



Alternatives for Purchasing Books

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the last several months, students of Anne Arundel Community College have complained about high pricing of books at the campus bookstore. This has created demand for other alternatives to acquire information. Many have opted for online bookstores, e-books and other alternatives that seem to be relatively cheaper when compared with purchasing physical books. However, there is no guarantee that the final price of these alternatives is lowered after all costs are included. Therefore, this research is aimed to determine and compare all available alternatives to purchasing books.

The study population included the students of Anne Arundel Community College, tutors, and the bookstore's staff. The student population comprises of approximately 20,000 students, although only a sample of them was used (100 students). Data collection involved individual interviews with students and tutors as well as surveying them to get their responses regarding purchase of the books.

Factors that are considered for data analysis include the price of the book (including shipping costs), students' opinions about purchasing books, the book buyback program, and availability of the books.

Considering the completed data analysis, it is suggested that the price of physical books should be lowered. Otherwise, students may tend to rely more on e-books or purchase books from online stores. Books purchased online have proved to be relatively cheaper or given at discounted prices. E-books, on the other hand, are more reliable, portable and can minimize storage space. Since physical books are recommended by teachers, their prices should be made more affordable for students (Bonk, 2009).

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the research was to determine all substitutes that can be used instead of books. The data collected was also analyzed to verify whether these alternatives are cheaper, according to the students of Anne Arundel Community College. To collect data, the following research questions were used:

1. How do students find prices of books at the campus bookstore?
2. What alternatives have students considered instead of purchasing physical books?
3. Are the alternatives effective and cheaper compared to buying at the bookstore?

BACKGROUND

Anne Arundel Community College is a higher education institution located in Maryland, United States. Most high school students who enroll for higher education in Maryland choose this institution as there is a very large population of students located in the area. With almost 225 programs and 3500 courses, the demand for learning resources is very high (Hornak, 2009). Because of this, the institution has built a campus bookstore where all students can buy books from. However, the prices of books at the bookstore have become too expensive for students to afford. This has caused scholars to complain to the student government, who then conducted research to seek a solution.

Prices of books at the bookstore are set according to the acquisition cost. The store acquires books from publishers or supply companies, and they are set at a standard price, which includes taxation. With various costs included, the books become expensive for the students to purchase. The concern was raised by the

students to the student government that is now trying to find the solution, and with this aim, a research was conducted and 100 students of the institution were interviewed.

The students provided their comments on other book sources that they would rather use instead of physical books. Most of them preferred using available e-books, some students opted to order from online bookstores. The buyback program also allows scholars to obtain books at a lower price since they are second-hand books. The bookstore buys used books from the students who can now afford buying books for other classes (Hornak, 2009). Specific data for this report was collected from students of Anne Arundel Community College and the analysis was conducted to pick the best alternative for students willing to acquire books (Dairy, 2007).

DISCUSSION: PRICING, OPINIONS ABOUT PURCHASING BOOKS, THE BOOK BUYBACK PROGRAM, AND AVAILABILITY

Books are priced according to the costs included. This applies mostly when purchasing web-based books. Another factor that was considered during the research was the students' feedback regarding purchasing books (which form of books they preferred and which ones were more reliable to purchase). The research also analyzed the role of the book buyback program in altering students' preferences. Availability of the books also determines which ones are purchased more often (Dairy, 2007).

Pricing

Textbook pricing at the bookstore is majorly done by the book publishers. They provide prices for previous and current editions. Therefore, it is not up to the bookstore to set the prices. The publisher also provides alternative forms of the textbooks, giving the faculty a variety of materials to pick from. The bookstore only provides retail prices for students. New books are normally bought at the price recommended by the publisher, unless discount offers are given.

According to students of Anne Arundel Community College, the retail prices are too high. For most of the courses, new editions are recommended for use. The editions may not be available on the textbook adoption or book buyback program, hence have to be purchased as new, with prices which are unaffordable (Dairy, 2007).

Opinions About Purchasing Books

About 30% of students preferred using e-books (if available) instead of physical books. Those who opted for books in softcopy said they are convenient for travel purposes since one can read them anywhere. Time for acquisition is also short since it does not take much time to get the book from the online store and download it. Unlike ordering hard copies of books online, e-books are more convenient, and one can start reading them immediately after purchasing them (Bonk, 2009).

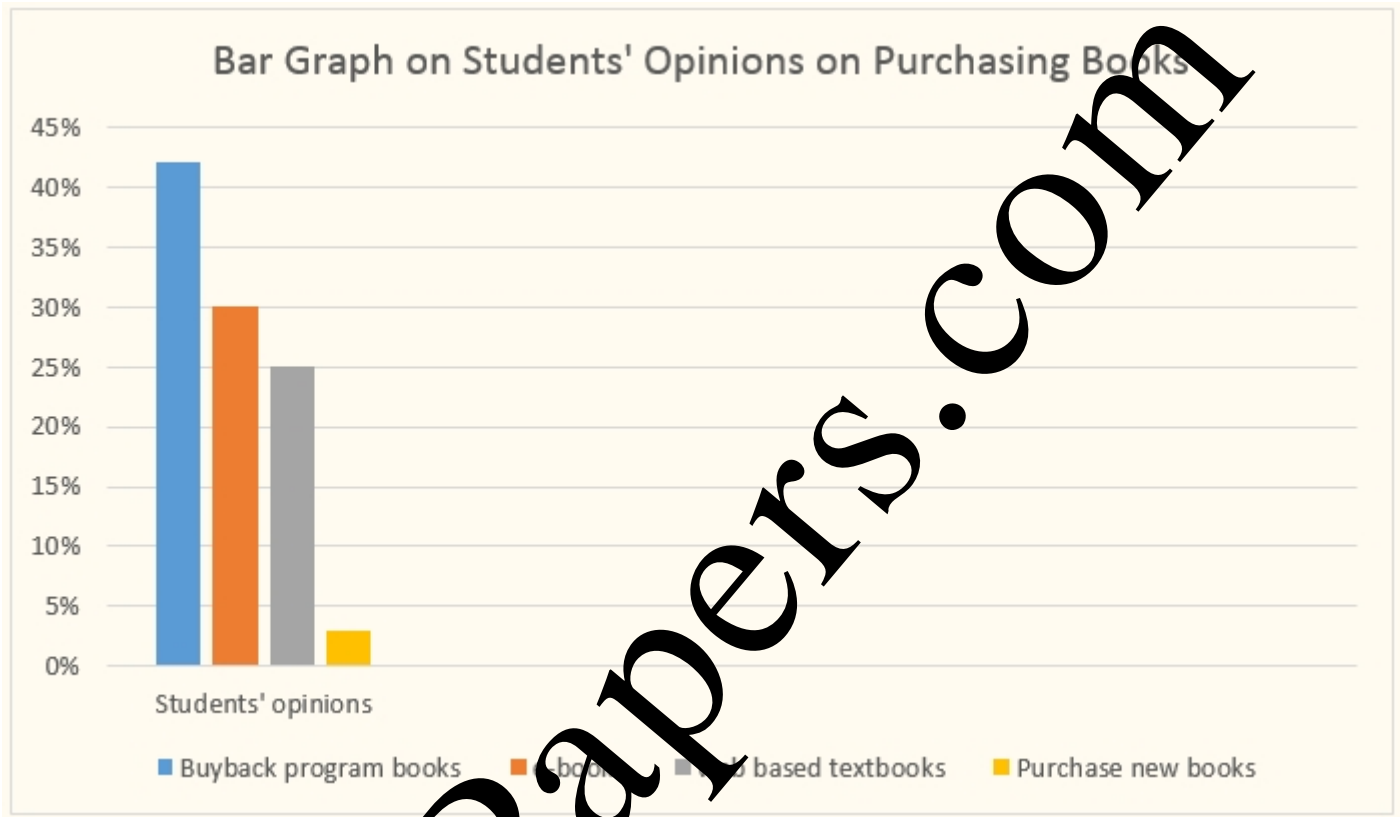
Students also claimed that it was cheaper to acquire an e-book than to buy physical textbooks, hence for economy purposes they go for e-books. They are also convenient for night reading, allow font adjustments and do not require a large space for storage. In addition, 25% of the sample population said it was easier to purchase web-based textbooks, which were relatively cheaper than the textbooks sold at the campus bookstores. For students in the United States, shipping costs are low. Thus, the total price of acquiring a book online becomes cheaper than getting it from the bookstore (Bonk, 2009).

The Book Buyback Program

The book buyback program allows students of Anne Arundel Community College to sell back their used textbooks for up to half the price of the new book. These books can be placed in the store for other students to buy at lower prices. The program is recommended since it allows the bookstore to make profits and gives the students an opportunity to get money to purchase other new books. It also allows students to purchase used books at affordable prices. Students thought that it was the best alternative since the used books were

readily available at the store for rebuying, and they tend to buy used books, especially at the end of the semester.

About 42% of the students supported the program claiming that buying back books can save money and is more reliable than purchasing books online. Tutors also claim that it is a good option as it allows them to buy many reference materials for teaching at lower prices compared to the new books. About 3% of the sample population thought it was better to purchase new books since they are available in new editions and are not tampered with. (Dairy, 2007).



Availability

Although many students preferred e-books and web-based textbooks, they cannot always be found online. Also, shipping can take more time than initially expected, and it may cause some problems of an academic character. These are two factors that make physical books available at the bookstores a better option, with no regard to buying new or used books at the stores (Bonk, 2009).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the data collected in the research, students require an alternative for purchasing new books. The alternative should be cheaper, readily available and convenient for both students and tutors. Comparing the available alternatives for purchasing new books, the buyback program has proved to be the best option and was supported by the largest percentage of students (42%). As much as the physical copies do not offer the comfort of softcopy books, they are available and tend to have lower cost. Nevertheless, not all books are available to be ordered online or downloaded from web-based bookstores. To ease students' financial stress and avail learning resources, the following recommendations were therefore made:

- Book publishers should provide all price lists for their materials so that students buy with appropriate retail prices from the stores.
- Bookstores should encourage students to sell their books back to the stores so that other students can buy them at low prices.

- The buyback program should not only buy books under specific titles. They should design the program aimed at collecting all books that have been previously purchased.

If the recommendations above are followed, not only at Anne Arundel Community College, but at all learning institutions, then the problem of financial stress of purchasing books will be effectively addressed.

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