

Bookstores competitive

Students find creative cost-saving methods to acquire books

By Kathryn Borman
Staff Reporter

Purchasing textbooks can often be a confusing and costly new experience for freshmen at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

But UNL's textbook providers say this does not have to be the case.

Jim Bellman, textbook manager at Nebraska Bookstore, 1300 Q Street, said freshmen who have not had to purchase textbooks in the past might be shocked by the textbook cost of \$200-\$300 for one semester.

In order to reduce costs, students might buy textbooks only as they find they are needed for a course, he said, or they might look to other sources for acquiring texts.

Bellman said he had seen more students getting literature texts from either used paperback stores or the library.

Students also borrow textbooks from others who have previously taken the course.

He said students often do what they can to prevent themselves from buying texts as they become more expensive.

"Publishers are aware prices are going up and there will be market resistance," Bellman said. "If students are sharing books, the bookstore sells fewer books and the publisher sells fewer books."

He said that some publishers were introducing "no frills" textbooks which eliminated costly enhancements such as photographs, graphics and glossy pages to the cost of the book. Textbooks for technical subjects, such as horticulture or anatomy, however, often require photographs and graphics, Bellman said.

In addition, more advanced methods of conveying information to students, such as videotapes on television production or sign language, are beneficial but more expensive than traditional texts, he said.

Both Bellman and Gwen Behrends, textbook manager at the University Bookstore in the Nebraska Union,

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— Bellman, textbook manager, Nebraska Bookstore

said that their textbook departments attempted to be competitive, both in pricing and when buying back textbooks.

The main cost of textbooks is determined by the publisher, and as their prices increase, the bookstore's prices must increase also.

"Our store is right at the national average," Behrends said of the University Bookstore. She cited a recent convention of college bookstores she had attended, at which all representatives indicated a 25 percent markup on textbooks.

"We use that markup to cover shipping, handling, labor and possible return costs," she said.

Sometimes classes are cancelled

or enrollment is low in a course, and then the bookstore must cover return costs out of its profits, she said.

Behrends also said University Bookstore tried to be competitive on its book buy-back prices. She said the rate was 60 percent of the current price for books that the store would need for next semester.

However, the buy-back price decreased for books of which the store already had sufficient copies, and dropped to 10 percent for mass market literature novels.

Because textbooks are costly, there is a temptation for people to steal them and return or sell them back to the bookstores, Behrends said.

Popular spots for theft are at the stacks in the libraries when students leave their books unattended, in residence hall cafeterias where many students leave their books while eating and from the racks outside of the bookstores when students do not check their books with bookstore personnel or use book lockers.

Avoiding these situations reduces the risk of theft, Behrends said.

She also said students should identify their textbooks as soon as they have determined that none of their texts will need to be returned to the bookstore. This could be something as simple as writing one's name in the textbook or something more complex such as picking a page number and writing one's name or ID number near the binding on the page in every textbook.

If a student's textbook is stolen and they report it quickly to the University Bookstore, store personnel can be alerted if someone tries to sell back a copy of the stolen text, Behrends said.



David Badders/DN

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