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# Making Sense of "Affordable" Course Materials Models

*Presentation to the Consortium of Academic and  
Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI)*

Wednesday, March 8th





# Illinois member libraries

- **Association of College & Research Libraries**
- **Illinois Wesleyan University**
- **Northwestern University**
- **University of Chicago**
- **University of Illinois at Chicago**
- **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**
- **American Theological Library Association**
- **College of DuPage**

**SPARC\***

Open  
Educational  
Resources

Day  
One  
Access

Low-Cost  
Textbook

Equitable Access

Flat  
Fee

Inclusive Access

Model





What are they and what  
do they actually mean for  
students?



# What is OER?

Open educational resources (OER) are course materials—from supplemental content to entire textbooks—that are free for people everywhere to use and repurpose.

# OER

- Digital access is available by day one at no cost to students (in at least one form)
- Access is free forever
- Students can choose low cost print option if desired
- Students retain access to materials forever
- Openly licensed so faculty can adapt materials to local needs


# Everything Else

- Digital: materials that are available in a digital format
- Low-Cost: a term often used in course marking to refer to materials under a certain amount
- Day One Access: a term used to describe providing materials by the first day of class
- Inclusive Access: sales model that adds the cost of digital course content into students' tuition and fees
- Equitable Access: a term often used for "flat fee" Inclusive Access programs (we prefer Flat-Fee Model)





What are the  
actual savings?



*I know they say it's cheaper, but that's not been my case. I pay more for inclusive access, and it's that one-time use that you don't have access to later.*



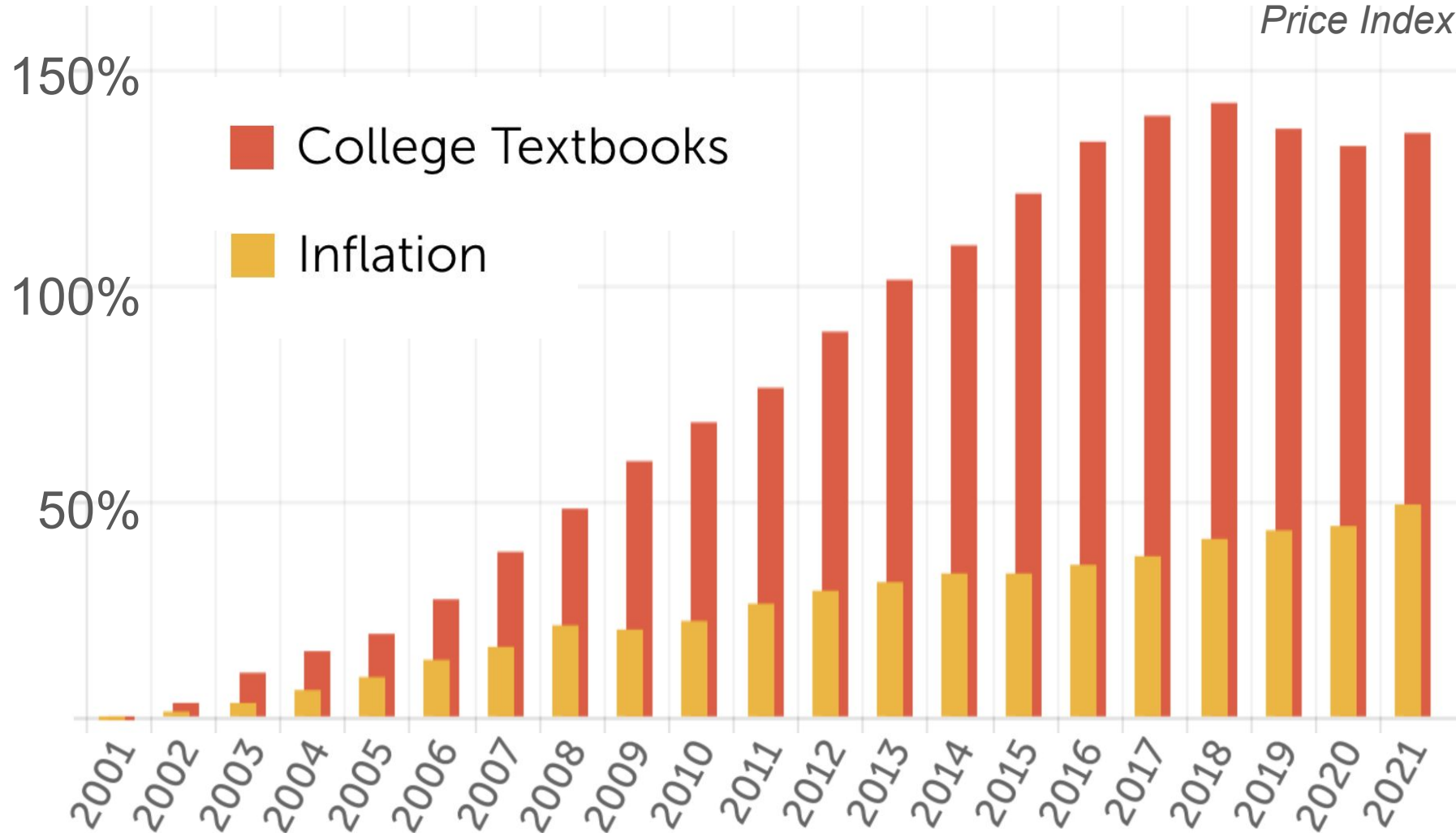
Barbara Gooch, Student

Volunteer State Community College | Gallatin, TN




# Textbook Prices 2001-2021

Source: Bureau of Labor  
Statistics Consumer  
Price Index.





Do students  
have a **choice**?



*The most pressing issue for students is cost and choice. Each student should have the choice to buy the textbooks that work best for them, and each student should be able to learn in a way that benefits them the most .*



Winni Zhang, Student

Washington and Lee University | Lexington, VA



A Data Mine?



# Student Data Collection

**Median student**



**1**

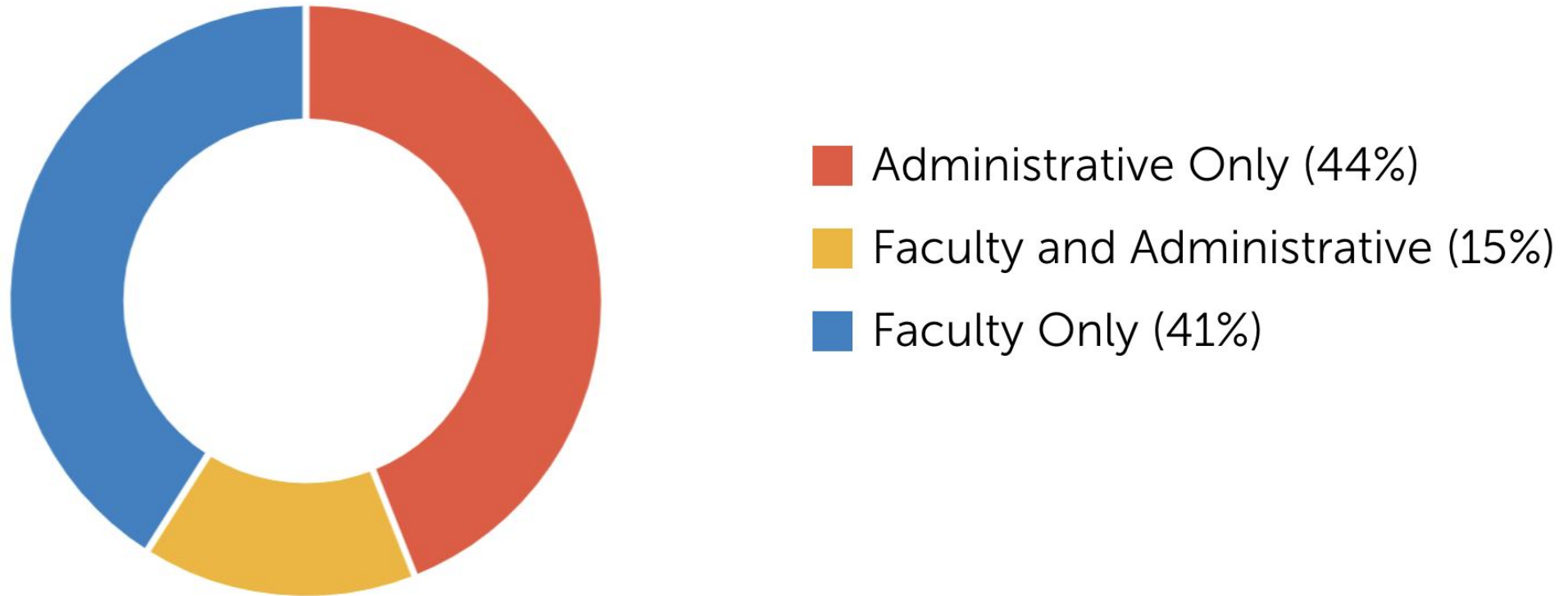
Poor understanding of publisher data collection policies for digital course materials

Perfect understanding of these policies and the ability to explain them to a peer

**10**

*Source: U.S. PIRG, Fixing the Broken Textbook Market, 2020*

# Inclusive Access: Who Decides?



Source: Source: Bay View Analytics, *Inflection Point: Educational Resources in U.S. Higher Education*, 2019

**How** to navigate these  
various models?



# Trends to watch

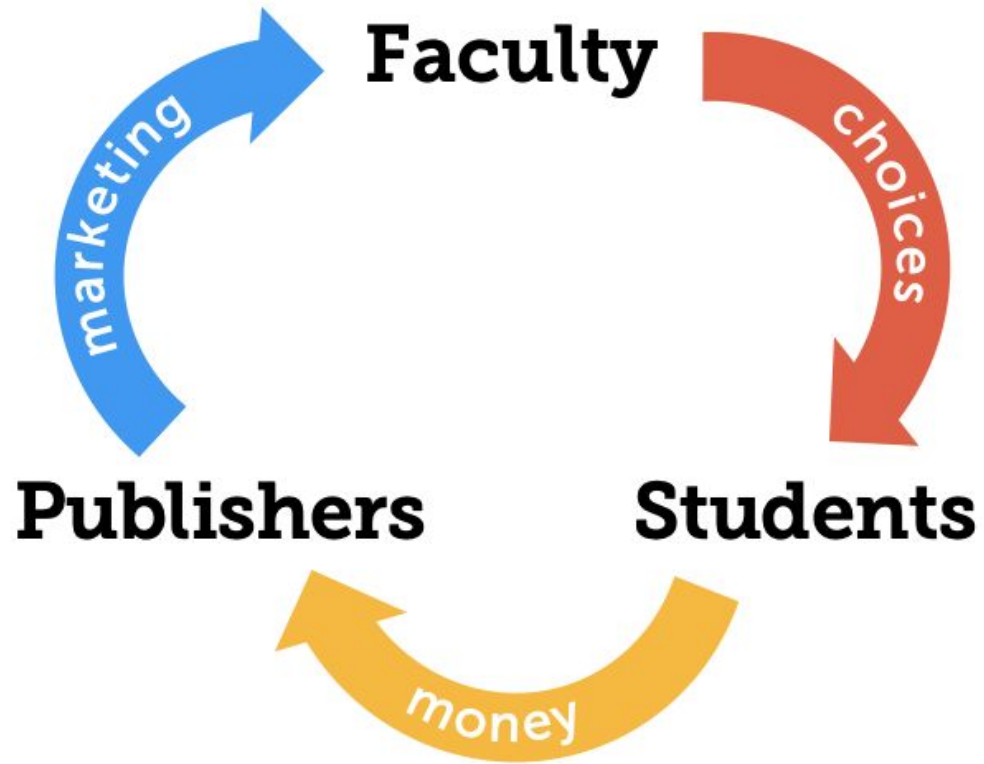
First Day Complete - Barnes and Noble

Follett ACCESS


Publisher strategies to use data

**SPARC\***





This is a market problem, not a procurement problem




# What can you do?

- **Be proactive.** Make sure admin, faculty, students are aware of OER initiatives how open practices have benefits beyond first day access.
- **Ask questions.** Thoroughly examine the legal, financial, and ethical implications of new models like Inclusive Access.
- **Be rigorous.** Ensure all claims about benefits and savings are backed up by independent evidence, including research and numbers.
- **Center equity.** Put student needs and voices at the center of the conversation – there is always time to consult and listen.

# Ask Questions!

1. Are there plans in place to independently verify the advertised savings of Inclusive Access and track them over time?
2. Are students fully informed about Inclusive Access costs and their right to opt out when they are registering for courses?
3. Are students informed about how Inclusive Access materials will collect and use their data before they are automatically billed?
4. Is the opt-out process simple, transparent, and clearly communicated to students?
5. What support mechanisms are in place for students who cannot afford Inclusive Access materials?
6. What plans are in place to regulate Inclusive Access prices, considering the industry's legacy of significant price inflation?
7. For flat-fee programs, are courses using OER exempt from the fee?



# Thinking beyond procurement

- Make decisions that align the institution's interests with those of students not the textbook industry
- Challenge the assumption that course materials should be procured vs. collected, tailored, and managed
- Lean into open educational resources as part of your sustainable digital infrastructure



# Questions

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