

## Professor says sticker-shock inevitable...

# Why Do College Students' Textbooks Cost So Much?

Students returning to fall semester classes are facing sticker-shock in college bookstores. Textbooks that formerly ran \$40 to \$80 a few years ago, now cost \$200 and \$300 each.

### Behavior Changes

As a result, students' textbook-buying behavior is changing.

According to a survey of students reported in a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education*, more college students are viewing textbooks as recommended rather than required and are waiting to see how much the material is used before they buy them.

### Materials Costs Decrease

A 2015 survey by OnCampus Research found that student spending on class materials dropped from \$638 in the 2013-14 academic year to \$563 for the 2014-15 year.

In addition to students waiting to see whether the materials will actually be used in class, part of this drop was a shift to cheaper textbook rental.

### Online Packaging

About 11 percent of students now have some courses that use new "integrated learning systems," where the text, videos, quizzes and homework are delivered online.

Publishers have realized at big research universities that value only research, many instructors of large classes are glad to turn over these teaching duties to a publisher's online system. This essentially turns the lecture course into a pre-packaged operation that is impersonal and standardized.

### Extra Trimmings Not Necessary

The production cost for a paper textbook is actually very low. Most \$200 textbooks could be profitably sold

to students for \$40, if it were not for the electronic ancillaries and support services that publishers feel they must provide to compete. Those are extra "bells and whistles" that most students do not use.

### Print Still Reigns

Meanwhile, surveys of college students reveal that they continue to overwhelmingly prefer paper text over e-texts for a variety of reasons that are supported by research on deep reading, reading speed, comprehension and skimming.

### No Shakedowns Allowed

Some professors are sensitive to their students' dilemmas and recognize the legalized extortion involved. They are encouraging colleagues to not require a textbook if they don't use it!

Some make textbook adoption decisions based on the best-book-at-the-cheapest-price and only adopt a text after it has been on the market a semester, so there are used books available.

### Serious Quality Issues

One solution that is not working is the use of "open source" online materials. Depending upon the discipline, there can be serious concerns with quality. Copyright-free material is often out-of-date.

Good publishers subject texts to careful peer review that is often missing in open source materials that are cobbled together from questionable sources. And online open source materials continue to have the drawbacks of e-texts and other electronic media.

### Royalties No Problem

Royalties to authors of bonafide textbooks are rarely a factor in the high costs of textbooks.

Copyright is not the problem driving up textbook costs.

*Thanks to Dr. John Richard Schrock for permission to reprint this insightful article. Dr. Schrock is a professor at Emporia State University in Kansas.*

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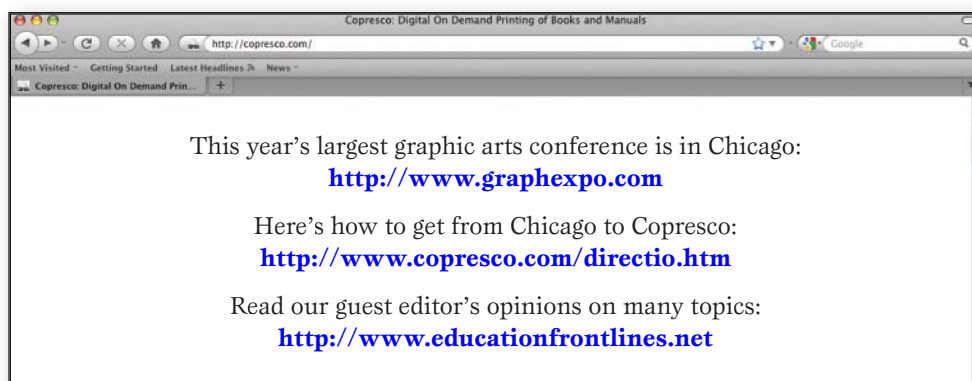
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After playing outside all day, a little boy all covered in dirt, came inside and marched up to his mother. "Guess who



I am?" "I give up," the mother replied. "Who are you?" "Wow! Mrs. Johnson was right!" the boy squealed. "She said I was so dirty, my own mother wouldn't recognize me!"

You know you're over the hill when you try to straighten out the wrinkles in your socks and discover you aren't wearing any.

"What happened to you?" a mother asked her 10-year-old daughter who came home from school all dirty with grass stains. "Billy Edwards kissed me on the playground," she answered through clamped teeth. "My!" the mother gasped. "I see you put up quite a fight." "I sure did," the little girl replied resolutely. "It took three of us to hold him down."

A real estate agent saw a "For Sale" sign on a house, and barged right in. "You must let me sell this for you," she insisted. "If we get rid of this atrocious wallpaper, paint over these depressing colors and pull up this filthy carpet, I can get you twice as much for this place!" "I appreciate all of your suggestions," the owner replied, "but I think you read the sign wrong. It says, 'Horse for Sale.'"



A koala entered a restaurant and ordered a sandwich. When finished, he pulled out a pistol, shot the waiter and walked out the door. "Hey!" the shocked



owner called after him. "Who do you think you are, eating my food, shooting my employee, and walking out without paying?" "Hey, I'm a koala," the bear yelled back over his shoulder. "Look it up." The bartender frantically grabbed a dictionary, flipped through the pages and found this entry: "Koala: n. a marsupial that eats shoots and leaves."

An English teacher spent a lot of time correcting grammatical errors on her students' papers and was beginning to doubt whether she was getting through to them. One day as the stress got to her, she leaned over her desk and rubbed her temples. "What's the matter, Mrs. B?" one passing student asked. "Tense," she mumbled. The student hesitated a moment, then said, "What could be the matter? What has been the matter? What was the matter?"



You can gauge ambition by whether someone considers his alarm clock a friend.



A hiker came to a river and saw a little boy on the other bank. "Yoo-hoo," he shouted, "how can I get to the other side?" The boy looked up and shouted back, "You already are on the other side."



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