

Textbook Purchases - Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why are textbooks so expensive?

Recently, the increase in gasoline prices has had a significant impact on textbook prices, from transport of raw materials to publishers to freight costs from the publisher to distributors such as our college bookstore. But prices have been on an upward spiral for years. Since 1994, wholesale prices charged by the textbook industry have jumped 62 percent. More disturbingly, over the past several years the textbook industry has been artificially inflating the cost of textbooks with unnecessary new editions and gimmicks. Adding (bundling) CD-ROMs and workbooks with textbooks drives up prices. Bundled textbooks are typically 10 to 50 percent more expensive.

2. When textbooks are bundled with CDs, workbooks, etc., do I have a choice of buying the textbook alone?

The bookstore orders textbooks one semester at a time based on faculty order lists. If instructors request unbundled options (textbook separate from any CDs, workbooks, etc.) the textbook alone will be available for purchase. If you have no choice but to purchase the textbook bundled, it may be because that's the only option the publisher provides, or the instructor has determined that the bundled items are needed.

3. Why doesn't the library have textbooks that I can check out?

The library book budget is not large enough to support the purchase of textbooks in sufficient quantity to meet the needs of hundreds of students who may need the item. Many textbooks include CDs with pass codes and workbooks with copyright restrictions that limit use to one person.

4. Why do instructors change textbooks so often?

Instructors try to change textbooks no more than once every three years except for specialized fields such as computer technology, nursing, law enforcement, broadcasting, etc. But book publishers change editions frequently and often needlessly (other than to raise their own profit), so instructors often are forced to change to a different textbook or change editions when the previous edition is no longer available. All textbook changes made at the college must have the approval of the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs. Unfortunately, when editions change, costs usually increase and students are unable to benefit from the ability to use lower priced used textbooks.

5. What is the college doing to help reduce new textbook costs to students?

The college supports and follows the guidelines proposed by the NC Community College Student Government Association Bookstore Resolution. The bookstore charges only a minimal markup to help offset operating expenses, and the manager takes advantage of opportunities to reduce costs by placing orders when publishers have special offers such as free freight. But, because of limited volume, the bookstore cannot compete with the discount prices charged by other retail sources. Most instructors do not approve of publishers' practices of frequently changing editions, bundling expensive and often unnecessary materials together, and charging exorbitant prices. Instructors do everything they can to reduce textbook costs to students without compromising educational content.

6. Does financial aid cover the cost of textbooks?

This depends on the amount of aid a student is eligible to receive. Aid is applied to the student's account, and tuition and fees are deducted. Any aid that is remaining after these items have been covered can be used to purchase books and supplies. ***In order to use financial aid funds for new or used textbooks, you must purchase them through the college bookstore.*** If you wish to use external sources for textbooks, such as those mentioned in item #7, you must use your own funds.

7. Do I have alternatives to buying new textbooks from the college bookstore?

Yes, a number of online sources are available for new and used textbooks, but be sure you purchase the correct edition. If you know the needed textbook's ISBN, a unique identifier for each book that is published, you can be sure that you order the right textbook. Remember that financial aid may be used only for purchases made through the college bookstore (see #6).

8. Will the college bookstore buy back my used textbooks?

The college buys some carefully selected used textbooks from students at one-half the original retail price, usually during exam week in December and May. Watch for posters around campus during these times of the year giving the exact location, time, and date.

9. Can I buy used textbooks at the college bookstore?

Yes, a limited number of carefully selected used textbooks are purchased from students (see #8) and are then resold at a discount in the college bookstore. Buying used textbooks from other students may be an option as well, but be sure that you are buying the correct edition. If supplemental materials such as CDs or workbooks are needed, buying used textbooks may not be your best option.

10. How can I find other Isothermal students who want to buy or sell textbooks?

There are many public bulletin boards available at the college where you may post books for sale or search for books to buy. Undated advertisements may be removed, so be sure to date items that you post. You may also check with friends or acquaintances who have taken the course and may know of someone who has books for sale. See #8 and #9 for other options for buying and selling used textbooks.

11. What is the bookstore's refund / exchange policy on new textbooks?

The bookstore will refund your cost or exchange new textbooks within two weeks of purchase provided that you have your cash register receipt and the book is in new condition. Restrictions apply on some items, so check the Refund / Exchange Policy which is posted in the college bookstore.

**North Carolina Community College System - Student Government Association
Bookstore Resolution**

To keep the cost of textbooks for students as low as possible without sacrificing educational content;

To request that the same text be adopted for all sections of a given course within the same community college, whether a college is a multi or single campus college;

To provide students with bundled and unbundled options;

To advocate for a 3-year textbook adoption policy with the exception of specialized fields requiring more frequent, updated information (i.e.) allied health, computer programming, etc.;

Resolved, these actions will create multiple alternatives to purchasing new textbooks and will give students the ability to establish online or physical book swap programs, purchase used textbooks more readily, resell their used textbooks more easily, and afford the often challenging expense of purchasing books for their classes.