

# THE EXPONENT ONLINE

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Search

- Front Page
- Campus
- City
- Features
- Opinions
- Sports
- Classifieds
- Comics

### Professor cuts book costs with online alternative

By Katie Wall  
Staff Writer

For some students it's a tough choice — textbooks or beer. Purdue Professor Bradley Lucier is making that choice easier.

The average college student spends around \$843 a year on textbooks, approximately the value of 63 cases of beer. Lucier, professor of math, publishes his textbooks online.

His online textbook costs substantially less than buying the book at a book store; however, it still comes at a price, generally \$10 for an individual license.

"The book industry is a huge industry with lots of layers," Lucier said. "I am trying to find a different economic model."

By selling textbooks online, Lucier is trying to avoid many other fees associated with selling textbooks through a book company.

"Education is a business," said Lucier. "I am trying to sell the information and trying to cut out the middle man."

As the cost of attending college climbs, one major complaint students tend to have is the high price of textbooks.

There are many factors that account for the price of college textbooks. One major factor affecting the price of a textbook is the cost at which the publisher sells the book to a bookstore.

Pam Goodman, a spokesperson for Follett's Bookstore, explained that the starting point for determining a final selling price for a textbook comes from the cost the publisher charges Follett's.

The books are then either sold at a net price (which is usually the case) or a list price. If the book is sold at net price, Follett's will determine its retail price at a gross margin price, generally 20 to 25 percent. If the book is sold to Follett's at a list price, the bookstore will match the publisher's suggested retail price.

"Bookstores across the nation typically sell at gross margins," said Goodman, "and our gross margins have not increased in the past 10 years, but the publishers' prices have."

Lucier says one reason why professors require expensive books is they simply do not pay attention to the price. In general, publishers will supply professors and teaching assistants with free textbooks.

"We are not trying to pick outrageously priced textbooks, but we don't have to pay for the books," said Lucier. "If the institution had to pay for the faculty's books, we would pay attention more to price."

Goodman also noted that professors often do not pay for the books used in their course.

"Publishers recommend their books to professors and the professor will then inform the book company of which textbook he or she will be using in their course and we will order enough of those books according to the expected demand," said Goodman.

The Internet has provided some students with a great medium to buy and sell used textbooks. Also, encouraging faculty to consider price when choosing textbooks has been beneficial for some students, and searching for books on the Web may often bring a better price for the textbook.

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