

Company makes free textbooks possible

CEO says just because tuition increases doesn't mean textbook prices should too

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Sophomore Brian Shenkin said the most he's ever spent on textbooks is \$500, as he carried a stack of about seven textbooks to the front of the campus shop. As a worker in Elon's campus bookstore for two and a half years, senior Molly Steinberg said she's seen a student pay as much as \$1,000 for textbooks in a single semester.

The amounts that students pay for textbooks each year may drastically decrease over the next few years due to a new textbook company that is out to sell a new type of textbook: free ones.

"With the cost of college skyrocketing and with aid not keeping pace, we want to see as many students as possible have free textbooks," said Tom Doran, CEO and founder of Freeload Press. "(Textbooks) are too important to go without . . . we're seeing textbook purchases declining as tuition increases."

Freeload Press, which was created in St. Paul, Minn., gave its downloadable college textbooks a test run this past fall. Fifty-one instructors from 20 colleges used the company's e-books, and because of the positive feedback from both students and professors, 175 colleges and universities are registered to use them for the spring 2006 semester.

Elon University finance professor, Wonhi Synn, will be the first professor in North Carolina to provide free textbooks to his students next semester.

"The reason I'm trying this out for my section is because the textbook I'm using is good quality," he said. "I would not adopt something that is sub-quality just because it's free."

Students in Synn's Fundamentals of Financial Managing class will download their e-books using Adobe Acrobat format from Freeload Press' Internet Portal, freeloadpress.com. If they would rather have a hardcopy, the company also offers paperback e-books with advertising, which are sold for 60 percent less than the original



Justine Hite/ Photographer

Textbooks line the back of the campus shop in row upon row of shelves. Used books can be bought at a lower price than new ones, but no book here is free.

cost of the textbook.

"We debated about using a browser base, but students want a sense of ownership," Doran said. "They want the information right on the laptop or desktop so they can have at it any time they want without worrying about being connected."

Synn said he's going to take advantage of the different textbook types Freeload Press offers. "I'm going to give my students options so they can read chapters on the computer screen, they can download it, and for students that cannot do that, and they want a printed copy, they can buy that online," he said.

Freeload Press is selling the printed copy of the finance book for \$25 with a \$4 shipping and handling fee, according to Synn. He said that's comparable to the regular price of \$150 for finance books.

Freeload Press is currently using 10 corporate sponsors. When businesses sponsor Freeload Press, they are able to put advertisements in the front of the printed book and in chapter openings of e-textbooks.

Doran said that the more sponsorship the company gets increases the number of books they can publish. "If we can save at least one textbook per year per student, that's the first step," he said. "When we see that students want more books, we want to provide more books, and more sponsorship means more titles."

Synn said he's looked through the e-books, and doesn't think the ads are intrusive. "Students can easily bypass the ads while reading a chapter," he said.

So what's the possibility of every student getting all of their textbooks for free in the next couple years? Doran said

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—Tom Doran, CEO and Founder of Freeload Press

it may be a longer project than we may hope. But he also said that these first steps made by Freeload Press are meant to cause a reaction and make an example for other companies to follow.

"That's our goal," Doran said. "We're trying to show other publishers that we work, we can get sponsors and we can get academics to use the commercial textbook."

Synn said that he's also willing to spread the news if he and his students like the material.

"If it works, if my students like it and it's doable and effective, then I'm going to encourage it to other professors," he said.

Freeload Press is the first media and publishing company to adopt the idea of using commercial sponsoring to reduce the price of textbooks. Doran said it was a collaborative effort to pull it all together. The founders are a group of authors, academics, advertisers, publishers and supporting vendors, all with backgrounds in academic publishing.

Doran has worked in the publishing industry for 24 years. The founders have seen increases in tuition and other college expenses, and they have the mission to make college course work more affordable.

"It's clear that next to the lecture, the textbook is probably the most important tool for the student to use in order to learn, and not all students are buying their school materials because they simply don't have money for it," Doran said. "We want to limit the financial concerns of going to college."

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