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LIVE @ THE GERLINGER LOUNGE

OSPIRG continues battle against textbook publisher

A widespread campaign seeks review of pricing by Thomson Learning and other book publishers

By Steven Neuman
 News Reporter

OSPIRG is taking continued action against what it deems as "a publisher's prominent refusal to stop driving up textbook costs."

At a rally last week, the student-activist group released a list of 540 math professors, department heads and graduate students from more than 100 schools who have signed a letter urging book publisher Thomson Learning to reconsider its current textbook policies. The letter was sent to the publisher April 6.

Thomson Learning/Brooks Cole, a division of the Thomson Corporation, is the publisher of "Calculus: Early Transcendentals," by James Stewart, a book that the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group claims is one of the most widely used calculus textbooks. The publisher released a new fifth edition of the book in 2003.

Speaking on the steps of Fenton Hall to a sparse audience, Corinne Cox, OSPIRG's Affordable Textbooks Campaign Coordinator, said Thomson had made little to no changes in the new book from the fourth edition released in 1999.

"Unfortunately, the only significant

"Thomson Learning says there are a lot of new features in edition five ... Is it really necessary for students to pay \$40 simply for new exercises?"

Corinne Cox
 Coordinator, OSPIRG
 Affordable Textbook Campaign

difference between these two textbooks is the price," Cox said. "The new fifth edition goes for about \$122 while the fourth edition can be found for \$20 to \$90, depending on where you look."

In U.S. dollars, the same text sells for the equivalent of \$95.78 in Canada and \$59.36 in Britain, according to OSPIRG.

"Thomson Learning says there are a lot of new features in edition five," she said. "In reality, they've changed some of the problem sets, consolidated some of the sections together and moved others around, and they also added a CD-ROM. Is it really necessary for students to pay \$40 simply for new exercises?"

Cox said that in the past, new textbook editions were released every five to 10 years. Now they are released every two to three years.

Thomson Learning spokesman Adam Gaber told the Emerald in January that the add-ons merely respond to expressed faculty and student needs.

"Both students and professors demand more and more access to technology to improve teaching and learning," he said via e-mail. "While these additional resources greatly enhance the value of textbooks, they also drive up the costs of developing, maintaining and supporting the modern textbook."

In the letter, OSPIRG supporters requested the publisher not release new editions unless significant changes are made. OSPIRG also wants Thomson Learning to make pricing more transparent and evenhanded, provide more information to faculty members up front about future plans for publications, and provide an online version of the calculus textbook.

Mathematics GT, Peter Dolan said he had to wait weeks on more than one occasion to finish buying his books because he had to save the money to buy the rest.

"I know many other students who

are in a similar situation," Dolan said. "I also know students who had to buy an expensive new version of the exact same book, and it was hardly any different from the previous one."

Math Professor Peter Gilkey said the mathematics department didn't have much choice in choosing the calculus textbook.

"... When the old one goes out of print, or goes into a new edition we have to write a new syllabus anyway, and the students have to buy new books anyway," Gilkey said. "That's the only reason we change textbooks."

Gilkey also expressed a distaste for new editions.

"I hate them," he said. "When you first write a book you're really enthusiastic. The second edition you're still really enthusiastic and you fix all the bugs. By the time you get to the fifth edition you're bored with it; it's an economic chore and it gets worse because you add a little extraneous material."

Senior mathematics major Tim Ryan said the number of new editions doesn't make sense for a subject like math.

"None of the math in these books has changed in the last 100 years," he said.

Cox said OSPIRG hopes the letters will force Thomson to change its policies, but the overall goal is to get as many publishers as possible to sign a code of ethics.

"The bad news is that Thomson Learning has completely dismissed student concerns and has refused to admit that there is even a problem with textbook prices," Cox said. "The good news is that today over 500 professors from over 100 of the largest and most prestigious universities across the country have joined in our effort."

Cox said if publishers will not listen to students she hopes they will listen to faculty.

Dolan said although he has little understanding of the nature of publishing and selling within the textbook market, he believes the current policies are unjust for consumers.

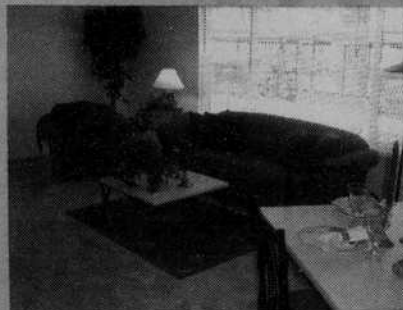
"Maybe with a little more public awareness the companies who are honestly trying to balance profit with product will be able to provide lower-cost alternatives that can still compete with those companies who have exchanged content for gimmicks and effort for unethical profit," Dolan said.

Contact the business/science/technology reporter at stevenneuman@dailyemerald.com.

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TOBACCO

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indicates that the University sanctions smoking and/or chewing, which contradicts messages about the dangers of its use," the report states.

Junior political science major Rebekah Lebwahl, a former Peer Health Educator, said that the University is the only school in the Pacific-10 Conference to profit from tobacco sales on campus.

"It's an embarrassment," Lebwahl said. "We hope to get tobacco sales off campus. We feel it goes against the mission of the University and the EMU."

The EMU Board has voted against the recommendation in the past, but Lebwahl hopes this time will be different because more student activists are involved in the push to end tobacco sales on campus.

Lebwahl added that it isn't just an issue of smokers' rights on campus but also a question of the rights of

non-smokers to breathe healthy air.

According to Staight, CAB is not currently working to ban smoking on campus, but she said that there are several models available for smoke-free campuses. She said that they are currently working, however, to expand the "10-foot rule" so that people must be more than 10 feet away from a building before smoking.

Staight added that the University Health Center currently has a grant to provide nicotine patches and gum to students to help them quit smoking.

Since the beginning of the service in fall 2003, 345 students have been provided with nicotine products, Lebwahl said.

Lebwahl encourages any student who wants Erb Essentials to discontinue tobacco sales to attend the Wednesday meeting and possibly even testify for the recommendation.

Contact the crime/health/safety reporter at liscatto@dailyemerald.com.