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Net books help CU students cut costs

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ITHACA — Students at Cornell University will for the first time be able to purchase eBooks for specific classes in the upcoming school year, an official said.

The move is an effort by the school to offer students more affordable options for text books.

A government study last year found that the cost of textbooks rose more than twice the rate of inflation in the past two decades.

The textbook business is a \$6 billion industry, and students are beginning to voice concern over the high cost of books, taking specific issue with the speed at which new editions come out, making old editions seemingly obsolete.

Margie Whiteleather is the strategic project manager for Cornell Business Services, under which Cornell's bookstore falls. She said a Cornell student will spend about \$1,000 on books every year.

“We share the concerns of the students over the increasing textbook cost,” Whiteleather said. “We have doubled our supply of used books in recent years. We try to buy back as many used books as we can from students.”

Whiteleather said used books account for 36 percent of the Cornell bookstore's inventory.

Michael Bovi, the director of college stores for Ithaca College, said used books are also a focus of Ithaca College.

“We work very hard to try to provide the largest amount of used books that we can,” he said. “We work with used book wholesalers and we buy back books from students several times a year.”

Bovi said used books account for 25 to 30 percent of the Ithaca College's bookstore inventory. He said the school has yet to offer its students eBooks.

Whiteleather said eBooks, textbooks that can be downloaded from the Internet, are also a way to help save students money. She said the eBooks can be up to 43 percent cheaper than a physical copy of the same title.

Many of the eBooks allow students to print limited numbers of pages from the text each week, to prevent pirating.

The school is offering 13 titles that will be used in 17 different courses.

Ilan Safir, a junior at Cornell majoring in Biology, carried two large bags full of books as he left Cornell's bookstore on Monday. He said he spent about \$540 on texts for the upcoming semester.

“The books are kind of really expensive,” he said. “But what can you do?”

Safir said he finds some of his text books to not be worth the price when professors only use a couple of chapters to support classroom instruction.

Students have also complained about the frequency at which new editions of textbooks are released.

“This is a vicious circle where the new editions are coming out to try and control or limit the used book market,” Whiteleather said. “Some publishers will tell you that the used book market is driving up the cost of text books.”

Whiteleather said students should communicate with their professors to see if older editions of a textbook can still be used for a course.

Bovi said the issue of expensive textbooks is overblown. He said parents and students should simply realize book prices are just part of the education process.

“We'll sell a \$70 sweatshirt and nobody ever complains, but we sell a \$70 book and everyone complains,” he said. “You get nothing for that sweatshirt at the end of the year, but what you learned from that book no one can ever take that from you.”

Freeload Press, a new textbook provider, is offering free eBooks to students this fall. The books are free because they have advertisements in them for companies such as FedEx Kinko's and Pura Vida coffee.

Lisa Blum, a graduate student at Cornell, said she wouldn't mind the books as long as the advertisements didn't interfere with studying.

“It depends on how distracting they were,” she said. “If it were just a few ads, that wouldn't be so bad, but if they were on every other page, I wouldn't like that and I'd rather just pay for the book.”

Whiteleather said Freeload's model is interesting.

“I think it's a great idea,” she said. “If it's saving a \$100 dollars students won't mind seeing the ads. But until they can infiltrate the larger book providers they won't have a huge impact. I think our whole business should be looking at other models to try and solve the cost issue.”
