**Campus Bookstore**

The Acadia Bookstore is operated by Follett Corporation. Local store management chairs an advisory group that includes faculty, students and staff. The purpose of this group is to raise concerns and seek solutions that will allow the Bookstore to better meet the needs and expectations of the campus community while respecting the operating realities within which the Bookstore operates as part of the Follett group.

In 2019, Bookstore management concluded that operational practices and processes that the campus community finds irritating might be mitigated through better communications with all stakeholders.

The complaints raised by the campus community (faculty and students) can be summarized in the following list. They are acknowledged by management as genuine concerns but they are not universally held by the campus community as negative or overly problematic.

* The campus Bookstore has become too corporate and is now simply a textbook outlet rather than a true Bookstore with a range of publications available for readers. As a result, many faculty members refer students to off campus Bookstores as a means of supporting the business model of the independent bookstore.
* Textbook lists from professors are required to be submitted at the end of the winter term for fall term classes, well before many professors (particularly new faculty members who arrive in the summer) have set their course reading material requirements. Book titles submitted late in the year are often unavailable through the Bookstore in time for the beginning of the semester.
* The Bookstore does not stock enough books for every student in the class.
* The Bookstore asks students who want to sell their used books, to complete the sale before the end of the exam period – often before they have written the exam for which they need to study. This early cutoff places students in a no-win situation.
* Bookstore prices are significantly higher than books for sale from on-line retailers. This, combined with the short supply makes faculty and students feel that the Bookstore is not a full academic partner.

The criticisms of Bookstore operations listed above flow largely from businesses practices that are defined by Follett or the book publishing business more generally, therefore, largely beyond the control of local management. These criticisms are offset by positive feedback so it should not be considered that criticism is universal. Faculty recognize that the Bookstore operates as a business and that there are certain realistic operational constraints.

An example of this positive feedback includes acknowledging that Bookstore staff provide excellent customer service, making extra effort to secure textbooks and material that is unavoidably ordered after the usual deadline. They also accommodate late book returns (buybacks) when notified that a particular text will be used late in the term.

On reflection, there are a number of general observations and suggestion that might be helpful to the advisory group.

A huge percentage if the campus faculty and student population is indifferent to the Bookstore operations. This should not be viewed negatively. In fact, faculty who have worked elsewhere or have experience with bookstores on other campuses acknowledge that Acadia’s Bookstore operates no differently than most – even those owned/operated by their University. This is a good sign. It should be understood that the complaints or concerns being considered by the advisory group arise from a very small percentage of the population. Despite this, they are valid and need to be considered. One way to look at the problem is to consider what changes can be made to address the critics that will not disrupt the general level of either contentment or indifference. And, as is always the case, there is no point at which every concern can be addressed. Attempting to achieve 100 per cent customer satisfaction would come at a significant and unsustainable operating cost.

At the same time, there are some changes that the Bookstore can consider.

* The Acadia Bookstore does not look like a bookstore. Instead, it looks like a clothing outlet with books in the back. Assuming resources are available, Follett should consider flipping its retail space so that books, arranged in bookstore fashion, are front-facing. That is, when customers walk into the space they should enter an outlet selling books and academic support material. A low wall with a well-decorated doorway into a rear section selling Acadia-branded clothing and giftware would be a low-cost way to provide customers with the impression that the Bookstore’s main focus is selling books.
* Establishing a social media presence for the Bookstore (Facebook is the most likely) will enable management to connect with customers. Utilizing student or part-time help with social media skills to maintain the page would be the most efficient use of resources. The page can be used to promote books, authors of interest and invite conversations. This leads to another point about the Bookstore’s commercial stance. Books and authors should be up front rather than clothing and giftware. A Facebook page can be used to remind customers of critical dates and answer questions.
* The Bookstore should consider stocking non course-related publications. For instance, books by Canadian or Nova Scotia authors. The absence of a bookstore on Wolfville’s Main Street creates a small opportunity for the Acadia Bookstore to attract non-Acadia customers and walk-in traffic interested in fiction and non-fiction books that are not part of coursework.
* The Bookstore should consider hosting readings by faculty members or students. That is, create the idea that the Bookstore is a destination. A coffee-house style event is an inexpensive way to generate traffic. At the same time, there is no reason why a Bookstore event has to happen in the Bookstore. Take the show on the road; to the Library, the BAC foyer, SUB, or Garden Room. Create an identity for the Bookstore that is supportive of authors and learners. Partnering with the Library to host events would be a powerful reminder of the role publications play in learning.
* Bookstore management is well respected, as noted above, for their willingness to adapt to professors’ schedules when possible. This is likely not well known. Bookstore management can be more visible with faculty by attending departmental meetings. It is easy to craft an angry email but it is more worthwhile to have a group conversation, particularly when other points of view might prevail. Of course, face-to-face encounters can be difficult but criticisms generally arise from a sincere desire to make a positive change and need to be taken in this context. Again, a valuable partner for the Bookstore might be Library or individual librarians and it is recommended that a relationship with the Library be explored.
* While the Bookstore already provides information to Human Resources for distribution to new faculty, Bookstore management should insist on an opportunity to meet with new faculty during their orientation session in August. Meeting incoming faculty will be an opportunity to explain how the Bookstore operates, answer questions, and if necessary, dispel myths.

In summary, the abbreviated version of the observations is this:

Reaching 100 per cent customer satisfaction is unlikely and would only be achieved through changes to operations that would deliver significant and unacceptable diminishing rates of return that no business would undertake. Adopting a “books first” attitude and would change the Bookstore’s stance and is unlikely to make any significant change to overall sales with the small potential to increase sales to non-Acadia customers through mainstream publications. And, being more visible in the campus community will help demystify the Bookstore and help it tell its story directly.