

Bookstore fee discourages text speculating

By Dane Claussen
Of the Emerald

Among the changes at the University Bookstore students may notice this fall are a 50-cent

per book "restocking fee," more discount sales and more in-store promotions and customer education.

But just as important are the

"behind-the-scenes" aspects, such as the installation of a \$74,000 computer, and continuing emphasis on service, quality, used books and retain-

ing the 11 percent textbook discount, says Jim Williams, bookstore manager.

The purpose of the restocking fee, which has already been tested in the University law school, is to discourage students from "speculating" — buying books they may not need because they drop a class or for other reasons. Restocking problems are compounded by students requesting that a book be reordered — at considerable expense to the store — then buying the book elsewhere or dropping the class, Williams says.

The restocking fee system has been successful at other college bookstores, notably Stanford, he says.

"Our intention is positive," Williams says, explaining that discouraging speculation will lessen bookstore operating costs and student inconvenience.

The bookstore also plans more discount sales to decrease college expenses for students and allow the bookstore to come closer to its goal — operating at a break-even point. More in-store promotion and education will alert bookstore "members" to the store's unique services, competitive prices and tough anti-shoplifting policy, he says.

The new computer — estimated to pay for itself in 2½ years — will improve efficiency at the bookstore in a number of ways, Williams says. Store employees will be able to give students more accurate information about the availability of books and provide professors with information about numbers of books purchased by students, among other services, he says.

The computer won't be a "cure-all," but "will allow more outreach," Williams says.

Without pre-registration, faculty "are in the dark on how many books they should order," Williams says, adding that the bookstore returns to publishers and wholesalers an average of 28 percent of the textbooks ordered.

Problems are compounded by a lead time of at least six weeks from the time professors contact the bookstore to the books being on the shelves, he says.

Used book sales, which increased 60 percent last year, will continue to be encouraged, Williams says.

Because attending college is expensive, students demand high quality goods at the lowest possible prices, Williams says, adding that he believes the bookstore has been especially

successful in this respect.

Bookstore prices are competitive with other merchants in the area, he says. The Western College Bookstore Association, for which Williams serves on a buying committee, takes bids for huge quantities of supplies, and keeps quality in mind as well, he says.

"You get the quality of a stationery store at a lower price," he says with pride.

The store also keeps prices as low as possible because of its fiscal goal to operate as close to a break-even point as possible, Williams says. Unlike 90 percent of other college bookstores, the University Bookstore is not under pressure to make a profit for the University administration or student union, but rather directed by its elected board to serve students, faculty and staff, he says.

Retaining the 11-percent textbook discount may conflict with the bookstore's fiscal goal. Plans currently call for the discount rate to be evaluated at the end of fall term, Williams says, adding that the store does 30 percent of the year's business in the first three weeks of fall term.

The discount rate, the highest of the nation's 72 "big college" bookstores, might have to be trimmed because of sales declines. Sales have dropped recently despite the bookstore selling textbooks below cost. The losses are made up in other departments, Williams says.

"The big unknown is fall enrollment," Williams says. Sales for fiscal year 1982-83 are already down 11 percent and that a 10 to 15 percent drop from last year's \$5.8 million gross income is projected, he says.

The bookstore also is a great service to students because of its product diversity, employment opportunities and services such as free check cashing, gift wrapping and notary public, he says.

"Members should expect a lot from their bookstore," Williams says, adding that students can always make suggestions at the Sounding Board on the second floor.

He says that the store's losses to shoplifting — \$60,000 to \$80,000 per year — do not represent large percentage but are notable, and that the store takes a tough stand on shoplifting.

"We employ student security guards... and then prosecute to the fullest extent of the law," Williams says. Prosecuting shoplifters is unpleasant but necessary, he says, adding that the bookstore's reputation among policemen and area legal circles is "impeccable."

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The bookstore is a great service to students because of its product diversity, employment opportunities and services such as free check cashing, gift wrapping and notary public.

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