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Collin graduate Frank Pallone and Collin student Diana Gonzales use every strategy available to save money on textbooks.
photo by Nick Young



If You Think Gas Prices are High, Check Out the Price of Textbooks

By Heather Darrow

A COOL, FALL BREEZE whisks leaves into the air as new students, flanked by parents, burst through the college doors. Filled with anticipation of the upcoming year's revelations, they cross the bookstore threshold, mesmerized by the racks of colorful, new tomes. Then they see a \$274.65 anatomy and physiology textbook bundle and they stare at one another in utter disbelief and then despair.

Student Diana Gonzales' jaw dropped when she saw the sticker prices on the textbooks she needed. When she and her family planned for college expenses,

they focused on tuition; books were a secondary consideration. Ms. Gonzales wishes she could warn parents with young children to research book prices now and start saving for textbooks immediately. She was surprised to find that many students shell out more money for books than tuition each semester.

"It overwhelms you when you see the book prices. Last semester one of my friends, who is a single mom, had a scholarship that paid for tuition but not books. I shared my book with her in class, but how do you do your homework without your own book?

She had to withdraw from the course. If you know you have the potential, but you don't have the money, what can you do?" Ms. Gonzales said.

According to a September 2, 2006 Houston Chronicle article, the National Association of College Stores (NACS) reported that 18 states have deliberated over more than 30 bills targeting a reduction in textbook prices. The article also refers to a 2005 Government Accountability Office study which determined that "textbook prices rose at twice the rate of inflation in the past 20 years, [and] the average student

spends about \$900 a year on books and other supplies.”

Collin College Board of Trustees Vice-Chair Brenda Willard Goodell decided that the college needed to address this issue head-on. In 2006, she established the Collin College Cost of Textbooks Task Force (COTTF). Comprised of students, staff and professors, the 12-member task force took a proactive stance and began to research the problem. The team found that bundling unnecessary supplementary materials with the texts, digitized and one-time web access codes, frequent new editions and increased freight charges contributed to the rise in textbook prices.

“I believe we are the only area college that is taking strategic steps to solve the rising cost of textbooks. This is a priority for us. We would like to be the template that changes this issue across the nation,” Ms. Goodell said.

SEEKING ALTERNATIVES

As the parent of a college student, Trustee Goodell was pleasantly surprised to find that Collin professors had been

trying to solve the textbook issue for some time.

They give you less than half price when reselling them at the bookstore. I pay \$150 for a book and they give me \$30 sometimes.

“Professors are referring students to free Internet resources. They also keep the same textbooks for multiple semesters, if there are no dramatic changes. One English professor used free workbooks online, so the students did not have to buy books that they could not resell. In addition, our university partner, the University of North Texas, has expressed an interest in sharing its in-house published books with us,” Ms. Goodell said.

A business administration major focusing on international business, Ms. Gonzales cannot understand why more of the books are not available in the less expensive black and white format.

“It really didn’t help to have my financial accounting book in color. Why would you want something fancy for one semester if you didn’t need it? E-books are another solution, but not a lot of students are using them yet,” Ms. Gonzales said.

Ms. Gonzales is glad that the college has many textbooks available for students to borrow in two-hour increments at the library. She has also taken advantage of the information that professors put on E-reserves for students to access in the library or at home with their student ID numbers. She uses every tactic she can find to save money on books.

“They give you less than half the original price when reselling them at the bookstore. I pay \$150 for a book and they give me \$30 sometimes. I try to sell books using the for sale/for rent board or the Internet because sometimes other

colleges and universities will use the book. If I had a magic wand, I would try to find a way to convince the publishers to reduce the prices because that would help everyone. We could be saving that money for tuition for next semester," Ms. Gonzales stated.

As a member of the taskforce, Ms. Gonzales explored many possible solutions to the textbook issue including alternative publishers who offer free or reduced cost texts and textbook rentals; however she found drawbacks, such as restricted text selection with these options.

Dallas Baptist University-North (DBU) in Frisco also suggests students purchase used books, when available. Matt Murrah, a spokesman for DBU-North, recommends visiting the university library. "DBU participates in the TEXASHARE library program which makes books available from across the state to students," he said. "Price is certainly a factor that is considered by faculty when choosing texts and creating the bibliography for their courses," he adds.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO CURB COSTS

According to David Husted, Collin's director for Auxiliary Services, Collin students saved \$500,000 in textbook costs last year. Ninety percent of Collin's core courses are using a common textbook for multiple semesters. This means there are used books for students to purchase. Professors are also substituting free Internet material instead of texts or supplemental material and some professors have chosen books that can be used in multiple classes.

Professors work with publishers to create a new version of the text that is tailored to their classes.

After researching textbook prices, Mr. Husted found that Collin texts purchased from publishers fall within normal pricing around the country; however, Collin

professors have taken innovative steps to keep the prices down.

"One of the things this college is doing is custom publication. Professors work with publishers to create a new version of the text that is tailored to their classes. We now sell a shrink-wrapped, three-hole punch text for two American government classes that is priced at \$58.45. Previously that text was \$114," Mr. Husted said.

Students can purchase a variety of custom books such as a sociology text for \$46 instead of \$84.60 and a custom algebra text for \$77.35 instead of \$126.70.

Mr. Husted reports the college has had a three-to-five percent increase in producing in-house supplemental material, including lab books and study guides. Many Collin professors are creating their own teaching material including Dr. Donna Cain, Dr. Carroll Bottoms and Professor Hershell Hanks who wrote an in-house published microbiology lab manual that sells for \$11.65, which replaces a \$66 lab manual. Psychology professor Dr. Barbara Lusk

has also written two lab manuals, which sell for \$10.35.

Dr. Cameron Neal, dean of mathematics and natural sciences, explains that in lieu of royalties, money generated from the faculty-authored laboratory books is given to the college's scholarship fund. In addition, the late Collin physics instructor Dr. Paul Johnson and physics professors Meade Brooks and Dr. Mike Broyles wrote two physics lab manuals, which are online and free to Collin students.

Textbook taskforce member and former Collin Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) president, Frank Pallone is pursuing a bachelor's of science degree in business administration from Texas A&M Commerce. He plans to earn an MBA and a Ph.D. in business or economics. According to Mr. Pallone, his Collin tuition typically costs \$400-\$600 each semester, but last spring his books were more than \$600.

My friend worked extra hours to pay for books. He figured the books would cost the same as tuition, but they were higher because he was taking chemistry and physics.

"I come from a business background, which means every dollar counts. If I don't need it, I'm not going to buy it. I lent books to friends, ordered books from individuals selling them on Amazon, and I know several students who swap books. My friend had to work extra hours to pay for books. He figured the books would cost the same as tuition, but they were higher because he was taking chemistry and physics," Mr. Pallone said.

During his tenure as PTK honor society president, Mr. Pallone instituted a program with Better World Books through the National Center for Family Literacy. Students and professors donate books that the bookstore does not buy back. The organization pays 50 cents per

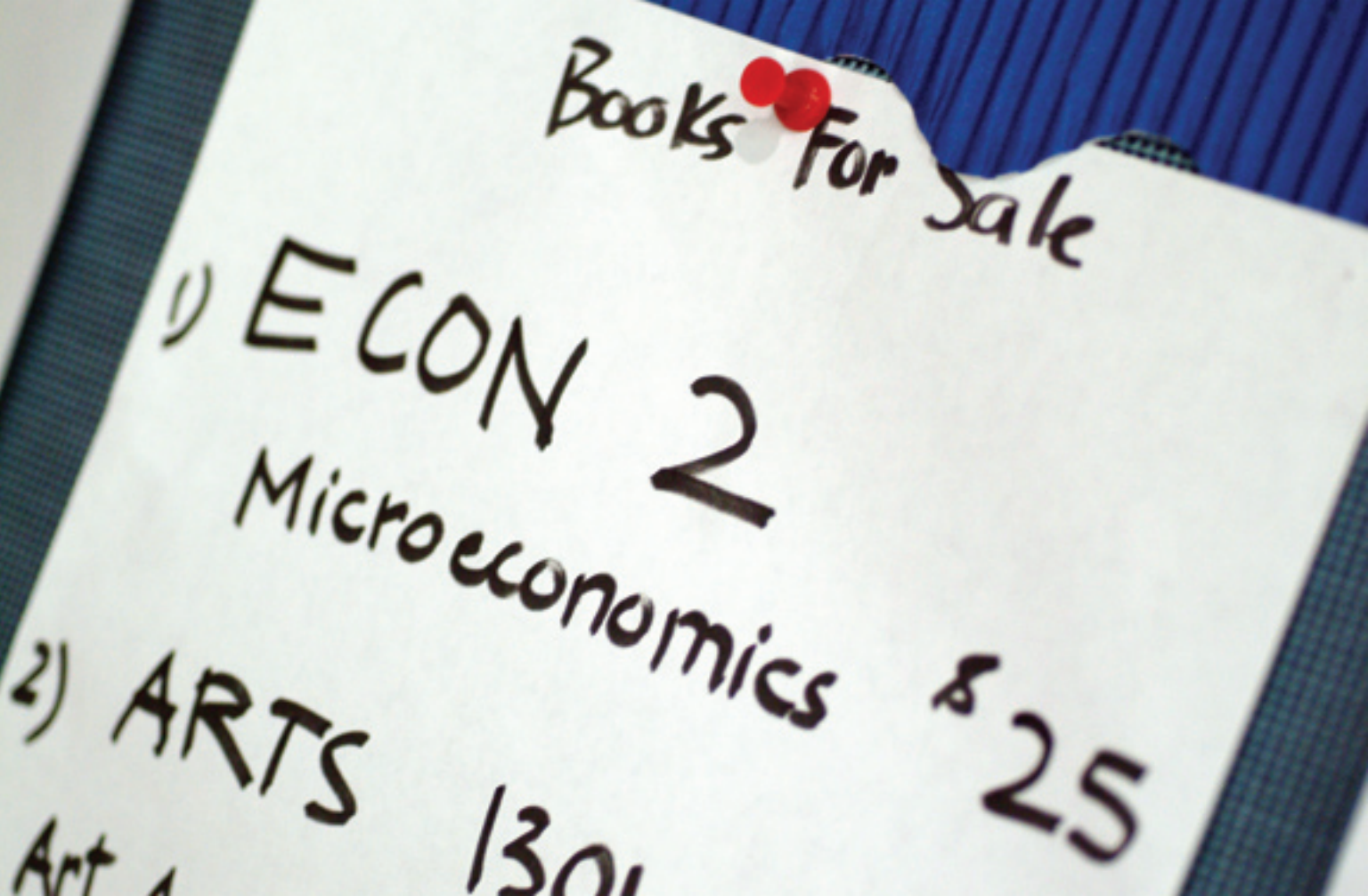


photo by Nick Young

book, which the Collin PTK collects for scholarships. According to Mr. Pallone, students and professors have donated 500 books so far this year.

"I do understand that the publishers need to make a profit; however, they are gouging students with bundling books, and I believe it is unethical to move a picture and sell the text as a new edition. Students have to take out loans to pay for school. The loans haven't gone up much over the years, but the textbook prices have. Book prices are driving more students not to be able to go to school or to have two jobs to be able to pay for school and books," Mr. Pallone said.

Former Collin student and textbook taskforce member Chadi El-Khoury could not bring himself to pay \$150 for poetry and literature books for his three-week wintermester course. Since the professor posted the syllabus online, he was able to surf the web and find the information he needed for free.

Mr. El-Khoury transferred from Collin to Creighton University and is pursuing

degrees in communication studies and international relations. He said he typically spent anywhere from \$400-\$600 per semester on books at Collin; however, two semesters his book costs exceeded his tuition.

Mr. El-Khoury said some Collin professors use PowerPoint lectures and do not require students to purchase textbooks. However, there were times when he wanted every advantage in a class and felt the need for a textbook, even if the professor didn't require it.

"The problem isn't selling the books back, but that they change the books too often and make new editions. The publishing company is filthy rich, and my book is worthless because no one will buy it from me. It is insane. It is going up every year. We are students and we are trying to learn. It shouldn't be this way at all," Mr. El Khoury said.

An April 2007 *The Boston Globe* online (Boston.com) article states that Harvard students spend close to \$1,300 annually for books, CDs and other associated school supplies. According to the article,

Harvard "deans estimate that students collectively spend \$8.5 million a year on textbooks and other course materials."

Collin College trustees, professors and staff want to make sure that students will not fall victim to exorbitantly priced texts. Collin professors have already met to discuss the taskforce's research and are sharing their cost-saving techniques. This fall, Collin economics students in Dr. Mike Cohick's and Professor James Richards' classes will be using a beta version of their new economics book on CD.

"Our board of trustees has voted against an increase in the in-county tuition since 2005 because accessibility of education is key for us as a community college. I want the community to be aware that we are inventive. There is no quick fix to the textbook issue, but we are already making an impact. Education is the one thing that changes lives and our community," Ms. Goodell said.

Heather Darrow is a staff writer for Collin College.