

A SURVEY OF STUDENT TEXTBOOK BUYING BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a survey that assessed the textbook buying behavior of college business students. The results, for the spring semester of 2012, show that the majority of students prefer to purchase traditional print textbooks from bookstores even though these are the highest priced option. About 18% of the students rented textbooks and about 32% purchased textbooks through the Internet. Printed textbooks are highly preferred to e-books.

INTRODUCTION

The market for products and services to meet the needs of educational institutions has clearly evolved from the time of the first printing press to the present day mix of print and on-line resources. How these resources are created, selected, and used is influenced by an interesting mix of stakeholders that includes: publishers, educational institutions, book suppliers, instructional technology designers, instructors, and students. As a result, a variety of different forms of educational materials is available with an increased number of ways to purchase these materials.

This research focuses on the textbook purchase decision of students enrolled in a four-year liberal arts university and majoring in business. Our inquiry of students' buying behavior started based on hearing and experiencing student comments such as: "I did not purchase a text, it was too expensive", or "I did not believe that I needed a text", or "I am sharing a text". We suspect that some students do not budget for textbooks in their financial planning for college. Also, the price of textbooks has been increasing at an extraordinary rate relative to the general rate of inflation in the economy. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) [1] for "Educational books and supplies" for 2011 was 529.545 using 1997 as the base. This means that the average 2011 price for these products was 5.29 times the average price in 1997. Further, the change from 2010 to 2011 was a +4.7%. (For additional information and comparison, the 2011 CPI for "Tuition, other school fees, and childcare" was 597.208).

So, the current challenge for instructors and students is to get the required course materials in a market that provides a variety of options, prices, and sources for course materials. We are interested to know how students use the current textbook market to acquire course materials.

Our inquiry of student course materials purchase behavior recognizes two characteristics of the market: 1) course materials can be expensive; and 2) there are many purchase options that vary in the relative cost of the materials. As an example, we surveyed the market for the 7th edition of Basic Statistics for Business and Economics by Lind, Marchal, and Wathen [2]. Table 1 shows the variety of sources and prices available to students.

TABLE 1.
LIND ET AL. BASIC STATISTICS FOR BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS, 7TH ED.

Source	Condition	Price
Privately owned off campus	New	\$191.65
Privately operated university bookstore	Used	\$144.00
Privately owned off campus	Used	\$143.75
Amazon.com	New	\$115.01
Amazon.com	Used	\$81.22
Amazon.com	Ebook/Kindle	\$124.02
Amazon.com	New Looseleaf	\$11.86
Amazon.com	Used Looseleaf	\$11.87
Chegg.com	Rental	\$42.49
Chegg.com	eTextbook rental (180 days)	\$82.42
Usenet.com (others)	Ebook	Free?
Barnes & Noble.com	New	\$153.73
Barnes & Noble.com	Used	\$80.99
Barnes & Noble.com	Rent	\$40.25

Table 1 demonstrates that there are a wide variety of purchase options and corresponding prices. The table suggests several questions regarding student buying behavior such as: Are students aware of the options? What barriers exist regarding purchasing behavior, such as: lack of market knowledge, financial and student loan issues, inertia versus convenience, and the availability of supporting technology such as laptops, ipads, etc.?

SURVEY AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the status of student textbook buying behavior in a particular college of business. The survey, included in the Appendix, was issued to undergraduate students majoring in business administration during the spring 2012 semester. 455 surveys were collected from a variety of courses offered in a College of Business classified as: business core course, major course, minor course, elective course, or other. Table 2 shows the frequencies of the responses by type of course:

TABLE 2.
DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS BY COURSE TYPE

Course type	Frequency	Relative Frequency
Business core	289	67.05
Major	99	22.97
Minor	25	5.80
Elective	3	0.70
Other	15	3.48
Missing	(24)	-

Overall, the demographics of the surveyed students in terms of gender, business major, in-state versus out-of-state, transfer students, and grade point average are very close to the demographics of all students in the college of business. We would surmise that our sample is a good representation of the population of students in the college.

Of the 455 responses, 328 students indicated that the course required a textbook. And of these 328 students, 294(90%) indicated they purchased a textbook and 34 (10%) indicated that they did not purchase a textbook.

Focusing on the 294 students who were required to buy a text, Table 3 shows how students acquired the textbook. The survey results show that, of the students who were required to buy a text, nearly 40% preferred purchasing a textbook through the campus bookstore. Students also used the Internet to acquire a text. Nearly 21% used the Internet to purchase a textbook and nearly 12% rented a text through the Internet.

TABLE 3.
DISTRIBUTION OF HOW STUDENTS ACQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

How was textbook acquired?	Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Buy on campus	115	39.66
Buy off campus	55	18.97
Buy on the internet	60	20.69
Buy from friend	4	1.38
Rent on campus	11	3.79
Rent off campus	1	0.34
Rent through the internet	34	11.72
Borrowed	8	2.76
Shared	2	0.69
Missing data	(4)	-

Student textbook buying behavior is summarized in Tables 4 and 5 in terms of buying versus renting a textbook. In our survey, Table 3 shows nearly 81% of the students bought a textbook and nearly 19% rented a textbook. Table 4 shows nearly 65% of students bought the textbook in a store and nearly 32% of student bought the text via the Internet.

TABLE 4.
TEXTBOOKS BOUGHT VERSUS RENTED

Bought vs. Rented	Frequency	Relative Frequency(%)
Bought	234	80.70
Rented or borrowed	54	18.61
Shared	2	0.69

TABLE 5.
TEXTBOOKS BOUGHT VIA THE INTERNET VERSUS STORE

Store vs. Internet	Frequency	Relative Frequency(%)
Store	190	64.62
Internet	94	31.97
Borrowed or Shared	10	3.4

Another purchase decision is whether a student buys an e-book version of the textbook. Table 6 summarized the results for the 294 students who indicated that they were required to purchase a textbook.

Nearly 93% of the students purchased a printed book. Table 7 shows the relationship between how a textbook was purchased and whether the purchase was an e-book or a printed text. While it is possible to purchase an e-book through a bookstore, 18 of the 21 e-books were purchased through the internet.

TABLE 6.
E-BOOK PURCHASES

E-book purchased?	Frequency	Relative Frequency(%)
Printed book	267	92.71
E-book	21	7.29

TABLE 7.
TEXTBOOKS BOUGHT IN PRINT VERSUS E-BOOK VERSUS HOW THE TEXTBOOK WAS PURCHASED.

How was textbook acquired?	Print	E-book
Buy on campus	109	2
Buy off campus	54	1
Buy on the internet	44	15
Buy from friend	4	0
Rent on campus	11	0
Rent off campus	1	0
Rent through the internet	30	3
Borrowed	8	0
Shared	2	0
Missing data	(10)	-

Our survey also included questions regarding the availability of web based textbook supplements and whether the students decided to purchase the supplement. In this analysis, 232 responded to these questions. The results are shown in Table 8. Students do what is required.

TABLE 8.
WAS A WEB-BASED SUPPLEMENT REQUIRED AND/OR PURCHASED?

		Did you buy the web-based supplement?	
		Yes	No
Is a web-based supplement required?	Yes	152	11
	No	9	60

Tables 9, 10, and 11 show purchase behavior in terms of employment status. Table 9 shows the overall results. Tables 10 and 11 summarize the comparisons between buying versus renting, and purchasing in a store versus buying through the Internet. When the choice of buying versus renting is compared, employment status does not appear to be related to this choice ($p=.4916$). However, when comparing the choice of purchasing in a store versus the Internet, differences are apparent ($p=0.0027$). While all three employment groups prefer to purchase in a store, part-time employed students have the highest preference for purchasing through the Internet following by full-time employed students. We believe that students who are employed part-time tend to be older and self-sufficient and will shop the variety of sources for the best price. Students who are not employed are the least likely to use the Internet to purchase a textbook.

TABLE 9.
HOW A TEXTBOOK WAS ACQUIRED BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS.

How was textbook acquired?	Full Time (n=56)	Part Time (n=106)	Not Employed (116)
Buy on campus	45%	33%	46%
Buy off campus	14%	18%	23%
Buy on the internet	16%	32%	12%
Buy from friend	2%	1%	0%
Rent on campus	2%	3%	6%
Rent off campus	2%	0%	0%
Rent through the internet	20%	11%	9%
Borrowed	0	2%	2%
Shared	0%	0%	2%
Missing data	(16)	-	-

TABLE 10.
STUDENT PREFERENCE FOR BUYING VERSUS RENTING BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Bought vs. Rented	Full Time	Part Time	Not Employed
Bought	77%	84%	82%
Rented or borrowed	23%	16%	18%

TABLE 11.
STUDENT PREFERENCE FOR BUYING IN A STORE VERSUS INTERNET BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Internet vs. Store	Full Time	Part Time	Not Employed
Store	63%	54%	78%
Internet	36%	43%	22%

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research is to survey the textbook buying behavior for a sample of undergraduate business majors. As Table 1 shows for a sampled textbook, the textbook market can be very diverse in the source for the purchase, the type of textbook, and the price. One of our questions is to what degree students may use these purchasing options, especially to manage rising textbook costs. This discussion includes a comparison of our results to the results of the 2010 Florida Student Textbook Survey [3]. The Florida Survey gathered 14,220 responses from students enrolled in twenty-eight colleges and eleven universities across the state of Florida between September 21, 2010 and March 21, 2011.

The most expected result is that students in both surveys prefer to buy textbooks in print. Note that in our survey about 7% of the purchased textbooks were e-books. The following table from the Florida Survey [3] shows a very similar result to ours. Note that a student could respond to more than one of the options so the categories are not mutually exclusive. In addition, the Florida survey included open-ended questions providing respondents an option to cite reasons that they were NOT interested in digital or e-books. The top four reasons were: 1) they want to a printed textbook to highlight and annotate, 2) reading electronic text was inconvenient, 3) difficulty moving within a digital text, and 4) lack of access to technology for using electronic textbooks.

2010 Florida Student Textbook Survey: How Students Access Textbooks		
<i>Q. 14. For Fall 2010, how do you access your textbooks? N=12252</i>		
How Students Access Textbooks	N	Percent
Print - used	9398	76.7
Print - new	6997	57.1
Print - rented	3037	24.8
Print - borrowed (no cost)	1794	14.6
eBook - limited ownership license	1124	9.2
Checked out from the library or inter-library loan	652	5.3
Open Textbook - online, download, self-print	557	4.5
eBook - permanent access	443	3.6
Open Textbook - commercial print	270	2.2
Total number of selections	24272	

While buying printed textbooks may be preferred, it is interesting that a relative minority of students choose to rent a printed textbook at a lower price. In our survey, about 19% of the students rented texts. In the Florida Survey, for almost 40% of the classes, students rented textbooks. In our sample, the rental option is in its second year and students may not be aware of the option or the option is not available for all classes. The response in the Florida Survey may be higher since it includes students attending colleges. Clearly the rental option provides students with a print textbook and a lower cost. In our university, we would do more research on the availability of the option and the student decision to rent.

In our survey, we included a question regarding purchase decisions of printed textbooks through the Internet. Our survey shows that about 32% of students did shop the internet options and purchased through the Internet. Based on the information in Table 1, we would conclude that these students are aware of their purchasing options and are seeking the best price for their textbooks.

The Florida Survey supports our inference that students use the Internet purchase option to manage costs. The Florida Survey shows that the top response to manage costs is to shop sources other than the campus

2010 Florida Student Textbook Survey: Measures Used to Reduce Textbook Cost		
<i>Q. 11 What measures have you taken to reduce your textbook costs? Check all that apply.</i>		
Answer Options	Responses	Percent
Buy used or new books online from source other than the campus bookstore	8932	72.2%
Buy used copies from campus bookstore	7940	64.2%
Sell used books	7170	58.0%
Share books with classmates	4808	38.9%
Do not purchase the required textbook	4585	37.1%
Rent textbooks through an on-campus rental program	3003	24.3%
Buy an electronic version of a textbook	2101	17.0%
Use a reserve copy in the campus library	1576	12.7%
Buy only the e-textbook chapters needed for the course	861	7.0%
Do not attempt to reduce textbook costs	316	2.6%
Other	1123	9.1%

book store. It is also interesting to note that renting a text and buying an electronic version of the textbook were not highly rated options. Also, students indicated that not purchasing a textbook is a very real option.

The last analysis reported in our survey is the relationship between employment status (full-time, part-time, and not employed) and buying behavior. The interesting result is the relationship between the source of the purchase or rental and employment status. The results show that part-time employed students are most likely to purchase or rent through the Internet followed by full-time employed students, and the least likely are students who are not employed. Our presumption is that employment status may be an indication of a student's financial status. In our case, students who are employed, either full- or part-time are more sensitive to prices and use the internet to find lower priced textbooks. This particular question would need further research to validate our presumption.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research indicate that students prefer traditional printed textbooks. The research also suggests that most students do not price shop the various sources of textbooks deferring to make their textbook purchases at campus and off-campus book stores.

REFERENCES

- [1] United States Department of Labor; Bureau of Labor Statistics;
(<http://www.bls.gov/cpi/cpid11av.pdf>)
- [2] Lind D.A, Marchel, W. C, Wathen, S. A. 2011. Basic Statistics for Business and Economics, 7th edition. McGraw-Hill/Irwin, New York, New York.
- [3] 2010 Florida Student Textbook Survey. 2011. The Florida Distance Learning Consortium. Tallahassee, Florida. http://www.openaccesstextbooks.org/df/2010_FSTS_Report_01SEP2011.pdf

APPENDIX

Securing Textbooks for your Courses

We would like to learn more about your textbook buying behaviors. From this information, we hope to better serve your instructional needs in the future. Rest assured, your responses will remain confidential. We'll combine all data so each response remains anonymous. We thank you in advance for sharing the requested information with us.

Q1 Is there a textbook available for this course?

Yes..... ☐
No ☐

Q2 Is a textbook required by your instructor?

Yes..... ☐
No ☐

Q3 If there is a textbook for this course, do you have one (whether it was required or recommended)?

Yes..... ☐
No ☐

Q4 Assuming you do have the textbook for the course, are you using the most current edition?

Yes..... ☐
No ☐
Unsure ☐
Not applicable. I do not have the textbook..... ☐

Q5 Assuming you have a textbook for this course, how did you acquire it? (Check one)

I BOUGHT it at the ON-CAMPUS bookstore ☐
I BOUGHT it at an OFF-CAMPUS bookstore ☐
I BOUGHT it on the INTERNET ☐
I BOUGHT it from a FRIEND or other source ☐
I RENTED it from the ON-CAMPUS bookstore..... ☐
I RENTED it from an OFF-CAMPUS bookstore.... ☐
I RENTED it from an INTERNET site..... ☐
I BORROWED the textbook..... ☐
I SHARE(D) the textbook with a friend..... ☐
I DID NOT ACQUIRE the textbook for this course ☐

Q6 What form of the book did you acquire?

A printed copy..... ☐
An e-book ☐
Not applicable. I did not acquire the textbook..... ☐

Q7 Is there a Web-based supplement (i.e., CONNECT, WileyPLUS, MyLabs) for this course?

Yes..... ☐
No ☐

Q8 Is the Web-based supplement (i.e., CONNECT, WileyPLUS, MyLabs) required by your instructor?

Yes..... ☐
No ☐

Q9 Assuming there is a Web-based supplement (i.e., CONNECT, WileyPLUS, MyLabs), did you buy it?

Yes..... ☐
No ☐

Q10 Gender

Male ☐
Female ☐

Q11 What is your major?

Accounting ☐
Economics ☐
Finance ☐
Management..... ☐
Marketing..... ☐
Resort Tourism..... ☐
Other..... ☐

Q12 Are you an in-state student?

Yes..... ☐
No ☐

Q13 Are you a transfer student to Coastal Carolina University?

Yes..... ☐
No ☐

Q14 What is your approximate Grade Point Average (GPA)?

Below 2.00 ☐
2.00 - 2.50 ☐
2.51 - 3.00 ☐
3.01 - 3.50 ☐
3.51 - 4.00 ☐

Q15 Which statement best reflects where this course fits into your degree program? (Check one)

Business Core ☐
Major field of study ☐
Minor field of study (or cognate) ☐
Free Elective ☐
Other ☐

Q16 What is your year in school?

Freshman ☐
Sophomore ☐
Junior ☐
Senior ☐

Q17 Which of the following devices do you own? (Please check all that apply.)

Laptop/Desktop ☐
Tablet ☐
eReader (Nook, Kindle, etc) ☐
iPad ☐

Q18 Do you receive some form of financial aid?

Yes..... ☐
No ☐

Q19 Assuming you do receive financial aid, which specific aid type applies? (Please check all that apply).

Scholarships/Grants ☐
Loans ☐
Work Study ☐
Not applicable. I do not receive financial aid. ☐

Q20 Which statement best reflects your current employment status? (Check one)

I work full-time for CCU ☐
I work part-time for CCU ☐
I work full-time off-campus ☐
I work part-time off-campus ☐
I am not currently employed ☐

Q21 Student Status

I am a FULL-TIME student ☐
I am a PART-TIME student ☐

Thank you for participating in this study!