

# Current Textbook Issues

San Mateo County Community  
College District Bookstores Strive to  
Provide Lower Cost Textbook  
Options for Students

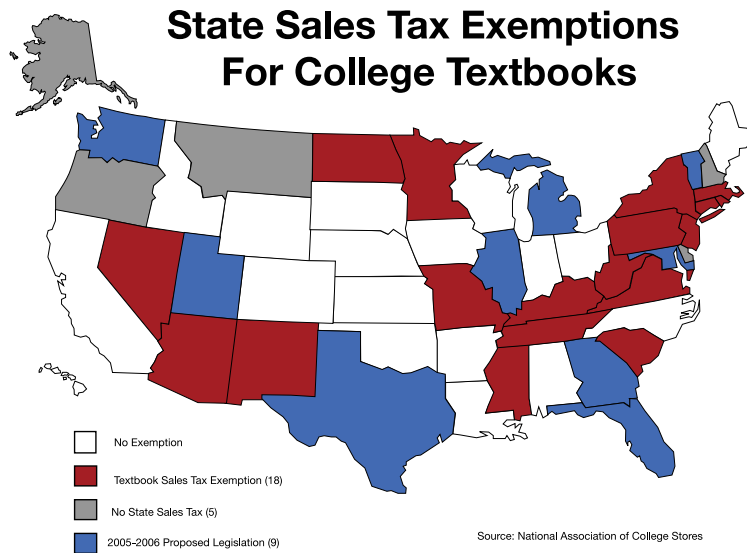
by

Tom Bauer

Semester after semester, college students face the ever increasing cost of textbooks. In fact, college textbook prices increase at a rate of 6 percent per year and, from December 1986 through December 2004, increased 240 percent while average inflation for the same period was 72 percent. (Source: Government Accountability Study). College bookstore managers and directors are on the front lines of this issue. Many students blame the college bookstores for the price of textbooks as the bookstore is where they are spending their money. Likewise, due to the more frequent than ever changing of editions, bundling of textbooks with oftentimes superfluous materials and hyped up marketing of the “newest, latest and greatest” titles, the bookstore’s ability to satisfy the student at the buyback counter has also been compromised. Bookstores are not able to buy back textbooks that are old editions or that contain material that make it necessary for the student to only buy new books. Thus, the bookstore looks like the bad guy once again. So what are bookstores supposed to do to retain their student customers, who now have more choices than ever to purchase their textbooks (including going direct to the publishers, some who are now creating avenues to cut the bookstores out all together), in the face of all these market conditions?

## Innovation Is The Key

The San Mateo County Community College District (SMCCCD) consists of three community colleges in the San Francisco Bay Area. The colleges, Skyline College, Cañada College and College of San Mateo, have struggled with all the market conditions discussed earlier. In fact, community college students and bookstores struggle with textbook pricing issues on a much larger scale than their 4 year counterparts. The GAO found that the cost of textbooks and supplies as a percentage of the “published price” of tuition and fees varies greatly



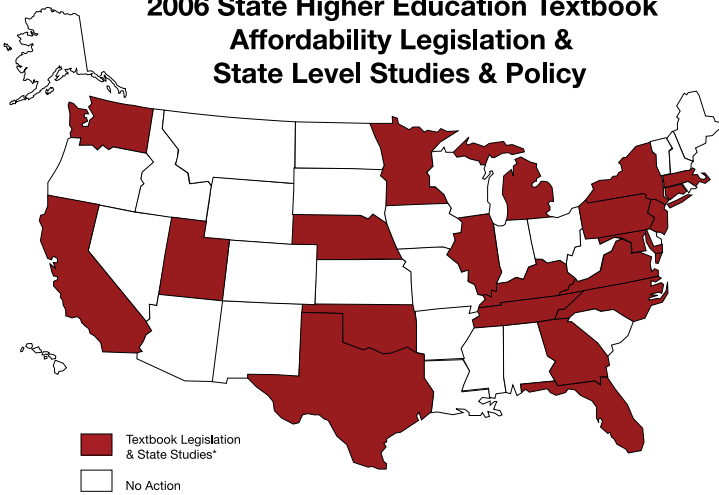
for first time, full time degree seeking students by the type of institution attended. Not surprisingly, the cost of textbooks at 2 year, public institutions is 72 percent of the cost of tuition compared to 26 percent at 4 year public schools and 8 percent at 4 year private schools. College bookstore managers and directors work feverishly to get their booklists from the faculty as early as possible so they can start working the used book market (which, by the way, the publishers blame for the price of textbooks rather than their own flooding of the marketplace with “free” desk and review copies and other costly marketing activities) to obtain as many used textbooks as possible. Used textbooks sell for approximately 75 percent of the price of a new textbook. Due to the changing of editions and other practices by publishers, the amount of used textbooks on the market continues to drop year after year. Bookstore managers and directors are now more than ever challenged to think innovatively to offer their students the best value for their dollar and provide exceptional service as well.

In 2004, our store manager at Cañada College, Jai Kumar, approached Dianne Eyer, Professor in Early Childhood Education at Cañada College and principal college grant writer with the idea of starting a rental program for the Early Childhood Education program. Professor Eyer wrote the original grant proposal to First Five San Mateo County. The First Five grant provides a system of supports and services so that Early Childhood Education/Child Development students can continue their higher education goals. This grant is funded by the tobacco tax passed in California in 1998 with the passage of Proposition 10. The Early Childhood Education program at Cañada College has close to 1,800 students in it throughout the year. Prior to January 2005, the program purchased the textbooks for each student. The textbooks were theirs to keep. As always, having enough money to accomplish all the goals of the program became an issue. Jai approached Professor

Eyer and told her that we could start a rental program for the ECE students. The ECE department would need to use their grant money to buy the textbooks one time and the Bookstore would create and manage a rental program whereby the students could rent the textbooks for 25 percent of the new price (a \$100.00 textbook would rent for \$25.00) and the same book could be rented over and over again through the life of the program. Professor Eyer liked the idea and wrote a grant proposal that got us the funds to proceed. In the fiscal year July 2005 through June 2006, students rented textbooks for \$57,651.00. If the students had to buy those textbooks at full retail rather than renting them, the cost would have been \$230,605.00! Our rental program saved students and the ECE program \$172,954.00 in one academic year alone! With results like these, our District Bookstore team was motivated to act.

Armed with these facts, figures and success, I addressed our publically elected Board of Trustees earlier this year at a study session on January 11, 2006. The Board has been acutely interested in textbook prices and focused on what we can do as a District to help students succeed. The presentation, which can be viewed by visiting our website at [http://www.smccd.net/bookstore/downloads/smccd\\_board\\_0106.html](http://www.smccd.net/bookstore/downloads/smccd_board_0106.html) focused on the textbook industry as a whole and paid specific attention to the findings of the Government Accountability Office report on textbook prices as well as the report, Ripoff 101, done by CalPirg. The goal of my presentation was to update the Board on all aspects of the textbook business, our bookstores role in assisting students and to solicit the support of the Board for continued fundraising to expand our textbook rental program even further. As I thought about the success we have had with the First Five grant, I wondered if we could actually raise funds for such a worthy cause from other federal and state grants as well as private donors. Textbook prices have been in the national news now for some time; in election years like this one

## 2006 State Higher Education Textbook Affordability Legislation & State Level Studies & Policy



you can almost count on a plethora of proposed legislation surrounding textbook prices. I presented the Board with our facts and our success and asked for their support to continue raising funds. The Board enthusiastically agreed and a fund was immediately established for each of the three colleges with the San Mateo Community College District Foundation, the independent, fundraising arm of our District, for donations. When I started in this business over 20 years ago, I never imagined that fund raising would become part of my job description. However, changing times call for action. With the help of our Foundation staff, we have promoted the textbook rental program to all our current benefactors in their annual report and have asked District staff to consider supporting this endeavor personally. Recently, upon the death of a College of San Mateo faculty member who was very concerned about students having access to textbooks, his widow asked that in lieu of flowers, donations could be made in his memory to our textbook rental fund. In the coming year, I will be soliciting community groups for their support and have already received financial support of a local Rotary organization. The more money we raise, the more books we can add to our program across the three colleges. Groups and individuals

to whom I have presented love the concept of donating to a textbook rental program because their money goes to help a large number of students. The program is both innovative and successful. The concept appeals to donors. Recently, a colleague asked me how I ever got people to donate to a bookstore driven fund. I responded by telling her, "I just asked". I am encouraged by the support we have received thus far and am committed to growing our program this year and in years to come.

### Now that You Have the Money, How Do You Make It All Happen?

Establishing a textbook rental program is not for the faint of heart as the managers in our District will certainly attest. It takes a great deal of work and commitment to make it successful along with a POS system that can support it, faculty that are behind it and an administration that believes in what you are doing. As Director of the District Bookstores, I am fortunate to have all of these things in my favor. The bookstore managers are student focused and committed to our success, our faculty have consistently stepped up and answered the call to help students with ballooning textbook prices (almost 90 percent of our textbook orders across the colleges are in hand by the due date) and our District administrators are solidly behind the bookstore team in making all of this a reality. Our POS provider, MBS Textbook Exchange, Inc, has recently convened a group of store managers that have rental programs over this last year to focus on what they can do to create a superior rental module in their system addressing the many needs of a successful rental program from both the POS and back office side of the house. MBS recognizes the fact that rental program will become more and more prevalent across this country as textbook prices continue to increase.

### *It is a win-win for all involved, especially our students*

Store managers and directors often express frustration at the lack of support on their campuses for the bookstore and for textbook issues. Managers and directors need to take the offensive and

continue to present the facts to student groups, faculty, staff, and administration. We need to be the point people on our campuses about textbook issues. We need to be in the public eye on our campuses all the time talking about the issues and promoting effective solutions that provide a value to our students and allow the bookstore to cover their costs. It sounds simple, doesn't it? Well, it is not simple and it takes a lot of time and effort and, oftentimes, a very thick skin. However, it is our job as professional bookstore operators to educate our administration and faculty on textbook issues. They, too, owe it to students to do whatever they can to support the bookstores in their efforts to help students afford all aspects of a college education, including textbooks. It is our job to bring that point home each and every day.

## Bookstores Used Text Sales Increases 2003-2005

College	Used Textbook Sales 2003-2005						
	2003	2004	\$ Diff 03/04	% Diff 03/04	2005	\$ Diff 04/05	% Diff 04/05
CSM	\$ 581,739.28	\$ 649,644.63	\$ 67,905.35	10%	\$ 690,744.03	\$ 41,099.40	6%
Skyline	\$ 441,109.74	\$ 526,863.51	\$ 85,753.77	16%	\$ 674,757.06	\$ 147,893.55	22%
Canada	\$ 227,337.06	\$ 253,698.49	\$ 26,361.43	10%	\$ 348,775.41	\$ 95,076.92	27%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 1,250,186.08</b>	<b>\$ 1,430,206.63</b>	<b>\$ 180,020.55</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>\$ 1,714,276.50</b>	<b>\$ 284,069.87</b>	<b>17%</b>

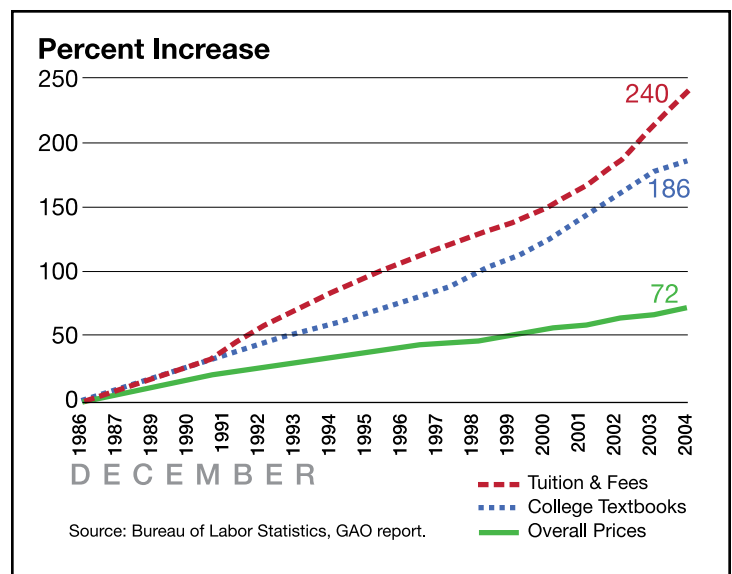
## Technical Aspects of a Successful Rental Program

In addition to all the commitment needed from the campus constituencies, there are other requirements for a successful textbook rental program. Eligible textbooks must meet a strict set of criteria for it to be included in our rental department. Given the fact that we want to get the best use of our funds that will serve the largest number of students for the longest period, we have the following requirements:

- Textbooks must be adopted for two years at a minimum.
- Textbooks must be in a new(er) edition so we can ensure that the book will be available throughout the course of the rental cycle. As we allow students who rent textbooks to pay the difference and buy the book at the end of the rental cycle, we will always have need of more copies.
- Textbooks need to be used for one term only. Textbooks that are used for two consecutive semesters would not qualify as the two rental fees would negate some of the savings to our students.
- The course must be taught every fall and spring semester.
- We prefer that courses be core classes or general education classes. These are often large classes allowing us to assist the largest number of students.
- We cannot add books that are bundled with other books or web products meant for one time use only (one of the publisher tactics I spoke of earlier; this ensures that bookstores can only purchase new copies). While these items are marketed as “free” with the purchase of a new book bundle, many are in fact very expensive when purchased separately if they are even available as individual components. The purchase of these components individually makes the rental of that textbook too high.
- The book cannot be a workbook requiring that require pages be written in or removed.

Not every student wants to rent a textbook. Since rented textbooks cannot be written in or highlighted, they do not appeal to everyone. This is why we offer students who rent the opportunity to buy the textbook for the difference of the new price and the rental fee at the end of the rental cycle. Likewise, we only obtain a percentage of total copies as rental copies. This allows for the fact that not every student wants to rent a textbook and allows us to use our funding to obtain as many different titles as possible. Students are required to sign a rental contract that allows them to keep the rental book until the last day of final exams. Once the book is returned, it is processed back into the store and ready to rent to another student in the next semester.

Our textbook rental program and the fundraising that supports it is just one part of what the bookstores and our



colleges are doing to help defray the costs of textbooks for our students. In the coming years, bookstore managers and directors must continue to seek out more innovative ways to bring textbooks to our students and keep the bookstore as the central point in that transaction. College bookstores are an essential part of any successful college. It is our charge to keep our stores student focused, cost effective campus auxiliaries and to keep the administration and faculty committed to our success. The success of the college bookstore in its mission to serve students translates into the success of the students and the college as a whole. It is a win-win for all involved, especially our students. ♦



**Tom Bauer** is Director of the San Mateo County Community College District Bookstores, comprised of stores at College of San Mateo, Cañada College and Skyline College all located in San Mateo County in the San Francisco Bay Area. Prior to joining the District in 2005, Tom was Director at Huntley Bookstore of The Claremont Colleges in Claremont, CA for three years and spent the sixteen years prior to that working in and managing various college bookstores across the country with Barnes & Noble College Bookstores. Tom began his career with Barnes & Noble while he was in high school and worked as a student employee at college bookstores until receiving a BA from Saint

John's University, Jamaica, NY. In 1990, he was made manager of his first college bookstore located at Long Island University, CW Post Campus, in Greenvale, NY. Tom is the eldest of seven children and grew up in Baldwin (Long Island), NY. He resides in Hayward, CA, with his partner Nilo and dog Niko.

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