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Textbook Policy and Renting of Textbooks

10-6-2010

Submitted by: John Weaver

10/6/2010

Discussion:

At the beginning of the semester of the semester I submitted a request for information regarding a) textbook policy and b) the renting of textbooks. I would like to submit this discussion item request to begin the process of forming a more intellectually suitable policy concerning textbooks and books on this campus.

First let me say, as a scholar and professor of this university I distinctly view textbooks and books as different. Textbooks are secondary sources and books are primary sources. I believe the current (text)book policy is counter to the university mission statement in three key areas: It is our mission to 1) create a "culture of engagement that bridges theory with practice, extends the learning environment beyond the classroom, and promotes student growth and life success." This part of our mission is made more difficult when students are encouraged to view their (text)books only as something that should be held onto and referenced for only one semester. If (text)books are seen as a major bridge to connect theory with practice it is only a temporary bridge and not very well built. Also if (text)books are a major way in which faculty engage students then it is only a temporary and very cursory engagement. Not one built on a sound future marriage. 2) The University Mission is to create "a fertile learning environment exemplified by a free exchange of ideas, high academic expectations and individual responsibility for academic achievement." How can we expect to create such an environment when there are only rented (text)books and used books dominating the circulation of the main locus for the circulation of ideas? How can we hold students responsible for their own learning if we encourage them to willfully disconnect from the main source of learning: books? How can we engage our students in learning if we partake in a process in which learning is seen as an economic transaction and an automaton-like process of information exchange rather than knowledge creation? This only encourages the creation of passive learners. 3) The university mission wishes to create "learning experiences of the highest quality, informed by scholarly practice,

research, and creative activities." When we encourage students to sell back their (text)books or to rent them or when we encourage them to buy used books, we undermine the scholarly process that is based on the circulation of books and journal articles through publishing houses that can only afford us opportunities to publish if they are able to disseminate enough books and journals.

Rationale:

When the University of Berlin was forming in 1807, the German Philosopher Johann Fichte called the university, any university, a Holy Place. Seventy years later Nietzsche, in his inaugural lectures to the University of Basil, referred to the university as sacred ground. As professors we live and practice our vocation on holy and sacred ground. We are the standard barriers not of job training or information but of that which our society and world holds to be heartfelt truths. We should be concerned with the degradation and reduction of books to things that are parts of an emotionless transaction. As professors we are people of books and it is our duty to protect the meaning and importance of these books. It is the duty of the university store, which should be called the university book store, to also protect the meaning and importance of books. The Spanish Philosopher Jose Ortega Y Gasset stated in the 1930s that "not only the life of the university, but the whole new life must be fashioned by artisans whose first thought is authenticity." As professors, we are the artisans and we must ask if we can be authentic with our students and that which we create through rented textbooks and used books?

Response:

10/13/2010: Here is the SEC response to John Weaver's Request for Discussion. The SEC declined this request.

This request is related to a question of value, which has a place in academe, but not in a deliberative policy-making body. If this request were related to a specific policy question, it would be eligible for Senate consideration.

Sincerely,
Clara