



TEXTBOOKS F.A.Q. FOR FACULTY – Part 2

Textbook Quantities & Textbook Prices – The Straight Answers

A. Textbook Quantities - how much *does* the bookstore order?

1. I always request more than enough books for my classes but sometimes the bookstore runs out - how can this happen?

The truth is we have to edit the quantities requested on your requisitions. From the estimated enrollment you provide, we look at a number of factors to determine how many books we will probably be able to sell, including:

- past sales history for a given title
- enrollment history for a particular course and instructor
- enrollment projections from the college
- length of time a title has been used on this campus (the longer a book has been used, the fewer copies we sell, generally)

Our goal is to have exactly one copy of each adopted title left over by the middle of the quarter. That way we know we didn't over-order, but we didn't miss a student either. In practice, it rarely works out that way - we always have some titles that don't sell at all, and no matter how carefully we make our decisions there are always some titles we sell out of. If that happens during the first two weeks of the quarter, we rush reorder books via 2nd day air or overnight (depending on the publisher) to minimize the waiting period for students missing books.

Please notify us if there is some reason that would increase demand for the book - i.e. the class has been heavily advertised for the first time, or it's become a required prerequisite for another popular class, the book is being used differently in the course, etc.

2. Checking enrollments makes sense, but don't you order one book for each student in the class?

No, textbook sales and enrollment are hardly ever a one-to-one correlation, for several reasons. To list just a few:

- **Competition!** Between off-campus stores like UBE, online e-tailers, auction sites, and students putting posters up on kiosks, we are not the only source for books for Cal Poly students.
- Students are "savvy" shoppers these days - they wait to see if the book marked "Required" on the tag is really going to be necessary to pass the class. If they don't need it, they won't buy it.
- Students arrange to purchase and share texts in groups, and then study together.

3. I thought it didn't matter if books were over-ordered, because the bookstore can return all the extras - right?

Not necessarily. We often can't return used books. Even for new textbooks, most publishers penalize bookstores for returns over 15-20% of the total orders. Many smaller publishers allow only very limited returns or no returns at all. Federal and State publications, Graphics coursepacks, and similar items are all completely non-returnable.

4. I always use the same books, so it shouldn't matter if you have a lot left over from term to term.

It's true that books don't "spoil" if left on the shelf, but they do get worn and scuffed, possibly becoming damaged enough to be unsaleable. It costs us to keep lots of unsold inventory, and we have limited storage space. Since editions change so frequently, we can't afford to bank on the "always" requisition and keep several quarters' worth of a textbook on hand.

B. Textbook Prices & the necessity of used books

1. Why do textbooks cost so much, anyway?

Several factors have contributed to the sharp rise in costs over the past several years:

- Production and development costs, especially the costs associated with online content and technology, have risen dramatically.
- The growing used book market has meant a decreasing market share for publishers.
- Buyouts and mergers have decreased competition and increased costs.

For more information on textbook costs, check out the Government Accountability Office's report released in August 2005 at: www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-0806.

Bronco Bookstore's margins are well within industry norms, and we use the same formulas year after year. Price increases come strictly from publishers. We recognize that textbooks are an increasing financial burden for students, so we try to reduce the overall cost to students by providing as many used books as possible, and working with publishers to find ways to reduce costs with bundles/custom books where appropriate.

2. What does the bookstore actually make on textbooks?

Our target gross margin on new textbooks is 25%. **Margin** is the difference between a book's selling price and the store's cost from the publisher; for example, for a \$100 textbook, we pay \$75 to the publisher. But we have other costs beyond our bills from publishers. From that \$25 "profit" \$3- \$4 goes for incoming freight, and \$17-\$18 to pay general overhead costs such as rent or depreciation and utilities, labor costs for store personnel to do the ordering, receiving, shelving of books, cashiers, customer service, and freight/handling charges to return extra textbooks back to the publisher. Only the remaining \$3-\$5 is net store income - and much of that goes back to the university through the **Cal Poly Pomona Foundation**.

3. Why are used books important?

Used books save students 25% compared to new prices. In today's world of soaring educational costs and falling levels of aid, students literally demand the savings of used books. They are usually willing to put up with texts that are in less than pristine condition if it will stretch their textbook budget that much further.

4. But surely the bookstore sells only new copies of lab books, study guides, etc.?

Not necessarily. If we know that a particular course doesn't actually require the fill-in portion of a workbook/lab manual, or if we think we can get clean (defined as less than 10 pages marked) copies we will still try to provide at least some used copies to save students money. However, if an instructor or department specifically requests on the requisition forms that we carry only new copies we will honor that request.

5. What about custom books or packages, don't they save students more money than used books?

It depends! For packages, is the supplement something students actually would use, if it were sold separately? Is it likely to slow down production and shipping considerably? Are their copyright clearance issues? Will using this package decrease the amount students can get for their book at buyback? There are many issues to consider in any package, and you should always let the bookstore know if you're thinking of adopting a package or custom book.

6. What else can I do as an instructor to keep textbook costs reasonable for my students?

- **Communicate clearly with your publishers' reps!** Let reps know that student book price is a crucial adoption factor. Push for less expensive alternatives like paperback or "essential" versions without as many fancy features. Tell the reps if you think texts in your field don't need to be updated every two years. Be specific about how these issues affect your adoption decision.
- **Stick with a textbook as long as possible.** This allows us to buy back books and order used copies from wholesale companies. We can even provide used copies of the old edition for up to a year after the new one comes out – but only if we have the requisition in time to do buyback and used book searches.
- **Try using a trade book that covers your discipline** rather than a dedicated "textbook." Also check out paperback only vendors like Dover Thrift and Atomic Dog.
- **Order your books by the deadline every term.** Shipping takes time, and rush shipping costs more. This is one of the bookstore's biggest expenses related to textbooks. Also, the earlier you turn your requisition in the more likely we are to be able to stock used copies.
- **If your department has a lot of instructors/sections added at the beginning of the quarter, try to choose a text for them and get it ordered.** Students will be thankful for the common text in a multi-section class. This also allows us to buy used books and ensures that scholarship students and veterans will be able to get their books.
- **Create a course packet or reader.** Sometimes course packets or readers make the most sense. Requiring students to purchase two or three texts when you plan to use limited portions of those books puts unnecessary financial strain on students. Our department provides custom publishing services in partnership with Graphics Services, and we assure copyright compliance.
- **MOST IMPORTANTLY: USE the textbooks you ask students to buy!** Students are more likely to see the value in a text they use in class. Some students are always going to put on evaluations that you used the text too much but that is better than not enough, or sometimes not at all.

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The Book Department of BRONCO BOOKSTORE is here to serve Cal Poly's learning community of students and faculty by ensuring that all course materials necessary for student success are available and correct. We believe the best way to accomplish this is for instructors and bookstore staff to work together and communicate.

Please feel free to contact us anytime with your questions or concerns regarding textbooks or stop by the store and visit.

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