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2025 VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

Identifying Students Most Impacted by Costs

VIVA



Bay View Analytics®

2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey: Identifying Students Most Impacted by Costs

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

Introduction

Faculty and academic administrators are aware that expensive course materials can harm students' academic success. Many institutions already have or are developing support programs to help students affected by these costs. The findings of the 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey can offer valuable guidance in identifying the students most impacted.

Key findings include:

1. Students who work full-time, are first-generation college students, have caregiver responsibilities, report a disability recognized by the ADA, receive a Pell Grant, or are people of color are all more likely to report feeling extremely worried about course materials costs.
2. Students belonging to more than one of the categories listed above are the most impacted by the cost of course materials.
3. Compared to the general student population, students who report being "extremely worried" about affording their course materials are significantly more likely to report a negative academic impact. Compared to the general population, these students are:
 - 2.7 times as likely to have course material costs impact their choice of major.
 - 2.7 times as likely to have course material costs impact their choice of minor.
 - 7.3 times as likely to take fewer courses.
 - 6.1 times as likely not to register for a specific course.
 - 9.9 times as likely to withdraw from a course.
 - 10.2 times as likely to earn a poor grade because they could not afford to buy the textbook.
 - 11.9 times as likely to fail a course because they could not afford to buy the textbook.

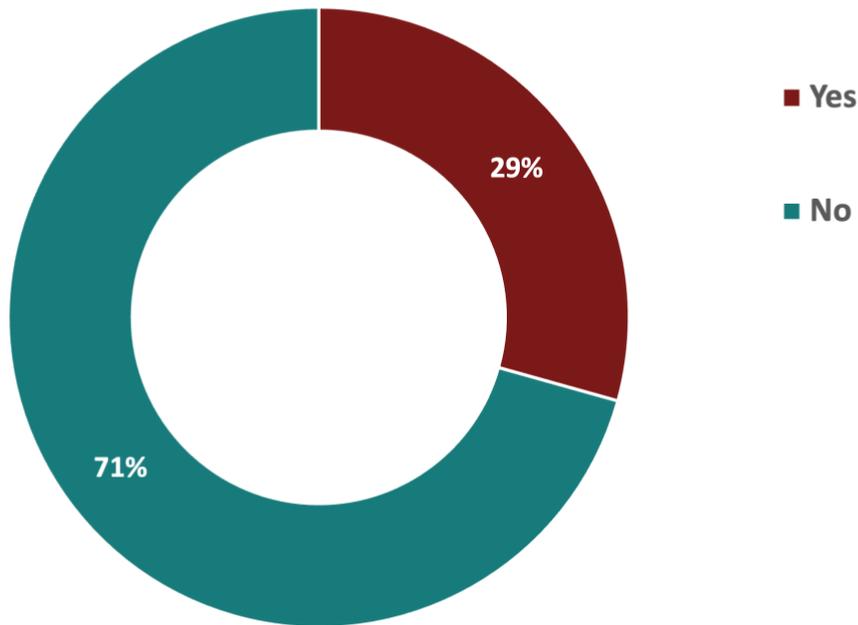
Identifying Students Most Impacted by Costs

Results from the 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey enable us to identify student characteristics associated with extreme worry about meeting the costs of their course materials.

A retrospective question asked students whether cost concerns, from any source—not just for course materials—had ever caused them to skip or delay a term. Overall, nearly 30% of students reported experiencing this at least once during their academic career (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The proportion of students having to skip a term or delay academic pursuits because of financial concerns

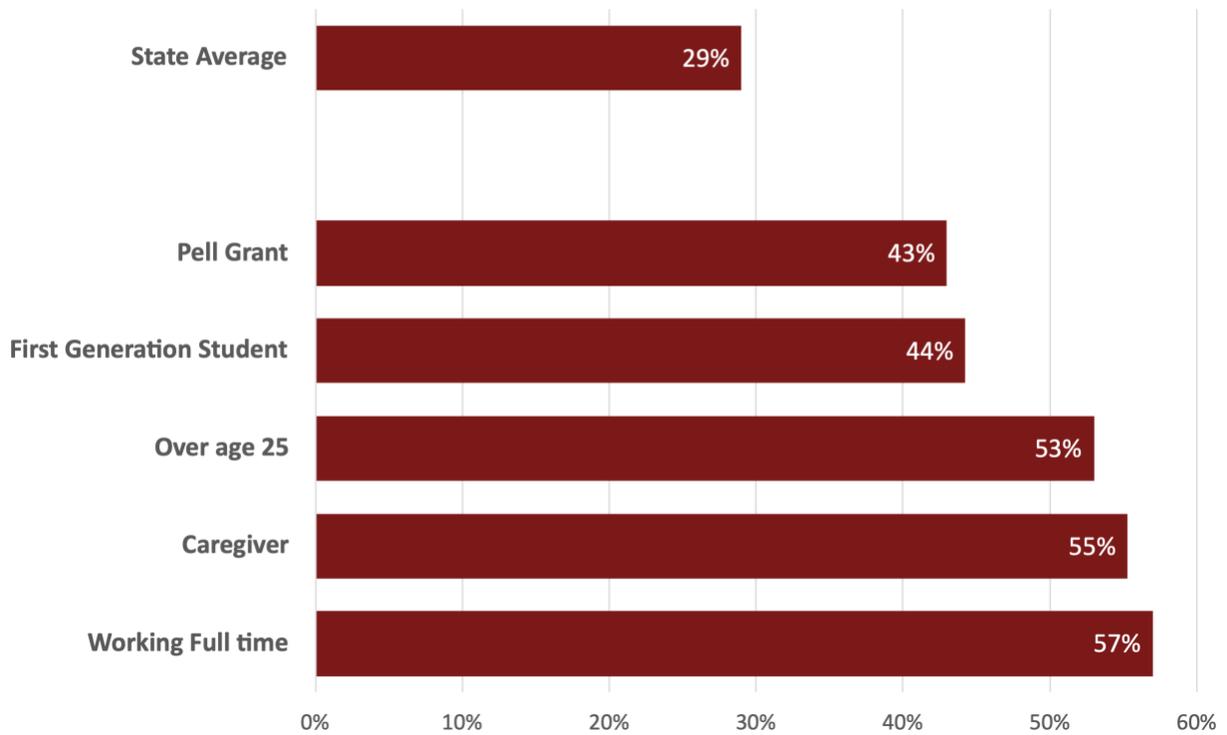
Have financial concerns ever caused you to skip a term or delay your academic pursuits?



Most students who worked full-time (57%) reported skipping or delaying a term. Additionally, first-generation students (44%), students with caregiver responsibilities (55%), students over 25 (53%), and those on Pell Grants (43%) all indicated significantly higher rates of skipping or delaying their education because of financial concerns (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The proportion of students having to skip a term or delay academic pursuits because of financial concerns, by student characteristics

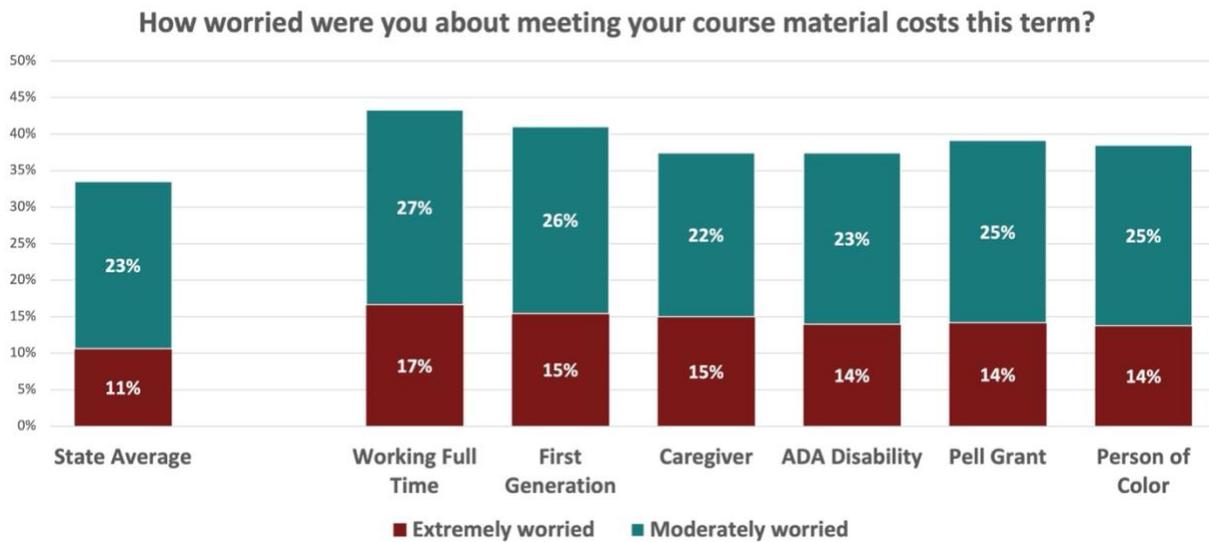
Proportion of students who had to skip a term or delay academic pursuits because of financial concerns



Worry About Meeting Course Materials Costs

Students who work full-time, who are first-generation students, who have caregiver responsibilities, who report having a disability the ADA would recognize, who receive a Pell Grant, and students of color are all more likely to report that they are extremely worried about course materials costs (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: The level of worry about the cost of course materials, by student characteristics



While students in any of the above-listed categories are more likely to have an elevated level of worry, those who fall into more than one such group are even more at risk. For example, 14% of students who reported having an ADA disability were extremely worried, but this number rose to 23% for those who were also first-generation, or to 20% if they were also working full-time (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: The level of worry about the cost of course materials, by combinations of student characteristics

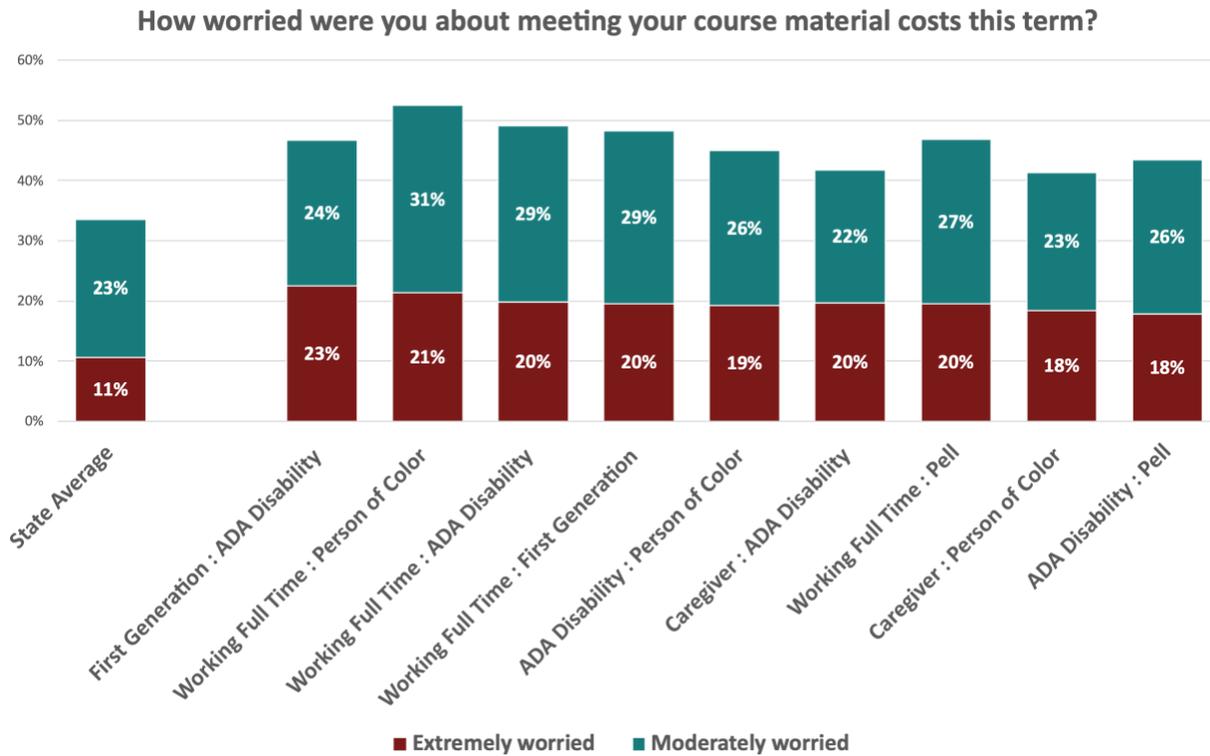
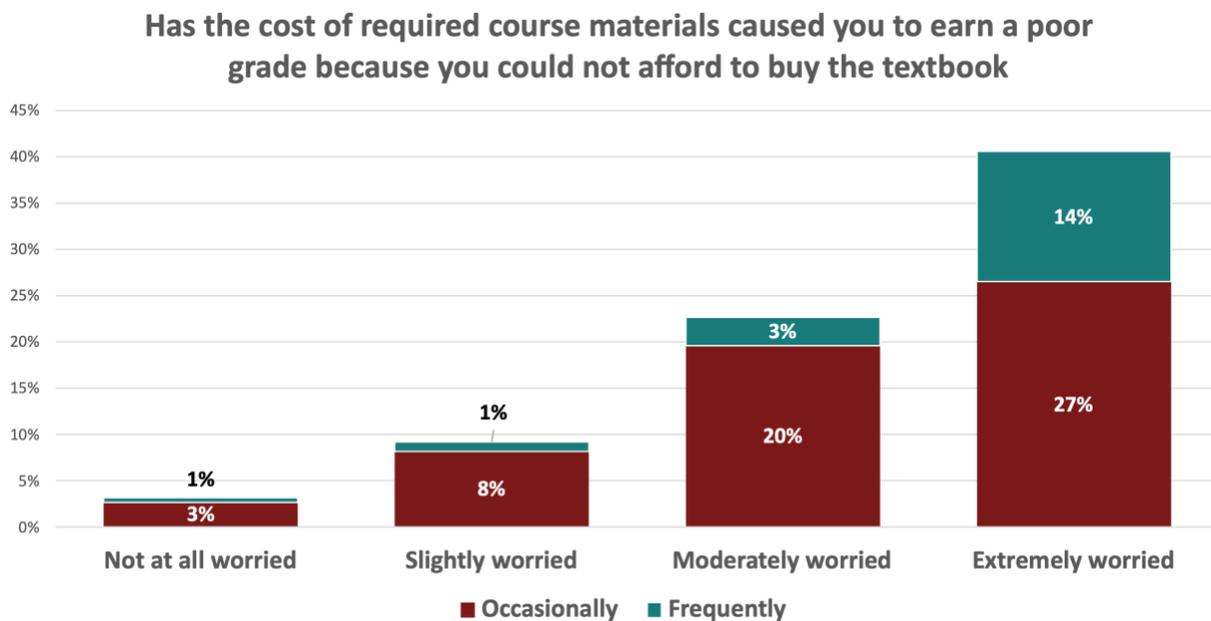


Figure 5 illustrates the strong relationship between worry and its impact on students' academic outcomes. Over 40% of students who were extremely worried about course materials costs reported earning a poor grade because they could not afford to buy the textbook. Of their moderately worried counterparts, fewer than 25% had earned a poor grade. Among students with extreme worry, 14% had frequently seen their grades suffer due to a lack of access to course materials, compared with just 3% among students with moderate worry. This pattern is not unique; it is repeated for the other measures of negative student academic impact.

Figure 5: The proportion of students reporting that they earned a poor grade by their level of worry about the cost of course materials



Student Voices: Most Impacted by Costs

Students most affected by course material costs shared details of their situations in response to many of the open-ended options in the survey. A sampling of these comments follows.

"As a part-time student who works full time with a family and a mortgage to take care of, it's unbelievable how expensive college is. I'm 53 years old, and for me, the cost of the books is expensive. For the amount we pay for these classes, I don't understand why the schools can't just add the books or put them electronically for free download."

"As a single father it's hard for me to pay for books and life. Not to mention I had to buy a computer too. Financial aid covers the classes but I can't do full time and raise my son. So, books come out of pocket for me. Its roughly 300 for this semester and summer will cost me over 600 and that's just for summer courses"

"As a young woman living on my own, sometimes it is difficult to afford textbooks and classes. I work two jobs and go to school."

"Getting through a semester is stressful on its own without having to worry about affording a \$300 textbook and also feeding my kid and paying the bills."

"I am a service connected disabled veteran with a severely disabled daughter. My education path is not an easy one."

"Last semester I had to buy 4 textbooks, the cost ran me about \$400... I am a 18 year old who works 50 hours a week as it is and I hard to work very hard just to buy required materials for school."

"Think about the working parent living paycheck to paycheck and trying to get a degree at the same time."

Methodology

The George Mason University IRB (GMU IRB Study ID: STUDY00000231) reviewed and approved the revised survey, protocol, and student recruitment messages.

The Virginia Course Materials Survey was distributed as an email invitation through each institution's respective survey distribution office. Campus partners managed the distribution via email to a random sample of at least 20% of students or 100 students, whichever was greater, who were 18 years of age or older and not in the prison population.

There were two data collection periods: one in Spring 2025 and another in Fall 2025 for institutions that could not participate during the primary Spring data collection period. Spring data collection was open from March 3 to May 3, 2025, and Fall data collection from September 28 to November 9, 2025. Each participating institution chose when to send survey invitations to its students during those periods. Respondents who completed the survey could enter a random drawing for one of five \$100 gift cards or one of 180 \$25 gift cards. A second raffle was offered for the fall distribution that included a random drawing for one of 80 \$25 gift cards.

All survey questions were optional; students could skip any they chose. Students could withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. There was no link between the student survey answers and the information form used to enter the drawings. Researchers could not link student names or email addresses to responses since the institutions distributed the survey.

A total of 9,089 valid student responses were received in the Spring period, along with 764 responses in the Fall. Overall, 9,853 responses came from students across 40 of the 70 VIVA higher education institutions. These included representation from all four categorized institution types: public doctoral, public four-year, public two-year, and private non-profit.

Virtually all questions were asked of the entire sample, resulting in a 95% confidence interval of +/- 1% or less. The few questions with skip logic, asked only to a subset of respondents, have slightly wider confidence intervals.

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.

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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