

Students wonder...where's the book?

Campus bookstore owner cites late enrollment and faculty tardiness as main causes for shortage

By **PETER STRELLA**
Editor in Chief

It was already a couple weeks into the semester when Jarrad Strausbaugh's Spanish II professor was prepared to give a quiz. The class had only eight students, most of them able to use the same book they had purchased for Spanish I. But Strausbaugh's book had been misplaced.

The problem went from bad to worse when he learned that Penn State Harrisburg's campus bookstore did not have the Spanish book in stock. After a couple more failed attempts at the bookstore, Strausbaugh took a quiz he did not study for.

Strausbaugh is not alone. Empty shelves at the bookstore have forced many teachers to make syllabi changes while students scramble to borrow books from classmates.

Bookstore Manager Fred Hockenberry attributed the shortage to many factors. "The bottom line is that first and second year students register early, third and fourth year and beyond don't, particularly within the master's programs and the doctorate programs," said Hockenberry.

Hockenberry, who transferred to the PSH bookstore this past September, had previously based his ordering on the number of students enrolled in classes at the time he placed his order. This approach worked at other Penn State campus bookstores where sophomores and freshmen were the main customers.

This approach was inadequate at Penn State Harrisburg, where most of the students are juniors, seniors, or beyond. Hundreds of students enrolled after Hockenberry placed his order for books on Dec. 22, the Monday after finals week. In most instances, this is what caused the book shortage this semester.

"I've had to adjust my entire ordering philosophy," said Hockenberry. "What I need to do goes against every grain of common sense and training that I've had in this business."

One solution will be to over-order on textbooks, something that he has never done before and will "put him on the line" with his company. Another solution will be to ask the teachers about the number of students who are expected to enroll in the class.

While a couple of computer glitches also contributed to book shortages, Hockenberry said some professors failed to submit their requests on time. Less than half the faculty had submitted their book requests by Dec. 15. The deadline was Oct. 15.

"It all hinges on good communication between faculty or faculty staff assistants, and us," said Hockenberry, who notified professors about the deadline on several occasions.

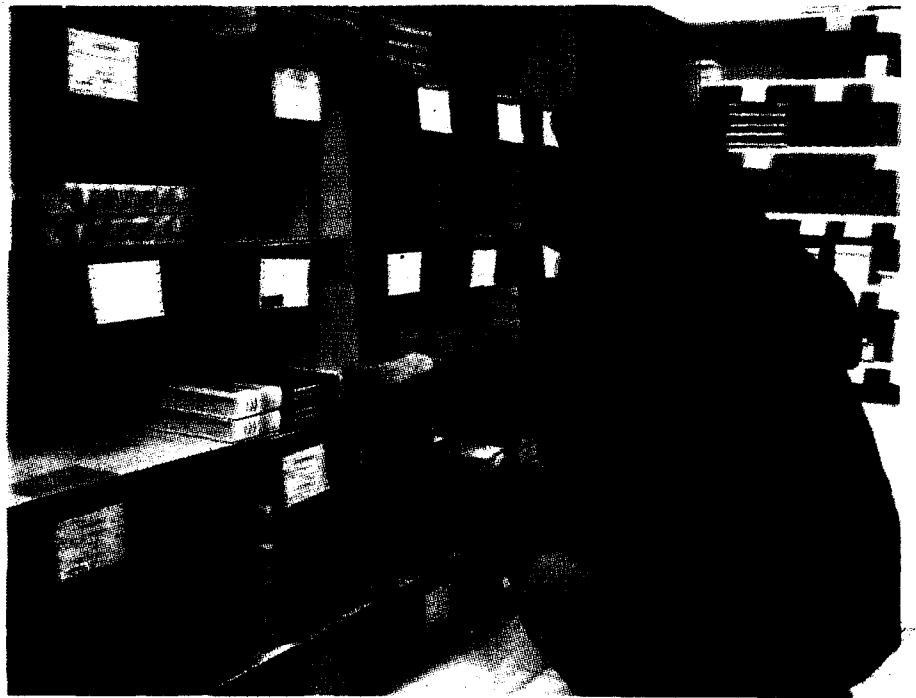
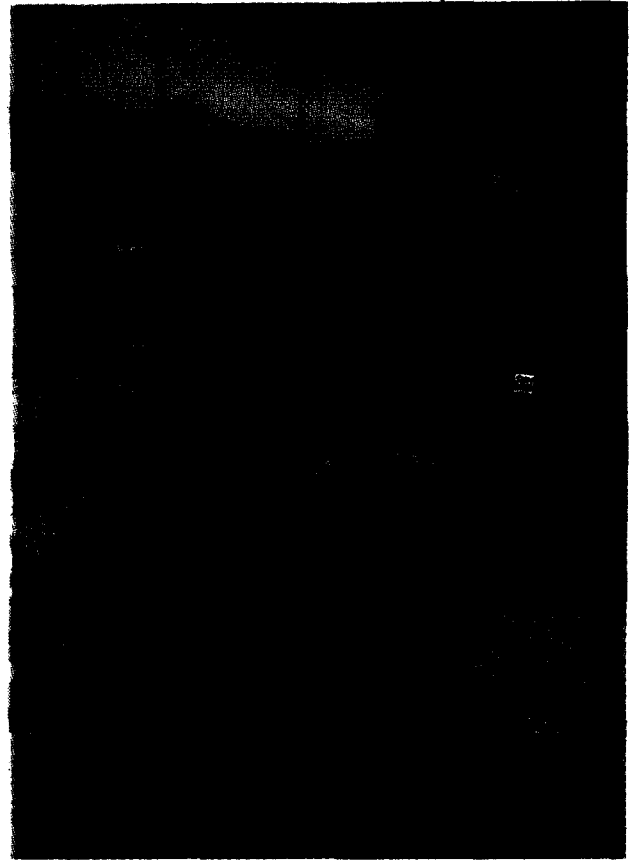
Late faculty textbook requests decrease the number of used books that are available to students in the next semester. It also decreases the probability that students will receive when selling a book back to the bookstore. "If I don't have [a teacher's textbook information] by the time buyback rolls around, I can't pass that money back over to you because I don't have a commitment from the faculty that they will, in fact, be using that book," said Hockenberry.

But students remain frustrated. "It kind of upsets me that we pay so much money to go to school here and I can't even get a book that I need to pass the class," said Strausbaugh.

Right: Daryl Wiest, a computer science major, said he would rather buy his textbooks at the campus bookstore because he likes the convenience. He said he gets some money back on the repurchasing, which also helps with the costly prices of campus books.

Photos by
Jennifer Kauffman

Below: Tamra Scanlon, ME EPC, looks for her CE 417 book.



Online retailers help students save on textbooks

By **PETER STRELLA**
Editor in Chief

Jennifer Lose had always bought her books from the campus bookstore until she enrolled at Penn State Harrisburg. As soon as she saw the \$125 price ticket on her advertising book, Lose decided it was a good time to see what Internet booksellers had to offer.

Lose, communications, was able to score the previous edition of the advertising book for \$9.20 on amazon.com after a brief search and setting up a user account. The only difference between the editions was a couple of replaced pictures and the page numbers.

Like Lose, other students have increasingly looked

to the web for cheaper textbooks as campus bookstores fail to meet demand and book prices continue to increase. With shipping only taking a week or two, students are finding it may be worth missing a couple reading assignments in order to find big savings.

Textbook prices have soared recently across the country. Since 1998, textbook publishers have increased prices by 35 percent while the Core Producer Price Index has only risen by five percent.

This has created a demand for textbooks over the Internet. Online book retailers have been able to meet this demand by undercutting the 25 percent markup that is the industry standard for textbooks. These retailers, such as amazon.com and half.com, can often avoid paying utilities, have a smaller staff, and can

pawn shipping costs off on the students.

As far as new books purchased at a fraction of the cost, many online retailers are intercepting international editions of textbooks and redirecting them to students via the Internet. These international editions are manufactured to have the same content as American textbooks, but overall are of cheaper quality and less expensive. They are intended to be sold to third world countries for kids who come from poor backgrounds.

Online retailers also have no commitment to the universities. "We've given well over \$20 million over the past 10 years back to the University," said Hockenberry, who said this has come in the form of scholarships, lectures, and other student activities.