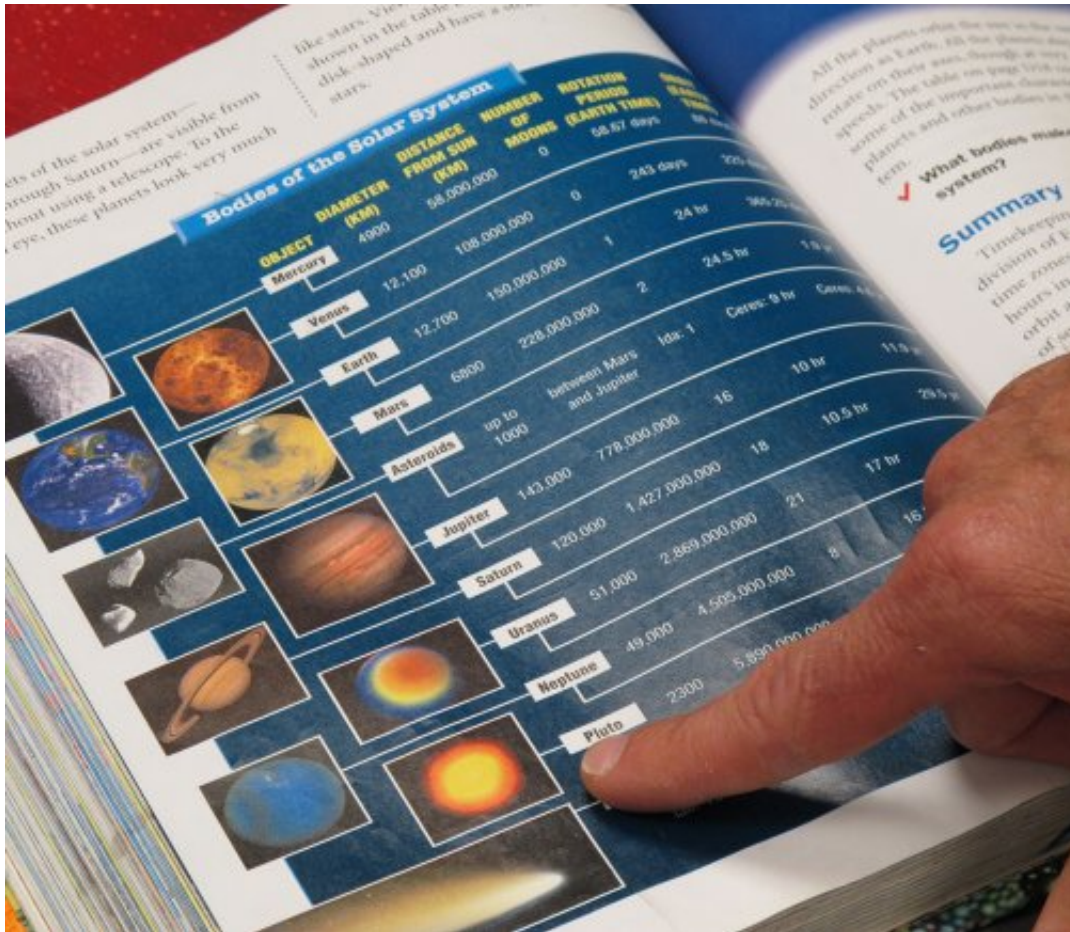


Print Textbooks Still Dominate Campus Textbook Market

In July, Cengage Learning, one of the biggest textbook publishers on the market, voluntarily [filed for bankruptcy](#). With almost \$6 billion in debt, the private equity-backed company laid out a restructuring plan to "introduce innovative digital and print products," and "meet our customers' evolving needs." This isn't necessarily the end of Cengage, but it does reflect the changes in the textbook industry. In an interview with *The New York Times*, shortly after declaring bankruptcy, [Cengage said](#) its decision will "support our long-term business strategy of transiting from traditional print models to digital educational and research materials."



Bruce Schreiner/AP

Cengage is slowly embracing digital learning methods in the wake of its finan-

cial trouble. Publishing giant McGraw-Hill is one step ahead. In a column for *Forbes*, McGraw-Hill vice president of learning solutions Tom Malek outlined a plan for replacing textbooks with e-books. Malek says e-books are the "presumed future of higher education," because they are cheaper and easier to transport. Since students prefer digital to print for everything else, they'll naturally feel the same way about textbooks.

But the transition to e-books on campus is likely to be slower and bumpier than many anticipate. As Malek notes, only around 3 percent of students use them. What's more, the price of e-books isn't necessarily dramatically lower than the price of comparable print textbooks. Meanwhile, many professors and students still prefer the analog to the digital models.

Taylor Scartozzi, a junior advertising major at the University of Texas, is sticking to print. "My favorite thing about having a printed textbook is that I can write notes directly onto the pages. When I go back to study later, the notes I make in my book help me to focus on studying."

I haven't given up on textbooks, but I rarely buy them. If I can, I get a digital version of a book on my iPad (which is often the cheaper option) or rent from sites like Amazon and Chegg.

But just because I prefer e-books doesn't mean everyone else does. I'm a sophomore at Hofstra University in New York, and most of my professors have allowed me to buy digital editions of my books. However, some of them (the same professors who prohibit note taking on laptops) are still against technology in their classrooms. They prohibit e-books, iPads, laptops, and cellphones and instead require students to use (and haul around) physical editions of the book.

The Kindle edition of a textbook for one of my journalism classes (which is required for every journalism major at Hofstra) costs \$38.61. But renting a used copy for the semester only costs \$22.50, and a brand-new version is \$49.95.

While I prefer having all my books on one light device, e-books are still not the cheapest option in every case. The Kindle edition of a textbook for one of my journalism classes (which is required for every journalism major at Hofstra) costs \$38.61. But renting a used copy for the semester only costs \$22.50, and a brand-new version is \$49.95. Another book for the same class costs \$19.25 for the digital edition, while a used rental only costs \$14. Such price discrepancies are one of the main reasons cost-conscious college students don't always embrace e-books.

It's somewhat ironic. For personal, economic, and institutional reasons, young people—who live their lives on smartphones, tablets, and computers—are still holding on to print textbooks. And they're likely to do so for several more years.

But there's a larger question on college campuses. With all the learning resources available, particularly online, do we even need to buy textbooks? The revenues of the textbook industry continue to grow, but that's largely because of the rise in prices. Textbook prices have tripled since 1986, at twice the rate of inflation. Students are still buying books, they're just not paying full-price. With each passing year, there are more options for buying secondhand books or renting them—online or in print.

Coming of age in the era of Airbnb, bike-sharing, Zipcar, and Rent the Runway, today's college students are also more comfortable sharing. A study in 2012 from e-book publisher [Bookboon](#) revealed that 75 percent of students decided not to buy their required textbooks. Some [70 percent of students](#) at the University of Oklahoma don't buy all their required books. Students said that the books were just too expensive, especially when they are only used once or twice a semester. Most students who choose not to buy either rent the books or borrow from friends.

Some schools are attempting to lower student's expenses by launching online books or using materials written by professors that cost much less. Half of my

professors at Hofstra assign only one book (or none), and it's typically not a traditional textbook; it's often a nonfiction book that coincides with the course material. One of the textbooks for my Politics of the Middle East class last semester (required for all political-science majors) cost over \$100 at the university bookstore. I bought it new on Amazon for less than \$20.

As deficits decline at the federal and state level, the era of austerity in the U.S. may be ending. But in the textbook, it's still going.