

Beyond the printed page: Seniors seek closure with perfect thesis binder

By Lindsey White

PRINCETONIAN SENIOR WRITER

Some lucky seniors are already done with their theses, while others finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. And with the pages complete, every senior must make one final decision — where to go to put it all together.

Students seek out different binding services according to their tastes — and their time management skills.

The longest-running thesis binding business is Smith-Shattuck Bookbinding, owned and operated by George and Judie Shattuck. They bought the business 19 years ago from Earl Smith, who had been binding Princeton theses since 1952.

George Shattuck learned bookbinding after deciding he wanted a hands-on job. He said the learning process was long and sometimes arduous, but he believes the effort was well worth it.

“Even today I’m not jaded after 19 years of bookbinding,” Shattuck said. “The return is not monetary, but producing something people like is a great feeling.”

His wife Judie agreed. “We love the business, because what we make lasts for a long time. We get a lot of gratification out of that. You know that people are happy with the finished product, that they’re not going to throw it out tomorrow.”

The Shattucks use the same bookbinding machines that Earl Smith used back in 1952. Several of the machines, one boasting a small Princeton tiger on its side, were made in 1936.

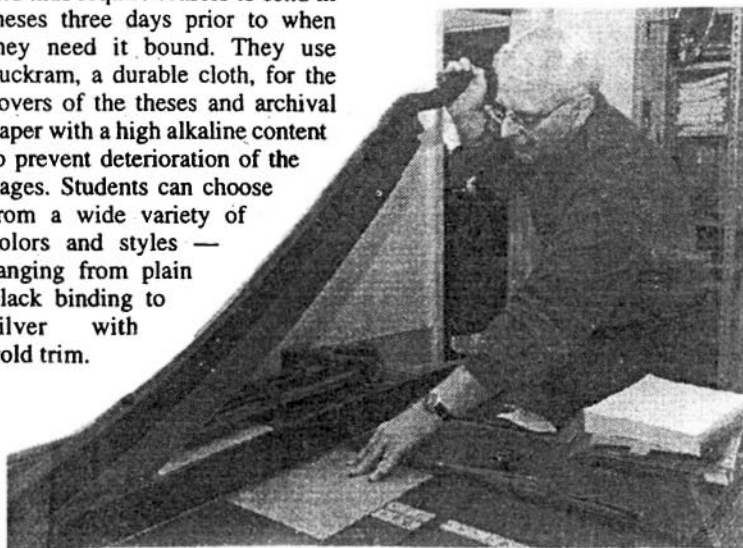
But despite the machines’ age, George has faith they, like the seniors, will survive thesis season.

“They know their duty to the Princeton grads and undergrads,” he joked, patting one of the binding machines.

The Shattucks spend two to three hours preparing each thesis and thus require seniors to send in theses three days prior to when they need it bound. They use buckram, a durable cloth, for the covers of the theses and archival paper with a high alkaline content to prevent deterioration of the pages. Students can choose from a wide variety of colors and styles — ranging from plain black binding to silver with gold trim.

Sara Kahan ’02, a politics major, said Smith-Shattuck was a good fit. “My thesis had a lot of pages and a lot of tables,” she

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noted, which she felt would be held together better with a solid binding.

“I also finished with enough time to bring it there,” said Kahan.

The Shattucks bind about 1/3 of the senior class theses each year. They have framed letters on the wall of their studio from grateful students. One former client thanked the Shattucks for their skills in proofreading as well as book-binding. The Shattucks caught a series of typographical errors in the student’s original copy and informed him in time to correct the mistakes.