A Modest Proposal

for

Helping Female Students to Buy College Textbooks

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This 1,485-word satire is especially appropriate for college newspapers.

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SEXY WOMAN AND HEARTS CLIP ART

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By David Bruce (1485 words)

All of us are aware of the high cost of education, and all of us value higher education, but not in cost.

One problem with higher education is the high cost of textbooks. Go to any local campus bookstore, and you will see calculus textbooks that cost $150 and engineering textbooks that cost more—much more. Perhaps sometimes the cost is justified, but at other times it is not.

Take calculus, for example. Calculus does not change. Why, therefore, must students purchase a new, expensive edition of a calculus textbook?

The same is true for other kinds of textbooks. When I was a student in college, I remember buying a new edition of Gardner's "Art Through the Ages" at considerable cost. Another student had an older edition, which was much cheaper. He and I compared editions and saw few differences other than page design. The professor saw us comparing texts and admitted that there was little difference between the editions; he said that the book publisher changed things a little bit once in a while because then students would have to buy the new edition.

Of course, one result of the high cost of textbooks is students working a job or two—I once had a student who was working three part-time jobs during each quarter to get a college degree (I have no idea when she found time to study), and I once had a

student who got mad at me because I called on her to answer a question during a morning class after she had been up much of the night working at a legitimate job to get money to go to college. Another result of the high cost of higher education is parents giving up a vacation, a second home, and two retirements to help their kids get a college degree. And yet another result is massive debt for students and for parents.

Sometimes I wonder why I don't see more students and parents carrying bushel baskets of money to pay their tuition and room and to buy their books, but then I remember that students and parents have credit cards to protect their backs from becoming strained. There's no sense in getting into even further debt to pay doctor bills.

Of course, it is easy to describe the problem; the hard part is to come up with a solution. I have a solution, although it is only partial, seeing as how it will benefit only, or mostly, female students. My solution is legal, and it will put money into the pockets of age 18-and-over female students, or at least put books into their book bags.

My modest proposal is to start making pornographic films at our college. Prostitution being illegal, I would not, of course, recommend it. However, making pornographic films is legal, but regulated. The actresses would have to be 18 or over, and they would have to provide proper identification to prove that they are 18 or older. To keep everything legal, the college's police department could even be in charge of making the pornographic films. After all, police officers know the law, and they have the resources for the needed documentation to keep things legal. And after all, the college has the use of the students' money, so it might as well have the use of the students' bodies.

The actresses would be paid in books. For example, oral sex could earn the actress an English textbook, vaginal sex could earn the actress a calculus textbook, and anal sex

could earn the actress an engineering textbook. The pornographic films could then be sold at a profit. The college could make arrangements to purchase the books at a discount from the college bookstores, thus increasing the college profits. In addition, the college will not have to pay male students to appear in the films. Trust me. They will be enthusiastic volunteers.

My modest proposal has many benefits.

First, the college's age 18-and-over female students will be able to get the books that the college requires them to purchase. They will have the books that they need each quarter in just a few sessions of making pornographic films. Of course, an especially gag-proof female student with endurance can earn her books for a quarter in just one long session. And the female students will earn the books without running up credit-card debt or depriving parents of their retirement.

Second, the college's female students will learn a job skill. All of us are aware that the economy is very bad and unemployment is very high. Many of us also are aware that degrees in many majors at the college are unlikely to lead to jobs. As you know, the college does not guarantee that students will find a job even if they graduate with a degree. Fortunately, the porn industry is always looking for new actresses and offering them paychecks. Getting a college degree assures few people of a paycheck in this economy. Often, students even find it difficult to get badly paid internships.

Third, the college will benefit from the extra income. No one likes to pay taxes, even when that person acknowledges that taxes are the price of civilization. As you know, state colleges are supported in part by tax money and private colleges benefit from such tax-supported things as good streets and fire departments. In this economy, police

officers, fire fighters, and teachers are being laid off, and many politicians oppose extending unemployment benefits to the desperate. Many people will favor my modest proposal because of their belief in personal responsibility, low or no taxes, and the free market. After all, making pornographic films is a business for many people.

Fourth, college professors will benefit because many more students will be able to afford the books that we require them to buy. Of course, we still have to find a way to get students to actually read the books, but at least we will have fewer students tell us that they have to make a choice: pay for books or pay for food.

Fifth, if my modest proposal works for textbooks, the college can expand it to include tuition, room and board, etc.

That is my admittedly partial solution. Male students will still have to work one or more jobs unless they are built like the star of the cable TV series "Hung" or unless the college needs extra cameramen. That is, until the college decides to make gay porn.

Of course, everyone who tries to help solve a problem will meet with the critics' cry of "But that won't fully solve the problem!" But all of us should realize that a partial solution is better than no solution.

Of course, the federal government has taken action to help reduce the cost of textbooks. That is why bookstores and publishers are no longer allowed to bundle books; instead, books must be sold separately so that students can buy only the books that they need. Also, the law now states that universities must make available to students the required course book titles and the books' ISBN numbers so that students can shop around for the lowest prices. But these solutions, like my solution, are only partial.

Some people may object to my modest proposal by pointing out that professors could, when possible, choose lower-cost rather than higher-cost books for their courses. For example, e-books are often cheaper than printed books. In addition, much public domain material is available. And online Web sites such as <curriki.org> are devoting themselves to finding ways to make free or cheap textbooks available.

To such people I say this: Dream on. Check out the bookstores and see how much college textbooks sell for. Calculus professor often require their students to buy a new $150 calculus textbook that has the same calculus as the older, cheaper edition.

So there you have it: This is my modest proposal for getting textbooks into the hands of female college students. However, if you have better ideas, please email a letter to the editor.

In conclusion, I wish to say that I will not benefit in any way from my modest proposal (other than being happy that my female students are able to get their books): I am not female, I am not a student, I don't watch pornography, and as a college part-time instructor (I teach nine courses per academic year, with summers off), I get my books for free.

Note: Google "sex work tuition" for essays about female students turning to sex work to pay for college. These days, satire cannot keep up with reality. By the way, if any female student is harassed by anyone reading my modest proposal, she (or someone else) should call the college's police department.

David Bruce teaches English at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.