

# Bookstore pricing; cost effective or cost driven?

by Rick Deitz

Seventy-one dollars. \$71. Seventy-one and no/100. No matter how it appears it is the price of a new copy of the textbook required for Industrial Psychology this spring.

The book is hard backed and measures nine inches long by seven inches wide by one inch thick. There are no spectacular colors in the book nor are there complicated graphics. So why is this book, or any book, this expensive? Every student has had to pay for books they thought were too expensive and have pondered the same question.

Debra Schwanke, who has been the manager of the bookstore since Jan. '98 explained that all of Penn State's bookstores are run by Barnes and Noble, a publishing company based in New York City. The bookstore building is owned by Penn State but leased to Barnes and Noble. Barnes and Noble employs the bookstore staff as well. All these are items that must be paid for with income from the bookstore.

However, this does not dictate the mark-up on book prices. "Many of the books we sell have retail prices that are pre-determined by the pub-

lisher," Schwanke said. Although she would not give a firm figure, she said a good national average would be about 25%.

This figure is on the low side according to a source at the Arkansas Book Co., a large warehouse distributor of textbooks. They said a better average would be between 35 and 50 percent. In order to come up with a price for books that is not dictated by the publisher, the price is determined by Barnes and Noble then approved by Penn State, Schwanke said.

The markup of the books is fairly reasonable. After all, a business has to make a profit, no one will argue that. However, there must be a way to make it more affordable for the student. Most students would like to be able to plan how much they will need for books and tuition, not get surprised by a \$100, 10-page book.

One professor said he likes to order back issues of books because they are normally less expensive than the current editions. Usually, they are not much different as far as the text is concerned. However, even when he does this the bookstore gets the current and, therefore, most expensive book.

Schwanke could not comment of the purchasing policy because she has only been the manager since January. However, she did say that there seems to be a problem with professors turning in their book orders on time. Some 75% of the book orders were turned in late for the spring semester, according to Schwanke. Of those, 26% were more than six weeks late. This does not effect the price of the books but it does cost extra to ship the books in quickly so that they are available in time for the start of class.

The textbook mentioned at the beginning of the article cost \$71. Why is it so expensive? Schwanke called ITP, the publisher of the book, and identified herself as a student. She was told the retail price of the book was \$71.95. Penn State offers a whole 95 cent discount. ITP, when called directly, gave the same price. They would not release a wholesale price.

Several local retail book stores all said they could order the book and sell it for \$65.95. They also said they may be able to discount it further if more than one were ordered. One store added they get the text at a 15% discount and their wholesaler probably gets it at a 40% discount.

Using the publisher's price of \$71.95 that gives the book a wholesale price of about \$43. A book you feel is over priced could be taken to your local book store. With the ISBN number, it could be available overnight at a cheaper rate.

When the semester starts and you fork over hundreds of dollars for your books, you hope to get a reasonable portion of that back when you sell it back. As students file into the bookstore to sell back their books, they cringe when they hear, "It's not being used next semester." The refund is infinitesimal when compared to the purchase price. Why is so little refunded? Is the book not worth more than this?

According to the source at Arkansas Books, publishers do not make any money on book buy-backs be-

cause they do not redistribute them. Contrast this with a distributor who will buy the book back at just below wholesale then re-sell it to another university that needs it. Penn State's bookstores are run by a publisher, so getting a decent return on a used book is unlikely. The rare exception is if the book will be used again in an upcoming semester.

Is there a solution? If the most recent edition of a textbook cost \$42 and the previous edition was \$22 and is still available, then all parties concerned might agree to use the less expensive textbook. The student saves \$20. In return, maybe they buy one of those Penn State ties, T-shirts or coffee mugs that have been in the back of the bookstore since Joe-Pa coached his first game.

## Scheduling problems unattended

from page 1

But simple guidelines allowed for 75 minute periods on M/W which have been causing conflicts since at least 1993.

This semester alone, 33 classes were scheduled in that time frame. All were held Monday and Wednesday only. Due to the requirement

for some courses of study, some exceptions are necessary. They are mostly lab classes and were not included in the 33 classes Segnor highlighted. "I realize some classes need to be longer," he said.

However, most of the long classes present a problem, he added, "But will the faculty or staff actually do anything about it?"

| Sunday  | Monday   | Tuesday  | Wednesday  | Thursday  | Friday  | Saturday  |
|---|--|--|--|---|---|---|
| <p><b>The Campus Calendar for Penn State Harrisburg:<br/>for weeks of February 19 thru March 14</b></p> |  |  |  | <p>February 19<br/>Art Exhibit, Linda Rugel, "Faces, Phases, Forms"<br/>On display from Feb. 16-Apr. 3<br/>Gallery Lounge</p>   | <p>20<br/>BSU Bake Sale<br/>11:30-2:00PM<br/>Basement of Olmsted near Lion's Den</p>    | <p>21</p>   |
| <p>22</p>   | <p>23</p>  | <p>24<br/>National Eating Disorders Screening Program<br/>12:30-2:00PM<br/>W-231 Olm<br/><br/>Black Student Union Meetings<br/>Every Tuesday<br/>12:30-1:30PM<br/>BCAC W-132 Olm</p> | <p>25<br/>Black History Month Appreciation Program<br/>12:00-1:00PM<br/>213C Olm</p>   | <p>26<br/>Computer Tear Down Workshop<br/>3-6PM<br/>E-224 Olm<br/><br/>Women's Interests Speaker,<br/>Dr. Carol Nechemias<br/>12PM<br/>Conference Center,<br/>Schuylkill Campus</p> | <p>27<br/>Bernadette Muscat speaks on "Family Violence"<br/>10AM<br/>Gallery Lounge</p> | <p>28<br/>Bus Trip to Washington, D.C.<br/>10AM-5PM<br/>Departure from Meade Heights Housing Office</p> |
| <p>March 1</p>  | <p>2<br/>Women's Interest Speakers:<br/><br/>Dr. Beverly Cigler<br/>10AM<br/><br/>Dr. Yvonne Milspaw<br/>6PM<br/><br/>Gallery Lounge</p> | <p>3<br/>"Employee Ownership: A Case Study" presented by Gene Kowalski<br/>12-1PM<br/>Eastgate Center</p>  | <p>4<br/>Public Policy Lecture Series presented by Dr. Steven Peterson<br/>12-1:30PM<br/>Downtown Center<br/>Simple Gifts plays Irish jigs to Klezmer melodies to Balkan dances. 12PM<br/>Gallery Lounge</p> | <p>5</p>  | <p>6</p>  | <p>7</p>  |
| <p>8</p>  | <p>9</p>   | <p>10</p>  | <p>11</p>  | <p>12</p>   | <p>13</p>   | <p>14</p>   |