



VIVALIB.ORG



2025 VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

Executive Summary

VIVA



Bay View Analytics®

2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey: Executive Summary

Sophie Rondeau, Affordable Learning Librarian, VIVA

Dr. Jeff Seaman, Director, Bay View Analytics

Dr. Julia Seaman, Research Director, Bay View Analytics

Genya O'Gara, Director, VIVA



Rondeau, S., Seaman, J., Seaman, J., O'Gara, G. (2025). (rep.). *2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey: Executive Summary*. VIVA & Bayview Analytics is released under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).



Report available at: [Bay View Analytics. Course Material Affordability](#) and [VIVA. Course Materials Survey](#).

Introduction

This report aims to assist VIVA, Virginia's academic library consortium, and its parent organization, the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV), in understanding how course material costs affect students in Virginia's higher education system. The findings will inform VIVA's Open & Affordable Course Content program and support member institutions in strategically enhancing students' experiences with course materials.

VIVA, in partnership with Bay View Analytics, conducted the Virginia Course Materials Survey from March 3 to May 3, 2025, and again from September 28 to November 9, 2025. The research questions include:

1. What barriers are presented to students due to course material costs and how can those barriers be categorized and addressed by stakeholders?
2. What is the impact of course material costs on educational equity among Virginia students?
3. What course content materials do students find most beneficial to their learning?

The survey consisted of 34 questions about the costs and features of course materials, along with various demographic topics. Designed to be completed in under 10 minutes, the median completion time was 6.5 minutes.

This project builds on VIVA's 2021 survey and aims to expand statewide research, including the Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey conducted by the Florida Office of Distance Learning and Student Services, as well as the Pennsylvania Course Materials Survey 2023 by Affordable Learning PA and the Partnership for Academic Library Collaboration and Innovation, in partnership with Bay View Analytics. The survey also examines questions of educational equity through demographic analysis.

The survey received over 9,800 valid responses from students at 40 of VIVA's 70 higher education institutions, representing all four VIVA institution types: public doctoral, public four-year, public two-year, and private non-profit. Almost all questions were asked of the entire sample, resulting in a confidence interval of +/- 1% or less. The few questions with skip logic, asked only to a subset of respondents, have slightly wider confidence intervals.

Key Findings

The 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey addressed a wide range of issues related to the affordability of course materials and student preferences among Virginia higher education students. The more than 9,800 valid responses from students at 40 of the 70 VIVA higher education institutions provide a detailed view of the challenges students face, how these affect their academic progress, and the steps they are taking to address these issues.

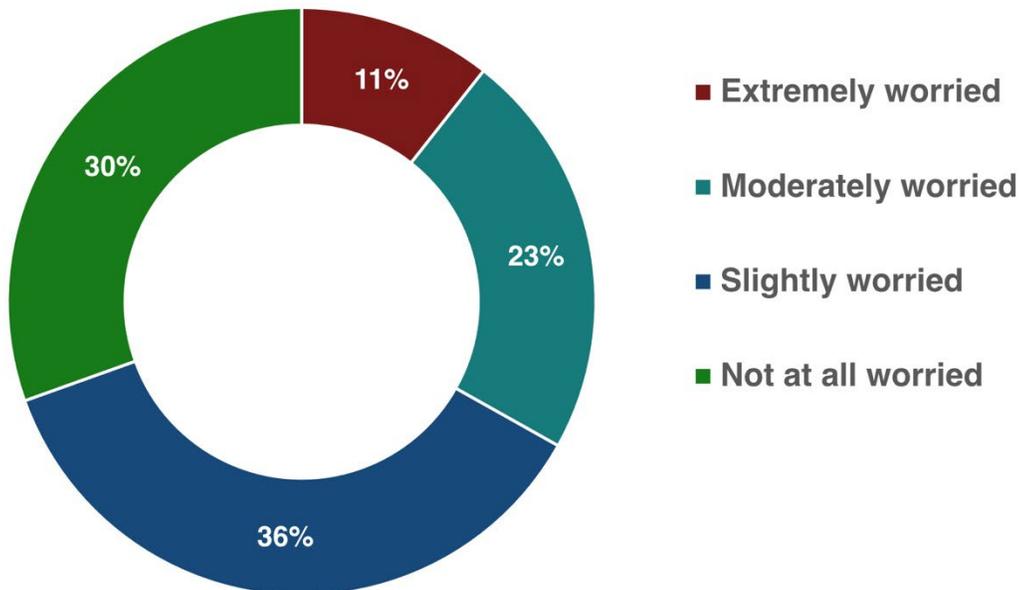
The key findings identified in this study are:

1. Seven in ten students worry about meeting their course material costs for the current term
2. The impact of course material costs on students' choices of major, minor, and institution has grown.
3. Course material costs impact some students more than others.
4. One in six students faced textbook costs of over \$400 per semester.
5. High costs create barriers to student academic progress by causing them to skip or delay a term.
6. Almost all students take steps to lower their course material costs.
7. Students typically pay for course materials with their own funds.
8. Students have nuanced preferences on textbook format, with the largest group favoring print.
9. Most students prefer to own their course materials.
10. Students voice concerns about the cost, transparency, loss of access to materials, and limited flexibility of Inclusive Access programs.

1. Seven in ten students worry about course material costs

Seventy percent of Virginia students worry about these costs, with 11% "extremely worried," 23% "moderately worried," and 36% "slightly worried." These rates are somewhat lower than those reported in 2021, with the proportion expressing the greatest concern, "extremely worried," dropping from 16% to 11%.

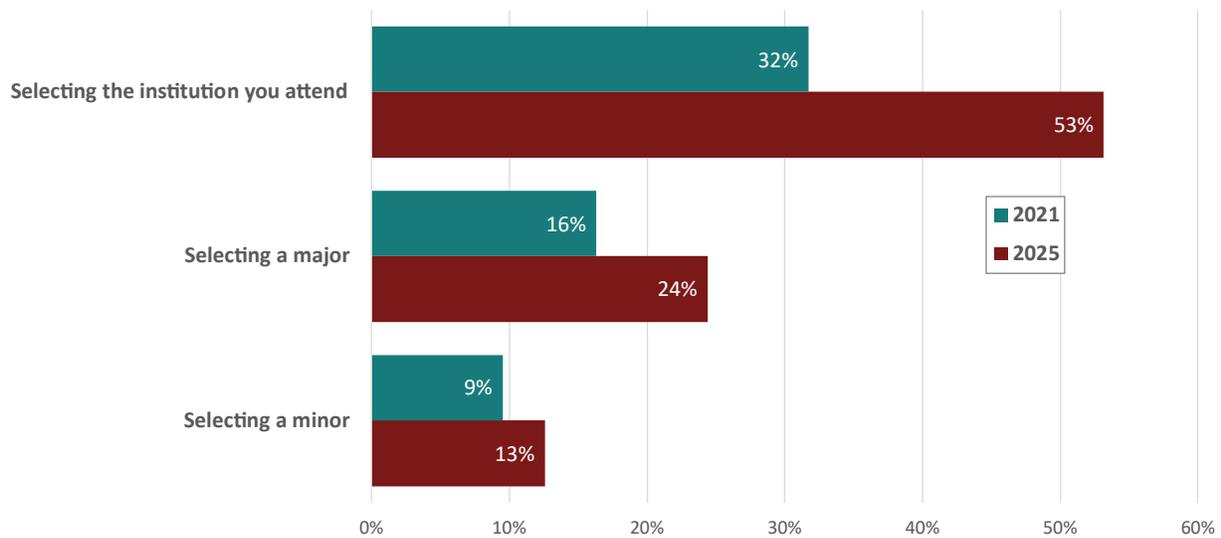
How worried were you about meeting your course material costs this term?



2. The impact of course material costs on students' decisions has increased

The overall level of worry might have decreased from 2021 to 2025, but its influence on students' educational decisions grew. In 2025, students reported that course materials costs impacted their choice of institution (53%), major (24%), and minor (13%).

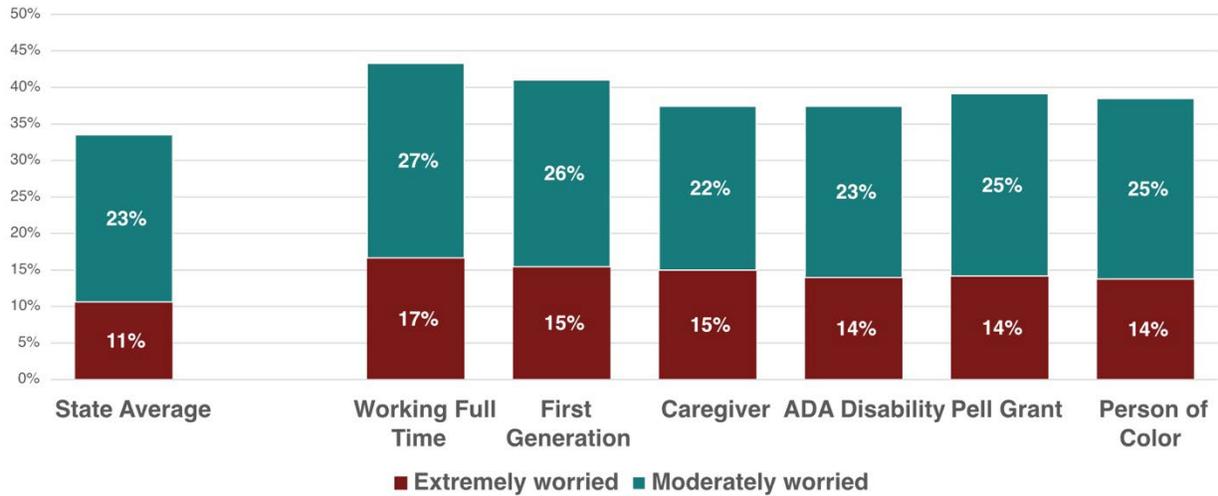
Have any of the following large decisions been based at all on the cost of course materials?



3. Course material costs impact some students more than others

Students who are full-time workers, first-generation college students, caregivers, or who have an ADA-recognized disability, receive a Pell Grant, or are people of color, report higher worry levels.

How worried were you about meeting your course material costs this term?



4. One in six students faced textbook costs of over \$400 per semester

Most students spend \$200 or more per semester on course materials, with one in six students (15%) incurring costs of over \$400 in a single semester. Only 2% reported having no costs.

"Textbooks are too expensive (upwards of \$100) for how little they are used in classes."

"It is frustrating when course materials are a required purchase that make me spend \$200-300, but then are not used in the course."

"One book is \$350. When you're a single mom with limited resources, it's hard"

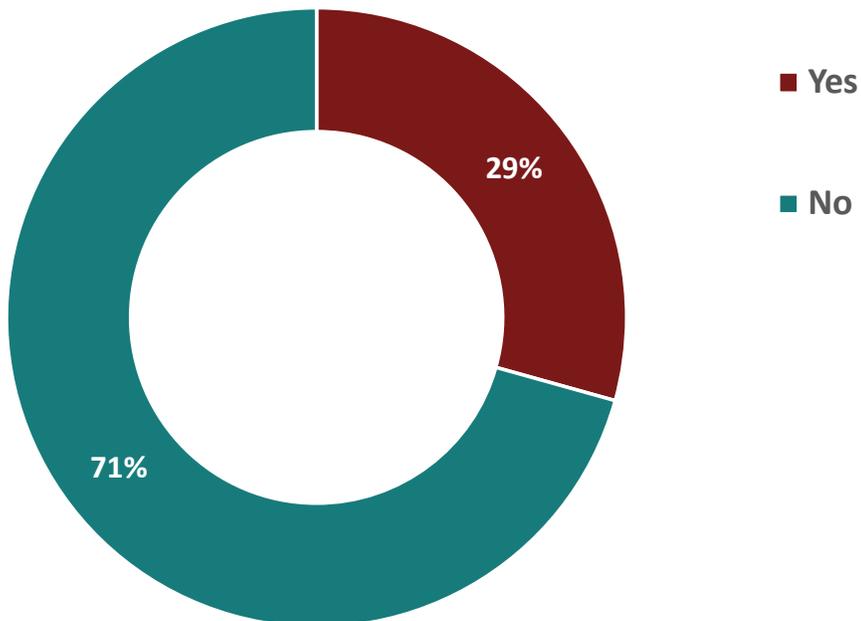
How much did you spend on course materials, whether purchased, rented, or leased, during this semester?



5. High costs create barriers to student academic progress

Overall, 29% of students reported skipping or delaying a term at least once during their academic career due to financial concerns, whether related to course materials or other expenses.

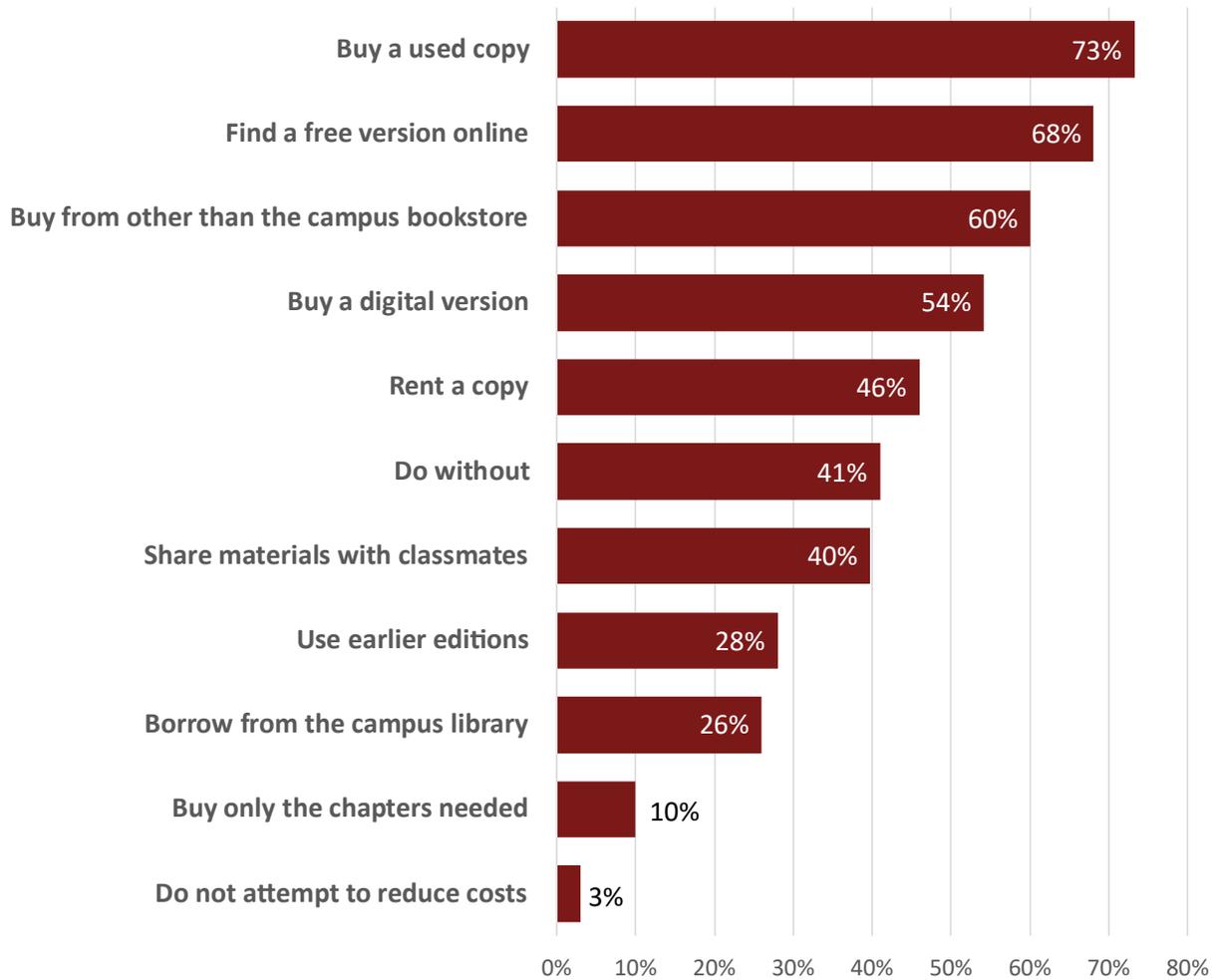
Have financial concerns ever caused you to skip a term or delay your academic pursuits?



6. Almost all students take steps to lower their course material costs

Virtually all students take steps to lower their course material costs. About three-quarters said they purchased a used copy, with a similar number reporting finding a free (often pirated) version online. Most students purchased a digital version to save money, while others chose to rent. Only 3% of students reported not taking any steps to reduce their course material expenses.

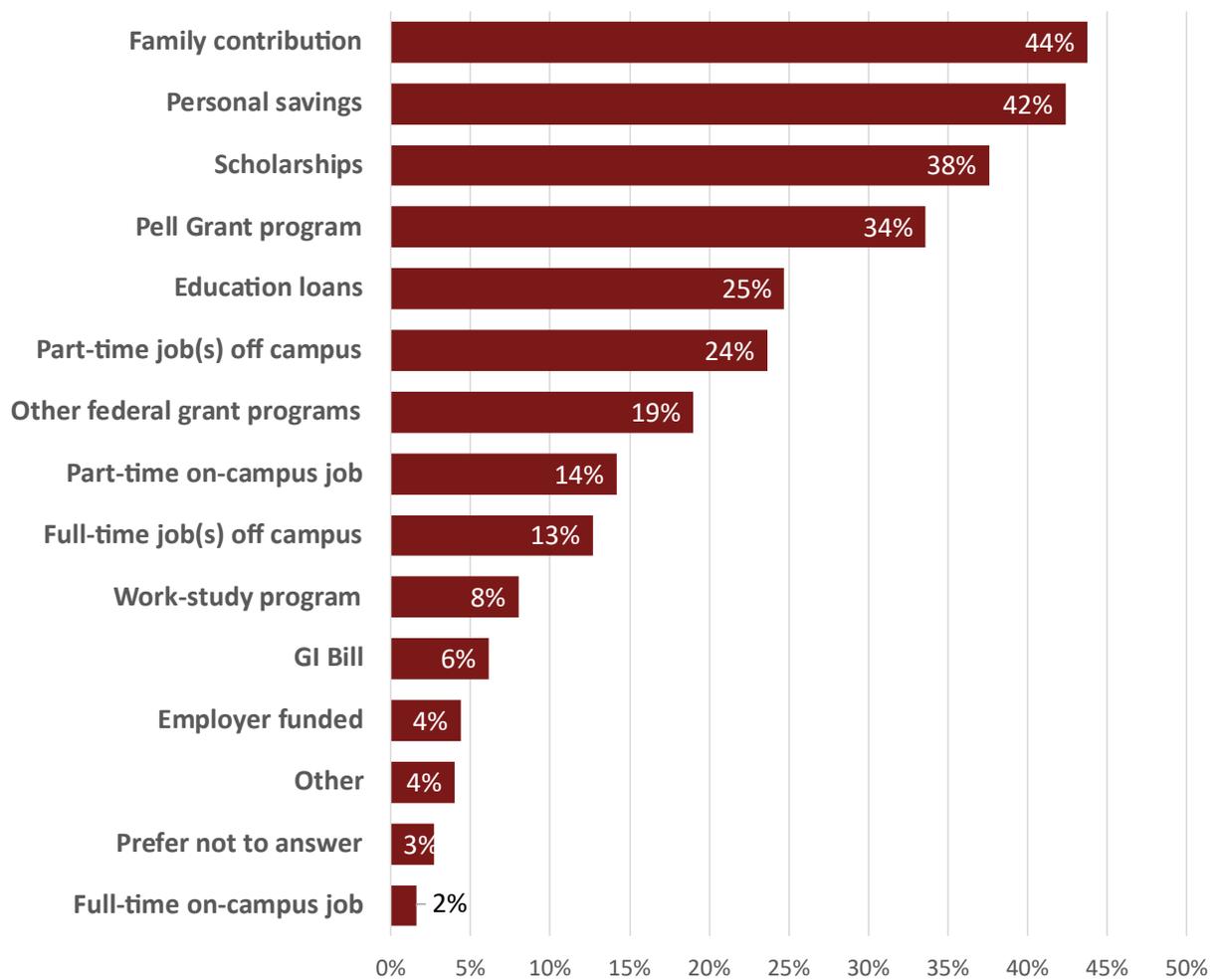
What measures have you taken to reduce your required course material costs throughout your college career?



7. Students typically pay for course materials with their own funds

Students most often use personal funds from their family or their own savings to pay for course materials, with scholarships and Pell Grants the second most common source. Most students reported they had no financial aid to help with their course material costs, and fewer than one-quarter said their financial aid covered half or more of their course material expenses.

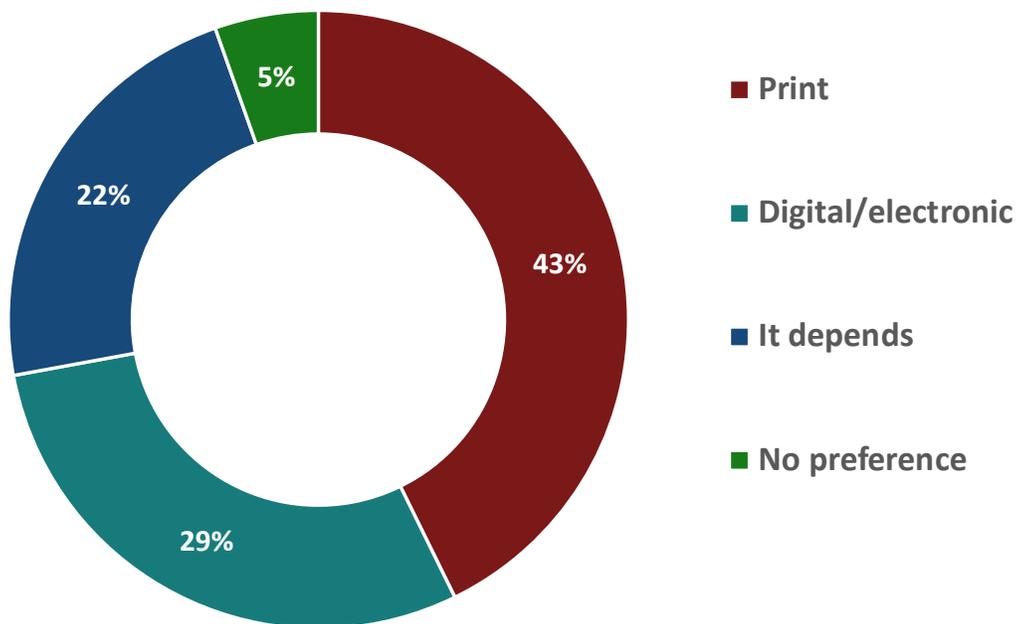
Which of the following sources are you using to fund your education?



8. Students have nuanced textbook format preferences, with the largest group favoring print

Assuming costs for print and digital materials are the same, 43% of students prefer print, compared to 29% who would opt for digital, while 23% indicated their preference depends on the specific course. All students, even those who prefer print, agree that aspects of digital materials are helpful for their learning.

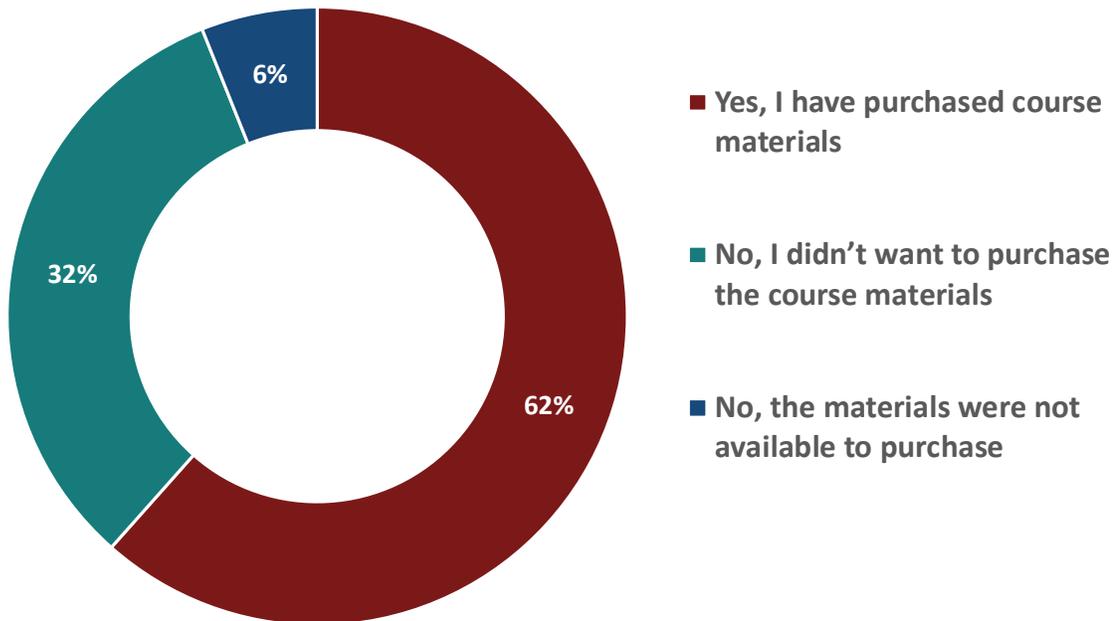
If the cost is the same, which format do you prefer for your course materials?



9. Most students prefer to own their course materials

A full 62% of students opted to purchase course materials, rather than rent or rely on access codes. Of the students who chose to buy their course materials when other options were available, 73% did so because their financial aid or personal finances made the purchase affordable. Many students (43%) also valued the ability to use course materials later.

When you have other options for getting your course materials did you choose to buy them?



10. Students voice concerns about the cost, transparency, loss of access to materials, and limited flexibility of Inclusive Access programs

Open-ended student responses reveal mixed views on Inclusive Access programs, with negative comments outnumbering positive ones two to one. Students expressed concerns about high costs, lack of transparency, non-functioning codes, loss of access to materials after the course ends, and limited flexibility. Students also expressed a desire for clearer information about costs and more options to opt out or select cheaper alternatives. Only 1/3 of students who have used or knew about these programs were aware of the opt-out policy.

"I do not like them. Because students are savvy enough to find discounts/cheaper options on their own, I think it actually just costs students more and just raises their tuition often without actually helping them to afford books. The only way I see this being effective is with the ability to opt out being not only made available but made accessible to students who do not want to pay this cost."

"I have found that when the cost is bundled it is often impossible to complete the course materials without that specific course item. This often means "opt-out" is not possible to succeed in the course. This is usually when completing questions within the textbook are graded. I would prefer to have the opportunity to find cheaper options myself."

"I don't appreciate the time limits on material access codes. They are expensive but expire with the class, leaving you no option but to purchase if you need to access the material again for any reason (comprehensive exams at the end of a program or needing to retake a class)."

"I didn't know there was an opt out policy. I didn't think I could. I would have preferred to look at the availability and costs of textbooks elsewhere before having them taken out of my tuition."

Acknowledgments

VIVA extends its gratitude to the **2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey Review/Revise Working Group** for their work reviewing the 2021 Virginia Course Materials Survey and adaptations made by other state systems. Their careful analysis and recommendations resulted in a revised instrument that addressed the current landscape while maintaining alignment with local, statewide, and national benchmarks.

2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey Review/Revise Working Group

Karen Centeno-Casillas (Virginia Military Institute)

Abbey Childs (Virginia Commonwealth University)

Nancy Falciani-White (Randolph-Macon College)

Mary Hanlin (Tidewater Community College)

Isaac Needell (Norfolk State University)

Jeff Prater (Northern Virginia Community College)

Monica Lee Rogers (James Madison University)

Sophie Rondeau (VIVA)

Jeff Seaman, PhD (Bay View Analytics)

Julia E. Seaman, PhD (Bay View Analytics)

These reports have greatly benefited from the contributions of:

Jessica Kirschner, Digital Publishing Coordinator, VIVA

Dr. Helen McManus, Associate Director, VIVA

Additional gratitude is extended to the following individuals who encouraged participation across all Virginia Community Colleges:

Micol Hutchinson, PhD, Interim Assistant Vice Chancellor for Policy and Instructional Support Services, Virginia Community College System

Steve Litherland, Associate Vice President for Libraries, Tidewater Community College

Finally, VIVA would like to thank all member institutions that participated in the survey. The strong statewide response has yielded robust data that enables meaningful analysis and will inform initiatives that directly support students across Virginia.

Participating Institutions

Public, Doctoral

George Mason University
James Madison University
Old Dominion University
Radford University
University of Virginia
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Tech
William & Mary

Public, 4-Year

Longwood University
Norfolk State University
University of Mary Washington
University of Virginia, College at Wise

Public, 2-Year

Blue Ridge Community College
Brightpoint Community College
Central Virginia Community College
Eastern Shore Community College
Germanna Community College
J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College
Mountain Empire Community College
Mountain Gateway Community College
New River Community College
Patrick & Henry Community College
Piedmont Virginia Community College
Southside Virginia Community College
Southwest Virginia Community College
Tidewater Community College
Virginia Highlands Community College
Virginia Peninsula Community College
Virginia Western Community College
Wytheville Community College

Private, Non-Profit

Bridgewater College
Eastern Mennonite University
Emory & Henry University
Hollins University
Marymount University
Randolph College
Randolph-Macon College
Roanoke College
Shenandoah University
University of Lynchburg