The cost of education is ridiculous. It’s not just the tuition itself though. It’s everything associated with it and a lot of those “required” materials come from dubious sources. The College Board has a monopoly on costly, ineffectual standardized tests which, thank the gods, are seemingly on their way out the door. Certain online programs that professors require cost a hefty fee, sometimes charging for a year’s subscription even though you only need their services for one semester. Textbooks cost a mint and are often dominated by Texan education boards. Need I say more?

Okay, so how do we fix this? Our current solution is to make political movements such as signing petitions, as I saw in the Hampshire dining common today. Yet how much is that going to do, especially when it’s so easy for politicians to ignore our pleas and when many of them are invested in maintaining these prices?

On a macro level, we could totally screw up the supply and demand by boycotting colleges (Especially the private ones. Watch John Oliver’s hilarious and insightful video to see why them in particular) and attending either community colleges or not getting any higher education whatsoever.

Not so appealing, right? It’s kind of like trying to demolish a rubber wall with a sledgehammer. It takes a ton of effort and, even if you manage to knock down the wall,
chances are that the hammer’s gonna bounce right back into you.

So, short of starting an unlikely national movement that could cripple our country, we might be able to influence the supply and demand of textbooks.

If we don’t buy textbooks and the demand drops, then the producers would be forced to drop prices to match if they wanted to maintain sales. I know this is extremely simplified, but you get the gist.

Problem: We need those textbooks for class.

Solution: The internet.

I found all but one of my textbooks online. As much as I would love to support local bookstores, shelling out hundreds of dollars each semester for just these things is absurd.

Perhaps this won’t work so well for the science majors, but I discovered that the vast majority of my texts could be found either as e-books in the Five College library system or as free manuscripts online (e.g. the Gutenberg Project or *ahem* various other sources). While I shouldn’t advocate non-legal ways of obtaining textbooks, the practice is becoming common.

As my father and probably any true Darwinist would observe, “You don’t adapt to necessarily become better. You adapt to suit your environment.” So perhaps our morals take a blow, but I doubt the hordes of struggling students out there would feel the shock too much over the sound of saved cash jingling in their pockets.

However, the best compromise between saving money and saving our ethics would be book swaps and used book sales.

On our class Facebook pages, there’s usually a scramble at the start and end of each semester to sell textbooks we are never going to use again. However, there are not nearly enough organized book swaps and sales to make this system practical. On occasion, there will be one or two and they are well worth looking into. That’s it, though, and it’s not enough since many people are unable to attend those specific days.

However, if we could organize such events more frequently and/or create an online forum for all UMass students to offer their books, then we would be on our way toward adapting to and surviving this impoverishing environment.

Song of the Week: “Thrift Shop” by Macklemore. It’s pretty much the same concept. You save money and still get what you want.

Blog Column:
Love, The Old Man

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