

## ONLINE PETITION TO REOPEN THE CALTECH BOOKSTORE

### WHY THE BOOKSTORE?

#### As a student, why should you care?

- *Yes, you can buy your textbooks online, but...*

Sometime you may like to have your textbooks when classes start, not two weeks later. Moreover, you may want to shop for which classes to take next term, by looking carefully and comparing textbooks used in different classes: the bookstore had them all on display for you to compare and choose.

- *Sometimes you may want to buy science books that are not just textbooks:*

If you don't know exactly which book you want to buy, but you just know the topic you would like to read more about, Amazon typically will make you sort through a huge amount of crap among which you need to locate the few good books, and with just a few pages of the introduction available for viewing, you often end up with a book that is not what you were looking for. A carefully organized and specialized scientific bookstore gives you access to the latest titles in the subject you want, already selected for quality.

- *Having a bookstore can also help you have a better library:*

Due to budget constraints, the library does not automatically buy newly published research monographs in the various research areas, but it relies on faculty input on which books to buy. With an excellent bookstore like we used to have, faculty members don't just shop there for books they need for their own research work, but they can also browse a broad selection of recent titles and pick those they can recommend for library acquisitions. Without the bookstore, doing that is much harder and time consuming (by sorting through publishers catalogs) and less accurate (as books online are not fully viewable). The elimination of the bookstore may adversely affect the quality of the campus libraries.

- *The bookstore closure affects the faculty, hence it affects you:*

Better research conditions for the faculty means better mentoring for students, see more comments on this below.

#### As a faculty, why do I care?

- *The bookstore seriously helps my research!*

Many of the research papers I have authored so far in my career started out by an idea I got by coming *unexpectedly* across an interesting book in a bookstore shelf, a book I didn't know about before (which therefore I would not have been able to find on Amazon) and which contained just exactly what I needed to start a new project. At various stages of different projects I also used bookstores just as much as I used libraries. Several of these research projects I have shared with SURF students and with graduate students; without bookstores they simply would not have existed.

- *Why not Amazon?*

I have used Amazon frequently: it is OK when I know exactly which book I want to order, but useless when I am trying to find something I did not know about (Amazon recommendations work very poorly for specialized science literature).

- *Why not another bookstore in the area?*

Vroman is an excellent bookstore for general culture (literature, philosophy, etc.) but it does not have a professional science section (only a few popular science titles aimed at the general public). The bookstores of USC and UCLA have some science literature, but they do not come even remotely close to the quality of the bookstore we had here at Caltech. Since the closure of the Caltech bookstore, I have resorted to flying to Berkeley over some weekends or, when possible, to the Boston-Cambridge area, where there are still many very good bookstores with a serious and extensive science section. It is a very inconvenient and expensive solution compared to walking to the campus bookstore, giving them my research grant number, and walking out a few minutes later with all the books I need for my work.

- *The bookstore also represents our research to outside visitors:*

It frequently happened, since the time when our bookstore was closed, that visitors and collaborators I invited to give talks and lectures in our seminars would ask me to take them to see our bookstore (which had an international reputation as one of the best scientific bookstores). Bringing our distinguished visitors to an empty room and a store selling t-shirts gives them a very poor impression of Caltech.

- *Why not everybody cares as much?*

You may have heard from other faculty members that their research was not directly affected by the closure of the bookstore. This is not surprising: not all scientists do research in the same way, but as a whole the Caltech community gains by trying to ensure that, despite the times of financial hardship, all of us can continue to carry out our research in the best possible way.

**The online petition.** Since the closure of the Caltech bookstore three years ago, I have tried in many ways to work towards its reopening, including serving on the appointed faculty committee that advised the Caltech administration about it. Over a year ago the committee recommended an agreement with an external bookseller and the reopening of the bookstore. Now another academic year is starting and there is no credible sign that the bookstore will reopen anytime soon. So I resorted to starting an online petition.

The text of the petition reads as follows: *Caltech used to have one of the very best scientific bookstores in the country. Three years ago the Caltech administration, without consulting faculty and students, decided to close it down. Not only the bookstore was important to the faculty in their research and to students for the selling of textbooks and other reference books, but closing down the bookstore in one of the most prestigious universities also sends a terribly wrong signal to the general public and the community. We increasingly live in a time where anti-scientific and anti-intellectual feelings and attitudes are on the rise, and where cultural and intellectual values need the strongest possible endorsement from our centers of scientific excellence. Caltech had a model bookstore that delivered to its community of scholars and to the general public the best of our scientific and technological culture. Despite requests from the faculty and the recommendation of the appointed committee, and despite a promise from the administration that the bookstore would reopen, three years have gone by with no credible sign of its reopening. Its place has been occupied by a travesty of store selling t-shirts and flip-flops. Tell Caltech: Books not t-shirts!*

Some of you may have reservations about the somewhat confrontational tone of the text of the petition, but you should take into account that it comes after three years of unrelenting attempts at making our administration listen to our concerns, months of work of the appointed committee, and the seemingly complete disregard for its recommendations that followed.

**I need your help** to offer you better research and better mentoring! You can help me by contributing your signature at

<http://www.change.org/petitions/california-institute-of-technology-reopen-the-caltech-bookstore-2>

You can also sign the petition directly on my webpage  
<http://www.its.caltech.edu/matilde>

If you have any question about this petition, about the role of the bookstore as a service to our research, or on any other aspect of this document, I will be more than happy to discuss it further. My office is in SLN 162, or you can find me working at the outdoor tables, right in front of what used to be our wonderful bookstore.

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