

# Brunswickan examines bookstore prices and services



Most people think the UNB Bookstore turns over a good profit on its sales and is at least partially responsible for the high price of text books. Marv Greenblatt, student member on the Senate Bookstore Committee, disputes this.

By MARY GREENBLATT

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Almost everybody complains about high prices and poor service at the UNB Bookstore. Marv Greenblatt, student member of the Senate Bookstore Committee, says that this is unjustified.

"Wow! Twenty dollars for this textbook. Why, there can't be any more than 60 or 70 pages in this book. What a rip!"

How often around this time of year have we heard this comment echoing around the Bookstore cash registers? The fact of the matter is, that while somebody may be making money off textbooks, it certainly isn't the Bookstore, for it is basically a break even operation.

Located in its present location since 1963, next to the bank, the Store exists solely to provide required texts, necessary stationary materials and books for courses here at the University. As well, records, crested items, cards, posters, gifts and paperbacks are sold. The staff welcomes special orders on these items.

Why do textbooks cost as much as they do? There are several factors involved. First it should be realized that publishers set the retail price, not the Bookstore. The staff simply price the books and place them on the shelves. One reason for the high cost is that most are limited quantity printings that appeal to a small market. Only a few classes across the country may be using a certain text at a given time. A publisher then has to work with a hefty markup so as to recover his costs on the limited production run. This

differs from mass-produced paperbacks where everybody involved, from publisher to seller, can take just a little profit from each copy because of the vast quantities printed.

Another important factor is that quite often highly technical books become obsolete quite fast. This means that these books are priced higher so as to be profitable before they become outdated.

Textbooks suffer an extra burden in that the year's supply is ordered for the first of the term and has to stay in stock till the end; all the while accumulating interest and carrying charges. Since the inventory is financed with borrowed money, this adds considerably to overhead expenses and interest rates nowadays are high. Still another contribution to textbook costs is inflation in both materials and labour.

Since 1951 Mrs. Marjorie Logue has been manageress of the Fredericton Bookstore. A graduate of UNB, she holds a Masters degree in Biology. Assisting her are 16 full time persons, as well as two part time staffers. In addition the Store employs about 4 students in summer, up to 8 in the fall, and two during the winter.

What these people do seems basically simple enough: they order books for professors and upon arrival they place the books on the shelves. In a little more detail the process works like this:

In late winter or spring textbook orders for fall term are placed by professors with the Bookstore. Titles have to be ordered at least 5 to 6 months in advance. The Store then contacts publishers for an "in stock-out of stock" confirmation. Assuming the publisher can

supply, the books arrive over the summer months at the back door of the Store. They swell the storage space downstairs and floor shelves upstairs. Stock is priced and held in storage till the start of fall term, because, all through this time summer school texts stay on the shelves. Storage is a really critical problem nowadays. They have to coordinate book buybacks in spring and summer with storage of incoming orders for fall, as well as finding the space required for summer school needs.

The Store encounters many "snafu's" in the process going from ordering to selling. In some recent years as many as 1 out of 3 faculty members place their book orders after July 1, placing a great burden on Store staff as they frantically attempt to satisfy book needs in a mere 2 months.

Another problem experienced concerns mixups between what are required texts and what are reference texts. Sometimes only a few copies of the required text (used daily) are ordered by a prof; while at the same time many copies of the reference text (used only occasionally) are ordered. The result of this misunderstanding? Angry students and faculty members, because not enough care was taken in the placing of orders with the Bookstore months before.

A recent snag of the last couple of years involves computerization. A lot of publishers are turning to mechanized ordering systems. What this does is put one publisher, then another effectively out of action for a few months while they get the "bugs" out of their new systems. The complication here is that most titles are handled exclusively by one publisher; its hard then, to tell faculty that the one text they require is completely unavailable for their upcoming term.

These problems, it should be pointed out, are the exception, accounting for only one or two percent of all the orders. In the vast majority of cases, customer needs are satisfied.

## DID YOU KNOW

+that the bookstore actually loses money on textbooks in that it requires an average profit markup per item of 23 percent to break even; but the Store sells texts at only a 20 percent markup. This loss is made up by sales of other, more profitable items like records, stationary, gifts, etc.

+in 1963 when the Bookstore opened in its present location it served 5,100 students by providing 855 titles for 445 courses. In 1974-75, to serve 8,500 student (including UNBSJ) more than 4,005 titles were ordered for 1,163 courses. This increase means a critical shortage of storage space and large sums of money tied up in inventory for months.

+the financial statements for the Store show the following:

income	
1971	\$707,190
1972	784,675
1973	722,833
1974	732,189
expenditure	
1971	\$704,852
1972	792,985
1973	722,812
1974	735,901
1971	\$2338 PROFIT
1972	8310 LOSS
1973	21 PROFIT
1974	3712 LOSS

Any profit or loss accumulated by the Bookstore is absorbed by the University Fund. So as you can see, its a very tightly run, break-even operation with textbooks sold at the lowest possible cost.

+if the Bookstore had more orders in hand from faculty by years end in April, they would be able to buy back more books from students. Unfortunately, until they have text requirements down in black and white they are unable to repurchase course books.

+during 1973-1974 \$70,000 worth of books, representing 12 percent of all book sales were returned to the publisher because of course changes and over orders. This is costly because the bookstore pays all shipping costs in and out, staff time is taken up de-pricing and packing books. Since borrowed money is used to finance inventory, interest charges must still be paid while this stock is still on hand.

The truth of the matter, then, is that the Bookstore makes no exorbitant profits off students. From one end of the country to the other you will find similar situations. What the Store does do quite well is assist students and faculty by making books, i.e. "the tools of our trade", available in the most efficient manner possible.

Should anybody have any comments on the subject I would be happy to talk with you. I can be reached at MacKenzie House.



A lot of students come to grief in the scramble for books from these shelves. Marv Greenblatt says this is not the bookstore's fault.



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