of teaching, learning, and course content in the digital age? What are the salient issues on campus? What is your vision for the future role of instructional/academic technology?

Like campus librarians, campus technologists agree higher education is moving toward more digital and online environments, albeit slowly. The pace will depend on faculty buy-in, although funding and internal policies will factor in as well. Some instructors don’t yet see any connection between technology and teaching.

Most IT managers aren’t devoting much thought to course content but are looking at course formats and how to support their delivery, such as simulation, self-paced classes, multimodule courses, and concentrated courses intended for specific credentials.

Course Material Formats Most Often Assigned by Faculty (N=1348)

What do you see as the future of course materials on our campus? What role does instructional technology play? What are the most important enablers or barriers in the path of this anticipated future?

While campus IT managers envision course materials overall will shift from print to mobile-optimized digital and online, most are dubious about how soon that will occur at their own schools. Open educational resources (OER) were mentioned, but it’s not on the radar of most IT departments. Some anticipate that students will force the transition to digital in order to save money. Others feel faculty need an incentive, such as tying use of digital materials to promotion or tenure.

If funding for higher education institutions continues to slide, that may prompt more schools to consider new ideas. As technology solutions become more affordable, more accessible, and easier to use, IT managers think their schools might be willing to try things that wouldn’t have been considered in the past. The role of IT, they say, is to help make it work.

There are still a number of barriers, however. Some solutions on the market need more development to be truly useful. Students don’t possess the proper skills to take advantage of technology for study and research. Campus policies sometimes get in the way of change.

Are e-textbook readers and online course material platforms ready for primetime? What are the issues that will promote or slow their adoption?

Students are ready for digital and online reading platforms, but faculty aren’t quite prepared to take the leap, say the technology managers on campus. Not all platforms provide the level of interactivity and usability that students expect, and IT has concerns about integrating them with campus systems.

Competition among providers may drive prices down, making digital materials more attractive, even to students who prefer print materials.

What are the infrastructure, intellectual property, and technology support issues that concern you most? Who are the key players? Are there partnering opportunities between your unit and the bookstore?

Bring your own device (BYOD) is an ongoing issue with campus IT, who struggle to provide support for different devices and software, some of which are old. They’re also scrambling to keep up with the various technical solutions selected by different academic departments.

Copyright issues present a host of challenges: Who owns faculty-created content and courseware? Are faculty appropriately reusing content developed by others? How can the school manage the use of multiple pieces of digital content with different permissions?

For digital course content, campus technologists identify a number of key players, including tech support, faculty, libraries, bookstores, academic technology, publishers, learning management system providers, and providers of other types of content, such as video. Most campus IT managers are willing to partner with the bookstore, especially on distribution of content to students and helping faculty understand their options.

THE VIEW FROM CAMPUS AUXILIARY SERVICES

What issues, challenges, or concerns from your role on campus keep you up at night?

Those with responsibility for campus auxiliary services, including the bookstore, toss and turn over both short-term and long-term issues.

On the more immediate side, these directors, managers, vice presidents, vice chancellors, and CFOs are constantly watching the budget and are concerned about revenues. Managing ongoing projects and operational duties consumes much of their time and energy. To some extent, they feel they don’t have the resources or time for adequate long-range planning. Ensuring compliance with federal and state laws is also a major concern.
When they look beyond the day-to-day operations, these administrators say they're trying to understand changes in higher education and how those changes are likely to impact their specific campus. In particular, they're keeping an eye on digital technologies to gauge the effect on course design and materials.

Do you and your peers discuss issues related to undergraduate students’ course materials?
For most, course materials is not a topic of regular discussion with other administrators. But when course materials do come up, often the conversation is about affordability, financial aid, keeping costs down, and sometimes the value of the materials to students.

Digital concerns sometimes arise in discussion as well. A couple of administrators also mentioned their schools were considering switching to a course material-fee model in which students pay a set amount for materials on a per-hour or per-course basis.

What are your thoughts on textbook affordability at your institution?
Most administrators don’t think the issue of textbook affordability will go away any time soon, although a few noted the cost of textbooks has always been a bone of contention among students. They feel affordability is getting a disproportionate amount of attention at the national level, even though it’s really only an issue for a relatively small percentage of students.

The efforts of bookstores to offer affordable options to students—such as rentals and used copies—received praise, but administrators aren’t sure what more stores can do given the need to boost, or at least maintain, revenues. They don’t feel it’s viable for their stores to compete on price against online sellers. They do see a role for campus stores in providing leadership and guidance on the transition to digital course materials.

How does the campus store most often come up in your conversations with others?
For most of the auxiliary services administrators, the campus store is rarely front and center in conversations. The reasons varied. One felt there wasn’t much to talk about as the store seemed to be hitting all of its goals.

Some lamented that other campus administrators and faculty are unable to understand the pivotal role played by the store and the potential for the store to assume responsibility for other needs on campus, such as central buying and support for digital materials. They said few on campus realize the store’s revenues help keep other programs and services afloat or how much effort the store puts into serving student needs.

Occasionally, the campus store figures in conversations about branding, sales of imprinted merchandise, and promotion of the school.

Students on My Campus Find the Store an Indispensable Resource for Course Materials—
Campus Store Reported (N=188)

What is your vision for the role the store should play in the campus’ transition to a future of digital course materials?

The store is in the best position to serve as the digital course materials expert for the rest of the campus, in the view of most auxiliary services administrators. Regardless of the format of materials, the store is still responsible for providing academic resources to students.

Administrators see faculty and students struggling to understand how to use digital materials, and they aren’t getting sufficient assistance from publishers. They think the store should figure it all out (including the business model), offer recommendations to the administration, and provide support to instructors and students.

Although administrators anticipate course materials will inevitably shift to mostly digital, they also believe the transition won’t occur as soon as some think. The usual barriers—reluctance to change, legislative issues, campus silos, digital materials not yet up to par—will slow the pace of adoption.

THE VIEW FROM EDUCATORS AND CONTENT PROVIDERS

Campus stores, libraries, IT departments, academic administrators, and auxiliary services aren’t the only entities with a stake in course materials. Others include faculty, academic authors, publishers, copyright experts, and advocates for open educational resources (OER).

What are the biggest issues, challenges, or concerns related to undergraduate students’ course materials?

Cost and affordability come up in one way or another across the board. In the worst-case scenario, students don’t have the money for materials, attempt to get through the course without them, and ultimately do poorly in the class, maybe even dropping out.

OER materials are intended to sidestep the whole problem of cost and to enable students to access course materials on the first day of class. The challenge then becomes finding, developing, maintaining, and updating open resources of sufficient quality to meet faculty’s standards. There are also questions concerning copyright compliance, fair use, digital rights management, permission fees, and ease of access.

Those engaged in traditional publishing are sensitive to concerns about rising prices on course materials and are trying to develop options for faculty and students. They’re giving a lot of attention to digital alternatives as a means of bringing down costs. Publishers are also convinced that technology-enhanced course materials are more engaging to students and produce better academic outcomes.

In order to create materials that students are willing to purchase and use, providers may need to develop materials in a variety of formats for each course to suit individual preferences.

How would you describe the evolution of teaching, learning, and course content in the digital age?

Greater accountability for student outcomes is forcing instructors to rethink how they approach course content. There is a move toward digital content, especially adaptive-learning products that adjust to each student. With digital tools, it’s easier to create and collaborate on content.

Faculty are also building more course work around primary sources (often free and openly accessible), while relying less on materials developed by traditional publishers. Students are performing more research and analysis as part of their courses.

What do you envision as the future of course materials on higher education campuses?

All see digital materials on the rise, like others have, but aren’t sure just when they will eclipse the traditional print book. The reading experience on a screen is not yet optimal.

The push for open resources is changing the game. Eventually, any material based on research funded by tax dollars may have to be open, creating a pool of free content for some courses. States may withhold financial support from public colleges and universities unless they embrace OER, or may earmark funding specifically for development of OER materials. One way would be to pay faculty for their time to review and update open resources.
The traditional publishing house won’t disappear, at least not right away, partly because they still own the lion’s share of vetted and curated content. Publishers are working on developing teaching materials that can be incorporated with the school’s learning management system and are also looking for ways to partner with open-resource groups on content projects.

**What are the most important enablers and the most critical barriers in the path of this future?**

High-bandwidth Internet access will facilitate the adoption of digital materials where it’s available, but will function as a barrier where it’s not. Libraries may play a role in ensuring students have more universal access to materials.

For OER, there is no sense of urgency on the part of most faculty, many of whom are still unaware of resources or think they’re inadequate. Studies on the effective use of alternative content, or possibly incentives provided by their institutions, may change their minds. In addition, more faculty may opt to prepare their own materials as authoring tools and delivery channels become simpler to use.

Here and there, individual departments are taking it upon themselves to adopt OER materials. Adjunct faculty may be less resistant to OER. Foundations are starting to donate money to pay for development and/or curation of resources, with the idea that state systems could then afford to cover ongoing costs.

For the time being, publishing companies may have a leg up over the open-access movement because they’ve already cleared a path toward a digital-first strategy that includes licensing content to campuses. Publishers have also accumulated a huge reservoir of prepared content that already meets the needs of instructors and students.

**Faculty Agreement about OERs “for the Kind of Courses I Teach...”**


**What are your thoughts on textbook affordability?**

Cost, still a big concern for now, may become less of an issue in due time. Publishers are trying to hold the line on prices for traditional materials while they attempt to shift to lower-cost digital technologies. Commercial pricing may be forced down anyway if more students choose to obtain cheap pirated copies and more faculty swap standard textbooks for open resources.

Efforts are underway to improve the quality and discoverability of open materials, especially for the highest enrollment courses. Organizations are encouraging institutions to support the development of such materials on their own campus, for instance, by providing instructional design assistance or allowing professors to take mini sabbaticals to update materials.
Critical Questions for Campus Stores

1. One of the themes in the responses is the small degree to which these stakeholders generally think about the campus store. Your store needs to be front of mind when campus leaders are discussing and determining course materials strategies. What tactics are you and your staff employing to develop and nurture relationships with these campus colleagues?

2. Many interviewees expressed strong interest in the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching and learning, and possibly improving affordability. But most were unsure how to proceed. This suggests opportunities for the campus store to become a leader in digital course materials and related technologies on campus—a strategy suggested by the authors of the primary project White Paper, as well. How are you positioning your store to take a leadership role and serve as a consultant to your campus in the new course content ecosystem?

3. Other themes that emerged centered on the needs of faculty and students with regard to discovery and use of digital course materials and learning products as well as related copyright compliance issues. What roles can your store play in raising awareness, educating, and connecting students and faculty with resources and other experts?

4. The “Mapping the Learning Content Ecosystem” White Paper lists resources you can use to start conversations and engage stakeholders on your campus. Set a goal for yourself related to at least one stakeholder in this paper and start making an impact on their viewpoint. Which of your store strategies and/or thought positions are supported by the stakeholder feedback summarized in this paper? Which ones do you now want to reconsider?

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Contact Tony Ellis at tellis@nacs.org with questions about this paper.

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