Editorial: 
Pricey textbooks for broke students

Everyone knows that college students are poor. Between tuition payments, the need for good off-campus food, every once in a while and the current price of textbooks, it's a miracle that students have any money at all. Thankfully, schools have removed some of the burden through both scholarships and financial aid. Even local movie theaters and restauranteers have chimed in by granting student discounts to those who can show a valid college ID. So, what about the textbooks? Well, according to a recent study conducted by several students at Rutgers University, publishers have been coming up with more and more ways to raise prices. Now that's just not nice!

The problem is that textbook publishers know they have a captive audience. Students are because they go to class and to go to class you need textbooks. It’s a vicious cycle that has resulted in prices increasing at four times the rate of inflation in the U.S. since 1984, according to the study.

There is no need for textbook prices to be elevated at such a high rate. In fact, they should be lowered. As mentioned above, college students can’t get away from textbooks. Every class usually requires at least one and attempting to get by without them can be frustrating. So, if publishing companies know they will always have a large sales base, why not lower prices? By doing this, they can lure back students who are forced to avoid buying books whenever possible due to lack of funds and make the college experience just a little easier while making a profit at the same time.

Many would argue that the current prices are justified because publishing companies don’t stand to make a profit any other way. Not true. According to the study, textbooks cost more in America than they do in any other country. One publisher, Thompson Learning, charges 72 percent more in the U.S. than in the U.K., Africa or the Middle East. This goes to show that a drop in price won’t cripple textbook companies. Since they’ve already done it in other countries with no problem, why not do it in the U.S. as well?

College book stores, including our own here at Rider, have always attempted to relieve some of the financial burden placed on students by allowing them to sell back their books at the end of the semester. However, publishing companies have begun cracking down on this practice as well by constantly releasing unnecessary new editions. In these updates, publishers sometimes do nothing more than change a few math problems or switch the chapter order around. Apparently, this is some truly back-breaking work, since these new editions are often 45 percent more expensive than the old ones, according to the study. Now that’s just plain unethical.

Sadly, it doesn’t look like textbook companies plan on releasing their strangle-hold on college students’ wallets anytime soon. In fact, they will probably only tighten their grip as years go by. However, students can now be positive that publishers do not care about their financial well-being and begin to take steps to correct the problem.

Students can use websites such as www.campusbookswaps.com and www.maketextbooksaffordable.com to buy used textbooks for well under the asking price as well as sell back old ones for up to half the original price. Such sites could be instrumental in bringing publishers’ prices down since they lessen their current monopoly on the industry. However, websites such as this cannot successfully solve the textbook problem unless professors stop insisting on the use of new editions.

For this reason, students should begin pressuring teachers to allow for the use of older textbooks. Professors would benefit because students would be much more likely to purchase the textbooks required and classes would not be affected since new editions are usually unnecessary. Students win because textbook prices then become much more manageable as a result of the previously mentioned websites coming into prominent use.

In the meantime, students will just have to embrace their near-penniless existence. Hey, at least we still get our movie discounts!

This weekly editorial expresses the majority opinion of The Rider News editorial board and is written by the Opinion Editor.