

## Textbook Pricing Q & A

### **Q: Why do book prices vary so widely?**

**A:** A very significant determinant of a book's price is its development costs. In addition to research, editing, design, and typesetting costs, many higher education books require the development of instructor support materials and student aids that instructors and students have come to demand over the years. Ultimately, each book needs to satisfy both audiences. Similarly, the cost of the book is determined by whether it is printed in one colour only or different inks are used, whether there are illustrations (and particularly colour illustrations), and whether there are extensive permissions costs associated with the book (as with most anthologies or collections of previously published readings). Another determinant of a book's price is its print-run. With a specialized title written for scholars or aimed at a limited upper-year student market, for example, the publisher will be able to justify only a very modest print-run, making the unit cost quite high and necessitating a higher price. Conversely, if the publisher is able to project large sales to a great number of first-year courses, a larger print-run will be scheduled, unit costs will be much lower, and a much lower price will be possible.

### **Q: Is the bookstore ripping me off?**

**A:** Certainly not in the vast majority of cases. Typically, the publisher sells to the university bookstore at a discount from the suggested retail price, but the discount is enough to provide for only a modest margin in the best of circumstances. Depending on a university bookstore's cost structure, it may be necessary to charge slightly more than the suggested retail price. This is particularly true when the university bookstore is located far away from the publisher's warehouse, since the customer bears responsibility for shipping costs.

### **Q: If book prices for a course seem to me to be way too high, is my instructor to blame for assigning the texts?**

**A:** In most cases, no. For one thing, strange as it may seem, he or she may well have had no easy way of discovering the book's current price. Many publishers do not publicize the retail prices to students of the books they publish. The assumption, presumably, is that since the instructor will not be the one actually paying for the book, he or she will not be interested in how much the students will have to pay. In fact, many university instructors do care about what their students pay for books, and would appreciate having this information made more readily available by publishers.

If a text is expensive, though, it may also be the case that the instructor has been aware of the price and has made an informed decision that the book represents the best possible value to the student for the course.

### **Q: What can I do about the prices of textbooks?**

**A:** It is always a good idea for students to discuss the price of books and the value of books with their instructors. Such discussion may serve, first of all, to confirm that your instructor does know what price you have paid. Just as helpful is to let your instructor know towards the end of the course if you feel the texts selected for the course have indeed represented good value. You may also wish to discuss with your instructors general issues such as whether you would prefer to see texts with less illustration, one-colour printing, and paperback covers—which would thus be priced

considerably lower than texts with a great deal of illustration, multicolour printing throughout, and expensive bindings.

We hope you find this information useful.