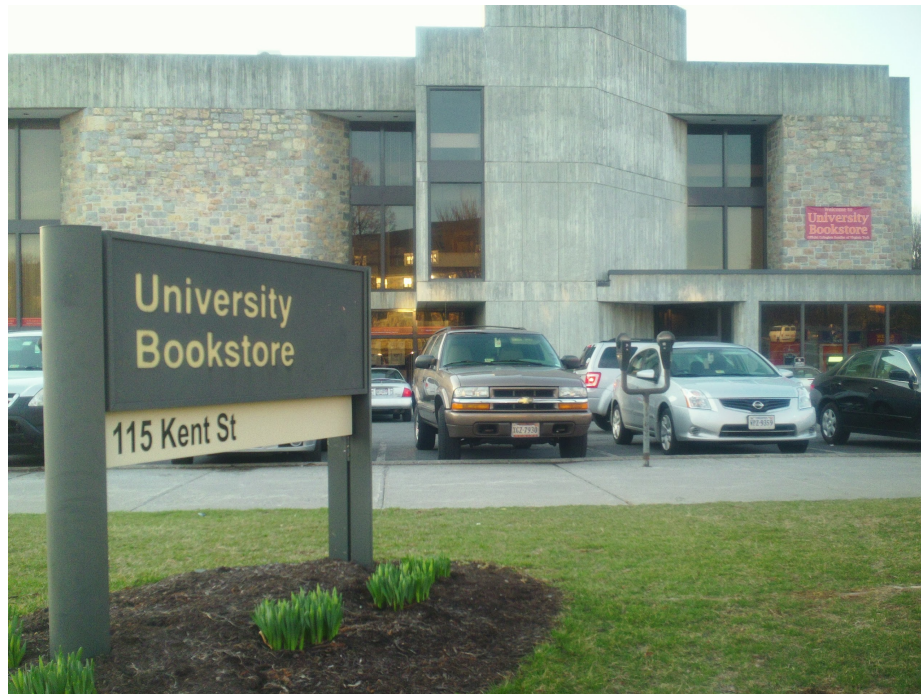


How to Avoid Being Ripped Off by the University Bookstore

While buying textbooks and class materials from a source other than the on-campus bookstore may seem a bit disconcerting at first, it is, in reality, an excellent way to save money and avoid the craziness that is the University Bookstore during the first week of classes. With very few exceptions, it is possible to instead purchase the majority of your books and supplies, both used and brand new, from a variety of online retailers and even local bookstores.



The University Bookstore.

Description

In this document, I will walk you through the process of finding and purchasing your college textbooks from establishments other than Virginia Tech's on-campus University Bookstore. I will also offer several warnings about pitfalls to avoid if you choose to follow these instructions. The purpose of this process is to avoid the outrageous prices being charged by the University Bookstore for their items, as well as to take a more active role in your education by making informed decisions regarding how you spend your (or your parents') money.

This process will likely be completed once a semester, several weeks (or even months) before classes are scheduled to start. It is important that you order your books well ahead of time, especially if you are ordering them online, so that you will receive them before your classes begin. Shipping books from online retailers can often take a couple of weeks, and you want to ensure that your books arrive in plenty of time.

The general concepts in this guide are applicable for almost any college student, but these instructions are written specifically for students at Virginia Tech, and contain school-specific information for navigating websites such as HokieSPA and the University Bookstore's textbook finder. This process is specifically intended for students who will be purchasing their textbooks on their own. Often, students will use financial aid to purchase their books directly through the bookstore. If this is your intention, then you may want to avoid purchasing any books or materials outside of the University Bookstore, since your financial aid would not be applied to these purchases.

Also, be aware that some classes occasionally require an access code to view online content related to the course. These access codes are often printed inside of the textbook for the class, and are only good for one semester. This may be one of the few cases in which it is actually a better idea to purchase a book from the bookstore, since you are assured that your access code will be valid and unused. However, depending on which website the online content is hosted on, you may be able to purchase an access code separately.

For the completion of this process, you must first identify the textbooks that you will need and then research prices at various local and online establishments. You must also make several price comparisons to determine the best place to purchase your books. The basic steps for this process are as follows. First, you must register for your classes, and then record the course request numbers for each class that you will be taking. Second, use the course request numbers and the University Bookstore's website to determine which textbooks are required or recommended for each of your classes. Third, discuss the books that the Bookstore's website recommends with students and faculty if you are unsure about whether to purchase them. Fourth, compare prices online, and at local bookstores using the International Standard Book Number for each book. Fifth, purchase your books from the establishment where you have found the cheapest price.

Following these instructions should allow you to save quite a bit of money as well as teaching you important life skills, such as budgeting and planning ahead, which should be of use to you in the not-too-distant future.



Glossary

Course Lookup: A function on the University Bookstore's website that allows you to find the required books for a class by CRN. This site shows you the ISBN number, which will allow you to locate the specific book on the websites of other online retailers.

CRN: Course Request Number. An identifying number that Virginia Tech uses to distinguish all of the classes in a particular semester. You will need this number for each of your classes when you use the Course Lookup function on the University Bookstore's website.

HokieSPA: An internal Virginia Tech website that hosts all of the personal information for every student at the university. This includes class schedule, financial aid information, scholarship information, and much more.

ISBN: International Standard Book Number. An identifying code assigned to every published book in the world. These numbers come in two different versions, a ten digit number and a thirteen digit number. All books published since 2007 have a thirteen digit number.

Online Access Code: A method that the bookstore uses to stage highway robbery. Some classes require these access codes (which usually expire at the end of the semester) to access online content related to the class. This essentially forces you to buy a brand new book from the bookstore to access the online course material.

Required Textbook: A distinguishing category assigned to textbooks on the University Bookstore's website. Required textbooks have been determined by the professor to be vital to your well being as a student in the class. Recommended textbooks... not so much.

Instructions

These instructions will help you navigate the world of online textbook purchasing, and will help you to avoid the pitfalls associated with this process. Read the instructions carefully, and follow them closely for best results.

To complete this process, you will need the following:

- A list of the classes you will be taking in the coming semester.
- Sufficient funds to spend on textbooks.
- Internet access.
- Time to research and find the best deals!

Disclaimer: Follow this advice at your own risk. Neither the author nor the Help for Hokies website will be held responsible for any consequences if you decide to follow these instructions and purchase your textbooks outside of the official channels provided by Virginia Tech.

Registration and Schedule



Virginia Tech requires annually the collection of specific demographic data for each student: emergency contact entry or emergency contact confirmation, mailing address, annual self disclosure of arrests/convictions confirmation, and VT Alerts Opt In or Opt Out action. You will be prohibited from registration until the information is provided. Registration Holds may also prohibit your registration. When a hold exists, the information specific to the hold(s) will appear below. Check with the specific university office regarding the steps for removal of the registration hold. Also, the university provides a web FERPA disclosure form for your use in authorizing information for third parties. You may access this form via this page.

[Go to Registration Links](#)

Schedule and Other Links

- [Detail Schedule for Spring 2014](#)
- [Download the New Student's Guide](#)
- [Look up Classes to Add](#)
- [Account Summary](#)
- [Email the University Registrar](#)

1) Create Your Class Schedule: Register for your classes on [HokieSPA](#). Make note of the CRN number and the professor for each of your classes. These pieces of information can be found in the "Registration and Schedule" > "Detailed Schedule for..." section of HokieSPA. I suggest creating an Excel document and recording the CRN, professor, and course title for each class. We will return to this spreadsheet later on in the process.

Find Your Textbooks

Problems using our textbook lookup? [Click here to use an alternate version.](#)

Select A Term	Your Schedule (0 Courses Selected)
FALL 2014	Add your courses by clicking on the CRN name in the Course Menu. Remove courses by clicking the minus button next to each course.
SPRING 14	
SUMMER14	
	<div>Find Books</div> <div>Reset Courses</div>

Find Your Textbooks

Problems using our textbook lookup? [Click here to use an alternate version.](#)

All Terms	Your Schedule (1 Courses Selected)
SPRING 14	Add your courses by clicking on the CRN name in the Course Menu. Remove courses by clicking the minus button next to each course.
ENGL - ENGLISH	
3764	<div>Find Books</div> <div>Reset Courses</div>
13252, 13262 - KINDER 13253 - HOWES 13254 - COMBITHS 13255 - LAUTENSCHLAGER 13256, 13264 - HAYEK 13257, 13258 - BEAN 13259 - MOONEY 13260-1, 19530 - GARDNER	<div>ENGL 3764 13260-1, 19530 GARDNER</div> <div>SPRING 14</div>

2) Compile ISBN Numbers: Create a list of required and recommended materials for each of your classes. Begin by visiting the University Bookstore website at <http://www.bookstore.vt.edu>. From there, click "Textbooks" in the header menu, and then choose "Lookup and Order Books" from the sidebar menu. Scroll down to the bottom of the page, and click the link labeled "FIND YOUR COURSE TEXTBOOKS."

You can then begin narrowing your search down, first by semester, then by course type, then by class number, and, finally, by the CRN and professor, which you have, no doubt, recorded in your handy spreadsheet. Click on your particular class section to add it to the column on the right. Repeat this for all of your courses. Finally, once all of your classes have been added to the second column, click the “Find Books” button. Record the book title, edition, ISBN number, and new and used price for each book listed in your increasingly important spreadsheet.

3) Determine Which Textbooks are Necessary:

Talk to your professors and other students to determine which items are really necessary for the class. Some of the books that the bookstore website lists are only recommended for the class, and not required. Talk to other students who have taken the class to see if they would suggest purchasing the books that are not required, and whether they thought the books were useful. You may also want to ask if any type of online access code is used for this class, and if it can be purchased separately.

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4) Shop and Compare: Look for textbooks and other course materials online and locally to compare prices. Using your awesome spreadsheet, copy and paste the ISBN numbers into the search box on the websites of new and used textbook resellers such as Amazon.com, Half.com, and Chegg.com. Consider the price of the textbooks on each of these websites (making sure to consider the cost of shipping), and then - you guessed it! - copy and paste these prices into your spreadsheet! Also, make sure to check with your local used bookstore, such as BookHolders in Blacksburg, to see if they have the textbooks that you need to purchase, and at what price.

5) Order: Now that you have gathered all of the information into one exceedingly awesome Excel spreadsheet, it should be easy to compare the prices and determine where you should buy each of your textbooks. Order from the cheapest location and save your money!

Conclusion

If you have followed these instructions through to their conclusion, congratulations! You have just taken one of the first steps in owning (pardon the pun) your college education.

Image Sources

Photographs: Ezra Richards

Screenshots: HokieSPA and <http://www.bookstore.vt.edu>

Half.com and Amazon.com Logos: Creative Commons Google Image Search