

Book buy-back system flawed

What are the criticisms of the book buy-back system at USC?

The bookstore gives peanuts for used texts, they don't take old editions, they don't care about the students, and they have the audacity to attempt to make a profit.

I've noticed a tendency among students to think the world owes them something simply because they had the brain-storm to come to college, and

I'm sure it will be evident again with the semi-annual whining about book buyback.

During the 1996-1997 school year, I attended a university in England whose only bookstore did not stock every text reported to them by professors. It was often necessary to wait several weeks into the school year to receive all the texts required for a course.

When the time came to attempt to sell books at the end of the school year, the bookstore posted a list of 20 books it would accept. The mandatory text I bought for a

course required of all mathematics and statistics students was not on it.

The student government organization ran a singularly disorganized used-book store, in which it was nearly impossible to find a needed book. When one could be found, it was usually out-of-date. The managers would not accept used books at all after mid-June, which was unfortunate for me because two of my final exams (worth 80 percent of my final grade) took place the final week of June.

Most students there did what students here are certainly free to do: They posted fliers and sold their own damn books.

Admittedly, there's a lot to dislike about buying textbooks. Every semester, I read looking at the price tag of a brand-spanking-new computer science text. I hate new editions that are trivially different from last year's. I think unkind things about professors who order three different texts so he or she can use a few chapters from each.

But acquiring knowledge is not without cost, and that's a fact that should be obvious even to students, who participate in only the first step of the learning process. The cost of publishing a book goes beyond the paper and ink on which it's printed. Nor can we honestly ask, expect or want our professors to teach with out-dated books. I can't, however, defend professors who require books they hardly use.

But a buy-back system allows us to recoup a portion, large or small, of the money we spend on books we no longer need. For a buy-back system to work, bookstores have to determine which books will be used again, they must physically accept the books, they must catalog and organize them, and they must prepare them for selling again. This means labor costs. I don't think many of the whiners would be willing to volunteer at Wallace Bookstore.

Furthermore, standard mark-up throughout the retail industry is 100 percent above product cost, so bookstores are refunding us in full for the actual book. What we can't return is the labor involved when they sold us the books at the beginning of the semester. And if bookstores took them back at 100 percent, we can be certain that they wouldn't sell them again at 75 percent.

No one expects a clothing store to accept returned items that already have been worn or kept for four months. We're fortunate we have a system already in place that helps us re-sell books we no longer need and enables us to buy books in near-mint condition (for early shoppers) at only part of the cost.

For those who would like to rent their books for free, I suggest the use of Thomas Cooper Library. A library lends books. A bookstore sells them.



Emily STREYER
Guest Columnist



The New Boy Scouts

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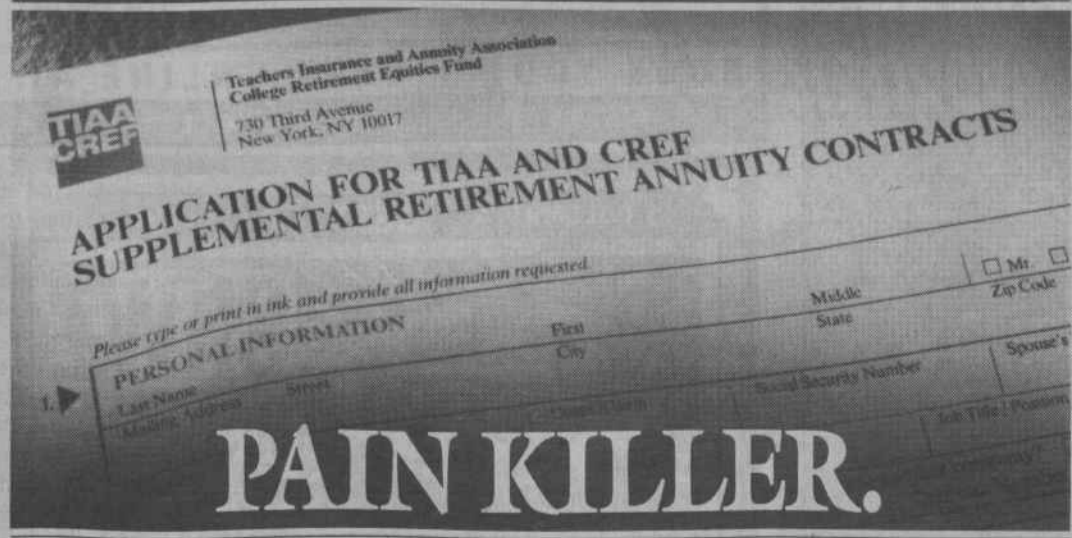
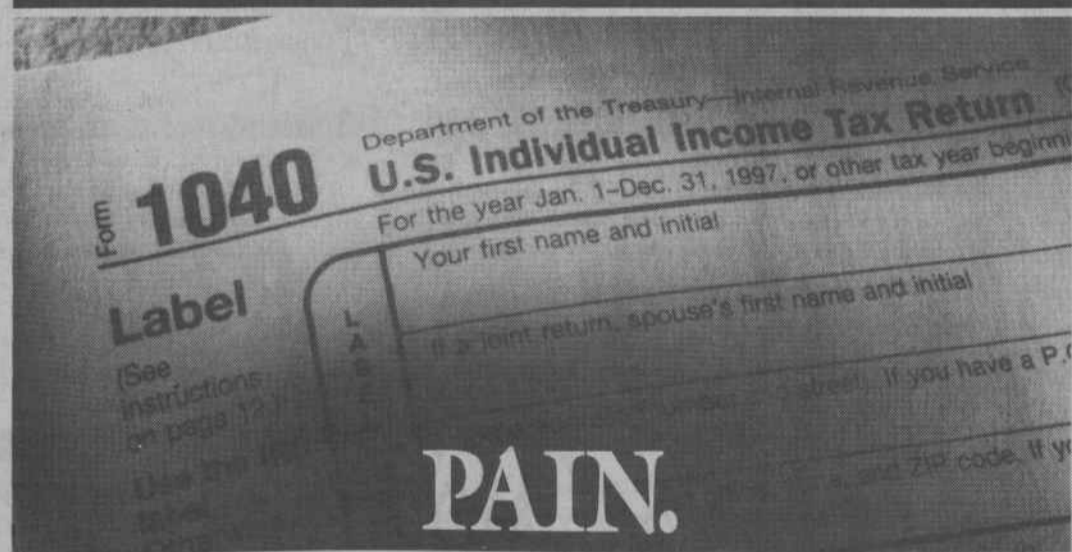
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