Penn State Pulse

Required Books

March 2003

Purpose

The purpose of this survey was to learn more about the experiences of a random selection of students and their purchase, use, and selling of books required for their courses this past Fall semester.

Implications/Highlights

More than half of the respondents had one or more required books that were *not used at all* by their instructors for assignments noted on the syllabus. Three-fourths had at least one required book that was 'mostly not used'. Students defined books as 'mostly not used' when their faculty covered less than 30% of the book. A majority of these books were specified as background reading.

Participation Rate

N = 984

Phone: 613 of 949 contacted (65%)
Web: 371 of 2000 contacted (19%)

Findings

Most students were enrolled in 4-6 courses last Fall semester.

Number of Courses Fall Semester

1%	1-3
96%	4-6
3%	7-8 or more

Five respondents (<1%) said they had purchased no required books for their courses last Fall. A majority purchased 5 or more required books.

Number of Required Books Purchased

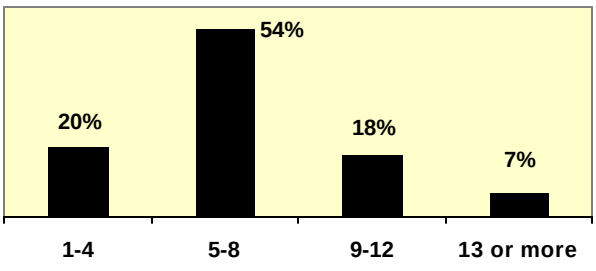

Figure 2. Most students purchased 5 or more required books

Women tended to purchase more required books than men.*
Those whose GPAs were equal to or less than 2.75 purchased *fewer* required books.*

Four-fifths of respondents said their required books were available for purchase by the end of the first week of classes.

Required Books Available First Week of Class

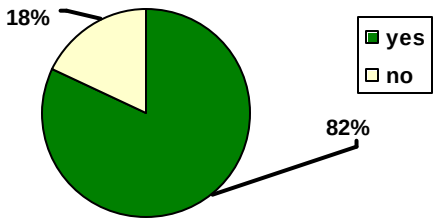

Figure 2. Most required books were available to be purchased

Reasons Why Not Available the First Week

- not ordered in time
- shipment delayed
- had to go online to order
- wrong edition
- waiting for new edition

Students reported spending an average of $356 to purchase required books.

Three-fourths of the respondents also purchased supplementary materials including: required software, lab equipment, problem sets, class workbooks, and printed course packets. These students spent an average of $87 on required supplementary materials.

Average Amount Spent on Required Books and Supplementary Materials

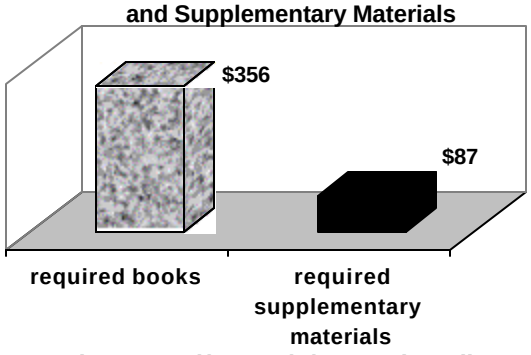

Figure 3. Students reported how much they spent last Fall on required books and supplementary materials

On average, juniors spent more on required books* and seniors spent more on supplementary materials.*

*Statistically significant at the .05 level

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The survey included three questions which focused on syllabus assignments.

Slightly more than half (56%) of the students said they had one or more required books that were *not used at all* by the course instructor for any assignments noted on the syllabus.

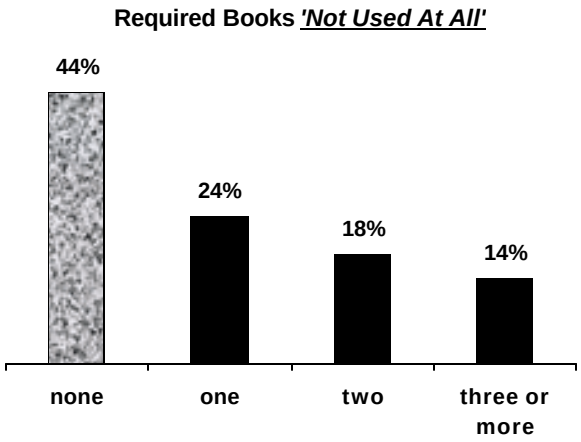

Figure 4. A majority had one or more required books which were not used at all

Three-fourths (78%) of respondents had required books assigned on the syllabus for 'some use' but were 'mostly not used.'

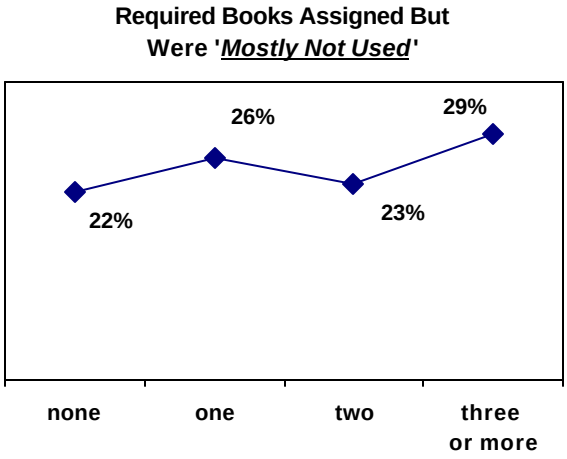

Figure 5. Three-fourths had one or more required books which were 'mostly not used'

Students defined what 'mostly not used' meant to them. Three-fourths defined 'mostly not used' as having less than 30% of the required book assigned on the syllabus.

'*Mostly Not Used*' Defined by Students as Using Only a Proportion of the Required Book

19%	less than 10%
34%	less than 20%
25%	less than 30%
9%	less than 40%
13%	less than 50%

Of the required books *mostly not used* or *not used at all* for assignments, a majority (54%) were specified by the instructor as background reading or providing alternative perspectives, supplemental information or reference materials.

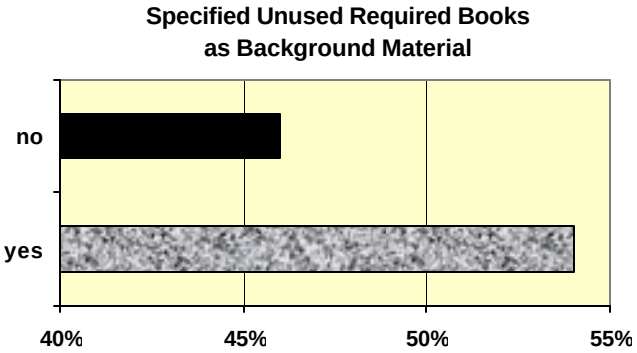

Figure 6. A majority of required books not used for assignments were specified as background reading

Respondents said that 40% of required books not used were authored by PSU faculty members.

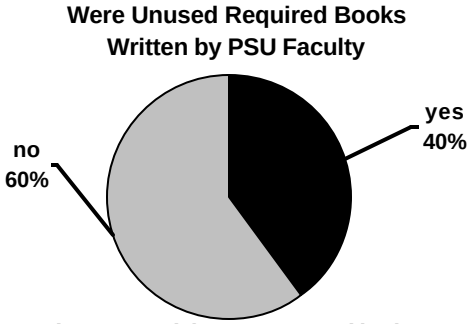

Figure 7. Students reported that some required books not used were written by PSU faculty

Three-fourths (77%) said they attempted to sell back some of their required books at the end of Fall semester. Seventy percent said they were unable to do so.

Reasons Why Unable to Sell Back Required Books

9%	syllabus wouldn't apply for next semester
27%	book not being used the next semester
13%	bookstore already had enough copies in stock
1%	condition of book
5%	plastic shrink wrap was opened
6%	required so ftware included cannot be resold
11%	part of materials sold as a packet
21%	old edition
8%	was 'Penn State' specific (had logo)

Women were more likely than men to attempt to sell back required books.*

More respondents who took the web survey than those who took the phone survey were rejected in their attempts to sell back books.

*Statistically significant at the .05 level.