

UM students find themselves lighter in the wallet after buying books
By *BETSY COHEN of the Missoulian*



University of Montana student Richard Rowe looks for his assigned textbooks Monday afternoon at the UM Bookstore during the first day of spring semester. Photo by KURT WILSON/Missoulian

Anita Maddux dutifully purchased all the required textbooks for her spring semester classes at the University of Montana on Monday, but the undergraduate couldn't help wonder if every book was necessary.

As her book pile was tallied at the Bookstore on campus, and Maddux forked over \$329.89 for the assemblage of her newly acquired stack of work, she scrutinized the titles.

Her brow furrowed when her gaze caught the \$53 textbook "Human Geography in Action."

"I think this is going to be one of those expensive books that's kind of useless," said Maddux. "Hopefully, I'll be wrong."

Like Maddux, most students were on the prowl for used textbooks, which were easy to spot with their yellow sticker on the binder, but difficult to find among the seemingly endless shelves of required reading.

"It seems like a lot of the books I need aren't available in used editions," said Karissa Drye, an elementary education major. Because of the scarcity, she expected to pay between \$400 and \$500 for new textbooks.

"It's frustrating because books seem to be getting more and more expensive," she said, "and professors always seem to want students to buy the newest editions."

Drye's assessment was partially correct, said Bryan Thornton, Bookstore manager.

Because the cost of new textbooks has increased by 7 percent in the past few years, the competition for used books is fierce among campus bookstores, Thornton said.

Compounding the problem is the fact that UM faculty demand their students have the best, most respected textbooks on the market.

"It's a huge challenge to get used editions of those books because every bookstore in the country is trying to get those books, too," Thornton said.

The conundrum, he said, has both positive and negative repercussions.

The demand for used textbooks has caused a niche boom in the book-selling industry, and there are now many more wholesalers for bookstores to work with. However, the demand has caused the price of used

books to climb. To compete, publishing houses have increased prices for new textbooks, and are selling more books by producing newly updated editions.

"New textbook editions are on the market frequently," Thornton said. "Some of the old standby textbooks used to go four to five years without new editions, now new editions come out every other year - or more frequently - and some books now come with packages that include workbooks and CDs, which wholesalers and buyers can't get on the used market."

The demands of the used and new textbook markets has caused such a strain among booksellers, the issue will be the hot topic at a nationwide booksellers conference in February.

Thornton plans to be in the middle of that discussion.

"We're trying to work with the publishers and the used-book distributors to stabilize costs," Thornton said.

In the meantime, UM's Bookstore will continue to help offset some of the students' sticker shock by offering one of the best buy-back programs in the country.

Unlike most American campus bookstores, which pay 50 percent of the retail price of textbooks and resell the items at 75 percent of the cost, UM gives students more money by buying used books at 65 percent of the retail cost and reselling them at 75 percent of cost.

No matter the expense, the price is worth the opportunity for an education that could lead to a satisfying career with a livable salary, said UM students Vu Ma and Carrie Martin.

The two pooled their meager resources and student loan money Monday to buy the bulk of their textbooks, and although they groaned when the bill came to \$303.10, they didn't have buyers' remorse.

"We are very poor," Ma said. "We are buying books with money we don't have, but we want to be educated."

"We'll be massively in debt when we are through," Martin said. "But hopefully we'll get decent jobs after we graduate."

"We'll see," she said. "Hopefully."

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