

# *The Ethical Professor*

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## **Selling Unsolicited Textbooks**

We've been asked recently to weigh in on the following proposition: the debate team would like to ask faculty to donate unwanted textbooks for a fundraiser. The team would sell the textbooks on Amazon and hopefully raise several hundred needed dollars to support the team. Anything wrong with this picture?

There's one objection that immediately comes to mind. If we sell teachers' editions of textbooks any student who buys the book may have test questions or exercises with answers. Clearly those books shouldn't be sold.

But what about student editions we've requested and unsolicited student editions of textbooks sent to us by publishers? Why shouldn't students looking for used textbooks be able to purchase these books?

Let's consider these books from the textbook writer's point of view. An author makes money from royalties, built from a certain percentage of each book's price. When a book is given free to a teacher, either solicited or unsolicited from a publisher, that book hasn't been sold, so the writer doesn't get any money for it. If that book is subsequently sold on Amazon, then the purchaser is buying that book instead of one that might yield the writer a royalty.

You might ask, what should we do with the stacks of textbooks we are sent by publishers? The easiest way to unload them is to give them to the book solicitors who haunt our department hallways. They'll sell them to used book vendors who'll sell them as used books to students. However, the same ethical problem exists here. Though we want to recycle books (and unclutter our offices), we don't want to take money out of the pockets of textbook writers.

How about donating the books to our own library, or other libraries in the area? College texts would certainly be welcome at local public schools, or private schools such as Crossroads. Other local organizations such as Children's Hospital, Hospice Care, the Boys and Girls Club, and the Veterans' Administration could use our books as well. We might also consider any one of a number of correctional facilities, as well as sending books overseas to people working to learn English. If we put our heads together, surely we can find better places than a used book seller to give textbooks that we've gotten for free. (In fact, we'd be happy to receive your suggestions for deserving recipients of such books.)

So what about the debate team's proposed fund-raiser selling books on Amazon? Let's support our young and excellent team by donating any books we originally bought but no longer want to keep, as well as any books we've inherited that were originally bought by students. (Contact Nate Brown, x8781)