

Perceptions of Value

When spending money on a product, (especially at a high price), expectations are formed that the item will be of significant value to the owner. This assessment of value is particularly important when the item is not purchased by choice, but rather as a requirement. As textbook prices increase, students are becoming more vocal about their expectations and assessments of value. Student feedback reveals that the following factors work together to either enhance or lessen their perception of value:

1. **New vs. Used Availability**
2. **Can it be bought back? (Consumables and Edition Changes)**
3. **Bundled vs. Text-only Options**
4. **Faculty Use—Required, Recommended or Optional**

Used textbook availability is one of the most important factors for students when deciding on whether they will buy their required course material. Used textbooks are priced at 25% off the new book price. This is a significant savings when also considering the potential buyback at the end of the semester. At **buyback** students are able to recover a significant portion of their original investment (dependant on the re-adoption of the title for the next semester and on the textbook's condition). Additionally, many students utilize buyback monies as an added source for future semester costs. Students can more easily see the value of required course material when looking at the full picture of the used textbook cycle.

Bundles, also known as packages, make up a complex part of the value equation for all involved; the faculty, the bookstore, and the students. Bundles may include any or all of the following: *textbooks, supplemental readers, CD-ROM's, single-use website access codes, workbooks, laboratory manuals, or study guides*. In many cases the added components cannot be ordered from the publisher as separate pieces, or are considered consumables (one-time use materials). In other cases, the package pieces can be purchased from the publisher at a price higher than is beneficial to the student. In these two cases, the packages then have to be sold "new only". This denies students the ability to purchase used textbooks at the beginning, or to sell back their textbooks at the end, of each semester. It is also common for newly created bundles to take significant price increases with each edition change. The publisher sets up a "special price" for material valued at \$255.00 to sell as a bundle for \$150.00. This sounds like a good deal, until you take into consideration that every student will pay \$150.00, without the opportunity to sell back at the end of the semester. If the bundle were broken down and sold as individual components the student would pay at least \$218.75. They would then have the potential to sell back the textbook and study guide for \$72.50 at the end of the semester. The net price the student would pay in the end, at best, is still \$146.25. This is only a savings of \$3.75 from purchasing the bundle new, and still a 28% increase (when accounting for the added access code) from the prior adoption.

The best deal for the students would be for the publisher representative to bundle only the consumable materials (access codes, lab books, workbooks, CD-ROM's etc) at a "special price", while leaving the textbook and study guide to sell as individual pieces. *Together, the faculty and the bookstore, can negotiate with publisher representatives to create bundles in this manner.* For more information regarding packages, please see "**FAQ on Bundles**" located in the back of this packet.

Faculty use is, undoubtedly, the most essential dynamic of the four factors. This is where the student will most heavily weigh and evaluate the perception of value. A workbook is usually regarded as "of value" if the exercises within are assigned and graded by the instructor. A bundle is deemed "of value" if every component is thoroughly used, tested from, and overall essential to the passing of the course. The textbook alone is judged to be "of value" if it must be referenced often, either in class or at home, as a main study tool.

Perceptions are derived from expectations. When course materials are adopted as "required", an expectation is formed that the material will be a key component of the course instruction. The students expect to be tested and graded from required material.

Conversely, when course materials are adopted as "recommended", an expectation is formed that the material will serve as an additional resource, available to the student who is struggling or seeking extra knowledge of the subject matter.

Keeping in mind how the book will be used, and therefore adopted, can go a long way to enhance student perception of value.