

Football, Friends & Flowers

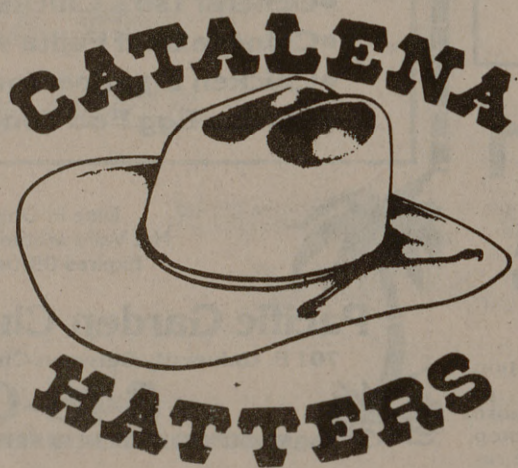
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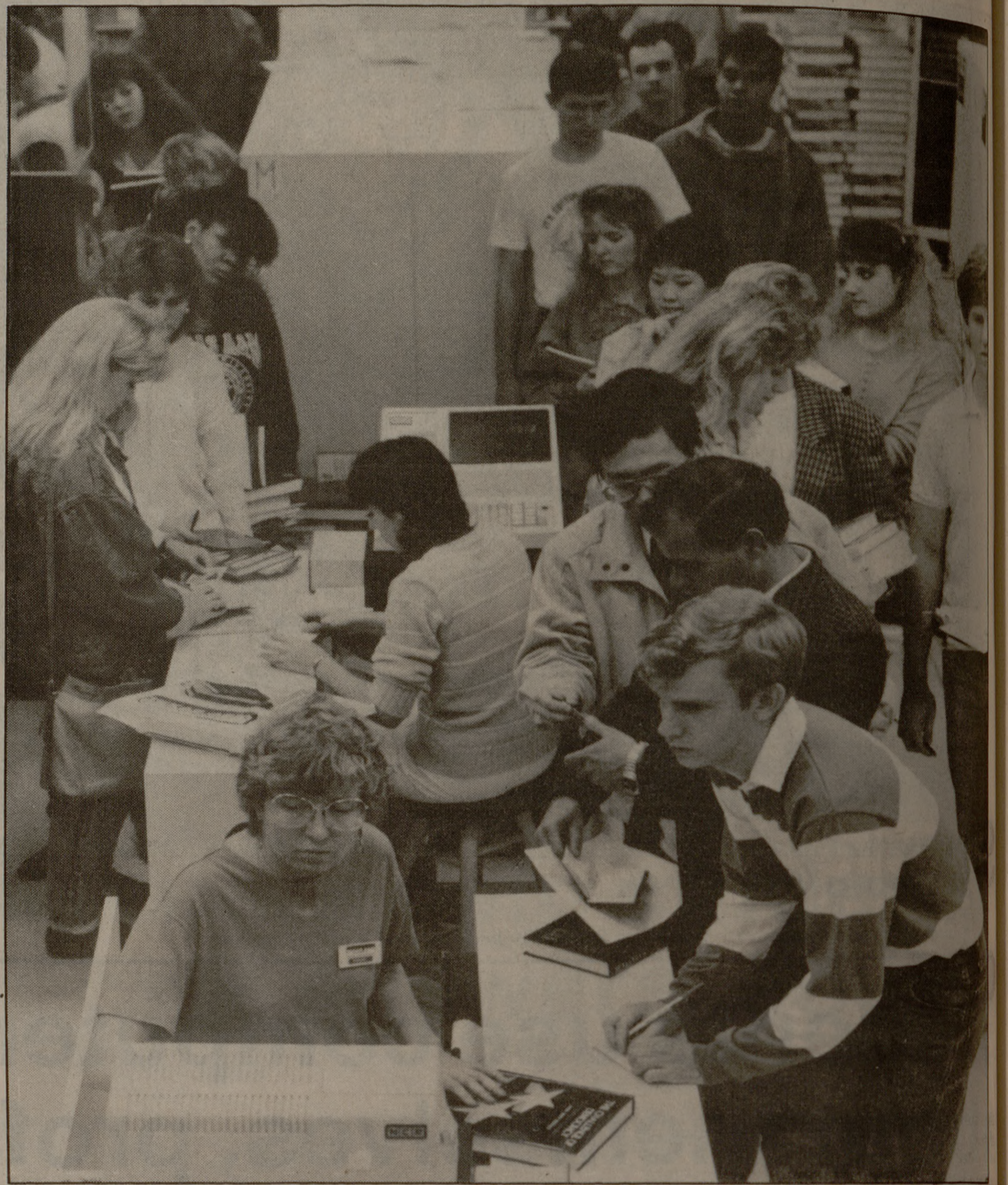
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Students wait in long lines at the Texas A&M Bookstore during the first days of classes of the Spring 1988. Thousands usually wait until the first days of classes to buy and sell textbooks.

Buying books tends to be expensive for everyone

By Kelly S. Brown
Reporter

BUY HIGH and sell low — sounds like the reverse of a stock market tip — but when dealing with textbooks, it's the price paid.

Textbook prices are generally the same at College Station's 11 bookstores.

A student who just spent \$40 on a biology book knows that he will get — at most — \$20 if and when he returns it. He wants to scream, "I've been robbed," and he wants someone to blame it on — be it the publisher, the wholesale dealer, the bookstore or the author — but there is no single culprit.

A&M Marketing professor and textbook writer Dr. O.C. Ferrell said the villain is the actual system itself.

The system works something like this.

PUBLISHERS ASK specialists, usually professors, in a subject to write a textbook. After it's written, sales representatives find buyers. Buyers, after looking at many books from many companies, decide which textbook they want to use. Once decided, a deal is made and an order is sent to the bookstores. The bookstores request books from the book companies. Seems simple, well — not quite.

Lynne Williams, director of Sales, Marketing and Finance for St. Martin's Press in New York City, said publishers are not making the enormous clear-cut profit that people think they are.

Bookstores sell books to stores at either a net price or a 20 percent discount. Bookstores lobbied against the 20 percent discount six years ago because they didn't feel 20 percent was enough. Most bookstores still buy at the discount price. Williams said the jury is still out over which system is better.

"We don't just make up prices in our mind," she said. "The price is decided by how much it costs to make the book, and what people don't realize is that publishers make a very small profit."

"So much money goes into the publishing of a textbook, often a million or more dollars, and we are trying to satisfy several parts of an equation — buyers, professors and consumers — and that's not easy because the three parts are in conflict. We try to make our prices as fair as possible for everyone," Williams said.

Kim Oles, a senior management major, knows in business things are not always fair.

"I used to feel ripped off and thought it was a scam whenever I sold back a book for half what I paid and bookstores turn around and sell it for more. I know where the money is going and understand that profit is not a bad word, but I still think textbooks cost far too much," she said. "The students are paying for the injustice in the system."

Williams said, "Costs include the physical book itself, which calls for an enormous amount of money. Some obvious costs include paper

and ink, while different colors or special figures in a book raise the price. Research and development — as well as salaries — siphon a bulk of the money. Royalties have to be paid to the authors. However, by no means are writers becoming rich from book profits."

Apparently, neither are the bookstores.

Howard DeHart, manager of the Memorial Student Center bookstore, said gifts and supplies are what

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Lynne Williams,
St. Martin's Press

make a profit for bookstores, not books. The books are what lure the students in.

"If I were to go into business for myself it wouldn't be in the book industry," DeHart said. "Books are solely for the student, not for bookstores to make huge profits. Besides, books are the best and cheapest thing a student buys while in college."

COLLEGE STATION bookstore managers agree that a student spends an average of \$200 to \$300 each semester on books.

One parent told the *Battalion* that he has spent \$23,591.53 on his sons' total four year education — 7 percent of which was for books.

Michael Kiely, a former bookstore manager, said bookstores don't make more than 1 or 2 percent profit from new books.

"Used books are where some of the profit is made. Most bookstores sell used books for 75 percent of the new selling price," he said.

Bookstores have different buy-back policies, but most will give in cash 50 percent of the list price and as Kiely said, sell it back at one and a half of what the student paid for it.

For example, if a student buys a book for \$20 and sells it back for \$10, the bookstore will re-sell it for \$15.

Bookstores, DeHart said, would rather sell used books and students would rather pay for used books, but there are never enough to go around.

"Many students at A&M, especially engineering and business majors, don't sell their books, and I think they should be commended for that," he said. "However, bookstores lose money, because to compensate for the loss of supply on used books, they have to send for

new books and money is spent on freight charges.

WHILE STUDENTS swap books, keep some and sell others to various stores, the order to the publisher drops and the publishers get angry, he said.

"Used books," Williams said, "go into our market and cause our book prices to increase in price. So much time and energy goes into buying used books that, in the long run, it's not worth it for the bookstores to buy used books."

Not so said Kiely, who now works for College Book Store, a wholesale company in Arkansas. The publishers are losing money but not compared to the money they could be saving if they really concentrated on the internal control of their company, he said.

The internal control Kiely is referring to is in the promotion and publicity department.

"They spend an enormous amount of money trying to get schools to buy the books. It has not been done, but the high cost is what's batable," Kiely said.

"Publishing companies have representatives who go to schools or schools have representatives come them for exhibits, and deals are made. Sure, the potential buyers to see a book before he buys it."

publishing companies give the buyers complimentary books to review. They keep the book regardless of whether they buy it or not. Money lost when the professor sells a complimentary book to a bookstore...that's not fair. The consumer essentially ends up paying for it."

PUBLISHING COMPANIES also offer a lot of expensive incentives to the potential buyers, slides, films, computers, test tapes and money for the department name several, Kiely said. "This also what is jacking up the price of the consumer and hurting him. It is where the internal control goes to start in order for the price of books to go down."

Williams said marketing a book is part of the whole process. They have to offer incentives, but she says it makes them angry when professors sell a complimentary book to a bookstore. It costs the company money and hurts the consumer, she said.

"I don't know if the professor just don't realize what they are doing or if they do realize it but don't care. Many bookstores refuse to buy complimentary books. They can tell a book is complimentary because there's often a stamp, sticker, something on the book saying so."

Ferrell considers it highly unethical for a professor to sell his complimentary book to a bookstore.

"The best correlation is pharmaceutical doctors who receive sample drugs free, sell the drugs to patients to keep the money," he said.

PROFESSORS COULD give textbooks to libraries or students but to sell them for profit is a broad