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Student Textbook Survey 2024 - Executive Summary

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BENTLEY UNIVERSITY

Student Textbook Survey - Fall 2024
Executive Summary and Key Findings

Administered by:

Bentley University Library

James Thibeault, Open Educational Resources Librarian

Between September 30 and October 11, the Bentley University library conducted a student textbook survey. The purpose of the study was to gather data from students on textbook affordability. Students responded to 10-15 questions covering topics like how textbooks influence their purchasing decisions, their total expenditures on course materials during Fall 2024, and the potential effects of these purchases. The library aimed to gather insights on:

- Students' views on current textbook prices
- Openness to adopting more affordable educational resources on campus
- Likely responses and behaviors if faced with high-cost educational materials
- Comparisons with findings from the Fall 2023 Student Textbook Survey

By gathering this data, the library hopes these findings will support the need to evaluate textbook affordability at the university, support the development of recommendations, and determine how no-cost materials and Open Educational Resources (OER) may be better integrated into courses in the future.

569 students completed the survey, approximately 10% of the institutional enrollment (via the Common Data set 2023-2024). Out of the respondents, 90% were undergraduate students, 9% were graduate students, and 1% were PhD students. Among undergraduate students, 35% were first-year, 27% sophomore, 21% junior, and 17% senior. 84% respondents were currently pursuing a business degree, 11% were arts and sciences, and only 5% were undeclared.

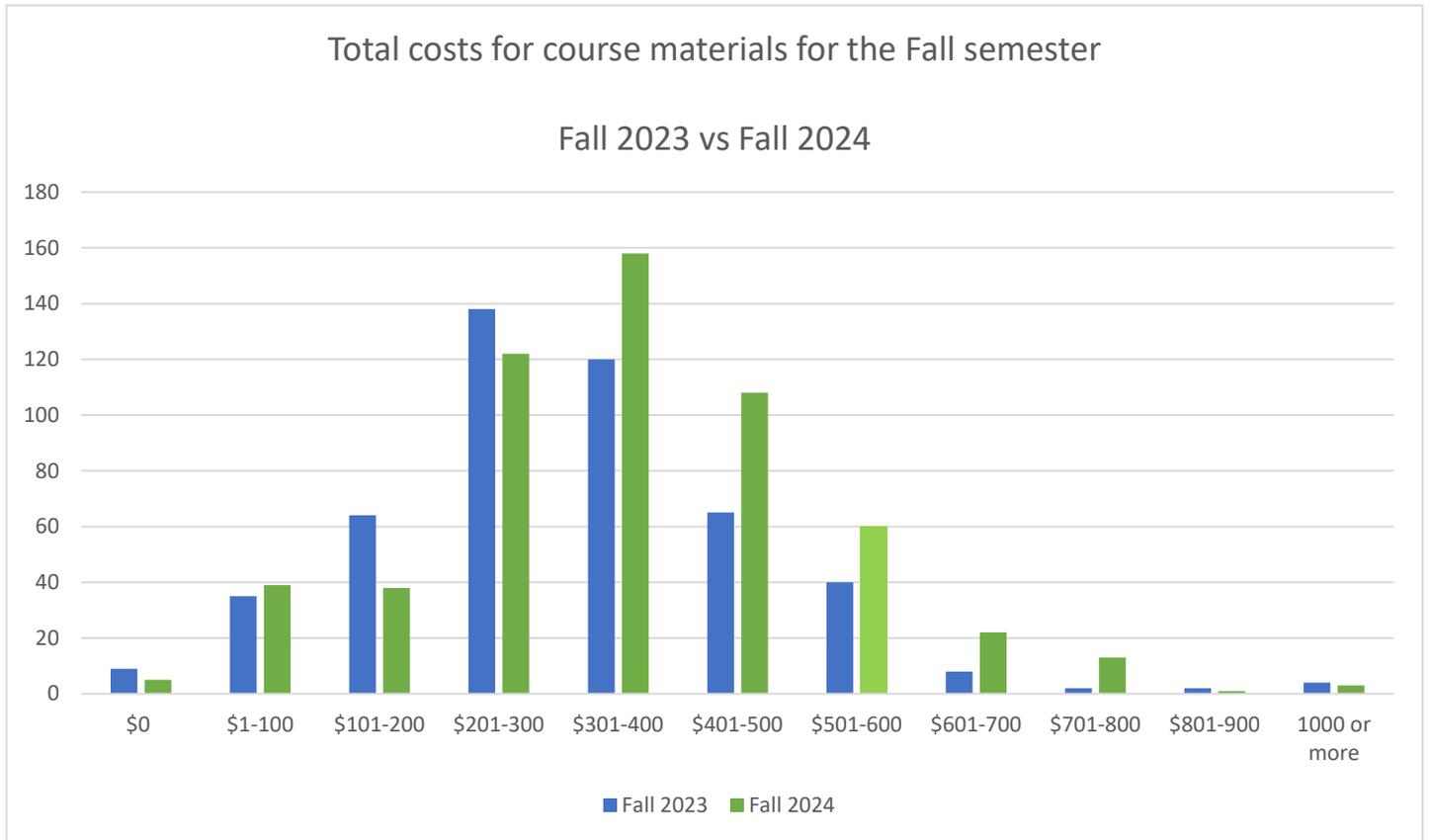
The primary researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program's online training course on human research subjects protection, and Bentley University's senior research consultant at the Academic Technology Center (ATC) reviewed the survey's design.

Summary of Key Findings

Key Finding 1 — *There is an increase in student spending for course materials compared to last year’s internal student textbook survey data.*

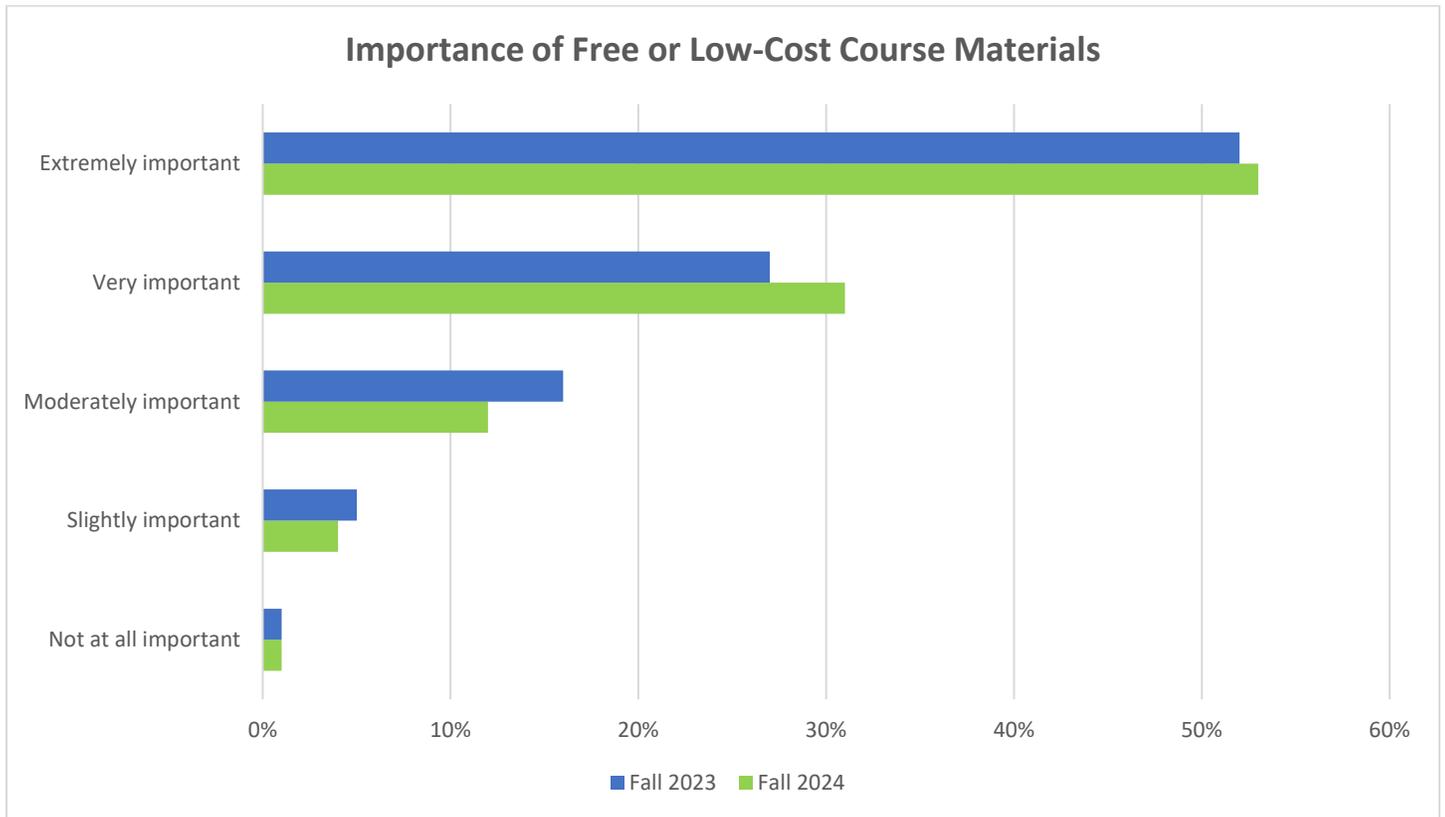
In the Fall 2023 student textbook survey, approximately 53% of students spent between \$201-400. In particular, 28% of students spent between \$201-300 and 25% of students spent between \$301-400. In the recent Fall 2024 survey, the percentage of students spending \$301-400 increased to 28%, while the percentage of students spending \$201-300 decreased to 21%. In addition, students spending \$401-500 rose to 19%, which is an increase from last year’s 13%. Conversely, the percentage of students spending \$101-200 fell to 7%, which is a decrease from last year’s 13%.

Overall, there is a notable increase in student spending compared to last year’s findings. While the percentage of students spending above \$500 or more has remained relatively unchanged, the average student spending increased from an average of \$311 in Fall 2023 to an average of \$356 in Fall 2024.



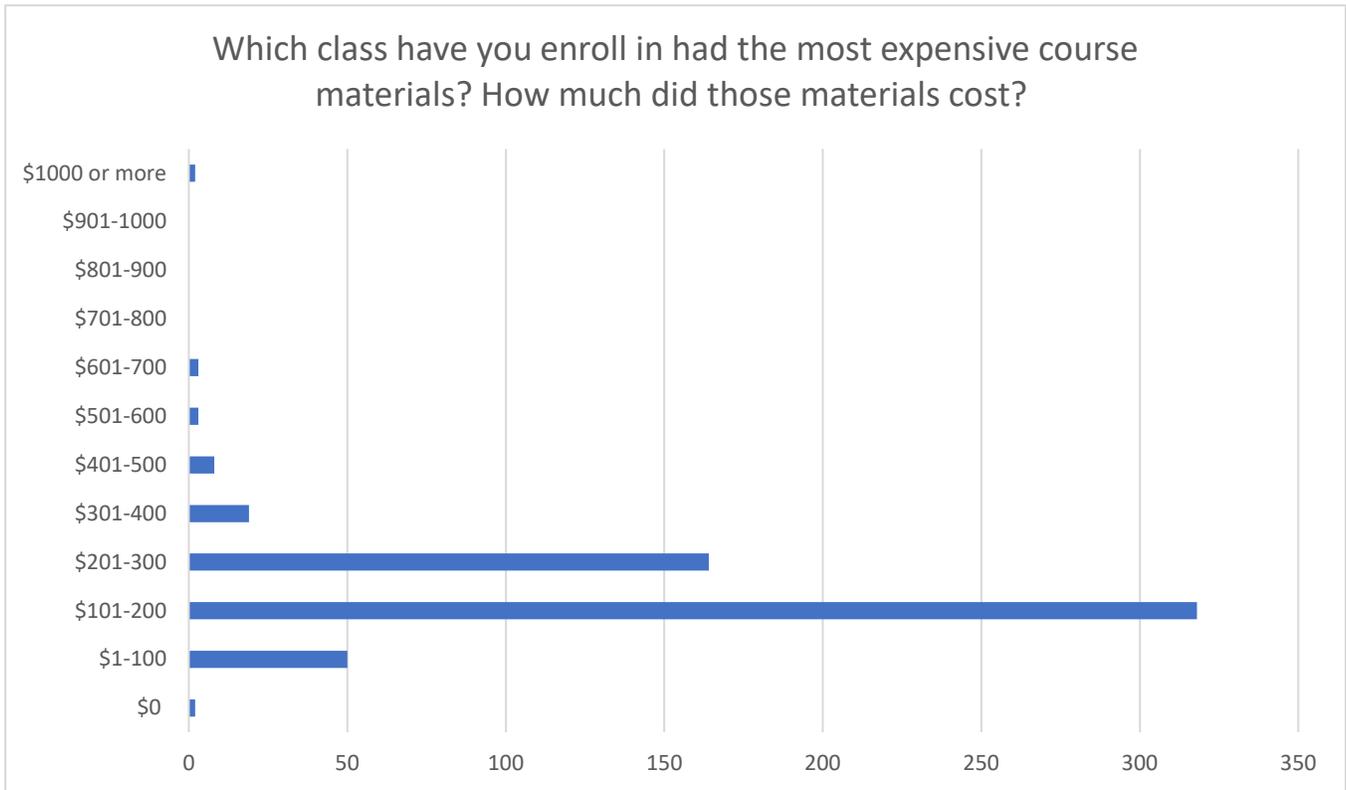
Key Findings 2 — *The importance of students seeking free or low-cost course materials remains high.*

The students’ preference for having free or low-cost course materials remains high. In the Fall 2024 survey, 53% of respondents selected “Extremely Important” and 31% selected “Very important”. While responses for Fall 2023 remain similar, there is a slight increase in the “Very important” and “Extremely important” categories.



Key Findings 3 – Students may be spending \$100-300 on a single course.

In the recent survey, a new question was asked for students regarding which class had the most expensive course materials and how much it cost. Out of the responses, 56% reported that students spent \$101-200 for a single course and 29% reported \$201-300 for a single course. It should be noted that due to the wording, students may have reported on courses outside of the Fall 2024. While the wording will be rectified in next year’s survey, these responses still suggest that **a significant portion of students are facing substantial costs for individual courses.**



Key Findings 4 – Students are overwhelmingly seeking free copies online to reduce textbook costs.

In the Fall 2023 survey, students were asked “During your academic career, what measures have you taken to reduce your required textbook costs?” Surprisingly, a significant number of students selected “Other” to write in something along the lines of “Find a free copy online.” Therefore, in this Fall 2024 survey, that option was included in possible answers. With that option available, 74% of respondents selected “Find a free copy online” in the recent survey. While this may not imply to every free copy found online, this response likely implies that **students are seeking other ways to purchase textbooks that may not be copyright compliant instead of purchasing resources through legitimate means.**

Key Findings 5 — *Students are expressing a need for more affordable and accessible course materials.*

At the conclusion of the survey, students were invited to share any additional thoughts on textbook affordability. Their feedback commonly expressed concerns about high textbook prices, challenges in affording specific materials, a preference for more affordable or free digital alternatives, frustrations with access codes and subscription requirements, and the financial stress these costs impose on students.

Below are a few notable responses:

- “It is a struggle as my family doesn’t have a lot of liquid funds that can just be used sporadically whenever a teacher needs me to buy a new textbook”
- “It is very frustrating to have to use 3 or four different online textbook resources per semester. In each semester, I use a combination of McGrawHill, Cengage, MyBusinessCourse, and Pearson. If it is feasible, Bentley should look to use only 1-2 online resources and give students low-price subscription plans so that these websites are used for all classes, and not have a separate online textbook subscription website for each class.”
- “I know this is a very difficult situation for the school to navigate. The school can't work with the publishers and can't afford to pay the costs of students' textbooks. However, the publishers have a complete oligopoly and use this to exploit students at universities all across the country. This school and other schools should take steps to try and develop their own textbooks tailored to the school's curriculum.”
- “I understand why Professors choose to use digital platforms like Cengage due to its convenience in assigning and grading assignments. However, the best courses I have taken had Professors that made their own homeworks, exams, and lecture slides.”
- “The price of textbooks is getting way too expensive and it's making it really hard for me to be able to afford university and then additional elements”
- “I believe that every start of the semester I shouldn't have to spend 500 just to be able to just do assignments in the class.”
- “It is very exhausting having to pay for these textbooks when you are not expecting it. These prices should be included into the tuition beforehand, not only for the appeal of the class, but for the sake of the students because a lot of them are already putting everything they own towards tuition.”
- “The cost of textbooks has put an overwhelming strain on how I start every semester. Not only is the cost of textbooks astronomical, but it's very stressful to find all the correct textbooks and subscriptions that I need on all different online platforms or from the bookstore.”
- “Textbook costs are only a part of the problem. Needing to pay to access homework and quizzes on websites like Cengage eliminates the ability to share or buy used copies.”
- “Looking at my credit card bill made me want to cry”

For more clarification on the results or to seek the full report, please contact:

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