

Online retailers help students play 'buy' the book

By Christine Tatum
College Press Exchange

CHICAGO (CPX) - While shopping for books this semester, Troy Dunmire spotted an intriguing ad in the student newspaper at the University of South Florida. It dared him to find "any other area college bookstore" offering books at lower prices. Campus bookstore officials were so confident it couldn't be done that they offered to pay double the difference to anyone who proved them wrong.

Dunmire, the university's student body vice president, hopped online and made only one stop: VarsityBooks.com. The Web site offered the books he needed for \$358.15 — \$78.50 cheaper than the charges he had racked up in the student store on campus.

Dunmire, consoled by the thought that the bookstore would give him double the difference, \$157, proudly presented his receipts and Internet research to store management. They turned him down, stating in a letter Dunmire received that online booksellers couldn't be counted among "area college bookstores."

"I don't know why not," Dunmire

said. "Online sellers are advertising on this campus, and they're certainly available in this area. If the student bookstore didn't want to include them in the offer, it should have put a disclaimer in the ad." Dunmire was even more insulted when he learned that VarsityBooks.com is an affiliate member of the National Association of College Stores.

"The lesson here is that I'll be shopping online for my books in the future," Dunmire said. "It was easier, and it was definitely cheaper." Such conclusions are sending shivers up the spines of college bookstore managers around the country. While it appears campus bookstores still have a much stronger foothold in textbook sales, it's tough to say how much longer that edge will remain. Students are increasingly Web savvy and have been searching for ways to overthrow campus bookstores for years. And with Web textbook vendors advertising on campus more aggressively, the battle for students' business is expected to get ugly.

"It's real competition at last," said John Dennis, a junior majoring in math at California State University at Bakersfield. "I've been waiting a long

time for this." Given the explosion of online shopping, it was only a matter of time before someone tapped into the nation's \$3 billion textbook industry. VarsityBooks.com and Big Words have emerged as the frontrunners among a half-dozen online bookstores looking to grab students' money.

Most of the Web "stores" tout hundreds of thousands of titles and discounts of up to 40 percent, reductions they say they are able to offer because they don't have to maintain staffs or buildings. E.Follet tells students to "get out of line," and Big Words currently is not charging for shipping and handling. For a flat shipping rate of \$4.95, VarsityBooks promises that books will be on students' doorsteps within three business days. For a few extra bucks, overnight options are also available.

"Our plans are already working," said Eric Kuhn, co-founder and CEO of VarsityBooks. "We fully understand that people expect shopping online to be cheaper and speedy. The savings and short delivery time we offer distinguish us from anyone else. We believe we have the whole package." Not so fast, said

Kay Farley assistant union director for retail and bookstore manager at Kansas State University. She's keeping a watchful eye on what her online competitors are up to and so far isn't too impressed.

"I think service is a big factor, and from what I hear, their service isn't as good as they say it is," she said. "People I've talked to say it's taken more than six days to get their books, and that's not good, especially when it's an algebra book; it's imperative you have that at the start of class." And what if a student drops the class or gets the wrong book?" she continued. "Returning a book ordered online is another hassle I wouldn't want to contend with."

Many bookstore managers say they're willing to pit service and product quality against their online competition any day. But price? Well, that's another matter, at least for now. Many managers, like Farley, say there's something fishy about the reduced prices being peddled online these days. "The publishers won't even let me buy some of these books at the rates they're being sold for online," she said. "I don't understand that."

Students help free man after almost 17 years on death row

By Mark Lebieh And
Charlie Meyerson
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

CHICAGO - Anthony Porter, who came within days of being executed by lethal injection in September, walked out of jail Friday afternoon after spending nearly 17 years in prison for a double murder that another man now says he committed. "It feels marvelous to be outside," Porter said after being released. "I'm free."

Porter, wearing black jeans and a black jacket instead of the brown prison uniform he had been wearing just hours earlier, said the outside world "looked great." He said he can't wait to get home to see his family and eat a steak dinner. And he said his faith in God helped him get through the ordeal.

Porter's release followed a hearing earlier in the day in Cook County Criminal Court. There, Assistant State's Atty. Thomas Gainer made a motion that, based on new evidence, Porter should be released on his own recognizance. Judge Thomas R. Fitzgerald agreed and ordered the release.

On Wednesday, a Milwaukee man,

Neither does the National Association of College Stores, which has hired attorneys to look into allegations of impropriety, said spokesman Jerry Buchs. And another thing about those low prices: Little or none of the money spent with companies online goes back to the university to help students, bookstore managers say. Figured into the price of textbooks sold by many campus stores are administrative fees paid to universities for a variety of support services and contributions to student, faculty and staff activities, events and promotions.

"These are all expenses that are not required of on-line booksellers and, to some extent, to private bookstores," Jeffrey Mack, director of auxiliary services at USF, stated in the rejection letter Dunmire received. "Without these expenses, these private companies can reduce the margin (and subsequent prices) necessary to run their operations. Their incentive is profit, and they are contributing nothing to the university."

To help its members fend off competition the association is encouraging them to fight fire with

fire. "It's simple," Buchs said. "College bookstores have to find a way to do business on the Internet."

In February, many college stores are expected to take advantage of a new product called "Course Web," a series of Web pages that can be tailored to individual campuses and are designed to make students' shopping easier. Using Course Web, professors will be able to post changes in required reading immediately. Students will be able to reserve books at the campus store, where they can pay for them when they pick them up, or they can choose to conduct the entire transaction online and have their books delivered to them at home later that day.

"It's the best of both worlds because it gives students up-to-the-minute information on their courses and the full convenience of shopping online," he said. "And because the student store is right on campus, this option also provides the next-door, face-to-face connection people need." Tell that to John Dennis, the Cal State student who ordered his books online this semester. "I'll shop wherever the books are cheapest," he said.

Mob Hits' CD is putting Fordham student through law school

By Gene Mustain
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

NEW YORK - A law student whose office is sometimes his bathtub has an offer he hopes you won't refuse, a chance to have your own mob experience without having to leave the comfort of your home. So far as we know, David Brinker and his crew of pals won't make you sleep with the fishes if you don't buy the album they've put out, the one they and singer Jerry Vale are hawking in the wee, wee hours on cable TV.

They just really, really want you to purchase "Mob Hits" so they can make money and Brinker can stay current with his law school tuition. It's a double-CD lineup of songs from mob movies and songs that sound like they should be. "If you put this music on while having dinner with friends, it's like, well, it's hard to put it into words, but it conveys the style, intrigue and adventure that you get from mob movies," says the 25-year-old Brinker.

"The songs are not about being in the mob. But some happened to be in mob movies and others, well, they've

just got that feel." Brinker, who worked for a record company before he enrolled at Fordham Law School, got the feeling to produce the album about 18 months ago while working in the bathtub of his East Side apartment.

"You study all night and go to the bath to relax, but when I'm in the bath, I'm thinking or I'm on the phone doing business, did you get this? Did you do that?" So far, with a Web site and those Jerry Vale ads on cable TV, the little company he started with backing from friends has sold about 50,000 copies; a retail distribution plan is in the works.

Even Luca Brasi would have a hard time failing to notice the album cover, a gold record pierced by what look to be .38-caliber bullet holes. In addition to Vale, the album features Dean Martin, Al Martino, Louis Prima, Lou Monte and Julius La Rosa. About half the songs are from such films as "Casino," "Donnie Brasco," "Goodfellas" and, of course, "The Godfather."

Some of the mob world's favorite singers, Frank Sinatra, Jimmy Roselli and Tony Bennett, are not featured,

but it was nothing personal, just business. Brinker couldn't obtain the rights to their songs. "It wasn't that they were too expensive, it's just that those artists have not allowed their works to be reproduced on compilation albums. That's why we got Paul Anka singing 'My Way,' not Sinatra. But it's Anka's song, he wrote it."

The idea came to Brinker because he is both an avid collector of music and a big fan of mob movies. "I grew up spending every cent I had on music, all kinds. I have 3,000 CDs littering my apartment. And then I became a mob-movie freak and I realized, hey, some of the music in them is stuff my parents listen to, but it's great."

His parents used to go to nightclubs to hear Vale sing "Al-Di-La" and "Non Dimenticar," and now both songs are on "Mob Hits" and Vale is the album's pitchman. "It's not music that would be at the top of my list," says Brinker. "But it's good music, and it's familiar in a New York kind of way because so many mob movies have been made here."

There's no excuse for athletes not making the grade

By Teneshia Ashley
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. - Some athletes have it made. You know, the ones who have phones ringing off the hook during all hours of the night. The callers, of course, are Division I college coaches, making all kinds of promises to these gifted athletes. The coaches tell them they will start their first season. They'll win a championship ring. But more importantly, they will get a free education.

Thirty-one Tallahassee-area athletes signed letters of intent to colleges on Wednesday, National Signing Day. But some of them will never suit up for the schools. See, there's a catch.

Before these players enroll, they must earn at least a 2.5 grade-point average in 13 core courses and make a certain minimum score on their choice of college-entrance exams, 820 on the SAT or 17 on the ACT. These standards are known as Prop 42.

Many athletes are failing to meet those standards. At least four high school football players in the Big Bend did not sign letters intent to Division I schools Wednesday because they didn't make the grade. There's no excuse for it.

What makes these athletes any

different from their classmates who participate in extracurricular activities? Band members and ROTC students practice for hours after school and participate in out-of-town competition.

Yet, they are not given the option of meeting minor requirements to receive a free college education. Most incoming freshmen have to earn grade-point averages exceeding a 3.5 to even be considered for full-paid college scholarships.

The only thing college recruits need are those small standards, and they can make their dreams realities. And they get the help they need. Like other high school students, these athletes have access to tutoring. They talk with counselors. They also have study hall with their teams.

Godby athletics director Art Witters said the department does everything possible to ensure athletes are prepared for college. Athletes even have an academic advisor, dean of students Kendrick Fearson. Fearson was a graduate assistant in the academic division of Florida State's athletics department. He has an annual meeting that informs athletes about the requirements for college. He also tells them the classes they need to take.

"They know what they're up against," Fearson said. "We told them what they need to do. They have

every opportunity to receive any necessary help at the school. There's no way we're putting athletics before academics." But every year athletes continuously fail to meet the college entrance standards.

Last year, seven Tallahassee football signees who accepted athletic scholarships to four-year programs ended up in junior college because they did not meet the requirements. The notable casualties were former Florida High running back Maurice Wilson, former Godby twins C.K. and C.R. McCoy and former Godby linebacker Aries Monroe. Those four signed letters of intent with Division I programs but did not qualify. They did not have the required grade-point averages or test scores.

Wilson signed with Central Florida last spring and plans to enroll next fall as a full qualifier. He recently made the required score on the college-entrance exam and is taking a class at Tallahassee Community College. The McCoy's, who signed with Tulane, enrolled at Middle Georgia College last summer and returned to Tallahassee soon after. They planned to enroll at Florida A&M this semester and try out for the football team.

Monroe now plays football at Coffeyville Community College. He initially signed with the University

of Alabama. C.R. McCoy said the blame for his nonqualification should not be placed on the athletics department.

"It's not their fault," McCoy said. "It's really no one's fault. We just didn't get the score. It's going to happen again. I don't know how to solve it, but it's going to happen again." But it shouldn't. Why are athletes who are making the grade considered exceptions?

Eight Quincy Shanks starters signed letters of intent Wednesday for football scholarships. The seniors combine for at least a 3.0 grade-point average. Lincoln defensive lineman Elton Patterson and Florida High running back Kevin Tate both are honor students.

And consider Shanks quarterback Willie Simmons - the Big Bend's leading passer last season. He will have his A.A. degree from TCC and will enroll at Clemson as a junior. More athletes need to stand up in the classroom instead of using the minimal enrollment standards as a crutch. Getting in is easy. Staying in is not.

Fraternity party spurs meningitis scare at Penn State

College Press Exchange

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. (CPX) - About 300 students at Penn State have sought medical treatment after potentially being exposed to bacterial meningitis during a weekend fraternity party. Doctors say the chances that any students at the party will contract the disease are low, but they have given a single dose of an antibiotic to most seeking treatment.

It is not known how many people

attended a party at the Pi Lambda Phi house on Saturday. A young woman enrolled at Shippensburg University, whose name has not been released, was diagnosed with the illness and listed in critical condition at a local hospital on Monday.

Bacterial meningitis, which can be deadly, is transmitted through extended close contact with an infected person or through sharing oral secretions.

Court: Sears not liable for student's suicide

College Press Exchange

CINCINNATI (CPX) - Sears, Roebuck and Co. and one of its security guards are not responsible for the suicide of a college student accused of shoplifting, a federal appeals court ruled. The estate of 20-year-old Grace Ko filed suit against the multi-million-dollar corporation and one of its guards, alleging that Ko's death stemmed from false accusations against her. The estate also accused Sears of fraudulent misrepresentation and inflicting emotional distress. The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed, upholding a lower court's 1997

ruling in favor of Sears.

Ko, a Chinese immigrant studying at the University of Michigan, killed herself in 1994 by jumping from her 18th-story apartment window one day after she was arrested for shoplifting at a Sears store in Ann Arbor, Mich. Ko denied the charge and tried to pay for the goods the next day because she said she feared being deported. According to court records, Sears officials told her a court hearing was unavoidable.