

New options for cheaper textbooks available

As a selected participant in a nationwide experiment, the UO Bookstore makes digital textbooks available

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SENIOR NEWS REPORTER

On the University campus, two new computer-related methods are being used to help students get cheaper textbooks: digital textbooks and a student-created search engine that compares prices of textbooks throughout the English-speaking world.

This year, the University of Oregon Bookstore was selected as one of 10 college bookstores across the country to offer Universal Digital Textbooks.

Digital textbooks come in the form of a card with two code numbers on it. To activate the course hook, a student goes to the Universal Digital Textbooks Web site at www.digital-textbooks.net and enters the two codes as well as a code from the bookstore receipt. The textbook then downloads from the Web site to the

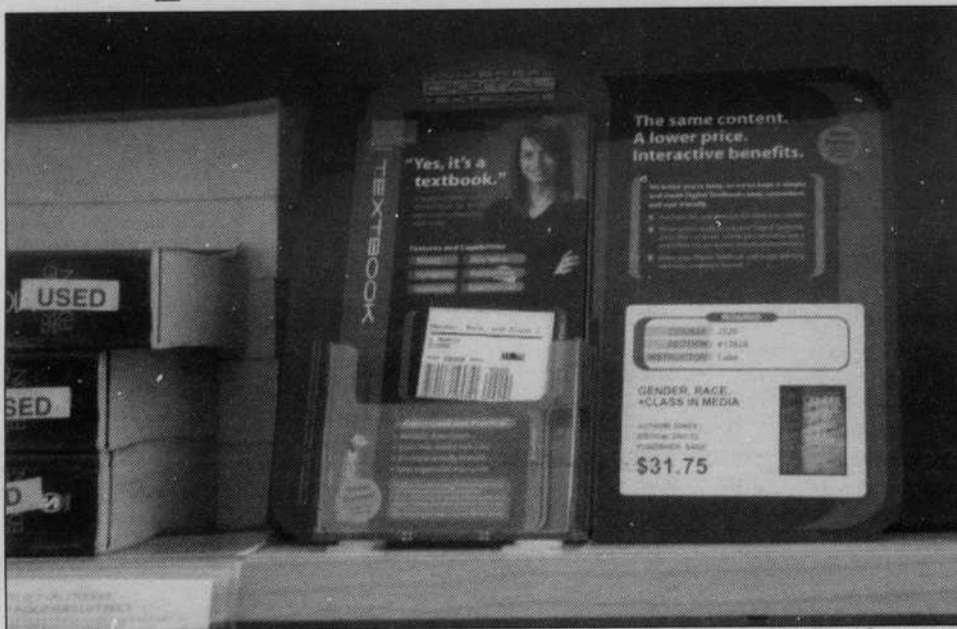
student's computer.

Digital textbooks work on any computer that has high-speed Internet access and Adobe Reader 6.0 or above, according to the bookstore's Web site. They use five to 100 megabytes on a computer hard drive and cannot be burned onto compact discs or other removable media.

Fifteen course books in various departments are currently offered in this format.

Some digital textbooks have limits on how many months they are valid, or how many pages can be printed at a time; but bookstore book-division manager Chris Standish said he expects those policies to be phased out.

Standish said the bookstore became a pilot customer in part because MBS Textbook Exchange, the company that makes digital textbooks, makes other software that the bookstore is already using.



ZANE RITT | PHOTOGRAPHER

The University Bookstore now offers digital textbooks in addition to regular books. Most are offered at a lower price than their paper counterparts.

But many other universities use MBS Textbook Exchange products, and not all were selected for the ex-

periment. Standish said he thinks the bookstore was selected because it is unusually student-oriented, with student ownership and a 10-percent discount for students on all books.

Digital textbooks are typically cheaper than their paper equivalents. For example, at the bookstore, "Consumer Behavior," the text for Marketing 435, costs \$129.50 new, \$97.15 used, and \$92 in the digital format.

Journalism professor Duncan McDonald, who is using a digital textbook for his Journalism 101 class, said they are a good resource for students who have the necessary technology and who can handle staring at a screen for long periods of time.

"Certainly the price is right," McDonald said.

He added that the digital textbooks are not necessarily affordable for everyone.

"Unless a student is financially equipped to have his or her own personal computer, it just creates another issue," McDonald said.

Another possible concern is the fallibility of technology.

"If you've lost your computer, you've lost your book, too," McDonald said.

It's too soon to say how well the digital textbooks are selling, Standish said, but the bookstore could stock as many as 150 titles in digital format winter term if the experiment goes well.

New search engine

One week ago, philosophy major senior Trevor Seherer created his own Internet search engine, www.textbookhunt.com, for finding cheap textbooks. A user can type the desired book's serial number, or ISBN, into www.textbookhunt.com and a list of the book's prices at six online retailers in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada will pop up.

"I'd just read an article in the Christian Science Monitor about how textbook prices are typically lower outside of the U.S., did a little research to validate this claim and then wrote the site," Seherer said in an e-mail.

For example, "Public Administration: An Action Orientation," the text

for Planning, Public Policy and Management 201, retails new for \$84.50 at the bookstore. According to www.textbookhunt.com, the book is available for \$48.58 at The Book Place, an online retailer based in the United Kingdom.

"I'm sure it happens from time to time," Seherer wrote, adding that the bookstore's 10-percent discount can help beat competition. "However, I've seen discounts upwards of 50 percent for books purchased from outside the U.S. For a \$100 book at that kind of discount, even with international shipping, you can save \$30 or \$40."

The shelves at the bookstore now include lists of the prices of selected textbooks at five U.S. online retailers: Barnes & Noble, www.amazon.com, eCampus.com, Powell's Books and www.half.ebay.com so students can compare prices.

"We started doing that because we were in the stacks listening and students were saying, 'Go online, it's cheaper!'" Standish said.

Bookstore staff checked the Web sites and found this to be inaccurate, Standish said.


"In 85 percent of the cases, we were either the lowest priced provider or within \$2 of the lowest priced provider," Standish said. "We're proud of the pricing we have, and we're willing to put it out there."

Standish cautioned against the use of foreign textbooks because they are designed differently from their U.S. equivalents and are made with less care. Sometimes the books are in black and white instead of color or are paperback instead of hardcover. They may also have different pagination.

"The international edition is really sketchy if you're going to follow along side-by-side with your professor's assignments out of the U.S. edition," Standish said.

It is illegal to import foreign textbooks in large quantities for resale, Standish said, though single-copy sales are allowed.


Contact the business, science and technology reporter at esywester@dailymerald.com



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