

## *Campus Services*

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### **THE LIFE OF A CAMPUS: BOOKS, BUSES, AND CHICKEN STRIPS**

#### **A Bookstore for All Seasons**

By LAWRENCE BIEMILLER

Athens, Ga.

At 67,000 square feet, the University of Georgia's bookstore is a big, big operation. It has space up front for general-interest books, an enormous area devoted to Georgia-themed clothes and gifts, a computer section, office and classroom and dorm-room supplies, and a vast mezzanine reserved for textbooks. You can buy aspirin, DVD's, French curves, iPods, laundry baskets, skateboards, sodas -- the store even has its own Clinique counter. It would be all the bookstore anyone could want if an 80,000-seat stadium weren't right across the street.

"It took six football games to make me appreciate all the space," says Jeremy E. Johnson, the manager. When the Bulldogs play at home, he stocks the shelves, rolls out extra cash registers, brings in backup employees, and gets ready to get overwhelmed.

Mr. Johnson has been at the store for just over a year, since the university gave up running the facility itself and turned it over to the Follett Higher Education Group. The store had been slowly losing business to three nearby competitors, including a Follett store in downtown Athens, and university administrators decided they didn't having the buying power to compete.

Follett won the contract in part by promising to spend a significant amount of money on renovations, which were accomplished last spring and summer (planning had to take into account both graduation crowds and a spring football scrimmage that drew 20,000 fans). At the request of faculty members, Mr. Johnson says, he moved general-interest books to the front of the store during the renovation, and at the same time added more titles.

But textbooks are the big sellers, accounting for half the store's business -- even though the other three stores all have almost identical offerings. Used textbooks are particularly problematic, because the store has to lure used-book sellers with an end-of-term buyback before it can supply the following semester's buyers. "We want to be the first option," Mr. Johnson says. "We've made it a more fun place to shop. And we've pounded it into our heads that we have to be prepared." The store stocks about 4,000 textbook titles per semester, and between 40 percent and 50 percent of textbooks it sells are used.

Of the store's non-textbook sales, clothing is the most difficult to predict, Mr. Johnson says. One buyer at Follett headquarters does the ordering for several large Southern universities, he says. The buyer and the store's staff try to keep in mind that they serve two audiences -- students and fans.

"It's a big challenge" anticipating what will sell, Mr. Johnson says. He was astonished this past summer when the store sold "thousands of units" of what he refers to as "butt shorts" -- women's shorts with "DAWGS" printed across the rear. Then male students started snapping up plaid pajama-bottom pants and wearing them all day long. Besides walk-in customers, the bookstore sells items online and from a 16-page catalog. Before the holidays last month, the mail-order staff handled up to 200 orders a day.

The bookstore, which is open seven days a week, sells students three models of Dell computers, bundled with software recommended by the university's information-technology staff. But the No. 1 selling items are still traditional blue exam booklets, which students buy for 40 cents each. This year the bookstore ordered 215,000.

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Section: Campus Services

Volume 51, Issue 21, Page B15

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