

The Problem

In addition to rising tuitions and the decreasing availability of financial aid, the high cost of textbooks has become a serious concern for students and parents. A 2003 National Association of College Stores report indicates that the wholesale price for new college textbooks has risen almost 35 percent since 1998. Studies such as “Rip-off 101: How the Current Practices of The Publishing Industry Drive up the Cost of College Textbooks,” by the California Student Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG), 2004, have closely examined the upsurge in textbook prices. These studies have determined that textbook publishers drive up the cost of textbooks by such practices as “bundling” texts with materials that are seldom if ever used (such as CDs) and forcing cheaper used books off the market by publishing revised editions with little enhanced content. Some publishers simply alter the book format and page numbers to render older editions obsolete. Several U.S. Congress members and governors are calling for investigations into these practices. Meanwhile college students nationwide are paying close to \$900 per year for books, and prices are expected to increase by 10 percent a year.

The following information has been compiled to provide information about options for acquiring required textbooks and learning materials necessary for academic success.

What Can You Expect to Pay*?

Below is a sample of textbook prices in various disciplines typically taken by first-year students. Note that these are only the required textbooks; many classes also have additional recommended texts. Some courses require different texts for different sections, and in some cases multiple books are required for a course.

Area of Study	Course	No.	New Price	Used Price
Chemistry	General Chemistry (2 bks)	103	\$130.90	\$98.25
	Advanced General Chemistry	109	\$130.00	\$98.00
Economics	Principles-Microeconomics	101	\$87.00	\$65.00
Mathematics	Algebra	112	\$88.45	\$66.30
	Calculus with Algebra & Trig I	171 (2 bks)	\$168.75	\$125.95
	Calculus & Analytic Geometry	221	\$99.00	\$75.00
	Calculus & Analytic Geometry	222	\$81.25	\$61.00
Political Science	Intro. American Politics & Govt.	104	\$87.50	\$65.65
Psychology	Introduction to Psychology	202	\$84.00	\$63.00
	Psychometric Methods (Statistics)	210	\$95.00	\$71.25
Spanish	First Year Spanish	102	\$121.50	\$91.00
French	Intermediate Language & Culture	228 (2 bks)	\$52.00	\$39.00
Italian	First Semester Italian	101 (3 bks)	\$167.00	\$125.25
Zoology	Animal Biology	101	\$104.00	\$78.00

* These prices are averages based on postings at local bookstores. When multiple books were required the costs were combined.

What Can You Do?

Find out the required textbooks early. This is really the most important step. Early accessibility to booklists allows you more time to find books at the best possible prices. The university is working with departments and the libraries to make booklists available for courses as early as possible. You will be able to find some of these lists on university department Web sites, campus library Web sites, or independent Web sites such as ExchangeHut or WISPIRG.

Buy new from a bookstore. At a bookstore you will generally find the textbook that you are looking for at full price. The advantage of buying new is that you know you are getting the most up-to-date edition with any recently added bundled materials such as compact discs or software. Keep in mind that if you wait until the last minute to buy your books you will probably stand in long lines.

Buy new from other countries. In many cases the same book is available from another country at reduced prices. This is a result of U.S. publishers selling textbooks overseas at lower prices than they sell to American booksellers. Buying from an overseas company can save you money if you can plan ahead. On the American version of Amazon.com, a new edition of *Elementary Statistics* by Neil Weiss sells for \$102.69 (used for \$94.46). On the British Amazon.com (www.amazon.co.uk) that same book sells for the equivalent of \$80.43. It is important to make sure that they really have the books in stock, and don't forget shipping costs and delivery dates.

Buy used from a bookstore. This can save 25 percent or more off the cover price. Normally these books have been inspected by the store and are in very good shape. The supply is often limited and only available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Buy used directly from students. It is also possible to purchase books from students who have already taken the class. Savings can be much greater than 25 percent, however, the condition of the book cannot be guaranteed. There is also some risk in that the required text for a course may change from semester to semester so it is important to confirm the required text before buying from a student.

Buy from independent book swap Web sites or ebay. According to the CALPIRG report, “Online textbooks [and online purchasing options] hold promise for lowering the cost of textbooks.” Students have always found that swapping books saves money. Online exchanges now allow students to extend beyond their friends to the rest of the campus. As online swap sites continue to

grow in usage, more and more students will discover the benefits of textbook swapping. Currently there are several online purchasing options created by students and alumni where students buy and sell with their own set prices.

Local online book swaps include the Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group (WISPIRG) that has had an online site for many years www.campus-bookswap.com. It is non-profit and student-run. Students can post their books for sale and set their own prices. Prospective buyers can browse the site and contact the seller about when and where they may proceed with the transaction. There are no transaction fees.

The ExchangeHut (www.exchangehut.com) is another example of a local online marketplace where students can buy and sell their used textbooks at the fair-market value. Students can find the books they are required to use by navigating the site's timetable (a replica of UW's *Timetable*). In order to buy or sell a textbook from another student, you must sign up as a member. In theory, students will find the lowest price textbooks from each other since there is no middle-man marking up the price.

UW-Madison Libraries. The libraries will buy additional copies of textbooks to be placed on reserve in the appropriate campus library. Ask your instructor if it would be possible to fulfill the requirements of the course by using a library reserve-reading copy of the text. Library staff will work with the instructors to determine the optimum number of copies that will be needed to meet student demand for convenient access to the texts.

Some of the smaller libraries will also be posting course booklists as they are made available.

An additional hint. Talk with your instructors to see if they would agree that you could use an older edition of the same book as a reasonable alternative. In many situations, the newer editions are not significantly different than the old editions. Instructors are aware of this fact and are more than happy to help students save money by buying a used, older edition.

This brochure is the product of a task force charged with preparing a study of the impact of the rising costs of textbooks on UW-Madison students. The committee consists of students, faculty, and academic staff, with representatives from Associated Students of Madison, the Libraries, Business Services, and Student Affairs.



JANUARY 2005

