Bookstore grapples with drop in revenue

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APTSO — When students return to Cabrillo College for the fall term today, they will likely notice some changes in the bookstore.

The reductions are not part of the recent round of cutbacks due to a decrease in state funding. Rather, the cuts stem from a problem that all bookstores are dealing with: reduced revenue in the digital age.

The bookstore on the main Aptos campus will be closed Fridays after Sept. 16, and the bookstore on the Watsonville campus has been shut for good.

“The Watsonville closing is my biggest concern because some of those students never come to the Aptos campus, and now will be forced to come down here or for order online,” Student Senate President Charlotte Achen said. “I’m disappointed also in the main store being closed on Fridays. A lot of things at Cabrillo are being closed on Fridays now. Sometimes it feels like the entire campus is closed on Fridays now because of the budget reductions.”

One full-time employee was laid off from the bookstore, and everyone else will take a 20 percent reduction in hours due to the Friday closings. Two unfilled positions were also eliminated.

“This was the best way we could achieve some savings and really focus on getting the most affordable textbooks to students,” Cabrillo Bookstore Manager Robin Ellis said of the reduction in staff and hours. “We are thinking of every initiative we can to get students the textbooks they need.”

Additionally, employees with

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Declining revenue has forced changes at the Cabrillo College Bookstore.

administrative fees including rent, Cabrillo employee expense and other operating expenses.

Expenditures at the bookstore have increased, from $720,000 in 2003-04 to a projected $81 million in 2011, while sales have declined — revenue from new and used textbooks has dropped by 28 percent in the same period.

“The National Association of College Stores estimates that 27 percent of college stores nationwide do not pay rent. At Cabrillo, the store’s rent is 2 percent of sales, about $72,000 last year.

“Not all bookstores pay rent,” Ellis said. “It’s a statement on how the bookstore is used. Is it for student use and benefit or profit? We are functioning as both.”

Ellis said the number of supplies from local residents who can use the service for their own publishing needs.

The store faces a challenge as students increasingly turn to online alternatives: trading books, purchasing online, downloading pirated copies or forgoing the required text all together.

If a book in the store is $100 and it’s on Amazon for $80, and you are a student on a tight budget, you have to choose Amazon,” said Achen, who added that she spends between $200 and $300 on textbooks each term. “With print on demand, it gives the bookstore more of an edge.”

The bookstore, in conjunction with the Student Senate in many cases, has instituted several programs to help lower costs for students such as a rent service.

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The challenge is to make the college bookstore more than a place to purchase textbooks.