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Store's business is books

By Julie Freeman

Of the Emerald

Stacked on the back shelves of the University Bookstore's second floor, textbooks containing everything from Shakespeare's greatest works to Spanish lessons may seem to be just another necessary task the Bookstore must attend to at the beginning of each term.

But while greeting cards and computers rather than books on chemistry or calculus occupy space on the main level of the building, textbooks represent almost 40 percent of the Bookstore's business and remain one of its central year-round concerns.

"They are one of our very basic responsibilities," says Jim Williams, bookstore general manager.

In fact, one of the main reasons the Bookstore deals with merchandise such as calendars and coffee mugs is so it can subsidize the sale of its books, which lose money for the bookstore annually.

Unlike many independent, college-based operations, the Bookstore discounts its books by 10 percent for the University's faculty, staff and students. Last year, for instance, it discounted \$360,000 worth of book costs for its customers.

Ironically, however, it is the store's book prices and abundance of commercial items that subject the Bookstore to its most frequent criticism, Williams says.

"Books are somewhat of a unique commodity," he says. "But one of the consistent goals of the Bookstore has been to provide students with their books on time and at the lowest possible cost."

Besides offering discounts to meet this goal, the Bookstore

recently has developed its own computer system to improve its ordering process and provide students with more lower-priced used books.

Despite this competitive approach to book sales, Williams does not believe the Bookstore is in direct competition with other bookstores in the area, such as the Smith Family Bookstore, which deals mainly in used books.

"One of the main distinctions between us and other bookstores is that we have an obligation to have all texts available on time for University classes," Williams says. "We don't have the option of ordering whenever we want."

Ordering the correct number of new and used books for a certain course is another difference, says Chris Standish, the Bookstore's course book manager.

"A lot of people complain when there are shortages of a certain book, but usually there are many more cases of overages than outages each term. And everything that is bought cannot be sold back to the publisher," Standish says.

The Bookstore also offers a two-fold buyback policy for books. The first policy offers students with their receipts a full refund for course books that are returned within three weeks after each term starts. The other policy provides a year-round buyback, based on the store's needs and a national wholesaler's demand.

Students can expect to get back about 50 percent of what a course book sold for new when they sell it back to the Bookstore, Standish says. But a slightly lower price is paid for



Photo by Karen Stallwood

books that are not used by the University and are sold to a wholesaler.

"Getting books back from students is the best way to get used books on the shelf," Standish says.

Used books provide a benefit for the student, who pays only three-fourths of the new book price and can then sell it back for more than half of what they paid at the bookstore.

The faculty is asked to make book orders the second week of each term. This way, the Bookstore can figure out how many new and used texts it must order, and what titles can be placed on the half-priced buyback lists, Standish says.

There still are problems to be worked out with the ordering process and the buyback system, but Williams says he believes the Bookstore is doing the best job it can.

"The reality is that students want relief from high book prices, and we're trying hard to give it to them," he says.



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