

# Textbooks: GAO report says textbooks prices have increased 6 percent

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at the request of Congressman David Wu last year, which states that the price of textbooks is "skyrocketing."

In the past, textbook price increases were blamed on inflation. However, the GAO report, which confirms previous research by nation-wide student Public Interest Research Groups (student PIRGs) found that textbook prices have risen at double the rate of annual inflation since the mid 1980s. While the overall price inflation rose

3 percent annually, textbook prices rose an average of 6 percent.

According to the GAO report, reasons for the increase include the publishers' response to meet the demands of instructors on "bundling" CD-ROMs and workbooks with textbooks, increased investment by publishers in making these accommodations, and unnecessary new editions each year.

"Publishers say they have increased investments in developing

supplements in response to demand from instructors. Wholesalers, retailers, and others expressed concern that the proliferation of supplements and more frequent revisions might unnecessarily increase costs to students," the report states.

University President Dave Frohnmayer is familiar with the burden of paying for textbooks, but he said that because the University is not in an adversary position with the University Bookstore, "the real issue is with

textbook producers."

"Everybody is looking for areas of discretionary spending because the cost of college in general is rising," Frohnmayer said. He added that professors have the ability to require used books, because new editions are not always necessary, but for students, he recommended taking advantage of books on reserve at the library.

"Penny-pinching students can find ways to avoid (high prices), and more library time" is one of them, he said.

But for students who enjoy marking up their pages or who lack the extra hours needed to take notes from books on reserve, purchasing online may be a solution.

The bookstore does provide advice in pamphlets and brochures for saving money, such as "Textbooks 101," which explains that "the UO Bookstore is listening" to student needs about costs, long lines and other hassles.

The tips provided in this and other brochures do not include purchasing textbooks online.

"(University bookstores) have a short window of opportunity when students return for school. They have a limited number of weeks to make their money," said Richard Davies, public relations manager for abebooks.com.

"The results of the GAO report didn't surprise us; it confirmed previous reports," Davies said.

He said the online market offers low prices on nearly every subject.

"I think students are fairly wise to that, but some students haven't been around long enough to know. I feel quite sorry for the freshmen, actually," Davies added.

While the University Bookstore advises against going online for textbooks, the GAO report and all previous student PIRG reports highly recommend using the online marketplace. And because the University has no plan to combat these higher-than-necessary prices because students going online for textbooks has yet to impact bookstore sales, according to Frohnmayer, the ball remains in the student's court in terms of making textbooks affordable.

The Emerald researched the difference in cost between buying books online and at the bookstore at student prices, which are discounted 10 percent for new books and 32 percent for used books.

Students taking History 101 this fall are required to purchase the new edition of "Discovering the Western Past." It will cost \$24.19 at abebooks.com, which includes shipping, whereas the campus bookstore charges \$44.75, which already includes the 10 percent discount. If students purchase this book used at the bookstore with the 32 percent discount, they will still save an additional 28 percent by going online.

For Chemistry 111 fall term a new edition of "Chemistry for Changing Times" is required. The books costs

\$66.75 online versus \$98.75, including the 10 percent student discount, at the bookstore for the same edition.

Nonetheless, the bookstore's tips, whether or not they actually save money, do come in handy. One suggests going to class early to make sure students buy the books that professors put on their syllabus.

"Sometimes profs change their minds after telling the bookstore to order the books," one brochure states.

The second and third savings recommendations are to understand the return policy before you buy and save your sales receipt. Steps four and five advise students to keep books in pristine condition to ensure a full refund if returned and buy used textbooks when available.

The back flap of one brochure warns against online purchasing, a money-saving tip recommended by student PIRGs, because students could purchase the wrong edition, not get the book in time for class, pay more in shipping, be taxed heavily, get scammed by publishers that "promise huge discounts" and have no options to return the book.

Many of these warnings no longer apply for most online suppliers because of increased competition in the online market. As bookstore prices climb, more students are steering away from the campus bookstore. Thinking a week ahead yields an average savings of 60 percent.

The California Student PIRG found, and the GAO report officially confirmed, that more than 50 percent of professors do not use additional materials, so if "bundled" materials are not included online — they usually are — students need not worry.

As far as buy-backs, if students do not make it during the three-week period after every term, when the bookstore pays 20 to 60 percent of a book's value, they will receive 0 to 20 percent the value of their original purchases. Also, shrink-wrapped texts with CD-ROMs and workbooks will not be accepted without the CD or if the workbook has been written in.

Smith Family Bookstore on East 13th Avenue buys back books at the same exchange rate as the bookstore 10 months out of the year, and, unlike the University bookstore, it accepts books not purchased from their store.

To get involved in the books-price war, contact OSPIRG at 346-4377 or visit Suite 1 in the EMU.

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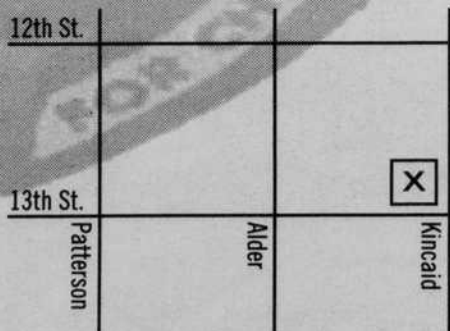
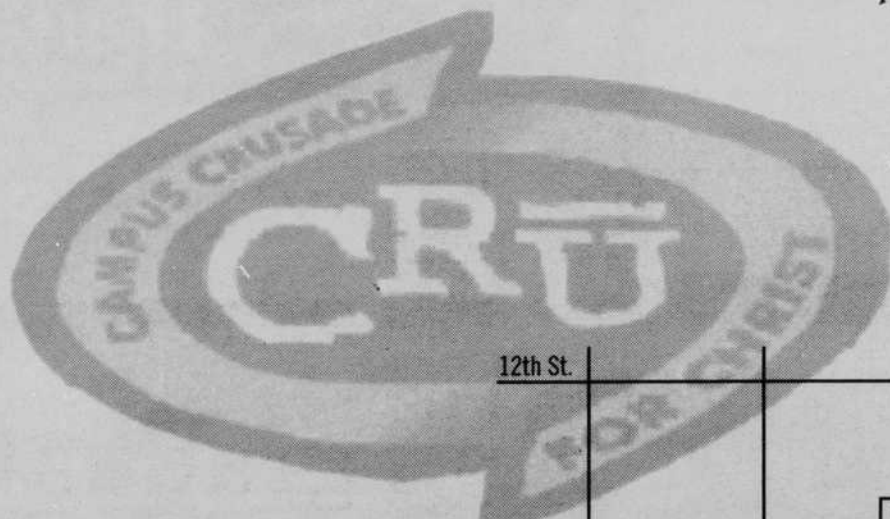
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# Curious?

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