

College textbook woes answered

By Heather Murtagh

Year after year college students face high textbook costs with an increasing number of books to purchase, but the San Mateo County Community College District is combating the cost for students with a rental program.

This is the second semester the program will be running at Cañada and Skyline Colleges offering students in participating majors the choice to purchase the book at either full or used price or rent the book at a significant reduction.

In most cases, the rental cost is about two-thirds less than the full price. For example, one book that costs \$100 to purchase new and maybe \$70 used can be rented for \$28 a semester. It has to be returned at the end of the semester in good condition without any writing or marks. The rental price is based on costs to the bookstore.

"Textbook rental talks started about four or five years ago, but that's just what it was — talk. People assumed it would be too time consuming, putting out every reason out there not to do it," said Tom Bauer, director of bookstore operations for the San Mateo County Community College District.

It's a rather simple process. Students enrolled in participating classes who want to rent the book must show up to the first class meeting and get an authorization form from the professor. The contract should be taken to the bookstore, pick up the book in the rental area and pay for the rental price.

Within the classes offering book rentals, 95 percent of the students enrolled are participating in the rental program, said Jai Kumar, bookstore manager at Cañada College.

"Students can walk into this store and not afford a book. But now we can see to it that the student gets the book," Bauer said.

For a department to become active in the program, it must commit to using the same books for a minimum of two years. And the books have to be purchased somehow, by either the department fronting the money or with grant money.

Early Childhood Education is one of the departments involved using grant money from First 5, which donated \$2 million dollars over six years starting in 2000.

ECE Professor Dianne Eyer said the program forced the faculty to talk and plan classes together to ensure the book chosen will work for at least two years. It has also increased the number of students able to get the book early in the semester.

Prior to 2000, Eyer said, professors didn't realize students didn't have the books because of the cost.

"Now we all know and students usually have the book. It makes a big difference in the class," Eyer said.

Students needing help paying for books actually have a few options at Cañada for help.

The Cañada Book Fund helps raise money for students who need help purchasing textbooks. Margie Carrington, director of financial aid services, helps students who qualify by means of financial need to different programs that will loan or pay for the books for the students. While those programs traditionally end up helping low-income students, the rental program is geared toward helping the low- to middle-income families.

Many students are in families who make too much to qualify for financial aid or grants but in reality, don't make enough to afford the books and supplies needed.

The rental program requires a lot labor and of storage — which restricts how big it can get in the future.

"It is labor intensive but it's a labor of love," Carrington said.

Bauer attributed the success of the program thus far to the synergy between everyone, the bookstore, financial aid, the faculty and the district.

"We have the right people to get this done right now. Their focus is to make sure people get the education they need to get," Bauer said.

To donate money to the book rental project please contact Georgi La Berge, executive director for the San Mateo County Community Colleges Foundation, at 574-6229.

