

Bookstore Committee
Annual Report of Activities for 2002/03
August 14, 2003

Davis Baird, Philosophy, Chair

For the Committee:

Robert Cannon, Computer Science;
Greg Carbone, Geography;
Jan Love, Religious Studies;
Randall Rose, Business;
Ernest Wiggins, Mass Communications

Introduction: This was an active year for the Bookstore Committee. We met as a full committee twice (11/6/02; 3/20/03), and the chair of the committee met twice with Mike Comisky, Manager of the Barnes and Noble Russell House Bookstore both to discuss specific complaints and to discuss general faculty concerns about bookstore operations (10/25/02; 2/14/03). Finally the chair of the committee worked with Helen Zeigler from the Provost's office to help improve faculty/bookstore relations and to provide suggestions for the reworking of the bookstore space. This resulted in a "focus group" meeting where faculty were invited to come and express their concerns about bookstore operations (4/23/03), and two meetings (6/18/03; 6/26/03) to work on developing an online method for faculty to check on their class book orders.

Specific Complaints: The specific complaints that the chair of the committee handled were of five sorts: (i) missing class books; (ii) insufficient numbers of class books; (iii) inaccurate information on book order status provided to inquiring faculty by bookstore personnel; (iv) the book order forms generated by the bookstore include out-of-date information; (v) the new Barnes and Noble book order forms suggest that the University bookstore will not share orders with the other two bookstores that serve the University. The chair of the committee met with Mike Comisky to discuss all of these complaints. Comisky promised to look into these specific issues, and to do whatever he could to prevent these kinds of problems occurring in the future. He confirmed that despite what the form says, the bookstore continues to share book orders with the other two bookstores that serve the University.

Bookstore Renovation: On Helen Zeigler's initiation, the whole committee met twice with both University officials and Barnes and Noble personnel to discuss and provide input concerning the planned (and now executed) renovation of the bookstore's space. These meetings allowed for a useful exchange on faculty needs and desires for the bookstore and the proposed changes to the bookstore space.

General Concerns: One consequence of these meetings was an appreciation on the part of bookstore personnel and several University administrators that there is substantial faculty dissatisfaction with bookstore operations, prompted (in all likelihood) by a multi-year history of problems with book orders and poor communication between faculty and bookstore staff. A focus group event was developed by the bookstore to allow faculty to come and air their concerns. This took place on April 23, 2003, and several concerns emerged.

The most important concern that emerged was the desirability of faculty to be able to determine the status of their book orders for their classes. This prompted a combined effort on the part of bookstore and University personnel to develop a means to provide this information to faculty. On the bookstore's side, concerns were expressed about the timeliness with which book orders arrive at the bookstore. Considerable effort was put into chasing down tardy orders during the summer.

Finally, there is the rather more amorphous but perhaps more serious problem of faculty perception of the bookstore, given a less than stellar history through most of the 1990s. Three strategies have been suggested to combat this: (1) Making sure that book orders are received and filled in a timely manner, so that books are available for students when they are needed, and dealing with faculty concerns about order status in an accurate and helpful way. This, by its nature must be an on-going process. (2) Renovating and improving the physical space of the bookstore so faculty and students realize that things are changing. This was done during summer 2003. (3) Arranging opportunities for bookstore personnel to meet with faculty—perhaps at Department faculty meetings—to exchange views on bookstore operations. This can take place during 2003/04.

Committee Changes: Two members of the committee—Robert Cannon, Computer Science and Jan Love, Religious Studies—rotated off the committee at the end of spring 2003. They were replaced by Daniela DiCecco, Foreign Languages and Jeff Persels, Foreign Languages. Davis Baird, Philosophy, continues as chair until the end of his term at the conclusion of spring 2004.

Comment: When I took over as chair of the bookstore committee—after a year when the committee never met—I was told that the committee's charge was to meet in response to faculty concerns. I believe that most faculty members do not know that complaints should be sent to the bookstore committee (if they cannot be handled directly with the bookstore). The complaints that I dealt with this year all came to me in my guise as chair of the Philosophy Department, not chair of the bookstore committee. Thus, I might also suggest that a better means to advertise the existence and purpose of the bookstore committee among the faculty would considerably help the committee pursue its mission of improving bookstore service for faculty.