

Why did WUSA's Used Bookstore really shut down?

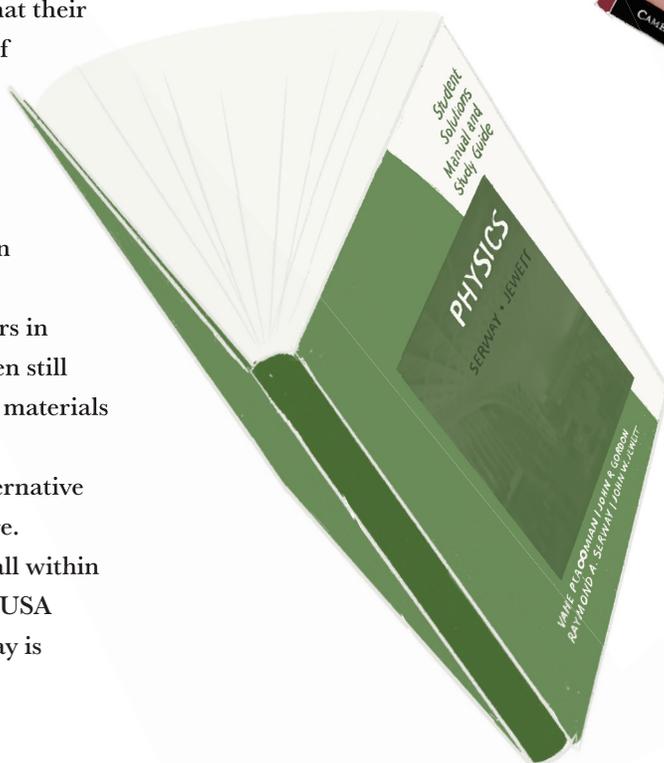
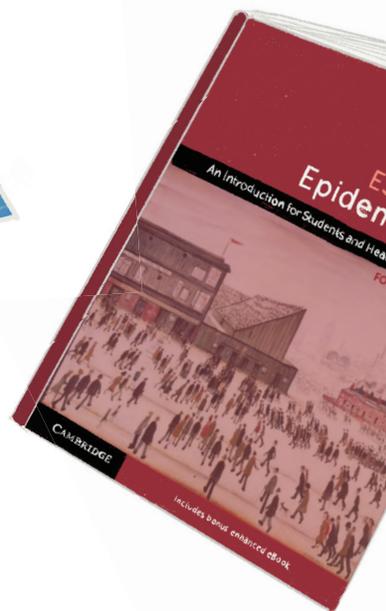
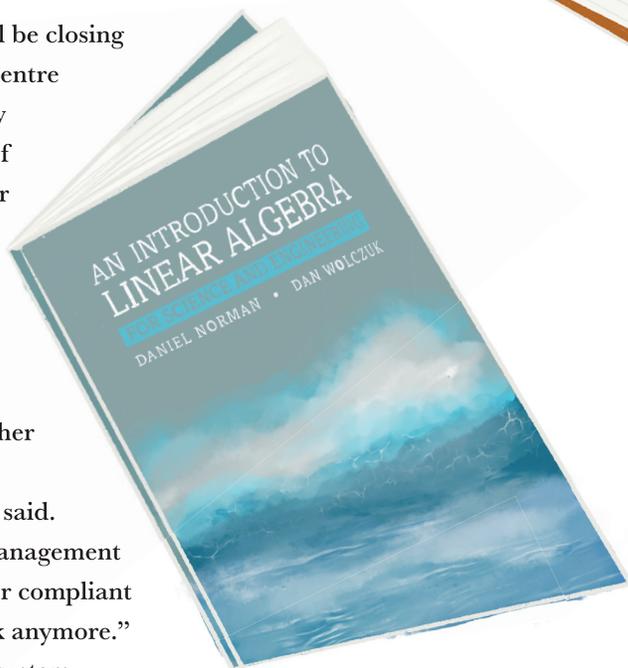
Nadia Khan, Senior Editor

On Aug. 28, WUSA announced that they will be closing their Used Bookstore in the Student Life Centre (SLC) basement. The bookstore, which originally opened in 1996, will remain open until the end of the year but will no longer be accepting books for consignment.

When asked why the Used Bookstore was being shut down entirely instead of transitioning to an alternative model, Scott Pearson, manager of facility operations and membership, said that WUSA had considered other options first.

"We thought about just being online," Pearson said. "But the largest problem is that our inventory management system is about 10 years out of date. It's no longer compliant as of the end of the year, the software won't work anymore." According to Pearson, replacing the customized system built by DAS software and developing new software would cost somewhere between \$50,000 to \$100,000. In their statement on the bookstore closing, WUSA states that their current margins aren't enough to "cover the costs of staff, space, and other necessary operational supports." This past fiscal year resulted in less than \$200,000 in sales, and Pearson said that the total operational costs for this past fiscal year were \$114,723.82. During that year, the bookstore ran an operating loss of \$86,440.46.

In comparison, the W Store sold 2.9 million dollars in course materials for the 2022-23 fiscal year, and even still there has been an average annual decline in course materials of 17 per cent over the past five years. The Used Bookstore offered students a cheaper alternative to full-priced bookstores on campus like the W Store. Sometimes, prices for used and brand-new books fall within a similar range: a copy of Julius Caesar from the WUSA Used Bookstore is listed as \$5.59 while the same play is



\$9.99 on the W Store website. What notably set the Used Bookstore apart was its deals such as the spring term “Buy 5 books for \$2” sale and “Fill Your Bin for \$1” deal.

Imprint spoke to several students when the announcement was first made, including first-year student Isaac Montesdeoca Hof, who had visited the Used Bookstore looking for deals and wound up finding a lab notes textbook he needed for 50 cents.

“I literally just got here to Waterloo maybe a week ago, and I was expecting all my books to be super expensive,” he said. “This place here — if I can find everything, which I’m hoping I will — is going to make it so much cheaper. So I don’t know what to say, honestly, I’m kind of taken aback by the closing.”

In a statement from the W Store, they said that “along with resource sharing, adoption of open resources, etc., the shift toward digital course materials — which accelerated dramatically during the pandemic and are typically at a lower price point — has undoubtedly contributed to the decline in overall course materials revenue. Some publishers, such as Pearson, have been explicit about their shift to a “digital-first” strategy.”

Digital course materials sales made up 11 per cent of total course materials sales in 2018-19. After four consecutive years of increases, sales of digital materials now represent 45 per cent of the total.

Over that same period, the quantity of physical textbooks and courseware declined by 65 per cent, while the quantity of digital materials increased by 83 per cent.

Pearson said that the Used Bookstore also tried to increase margins by selling excess inventory online through Amazon and purchasing additional books from the online used textbook retailers to supplement the store’s inventory.

Veronica Boxall, an arts student, wondered what WUSA was planning to do with all the remaining books in their inventory. “It seems like a bit of a waste,” she said.

Pearson said that all of the books will be donated and that no books will end up in landfills.

“The largest supplier, like, actually the only supplier of used textbooks, went out of business during COVID. So we can’t even buy those books anymore. So we did try that,” Pearson said.

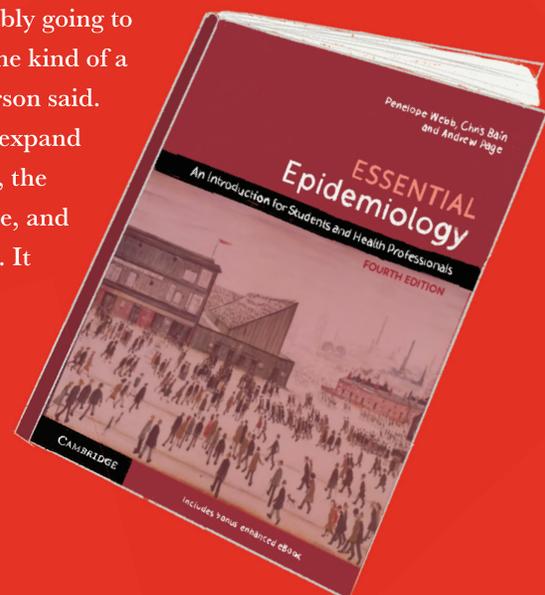
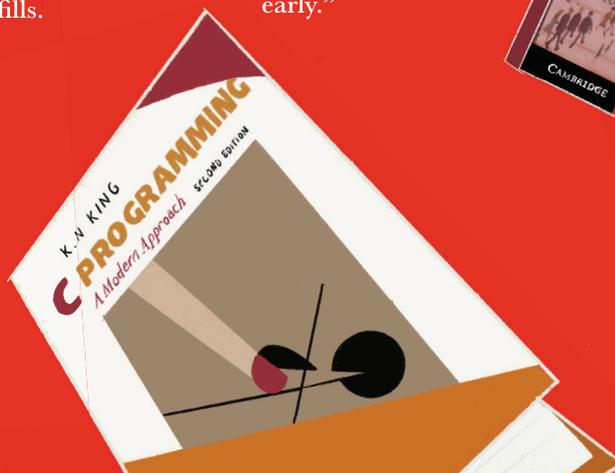
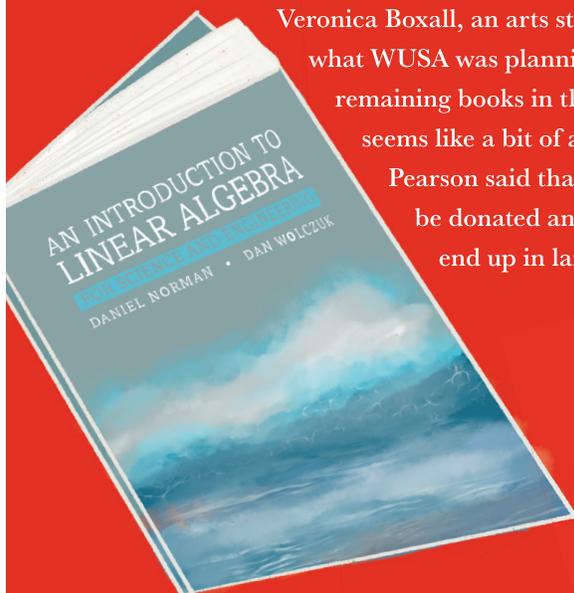
“The largest supplier, like, actually the only supplier of used textbooks, went out of business during COVID. So we can’t even buy those books anymore. So we did try that,” Pearson said.

The supplier in question, Nebraska Book Company (NBC) — from whom the Used Bookstore purchased their books — was not the only online supplier for used textbooks, but did notably go out of business in March of this year.

Pearson said that at the beginning of next year, WUSA will take an assessment of the space once it has been pulled apart.

“We feel it’s probably going to go back to being some kind of a student space,” Pearson said.

“We possibly might expand the lounge next to it, the former housing office, and make a giant lounge. It also could become a quiet space. It’s still early.”





WUSA Used Books



Natalie Szwec

imprint

THIS WEEK IN ATHLETICS

BLACK GO
WARRIORS
WATERLOO
BLACK GO

FREE EXAM FITNESS

DECEMBER 11 - 22
GOWARRIORSGO.CA/FITNESS

WARRIORS INSIDER

Stay up to date with Warrior Rec programs, events, job opportunities, tips and tricks on how to stay well, facility information and more.

Visit gowarriorsgo.ca/warriorsinsider to sign up for our newsletter.