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# 2025 VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

Results and Findings



VIVA



Bay View Analytics®

# 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey: Results and Findings

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

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### 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey Review/Revise Working Group

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## Introduction

VIVA, Virginia's academic library consortium, in partnership with Bay View Analytics, conducted the Virginia Course Materials Survey in 2025. There were two data collection periods: one in Spring 2025 and another in Fall 2025 for institutions that could not participate during the first 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. The survey consisted of 34 questions covering the costs and features of course materials, as well as a wide range of demographic topics. Designed to be completed in under 10 minutes, the survey had a median completion time of 6.5 minutes.

The project builds on VIVA's 2021 survey and seeks to expand related 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 conducted by Affordable Learning PA and the Partnership for Academic Library Collaboration and Innovation in partnership with Bay View Analytics. This survey further explores questions of educational equity through demographic analysis.

The survey received more than 9,800 valid responses from students at 40 of the 70 VIVA higher education institutions, representing all four VIVA-categorized institution types: public doctoral, public four-year, public two-year, and private non-profit.

While the survey itself covers course materials costs holistically (including textbooks, access to the digital homework platform, and any other required curricular resources), for brevity, we occasionally use the term textbooks.

This report is intended to assist VIVA and its parent body, the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV), in understanding the impact that course material costs have on Virginia higher education students. The findings will inform VIVA's Open & Affordable Course Content program and support member institutions in strategically improving students' experiences with course materials.

## Associated Reports

This report is part of a series presenting the results of the 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey. Two topics included in this report are also examined in greater depth in separate reports. Readers are directed to the following reports for detailed analysis.

### 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey: Student Experience with Inclusive Access

This report offers an in-depth examination of Virginia students' opinions and experiences with programs that bundle course materials with tuition or student fees. While the term “access codes” can refer to alphanumeric codes input online to access study materials linked to a textbook or online courses and assessments, this survey focuses on newer Inclusive Access programs that automatically provide course materials to all students in a class or program on a subscription basis through a fee added to students' accounts. These programs are most commonly offered by commercial publishers. Institutions may also brand these programs to their local context. Since there is no single definition of these programs and institutions often use campus-specific branding, the survey provided the following explanation to student respondents

“Are you familiar with programs that provide course materials available through access codes that are bundled in with tuition or student fees? These are often called Day One, First Day, inclusive access, or equitable access programs. They are most commonly provided by commercial publishers to provide digital access to all students in a class or program on a subscription basis (typically for the duration of the course).”

Key findings from the report include:

1. Most students (66%) are unaware of Inclusive Access programs.
2. Among those aware of or using these programs, fewer than a third (31%) are aware of opt-out options.
3. Students using these programs generally have a rough idea of costs (42%) or know the exact cost (24%). One in five students using access programs did not know the cost or how to find out.
4. Open-ended responses show that some students find these programs helpful; however, there are twice as many negative comments as positive ones.

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

This report provides a detailed analysis of student respondents' demographic and other characteristics, aiming to identify those whose academic success and well-being are most impacted by costs. 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 take fewer courses, avoid registering for courses, withdraw, earn poor grades due to unaffordable textbooks, or fail a class because they can't afford the textbooks.

## 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.

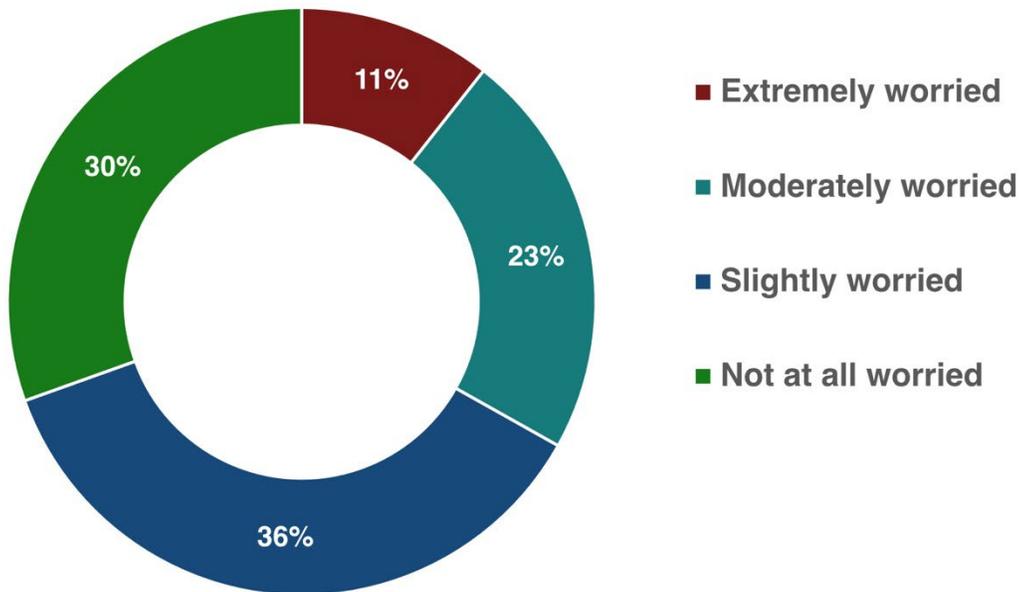
The key findings identified in this study are:

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%.

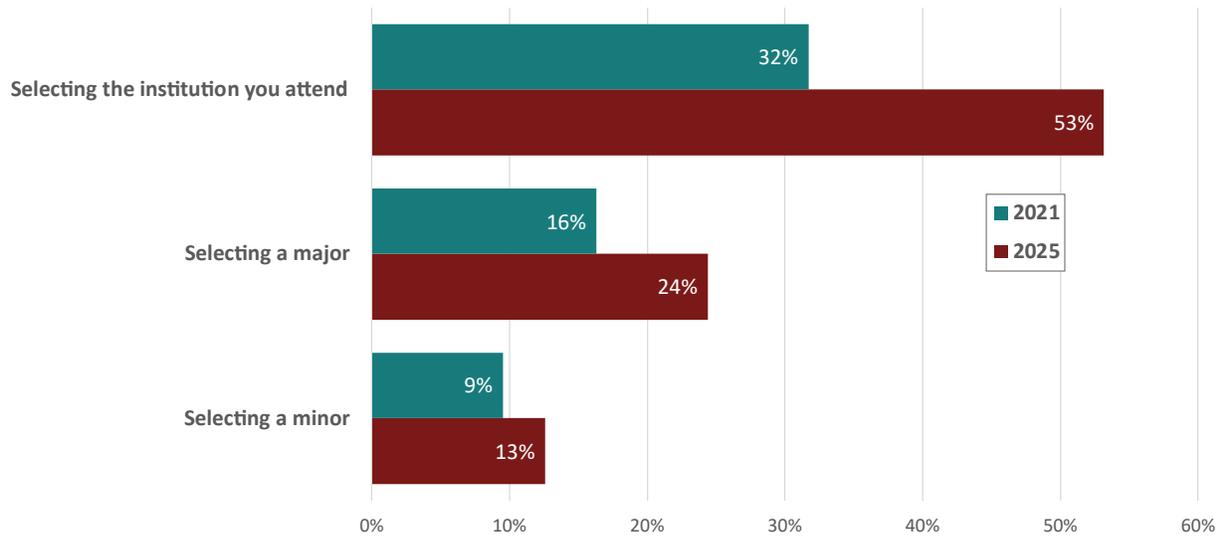
How worried were you about meeting your course material costs this term?



## 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%).

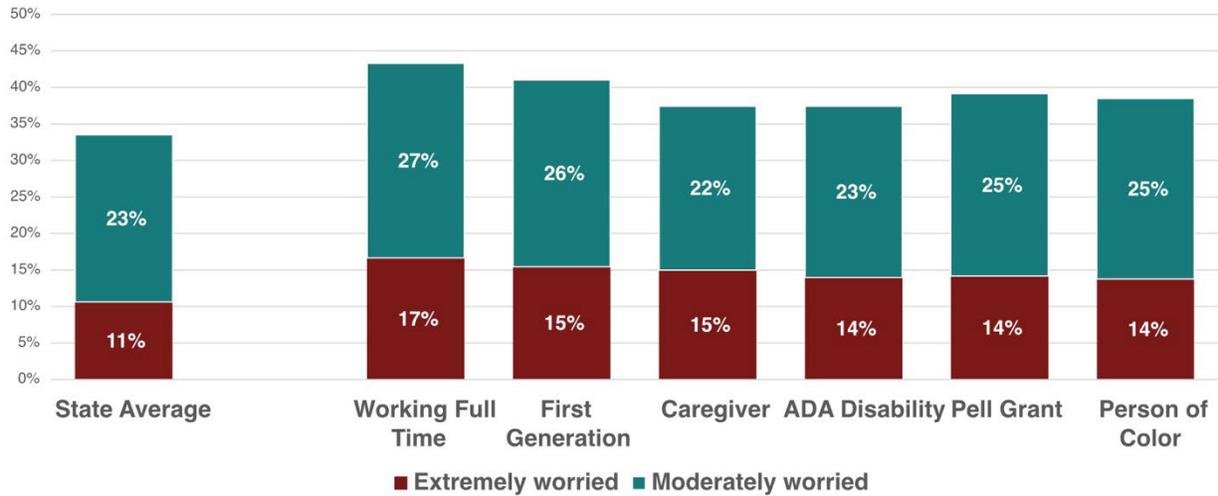
Have any of the following large decisions been based at all on the cost of course materials?



### 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"*

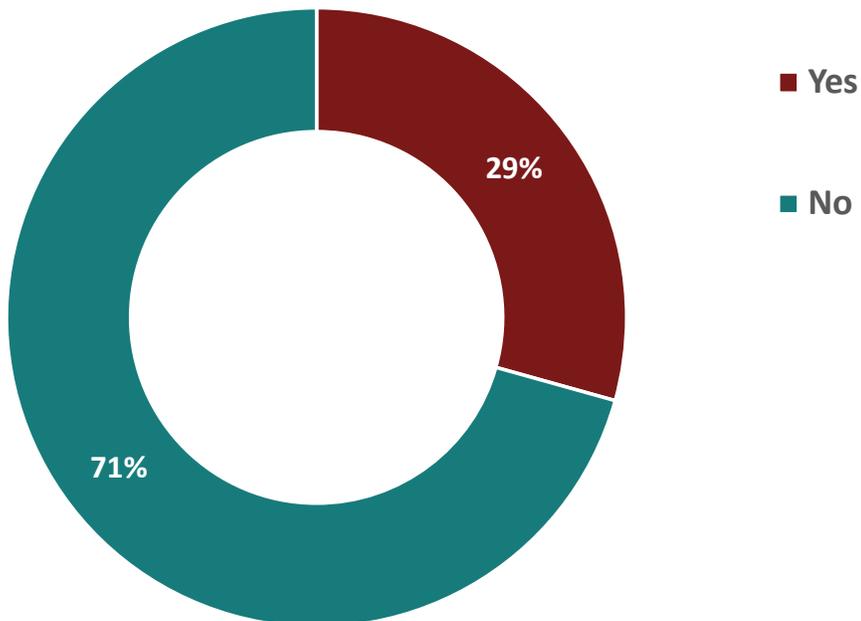
**How much did you spend on course materials, whether purchased, rented, or leased, during this semester?**



## 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.

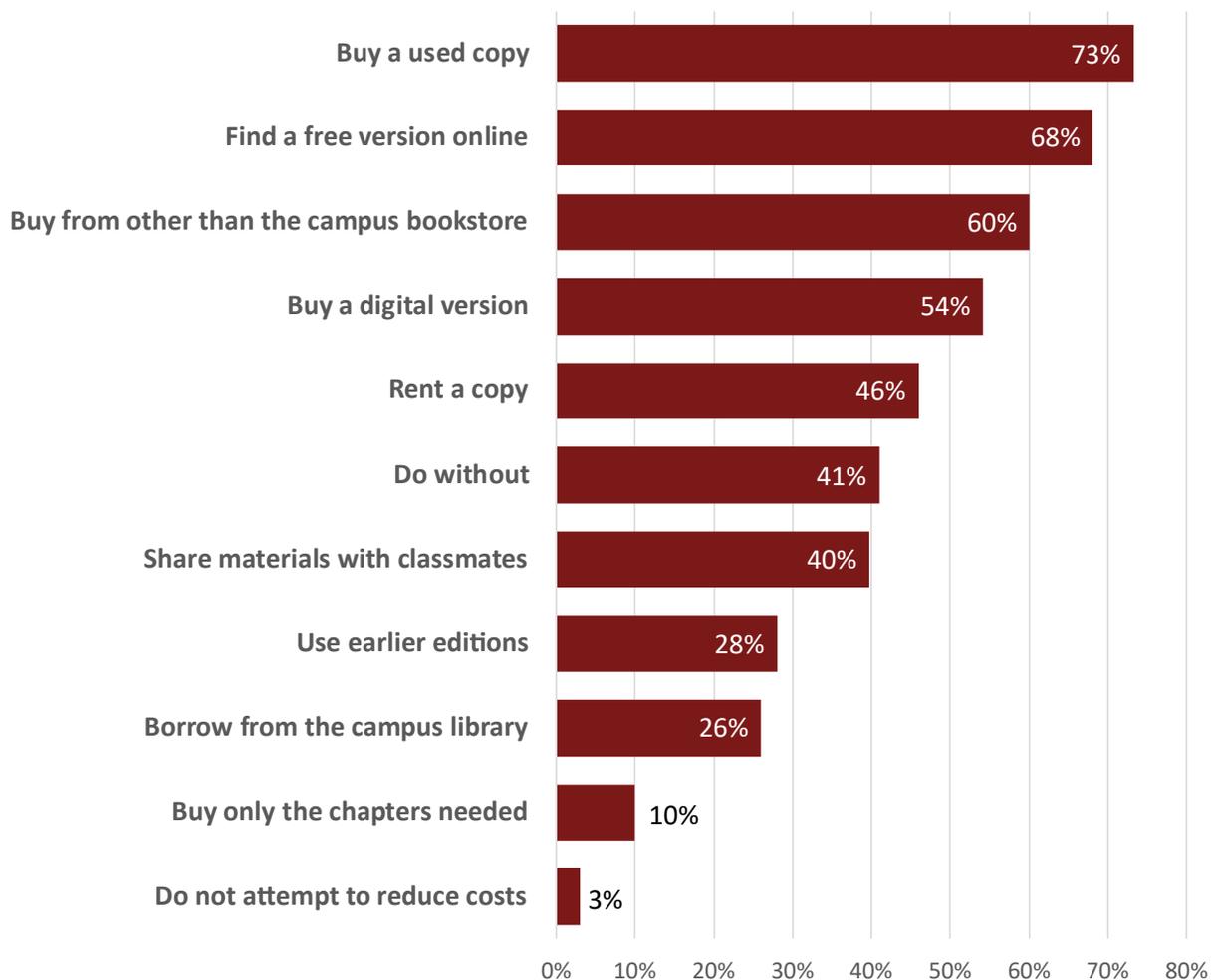
**Have financial concerns ever caused you to skip a term or delay your academic pursuits?**



## 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.

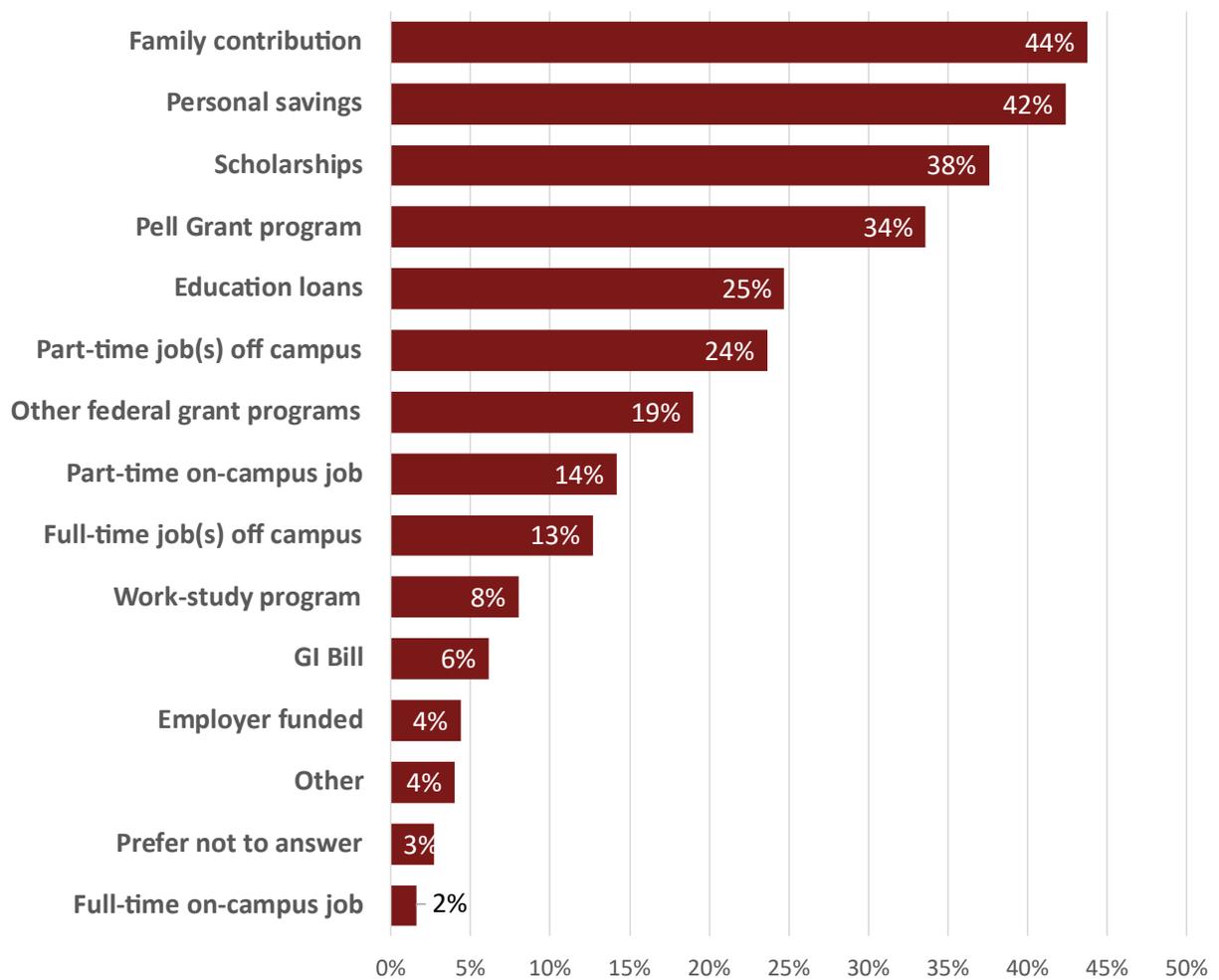
### What measures have you taken to reduce your required course material costs throughout your college career?



## 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.

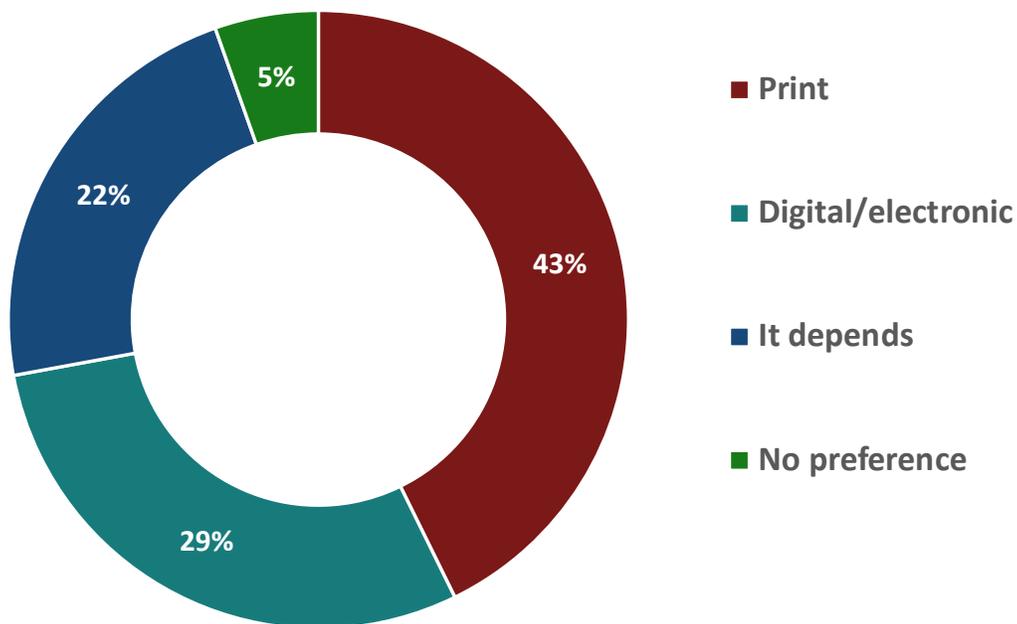
### Which of the following sources are you using to fund your education?



## 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.

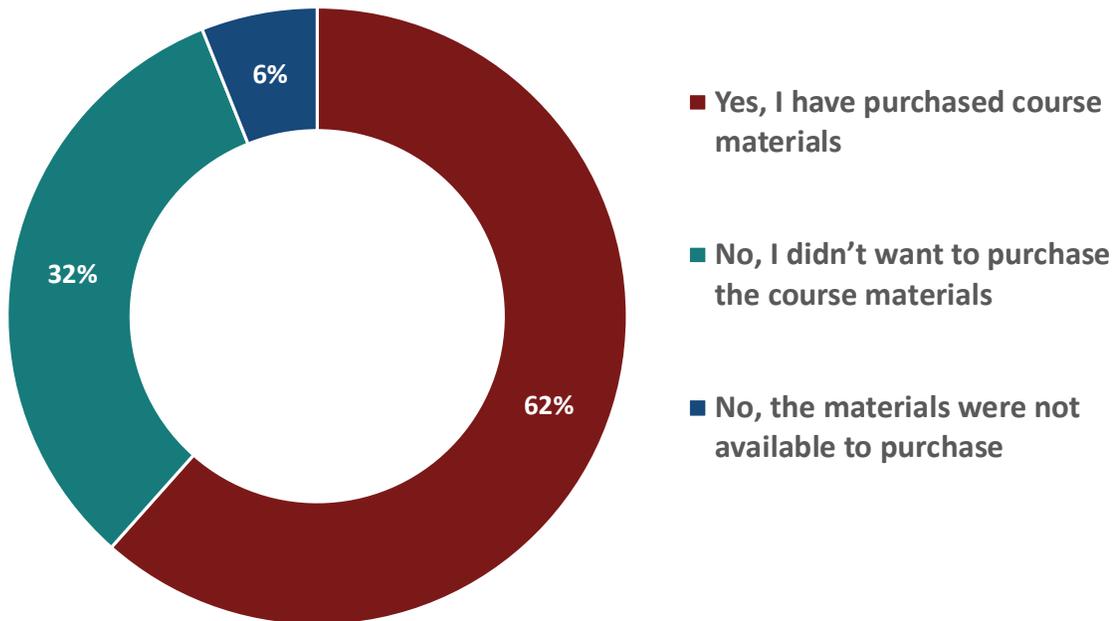
**If the cost is the same, which format do you prefer for your course materials?**



## 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."*

# Background

## Previous Study

The 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey is the second statewide project of its kind in Virginia, following a similar effort in 2021.

The Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA), a consortium of non-profit academic libraries across Virginia, conducted its first Course Materials Survey from October 1 to December 31, 2021. The 2021 project, approved by the George Mason University IRB, was inspired by previous research, especially the Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey by Florida's Office of Distance Learning and Student Services. The project collected over 5,600 valid responses, representing students from 41 of Virginia's 70 higher education institutions, including all four institution types: public doctoral, public four-year, public two-year, and private non-profit.

## Current Project

In 2024, VIVA began planning the 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey as a follow-up to the 2021 survey. VIVA partnered with Bay View Analytics to organize and execute the project. Since the landscape of course materials has changed since 2021, a Virginia Course Materials Review/Revise Working Group was formed in the fall of 2024. This group updated the research and survey questions to cover additional aspects of student experience with course materials, notably the rise of Inclusive Access programs. The research questions for the 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey are:

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 to be most beneficial to their learning?

## Methodology

The George Mason University IRB (GMU IRB Study ID: STUDY00000231) reviewed and approved the revised survey, protocol, and student recruitment messages. VIVA then sent a recruitment form to all VIVA library directors to gauge their interest in participation and to gather institutional contacts for distribution. Additionally, VIVA hosted two information sessions in collaboration with Bay View Analytics to outline the research goals and address any questions or concerns that prospective participants might have. Institution-specific survey URLs were generated and shared with participating institutions through the 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. If an institution was unable to generate a random sample or chose not to survey only a sample, they were invited to distribute the survey to the entire student body. Students in the excluded populations were informed of their ineligibility to participate through the consent form. Researchers could not link student names or email addresses to responses since the institutions distributed the survey.

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. 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. For example, follow-up questions about access codes were asked only to those who used or were aware of them, with a 95% confidence interval of +/- 1.7% or less. Another follow-up question on access codes was asked only to those who used such programs, with a 95% confidence interval of +/- 2.2%.

Students could withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. Respondents who completed the survey could choose to 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. There was no link between the student survey answers and the information form used to enter the drawings. All survey questions were optional; students could skip any they chose.

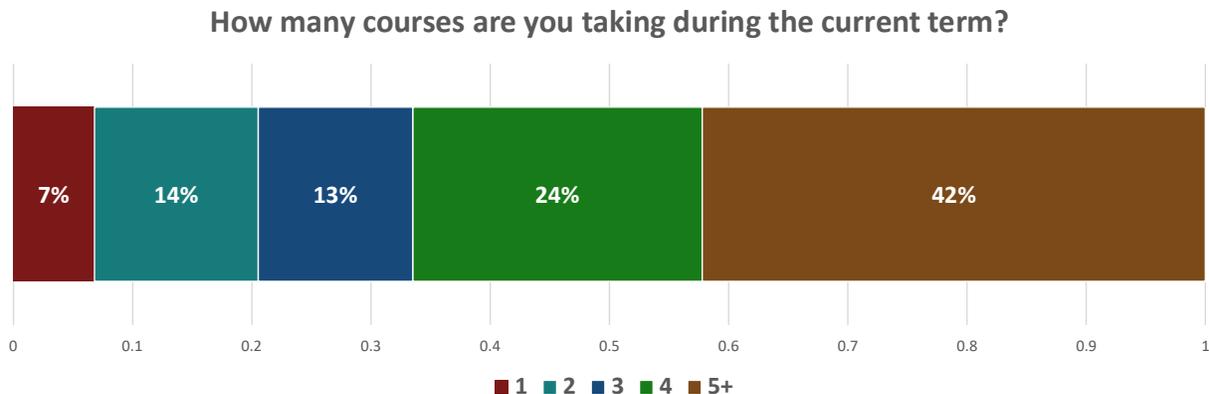
# Report Findings

## Course Material Requirements and Costs

Several initial questions aimed to understand the overall student experience with regard to course materials. Respondents answered a series of questions about the current term: (1) how many courses they were taking; (2) how many of those courses required them to buy, rent, or lease textbooks or instructional materials, regardless of whether they actually acquired or paid for them; (3) how many of these courses involved purchasing, renting, or leasing all required materials; and (4) how much they spent on course materials, whether bought, rented, or leased, during this semester.

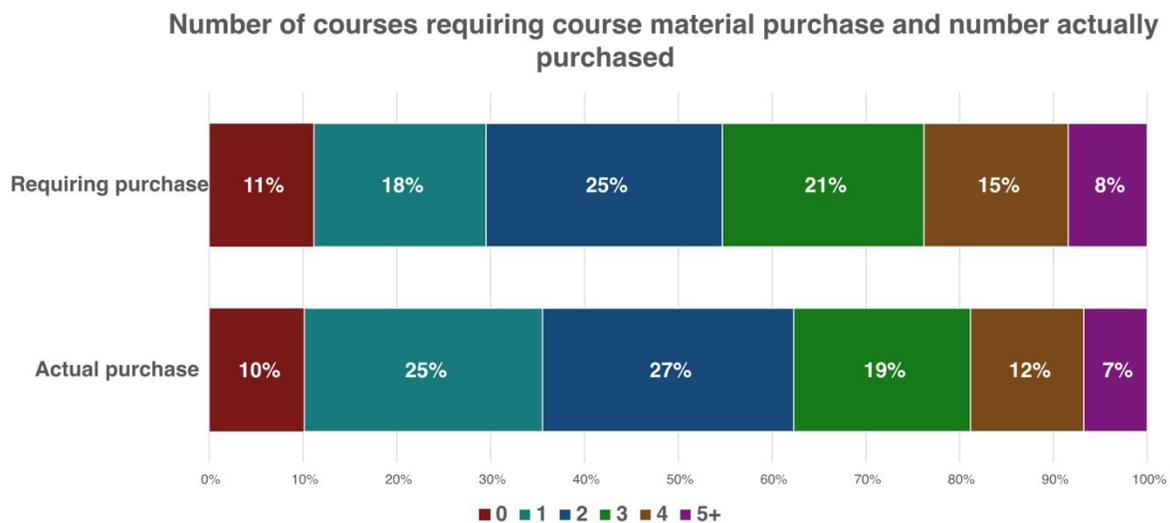
Two-thirds of respondents were enrolled in four or more courses during the spring term, with 42% taking five or more classes. It was uncommon for students to take just a single course (7%) or only two courses (14%) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The number of courses students are taking during the current term



Not all courses require students to buy materials, and some students did not purchase materials for every course with a purchase requirement. For example, 23% of students reported that four or more of their classes had required course materials, whereas only 17% said they actually bought materials for that many courses. Usually, however, the number of purchases matched the number of courses requiring materials. Keep in mind that students reporting they bought materials for a course does not necessarily mean they bought all the required items, only some of them (see Figure 2).

*Figure 2: The number of courses requiring purchase of course materials versus the number of actual purchases*



Half of all students said that the costs for the current semester exceeded \$200, with 6% indicating that the costs surpassed \$600. However, the cost of course materials varies widely among students. Only a tiny percentage (2%) reported having no costs, while another 21% said their expenses were \$100 or less. More than a quarter of students reported that their expenses for the current semester exceeded \$300 (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3: The amount that students spent on course materials during the current semester*



## Student Voices: Costs of Course Materials

Many students volunteered details about the costs of their course materials in response to the question “Can you please tell us more about how the cost of course materials has influenced your educational progress?”

*"I tend to pirate textbooks if they are over \$100"*

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

*"If I can't afford the textbook I drop the class. Especially if the class is less than 7 weeks and the books cost around \$300"*

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

*"For most of the required classes in my major, there are typically between 3 and 5 books required, and for some, the cheapest is between \$30 and \$50."*

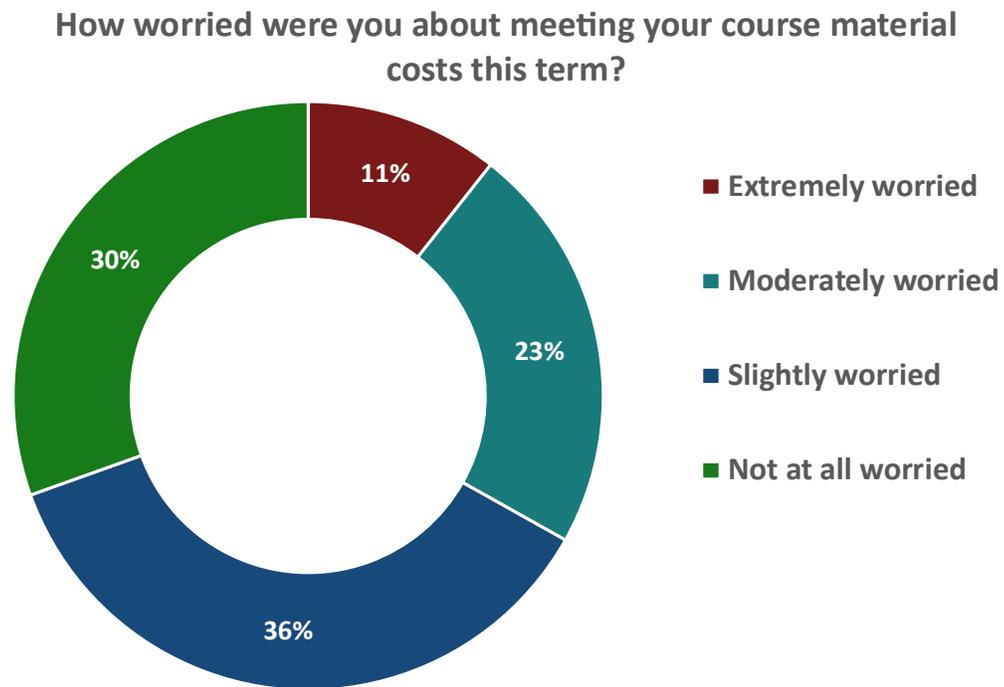
*"One book is \$350. When you're a single mom with limited resources, it's hard."*

*"\$318 per Spanish textbook that we have to buy in order to have an access code for the exam is a horrible approach to take money from students."*

## Level of Worry

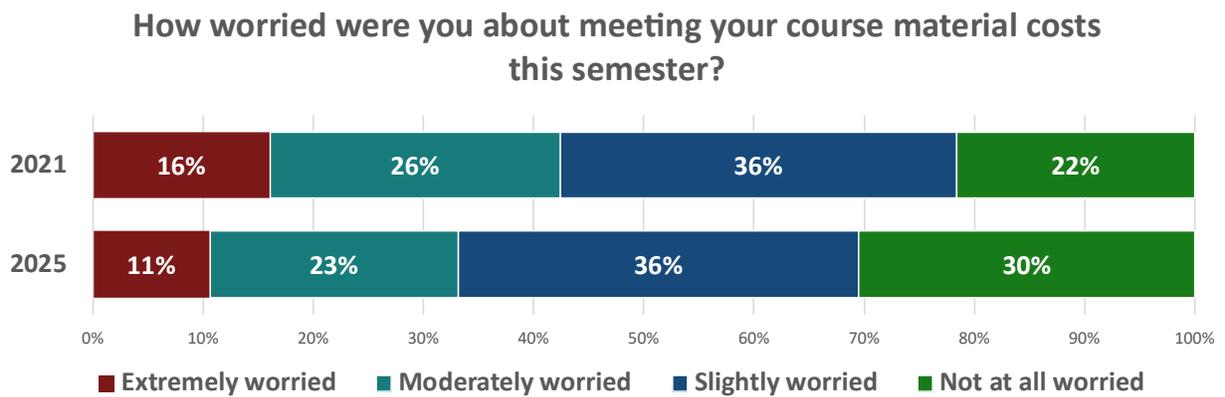
Nearly all students in Virginia worry about course material costs, with seven in ten expressing some concern. The largest group (36%) said they were only "slightly" worried, 23% were "moderately" worried, and 11% were "extremely" worried (see Figure 4).

*Figure 4: The level of worry that students report about meeting their course materials costs for the current term*



The overall level of worry about meeting course material costs was lower in the 2025 results compared to 2021. The proportion expressing the highest worry, “extremely worried,” fell from 16% to 11%, while those reporting that they were “not at all worried” increased from 22% in 2021 to 30% in 2025 (see Figure 5).

*Figure 5: A comparison of students’ level of worry about meeting their course materials costs for 2021 and 2025*



The more worried students are, the more they report adverse impacts. When compared to all other students, those who said they were "extremely worried" about their course material costs in 2025 were:

1. 7.3 times more likely to take fewer courses
2. 6.1 times more likely not to register for a specific course
3. 9.9 times more likely to withdraw from a course
4. 10.2 times more likely to earn a poor grade because they could not afford to buy the textbook
5. 11.9 times more likely to fail a course because they could not afford to buy the textbook

Students who worked full-time, were first-generation college students, served as caregivers for family members, had an ADA-recognized disability, received a Pell Grant, or were people of color, reported higher levels of worry than the overall student population. Students with more than one of these traits were even more likely to report increased worry. For example, students with an ADA disability who were also working full-time were twice as likely to say they are "extremely worried" about covering the costs of their course materials.

## Student Voices: Worry About Meeting Costs

Students provided insight into their worry about meeting the costs of their course materials, and the impact of that worry, in response to the prompt, "Can you please tell us more about how the cost of course materials has influenced your educational progress?"

*"It has caused an enormous amount of worry, stress, and anxiety."*

*"Having to prioritize buying textbooks and worrying about having enough money left over to buy things or eat."*

*"It is definitely a worry, but I find ways around it through borrowing classmates' textbook and professors' textbooks or checking it out from the library"*

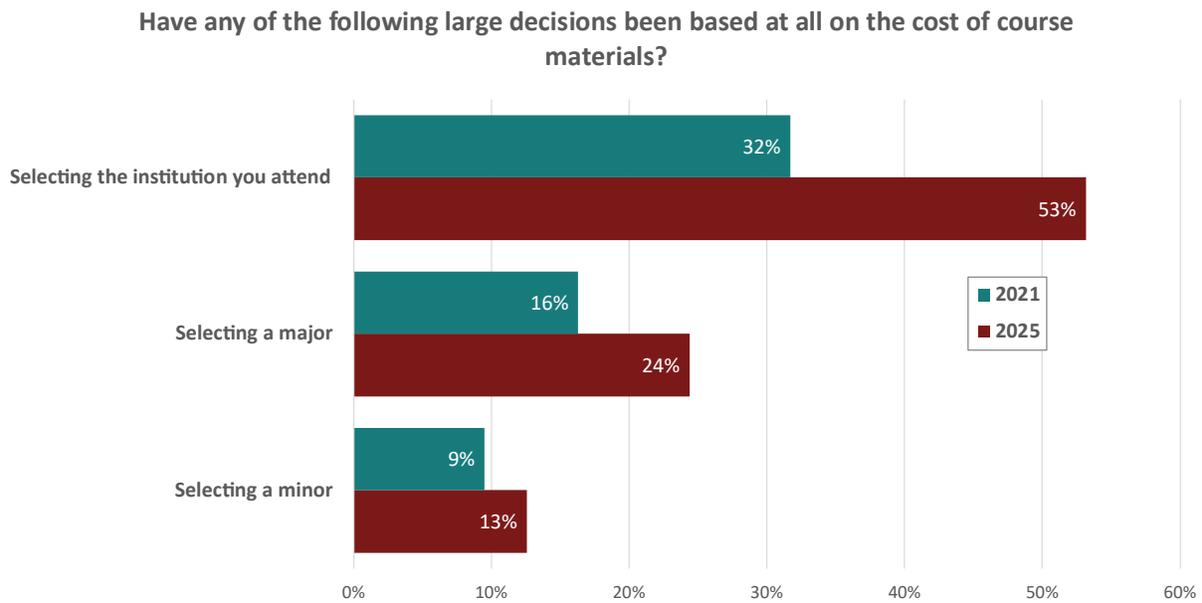
*"Another thing to worry about which leads to stress which leads to poor performance"*

*"The cost of materials and classes has caused me to worry that I may not complete my degree."*

## Impact on Students' Academic Decisions

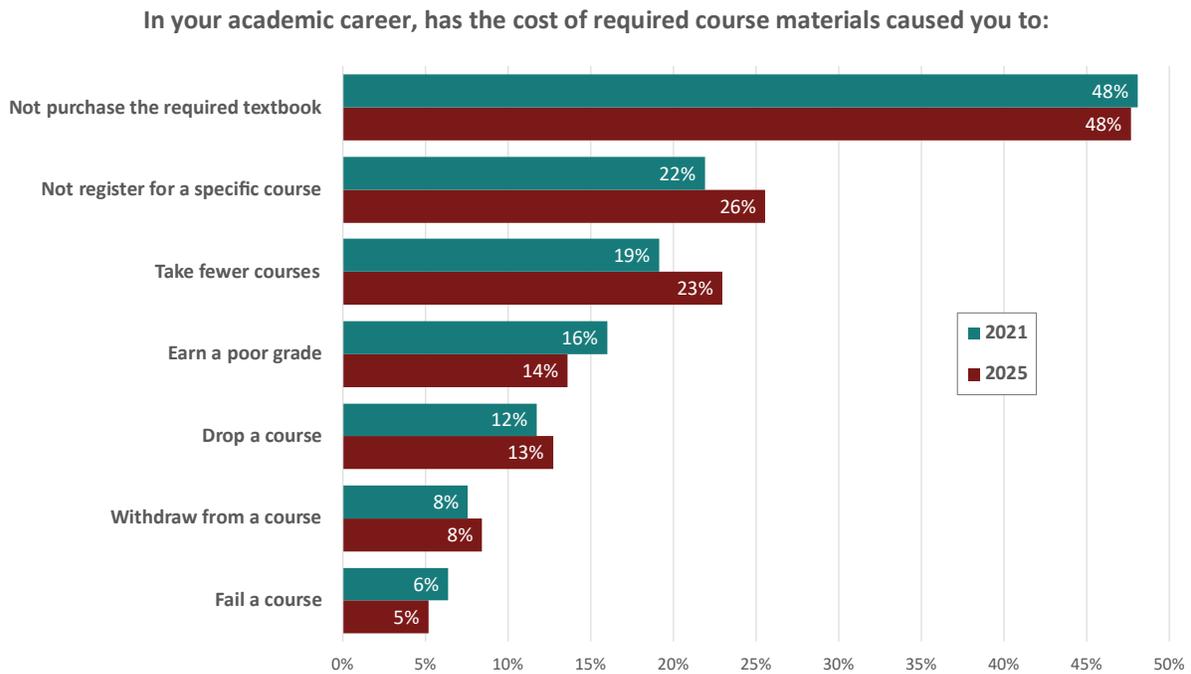
Although the overall concern about course material costs decreased from 2021 to 2025, the influence of those costs on students' decisions grew. In 2025, students reported that the cost of their course materials had a greater effect on their choices in selecting a school, major, and minor than it did in 2021 (see Figure 6).

*Figure 6: The impact of course material costs on large decisions for 2021 and 2025*



There were only minor differences between 2021 and 2025 in most other negative academic impacts caused by the cost of course materials. Students in 2025 were slightly more likely to say that costs led them to enroll in fewer courses or skip a specific course, while most other factors remained within a few percentage points across the two survey years (see Figure 7).

*Figure 7: Negative academic impacts of the cost of required course materials on students for 2021 and 2025*



## Student Voices: Impact on Choice of Institution and Major

Besides reporting whether the cost of course materials influenced their choice of major, minor, or institution, students provided additional details about these impacts in an open-ended portion of the question, *"Have any of the following large decisions been based at all on the cost of course materials?"*

*"Business school courses usually require purchased textbooks, I have decided to drop my marketing minor for this reason"*

*"I chose to major in my undergraduate degree in Public Health rather than Biomedical sciences. This was largely due to the cost of textbooks and supplies for the biomedical sciences degree, and the amount of credit hours needed for the degree."*

*"I couldn't afford my first major, so I ended up changing it"*

*"I have had to look for institutions that I could afford as well as specific courses that were less expensive. Cost has also impacted my decisions to learn online as opposed to in person."*

*"One of the many reasons I switched my major from nursing to health sciences was because of the course materials costs that come with the nursing courses."*

*"The cost of required education materials that exceed \$250 for one class has put me further into debt as an already struggling student who's goal is to just finish my degree. I was on track to finish college almost two years ago, but failed to return due to the exceeding costs of classes and materials."*

*"When looking at online classes to take this summer, I "shopped around" to find a community college with the cheapest course materials for the same class."*

## Student Voices: Impact on Educational Progress

In addition to asking students to check which items the cost of course materials had impacted, a follow-up open-ended question asked students, "Can you please tell us more about how the cost of course materials has influenced your educational progress?"

*"Delaying purchasing course material has put me behind in courses and caused lower grades"*

*"I feel less respect towards professors who require students to buy the professor's work when it could easily be provided for free, and professors who require \$80+ materials because the content can surely be acquired in another medium for less or even for free. College expects that if students can be there, paying tuition, they can afford all the books and such as well -- the truth is that many students can barely manage tuition and anything on top of that will prevent them from reaching their full potential. Stress about working full time or part time when school should be the main job in that person's life prevents them from putting 110% into their education."*

*"I have quickly realized without the textbook, there is no possible way to do any assignments and follow along with the material effectively. I failed a course because I could not afford the textbook and thought I could still try and push through."*

*"I've had to delay taking some courses or choose classes based on material affordability rather than interest or degree requirements. I found myself leaning more toward subjects that used more open educational resources or had cheaper materials."*

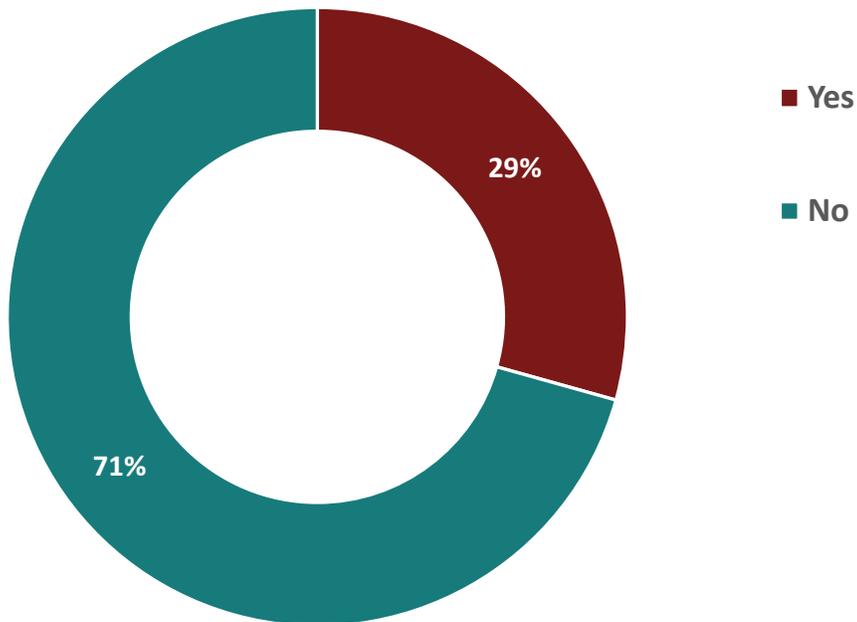
*"My math class I failed due to not turning in my work which was on a Pearson program I had to purchase."*

*"The cost dictates how many classes I can take."*

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, almost 30% of students reported experiencing this at least once during their academic career (see Figure 8).

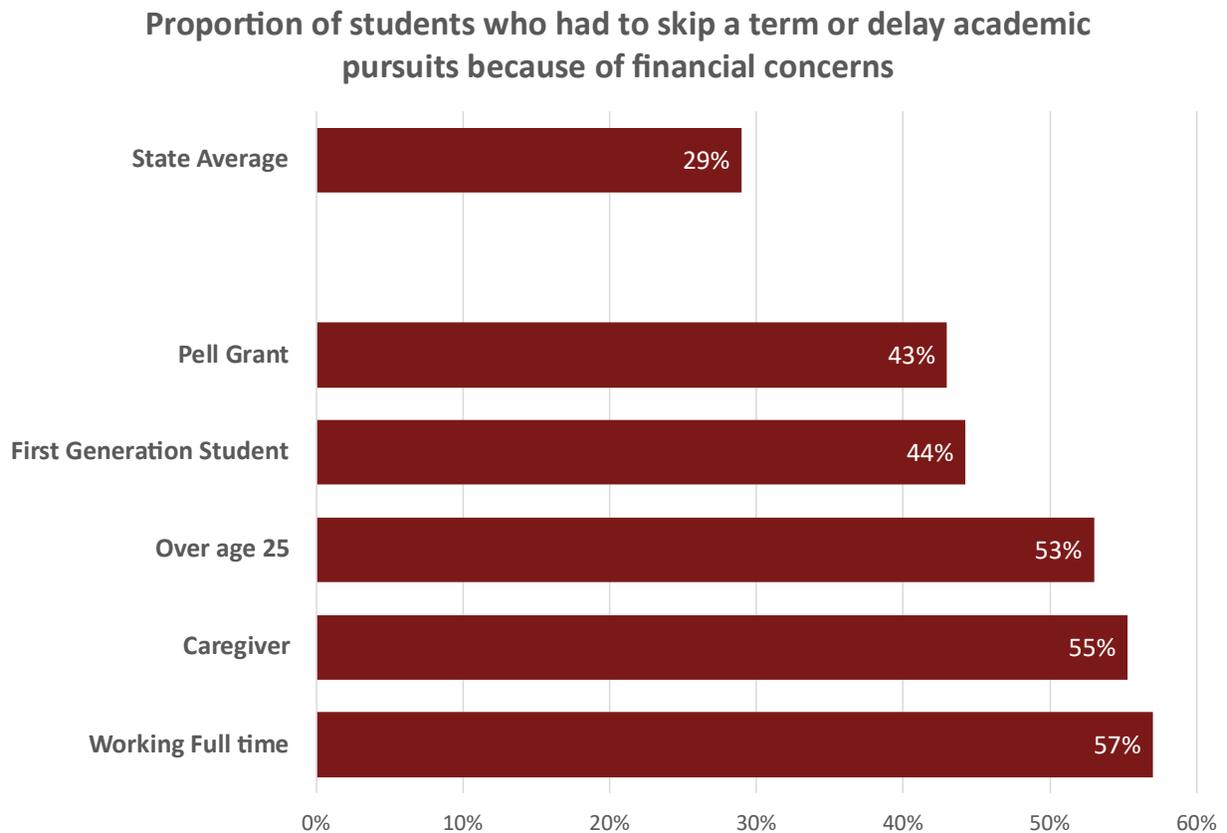
*Figure 8: The proportion of students having to skip a term or delay academic pursuits because of financial concerns*

**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 9).

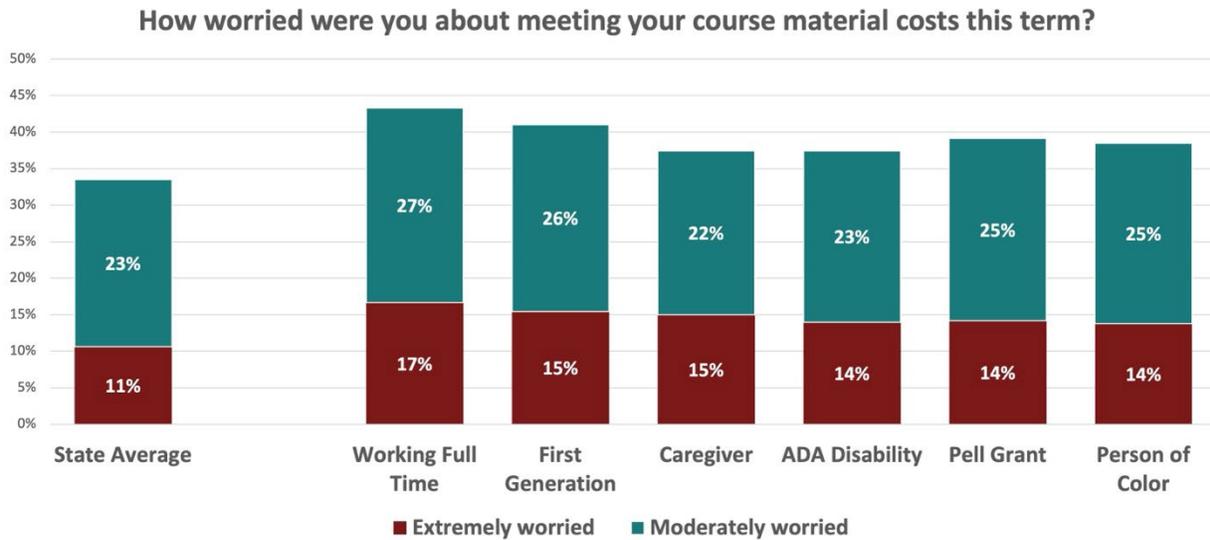
*Figure 9: The proportion of students having to skip a term or delay academic pursuits because of financial concerns, by student characteristics*



## Identifying Students Most Impacted by Costs

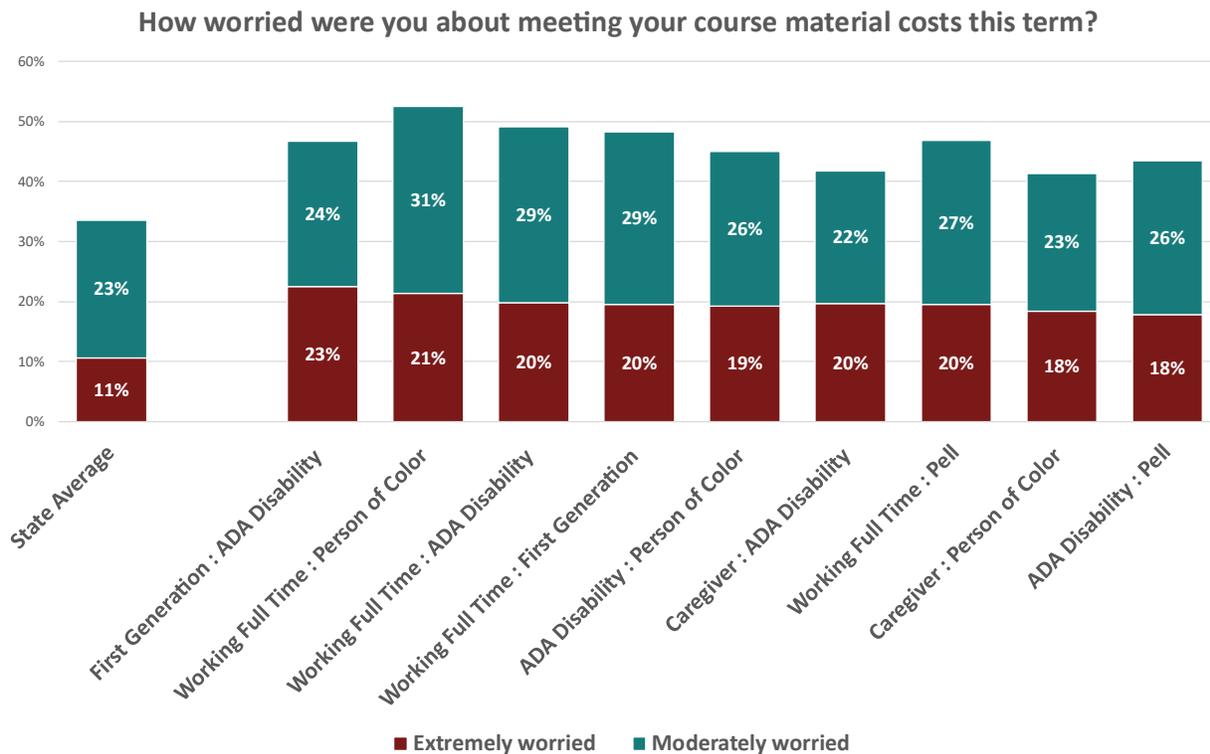
Results from the 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey enable us to identify student characteristics associated with extreme worry about meeting the costs of their course materials. Students who work full-time, who are first-generation students, who have caregiver responsibilities, who report having 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 10).

*Figure 10: 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 11).

*Figure 11: The level of worry about the cost of course materials, by combinations of student characteristics*



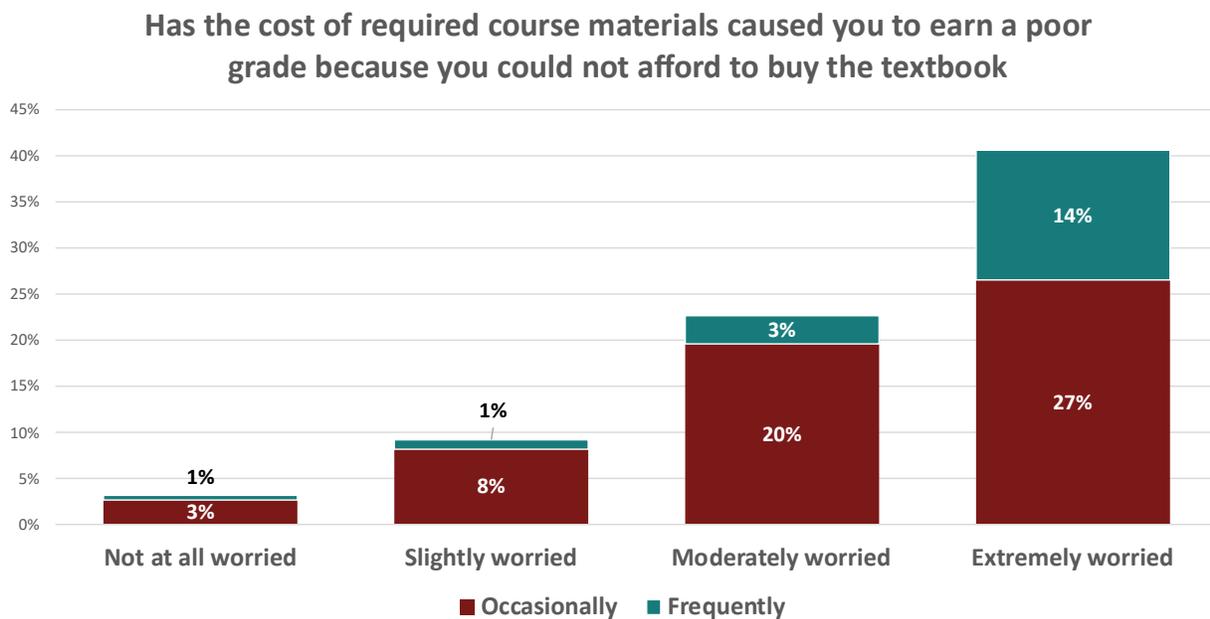
As noted previously, almost all Virginia students expressed concern about course material costs, with seven out of ten reporting some level of worry, and 11% reporting being extremely worried. Students who say they are "extremely" worried experience a substantially greater impact on their academic careers, suggesting they would benefit most from programs reducing course materials costs.

Compared to the general population, students who report being "extremely worried" about meeting the costs for their course materials 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.

Figure 12 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 12: 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."*

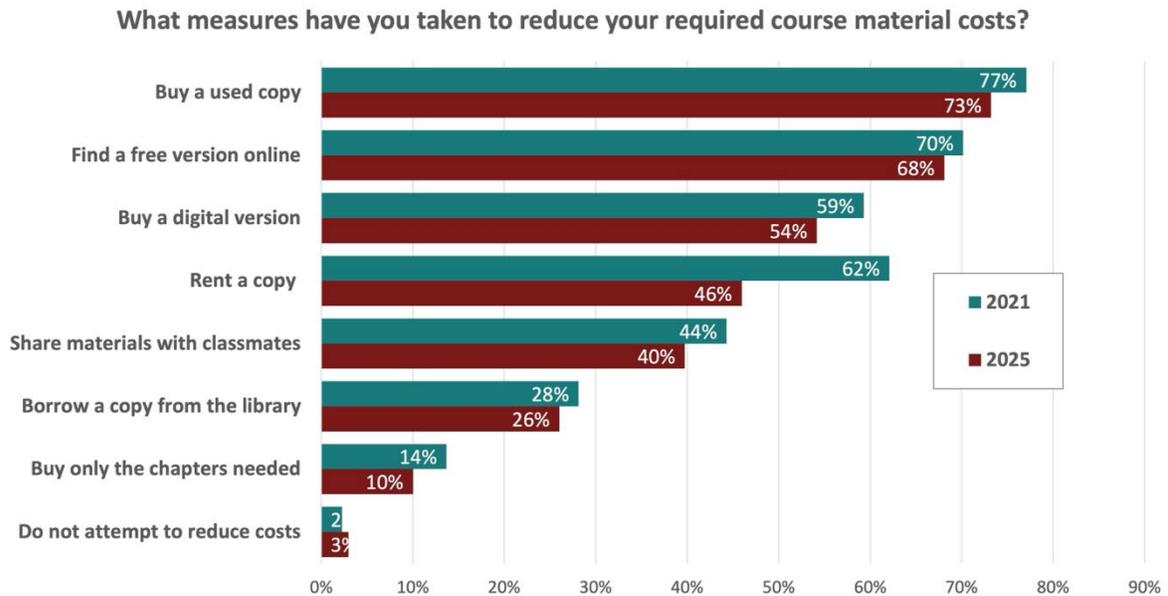
*"Think about the working parent living paycheck to paycheck and trying to get a degree at the same time."*

## Mitigation

Virtually all students (97%), even those without concerns about costs, took some action to lessen the impact of course material expenses on their academic efforts. About three-quarters of all students said they purchased a used rather than a new copy of the material. A similar number reported finding a free version online, often a pirated copy. Most students purchased a digital version to save money, while others chose to rent instead of buying the materials. Sharing materials with others or using library copies was also common. A smaller group of students reported only buying specific chapters.

The mitigation pattern for 2025 was similar to that from the 2021 study, with the only notable change being a decrease in the proportion of students reporting that they rented a copy (62% in 2021 and 46% in 2025) (see Figure 13).

*Figure 13: Measures that students have taken to mitigate the costs of course materials for 2021 and 2025*



## Student Voices: Mitigation of Costs

Students used creative strategies to mitigate the impact of course material costs, as evidenced by their responses to the question, "Please describe what other measure(s) you have taken to reduce course material costs."

*"Borrow a book from a friend who had the class last semester"*

*"Currently, I am significantly behind in one of my classes cause I could not afford the textbook. I am currently 5 or 6 weeks in, and I just now got the money to pay for it."*

*"Honestly, it leads us to pirate the books."*

*"I almost never buy textbooks and pirate everything. The cost is simply outrageous for a text I will use for at most one semester."*

*"I am almost never able to afford textbooks or other course materials. I usually will borrow books from libraries, other students, or just go without the materials altogether."*

*"I have often abstained from buying course materials for required courses. I have used bootleg or outdated materials online, borrowed from friends, or completed assignments without referencing the materials throughout my academic career."*

*"I rarely buy textbooks because 9/10 times they are over \$100 and you never once you use them. If I am in a class where we are frequently using it and I understand it is important to have, I will buy it. But, most of the time, it goes untouched."*

*"I've have to spend hours researching and shopping for "deals" on used textbooks, some of which are only slightly cheaper than a new purchase. While I'm very happy to have the online textbook provided by a class, this can make studying a chore and I am at the whim of the publisher's servers and their draconian DRM policies."*

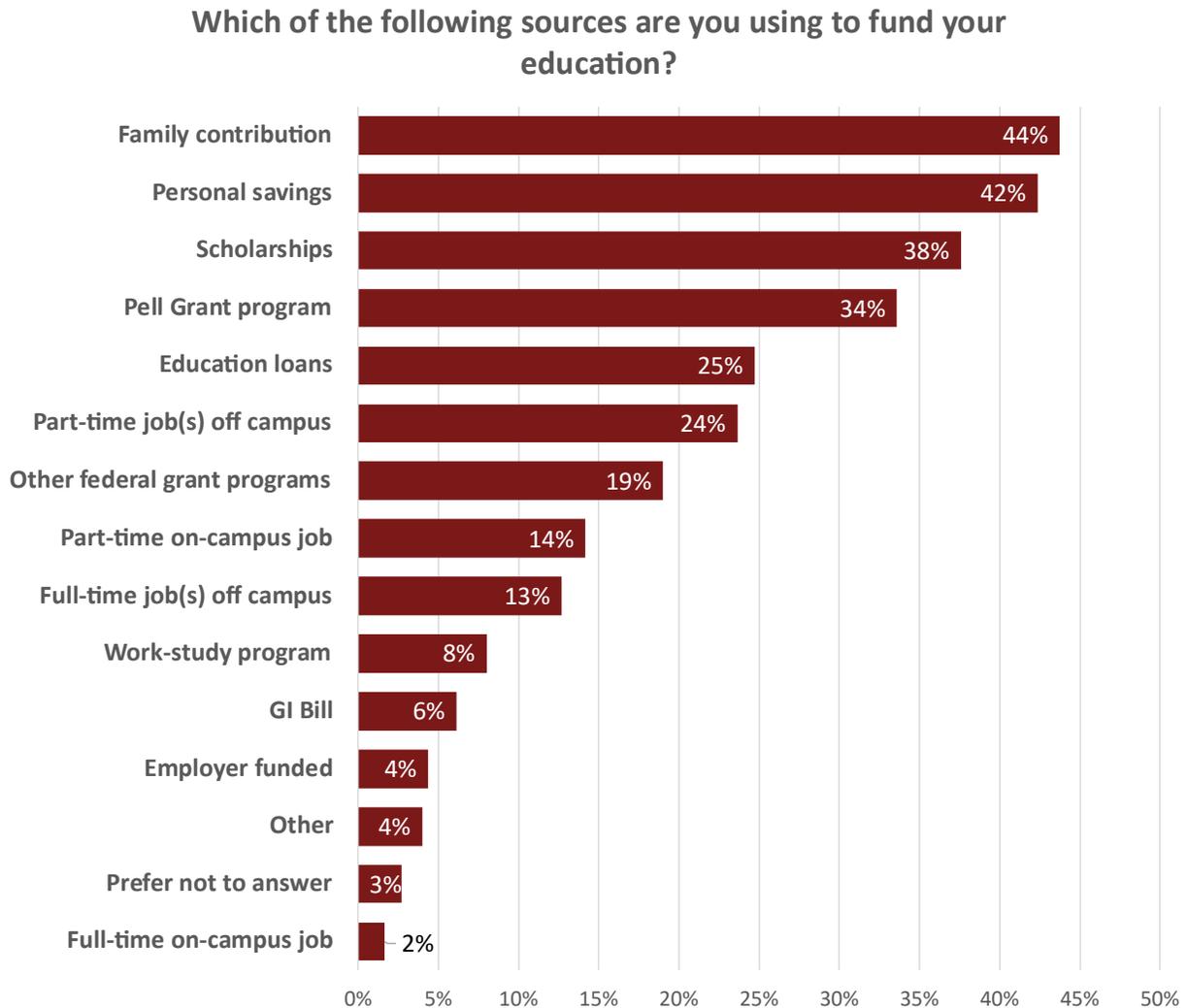
*"It has made me a better pirate."*

*"The cost of course materials honestly just causes me to borrow textbooks from friends, or pirate them off the internet."*

## Funding for Course Materials

Students use multiple funding sources to meet their course materials costs. The most common sources are personal – either from their family or their own savings. Scholarships and Pell Grants were both used by slightly more than one-third of students. One quarter of students took out loans, with a similarly sized group working part-time off campus to pay for the materials. Other students worked full-time on campus (see Figure 14).

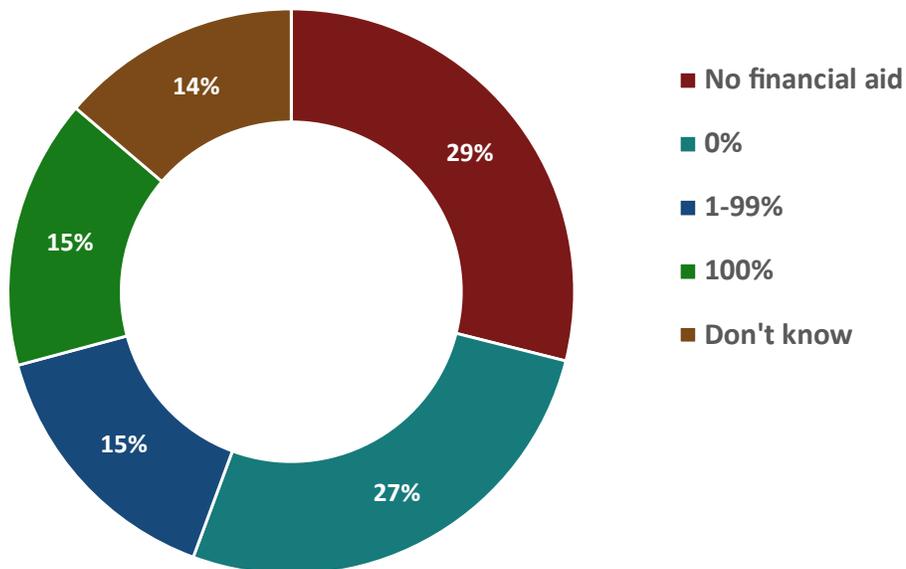
Figure 14: Sources students are using to fund their education



The majority of students (56%) say they either had no financial aid to help with course material costs or that their financial aid did not cover these costs. Slightly less than one-quarter of students said that financial aid covered half or more of their course material costs. Only 15% of students reported that their financial aid covered all their course material costs (see Figure 15).

*Figure 15: The percentage of a student's course material costs covered by their financial aid*

**What percentage of your required course material costs is covered or reimbursed by financial aid for this term?**

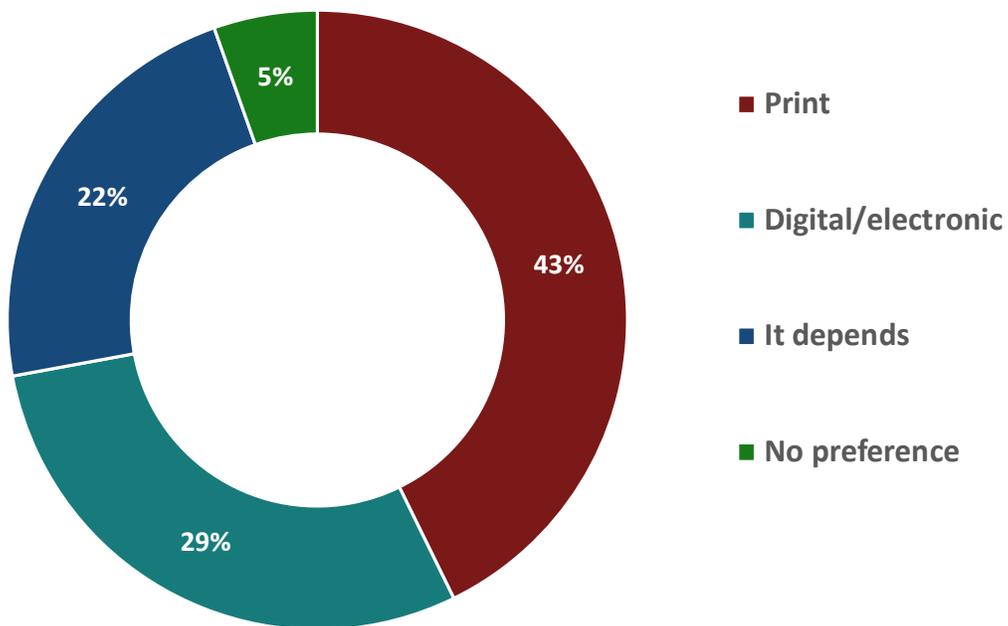


## Print Versus Digital

More students prefer print materials (43%) over digital materials (29%), while 22% of students reported that their preference depended on the specific course. Only 5% of students said that they did not have a preference (see Figure 16).

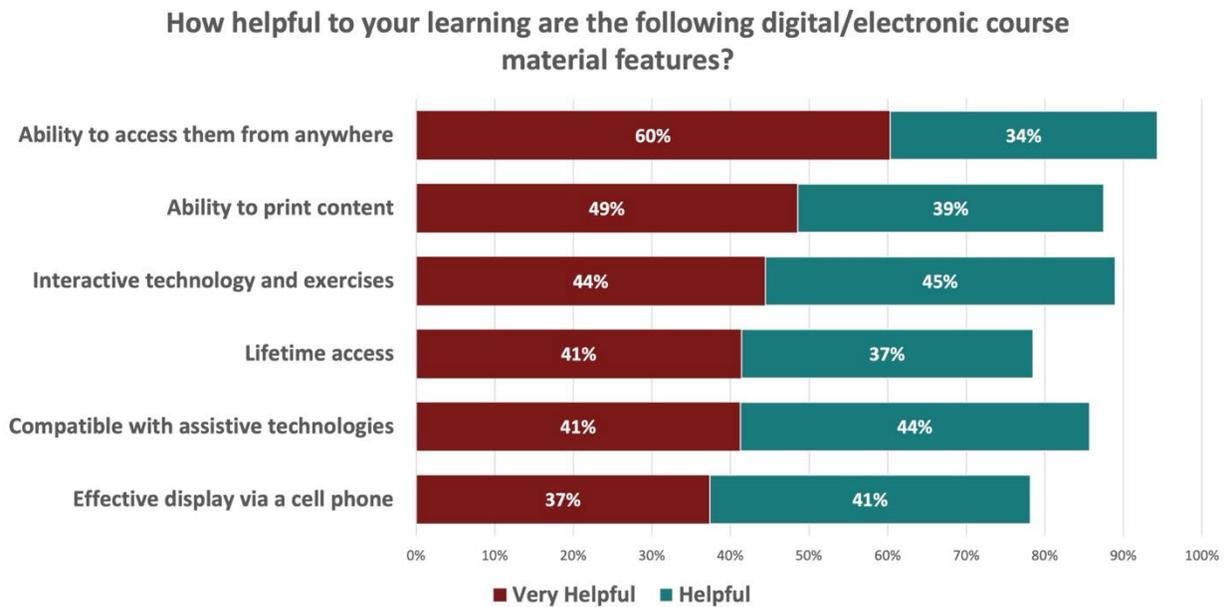
*Figure 16: Students' preferred format for course materials if cost were the same*

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



All students, even those who prefer print, recognize that aspects of digital materials are helpful for their learning. Over 90% say that the ability to access digital materials anywhere is "very helpful" or "helpful." More than three-quarters of all students find digital materials helpful because of their interactive technology and exercises, lifetime access, compatibility with assistive technologies, and the ability to display on mobile phones. More than three-quarters of all students considered each of the digital aspects either "very helpful" or "helpful" (see Figure 17).

*Figure 17: Student ratings of how helpful various digital/electronic features are for their learning*



## Student Voices: Format

Student responses to the prompt of *"Please tell us more about your format preferences:"* follow-up question to one of their preferred course materials formats.

Those who preferred digital:

*"Digital works best for me as I always have my phone with me. I do better in courses where I can navigate my materials on my phone (vs somewhere using the instructional content isn't viable through my phone, either be it ease-of-use or inability to do coursework)."*

*"I have very poor eyesight, don't even have a driver's license because it's so bad I can't even see a road sign till I pass it. So it's very important for me to be able to zoom in on texts so I don't strain my eyes squinting for so long at the tiniest pieces of texts."*

*"You can search a textbook instantaneously"*

*"Digital is easy and can be accessed from anywhere."*

Those who preferred print:

*"Print, it helps me learn better"*

*"Staring at a screen hurts my eyes; I prefer paper."*

*"I prefer print, but renting online is always cheaper"*

*"I like having a physical book I can flip and mark pages"*

Students who responded "It depends":

*"Depends on cost"*

*"Print for certain topics like math"*

*"Different classes change what I like"*

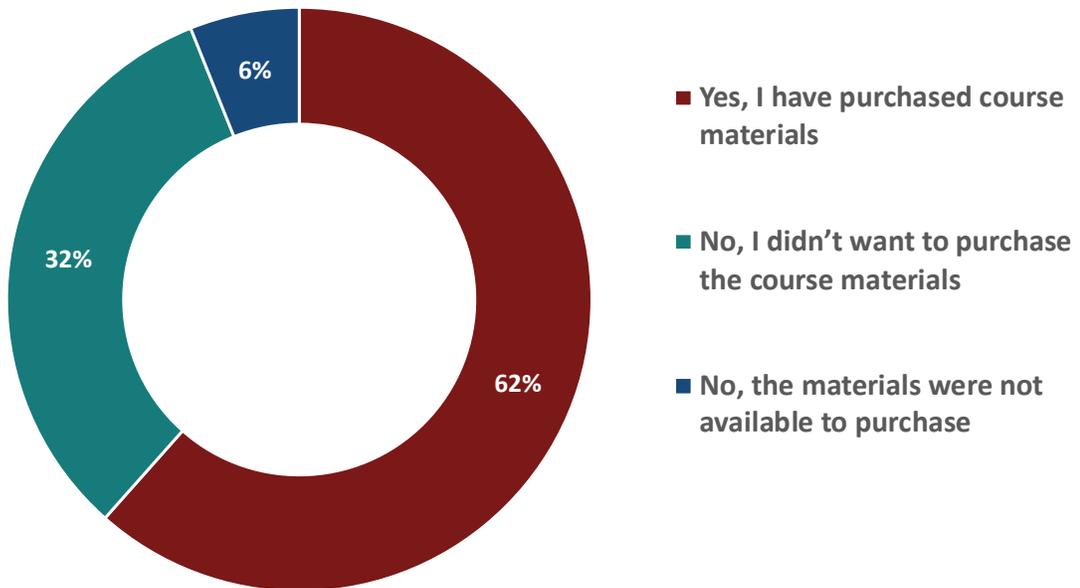
*"If I buy it I want print, if rent, I prefer digital"*

## Decision to Purchase Course Materials

Given the evidence that many students forgo buying course materials due to the expense, it may be surprising to find that 62% report purchasing materials when rental or access code options are available (see Figure 18). This suggests students do value textbook ownership.

*Figure 18: The proportion of students who purchased course materials when rental or access code options were available*

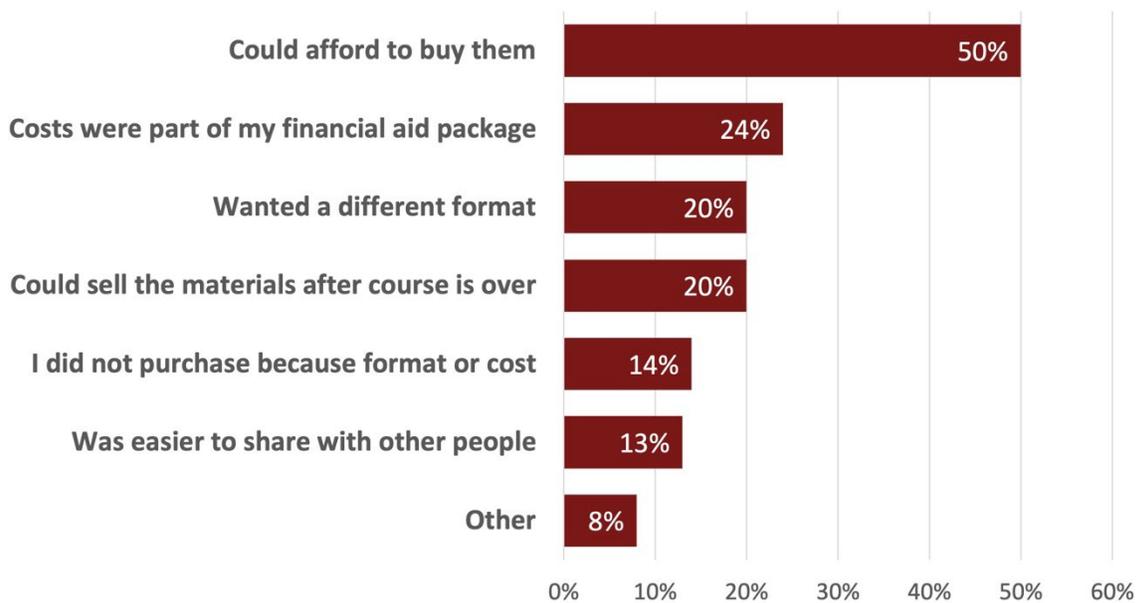
**When you have other options for getting your course materials, did you choose to buy them?**



When students were asked what aspects of the format or cost led them to purchase their course materials, their answers varied. The most common response was that they could afford to buy them. Other students noted that their financial aid covered the costs, so they would not pay out of pocket. About one in five students mentioned wanting a different format or that they could sell the materials at the end of the course to recover their costs (see Figure 19).

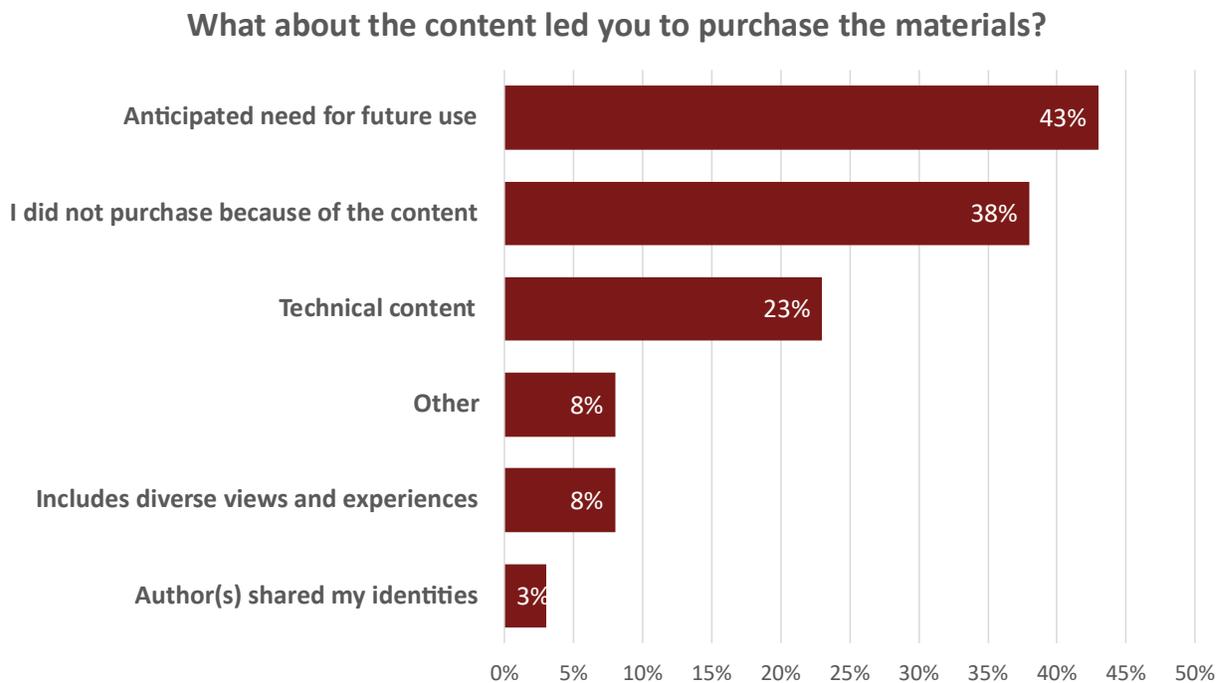
*Figure 19: Factors leading students to purchase course materials when rental or access code options were available*

### What about the format or cost led you to purchase the materials?



When asked what aspect of the course material content led them to make purchases, 38% reported that the content did not drive their purchase. Among those who did purchase for a content-related reason, the most common response (43%) was that they anticipated a future need for the materials, with an additional 23% citing technical content as their reason for the purchase (see Figure 20).

*Figure 20: Content-related factors students cite for purchasing of course materials when rental or access code options were available*



## Access Codes and Inclusive Access Programs

The 2021 Virginia Course Materials Survey did not include questions specifically about access code programs or Inclusive Access models. However, students mentioned access codes so frequently in their open-ended responses that they were coded as a separate theme in the qualitative analysis. The landscape has changed significantly since then, and students now encounter both traditional access codes and Inclusive Access programs with similar mechanisms. With that in mind, the 2025 survey added questions addressing this topic. Since there is no single definition of these programs and institutions often use campus-specific branding, the 2025 survey provided the following explanation to student respondents.

“Are you familiar with programs that provide course materials available through access codes that are bundled in with tuition or student fees? These are often called Day One, First Day, Inclusive Access, or Equitable Access programs. They are most commonly provided by commercial publishers to provide digital access to all students in a class or program on a subscription basis (typically for the duration of the course).”

The most common of these programs is typically referred to as “Inclusive Access.” The website [inclusiveaccess.org](https://inclusiveaccess.org) defines such programs as follows:

“Inclusive Access is a textbook sales model that adds the cost of digital course content into students’ tuition and fees. Inclusive Access programs usually start with an agreement between an institution, a bookstore, and one or more publishers. On or before the first day of class, digital content is delivered to students, typically through a learning management system. Students have a period to “opt out” before they are automatically billed for the cost. After the course, students typically lose access to the content. Inclusive Access is also known as automatic textbook billing, and the details of each program can vary by campus.”

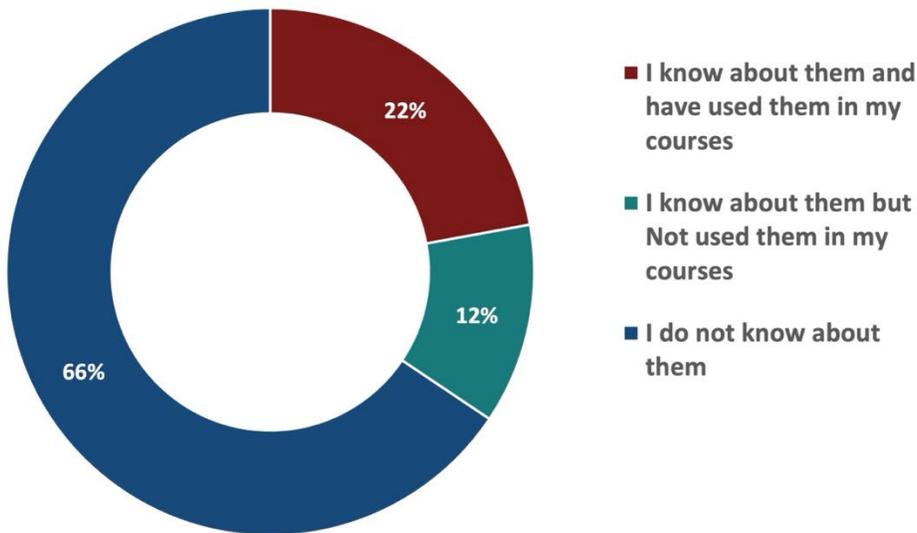
Respondents for the 2025 survey were asked about their awareness of such programs. All students who reported being aware were asked whether they knew about the opt-out policy for these programs. With the above explanation in mind, they were also asked a general open-ended question to “share any thoughts on your experiences with the use of access codes.” Students participating in these programs were also asked if they were aware of the costs and how they preferred to pay.

## Awareness of Inclusive Access Programs

Inclusive Access programs are not widely known among Virginia students. Approximately two-thirds of all students are unaware of these programs, while 22% report being aware of them and having used them in their courses. An additional 12% say they are aware of the programs but have never used them (see Figure 21).

*Figure 21: Students' level of familiarity with access code programs for course materials*

**Are you familiar with programs that provide course materials available through access codes that are bundled in with tuition or student fees?**



## Student Experiences

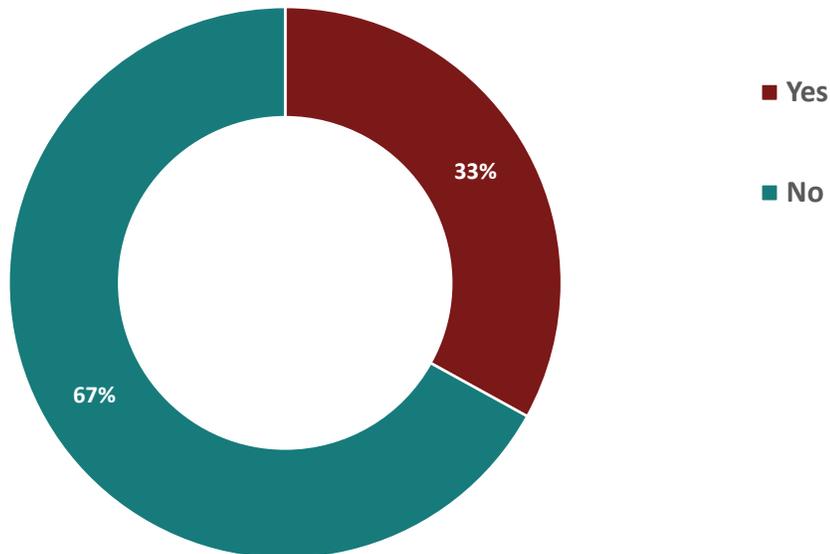
Students who reported being aware of Inclusive Access programs were then asked a series of follow-up questions. Note that these responses do not represent the general student population, but only those who were aware of (966 students) or using (1,845 students) such programs.

### Opt-out Options

Among students who were aware of or used Inclusive Access programs, one-third were aware of any opt-out options associated with them (see Figure 22).

*Figure 22: Students' awareness of opt-out policies for access code programs*

Were you aware of the opt-out policy associated with course materials using access codes?

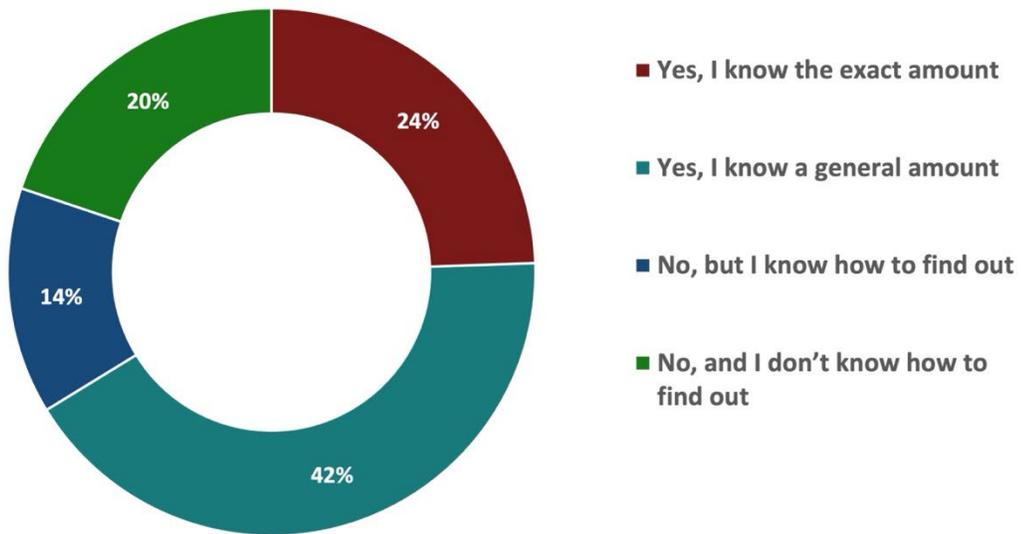


## Cost Awareness

Most students who used access code programs had at least a general idea of their costs (42%) or knew the exact costs (24%). A smaller group (14%) was unaware of the costs but believed they could find out. One in five students using access code programs did not know the cost or how to find out (see Figure 23).

Figure 23: Students' awareness of the costs of access code programs

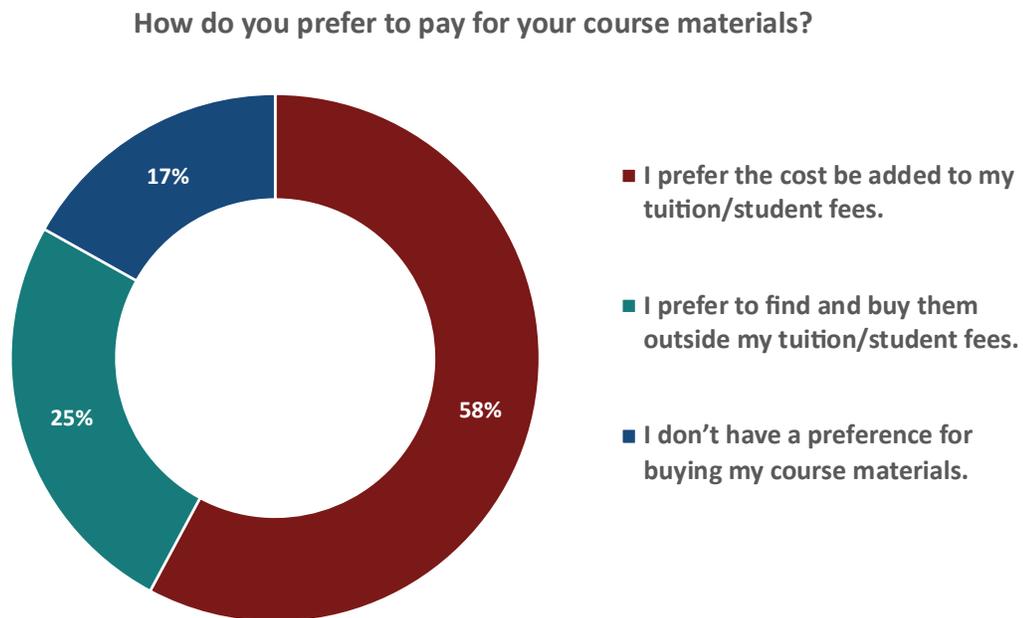
For your courses that use access codes, are you aware of the required costs?



## Payment Preferences

Students who reported using access codes were asked how they preferred to pay for them. The majority (58%) said they preferred to have them added to their tuition or student fees, while one-quarter (25%) preferred paying separately from tuition or fees, with only 17% indicating no preference. It is important to note that the question and answers specifically relate to students' opinions about paying for access codes, not for course materials in general (see Figure 24).

*Figure 24: Preferences for payment methods among users of access code programs*



## Open-ended Responses

To gather student opinions and experiences with bundled course material access programs (e.g. Inclusive Access programs), the survey included an optional open-ended question with the prompt: "Please share any thoughts on your experiences with the use of access codes that are bundled with tuition or student fees for your courses." Of the 1,845 respondents who reported using an Inclusive Access program, 680 (37%) provided an open-ended response.

The respondents expressed varying views on their experiences with having these programs included with tuition or student fees. Overall, the main concerns focused on cost, transparency, and flexibility. While many student comments mentioned that these programs were useful, there were twice as many negative responses as positive. The negative feedback covered various aspects of the programs, highlighting major concerns about cost, transparency, non-functioning codes, and the lack of flexibility with these programs. Comments also expressed frustration over the lack of clear information about what students are paying for and called for greater flexibility to opt out or choose cheaper options.

## Benefits

Several respondents acknowledged the benefits of bundled course material access programs and access codes, as they provided useful additional materials or were tied to assignments in a way that enhanced their learning experience.

*"I appreciate when they are bundled or just included in a class, it ensures everyone has the same material and simplifies the process and is overall less stressful."*

*"If a class requires an access code to have additional material, then I find it beneficial."*

*"Access codes are useful for personalizing these texts and materials to each student."*

*"I used them a lot with my online classes and find it a lot easier to access and have whenever I need them for studying and doing assignments and homework."*

## Indifference and Practicality

Some respondents viewed bundled access pragmatically, as a way to simplify course logistics, despite potential added costs.

*"I don't care either way really. I assume they make the class about the same cost whether we buy separately or its integrated."*

*"It is hard to gauge, it really depends on the class."*

## Cost Concerns

Many respondents expressed concerns about the high costs associated with Inclusive Access programs and access codes, often feeling that these are unjustly integrated into tuition fees without providing clear value. Several noted that the price is disproportionately high compared to alternative options like renting.

*"All the bundled costs is doing is making sure to charge the students full price from the university bookstore. You are now unable to find used or third-party resources and are forced to spend more money than you would have. Horrible behavior."*

*"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."*

*"A lot of times these cost students and we aren't informed until we are in the class and then it gets added to our tuition and is almost a hundred dollars per class."*

*"Access codes are more expensive in the bookstore. They were looking to charge me a \$13+ fee for simply using the bookstore as a medium. Instead, I had to pay out of pocket online."*

*"Bundled access codes are only effective if the cost is less than it would be on average to get used materials and if the students can opt out of the cost if they choose to purchase materials instead."*

*"I have found the day one access to not be very useful and often an unpleasant surprise on my billing statement and have opted out of it. I prefer to have a choice as to if or when I will purchase my course materials and haven't had trouble finding materials for the same price as the day one charge at a later date."*

## Access and Usability Issues

There were complaints about difficulties accessing and using these codes, such as system issues during entry, codes for incorrect editions, or codes that did not work on day one.

*"I really don't like the use of access codes bundled with tuition or student fees. I had to pay because there was no other option but the digital access code. I don't even get to own the book—it's just a temporary lease. On top of that, it's really inconvenient to navigate or search through the digital version compared to a physical book."*

*"This semester, the access codes that were bundled into tuition fees did not work for nearly the first month of the semester. Professors were flexible with assignment due dates because of this, but I ended up just opting out of the included access codes and purchasing them on my own to make sure I could get my work done. It was a bit more expensive for me to buy them on my own instead of through the school, but it gave me peace of mind that I'd be able to progress through my classes without delay."*

*"I had a code that did not work one time and I was unable to access my course material."*

*"I have been able to follow the instructions, but I do wish they were a little more user friendly."*

*"I have had multiple codes that I have purchased from my bookstore actually end up being for the wrong edition or book that my instructor had wanted and have had to go through publishers to get it corrected."*

*"I like the concept, but the execution has been frustrating- I'm almost halfway through my 2nd 8-weeks course, and still can't access the material!"*

## Expiring Codes

There were multiple complaints about the expiration of the material course codes. These issues can be especially problematic for those re-taking a course or otherwise needing the material later.

*"I also think these things are kind of a rip-off, requiring students to purchase electronic access that is then cut off at the end of the semester. If we are really learning, wouldn't students want to refer back to seminal texts for future capstones or research in their major?"*

*"I can't stand access code course materials because once the course is over you can never access the resource again. And the resource is often highly specific to the course and not very applicable to real life application of knowledge."*

*"I do not like using access code material as they expire by a certain date in case you need to retake the course over you will not be able to use the same material. The coded material is difficult to access at first and leads you to getting further behind in the course when you first start the assignments that are associated with the coded material."*

*"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)."*

## Lack of Awareness and Information

Some respondents were not clearly informed about access codes or other options available, leading to frustration over unexpected costs or being unable to choose alternatives.

*"I wish the university were more transparent about what they are charging fees for instead of just "academic fee" or some other vague and unhelpful label."*

*"Was never made aware of other options."*

*"Was not clearly informed about them."*

## Mandatory Nature and Lack of Alternatives

A recurring theme was the mandatory nature of access codes for certain course materials, which left students feeling trapped into paying higher costs with no real option to opt out without losing access to required resources. Student agency is diminished when instructors integrate course materials that require access codes to complete requirements.

*"Students who have mandatory graded assignments accessible ONLY through access codes within a purchased textbook cannot choose to opt out unless the school is then providing the codes. [Product] was mandatory for sophomores and the books were very expensive."*

*"I'd prefer to wait till the first day and ask the professor if the course materials are truly needed before wasting money. Half of the time we never use them and I'm paying double what I have to. Mine are included in my tuition so I have no choice!"*

*"All the experience I have with this is one of my courses needed this material and this was the only option, and I found it at the campus bookstore and nowhere else. I didn't like the fact it was the only option."*

*"Cheats students out of money when they drop a class before using the codes since they will lose the money because the system makes the code a final sale. no refunds/exchanges."*

*"Had to spend \$80+ on access code for Spanish or I would have failed the course because that was the way we did homework."*

*"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."*

*"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."*

## Inclusive Access Conclusions

There are several important caveats to consider when interpreting these results.

The first is that Inclusive Access programs are relatively new, and the results we have do not provide a clear comparison between students who have used only Inclusive Access, those who have used it for some portion of their education, and those who have not used it at all. We can only compare those who have never used access code programs with those who have used them for any portion of their courses.

A second issue is that the materials acquired through an Inclusive Access program may not cover all the costs required for courses, just as a textbook may not be the only required material. For example, students may still need to pay for lab fees or art supplies regardless of whether the course uses access codes, traditional print textbooks, or free, openly licensed materials.

Finally, because the programs are new, some student concerns could be addressed over time. Many negative comments reflect poor implementation issues like codes not working, incorrect activation instructions, and inexact communication about the program. Future implementations may be less prone to errors than current ones.

Given these caveats, the study does not find evidence that Inclusive Access has improved students' academic lives.

Student experiences with Inclusive Access are mixed, with two negative comments for every positive comment. Among the minority with a positive view on access codes, students cite the belief that the program ensures everyone has the same material or note that it is convenient for them personally. Negative comments focus on the inflexibility, lack of transparency, and loss of financial agency in Inclusive Access programs.

Some comments from the much larger group of students with negative perceptions of the programs could potentially be addressed through better implementation. Issues such as non-working codes, codes for incorrect materials, or bookstore codes that do not match those required by the professor might be addressed with improved planning and execution. Clearer communication could help reduce the many complaints about the lack of transparency surrounding the programs.

However, better implementation and clearer communication would not address most of the negative student feedback. The mandatory nature of the programs, which prevents students from choosing cheaper options and diminishes their agency; the fact that the codes expire; the frustration about being forced to buy everything at a fixed price; and the lack of format options (such as print instead of digital) are issues that remain even in well-managed programs.

The results shown here do not indicate that Inclusive Access programs enhance the academic experience of Virginia students. While these programs may be administratively more convenient for some students, more students reported loss of financial agency and continuing concerns about course materials costs under these programs.

The analysis also points to a need for additional research to compare student experience (e.g., worry levels, course selection, access to course materials, and academic performance) during semesters with Inclusive Access with that during semesters with traditional textbooks or a combination of the two.

While future improvements may address some of the concerns surfaced by this study, institutions should critically assess whether Inclusive Access programs as they are currently structured are meeting their intended goals.

## Next Steps

When comparing the results of the 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey with those of the 2021 study, it is clear that progress has been made in some areas. The most notable change is that the level of worry about meeting the costs of course materials has decreased among Virginia students. However, this 10% decline still means that over 70% of Virginia students are concerned about course material costs, indicating there is still significant room for improvement. While the decrease may provide some optimism, it also raises critical questions: why has this not led to the desired outcome of fewer adverse effects on Virginia students, and what more can be done to address the concerns of the majority who are still experiencing financial stress?

The current study suggests that students are less worried about course material costs in 2025 than in 2021, yet those costs now have a greater impact on students' academic decisions and performance. Students in 2025 report that course material costs have a stronger effect on their choice of institution, academic major, and minor than in 2021. Additionally, negative effects such as poor grades, taking fewer courses, and dropping courses due to material costs have also increased from 2021 to 2025. This trend of reduced worry alongside increased negative impacts raises several serious questions that need to be addressed.

1. What has caused the decrease in worry levels? Is it driven by lower material costs (and if so, why have the negative impacts increased), or by some other factor? Are students less worried only because they are used to high prices and view them as unavoidable, or have they become more effective in mitigating them?
2. Why are students with lower levels of worry in 2025 experiencing greater adverse impacts on their academic progress than their more worried counterparts in 2021?

Further research is also needed on the potential role of Inclusive Access programs. The current study indicates that these programs are not effectively lowering students' worry levels or reducing the negative effects linked to the cost of their course materials. Student feedback presents mixed evidence about the future potential of access code programs: many complaints focus on poor implementation, which could improve over time, but even more students argue that these programs restrict their ability to find less expensive options and lock them into higher fixed costs.

Student comments in the 2021 survey prompted the inclusion of questions about access code programs in the 2025 survey. Similarly, the 2025 responses highlight important issues that will require attention in future research. These include:

- 1. Poor communication about requirements and costs.** Students using Inclusive Access programs pointed out this was a problem, but students relying on traditional purchasing methods were also frustrated. Students discovering the cost of materials after enrolling in a course (and sometimes weeks later) had to either go without, secure additional funding, or drop the course.
- 2. Requirements and costs of homework systems.** Many students were upset to learn they had to pay significant amounts (often around \$200) to access a system for submitting their homework, and that they risked failing the course without it. Their frustration was heightened by the lack of coordination across the institution, with different courses requiring different systems.
- 3. Materials designated as required were rarely or never used.** A common concern expressed by students was that many costly items listed as mandatory for a course were rarely or, in some cases, never utilized.

While these questions about worry, academic progress, and issues raised by students in their comments are critical for future research, all aspects of course material affordability and its impact on student success require ongoing monitoring. For example:

1. Will course material costs continue to affect some students more than others?
2. Will the amount students pay for course materials—and therefore its impact—change over time?
3. Since nearly all students try to reduce their course material costs, how will these efforts evolve with the continued growth of access code programs and increased use of digital resources?
4. Students who receive financial aid for their materials experience less worry and adverse effects. Given current enrollment and budget pressures, will there be less financial aid available, leading to greater adverse impacts on students?

# 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

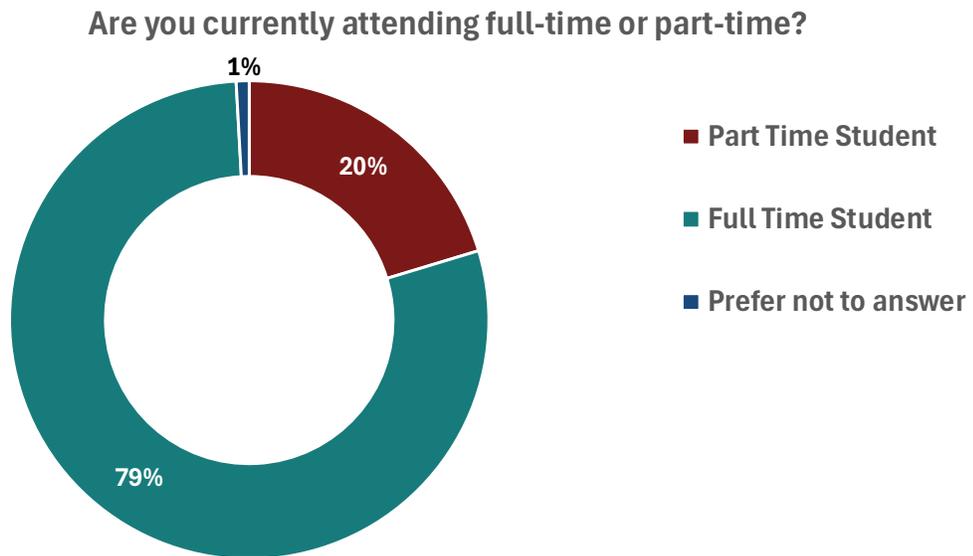
Bridgewater College  
Eastern Mennonite University  
Emory & Henry University  
Hollins University  
Marymount University  
Randolph College  
Randolph-Macon College  
Roanoke College  
Shenandoah University  
University of Lynchburg

# Appendix 1

## Respondent Demographics

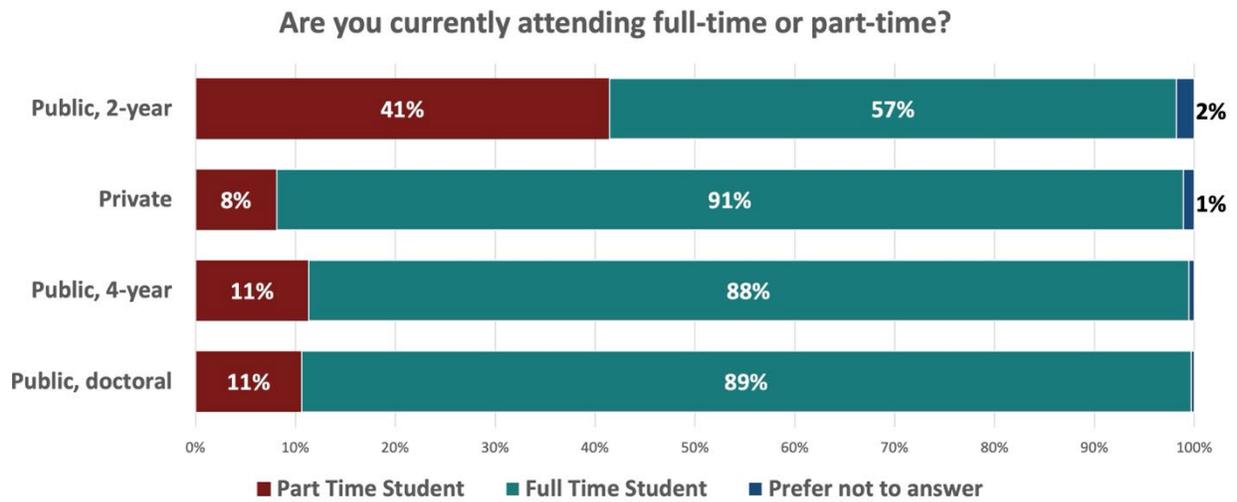
Over three-quarters of the student survey respondents reported that they are currently attending full-time, while 20% are attending part-time (see Figure 25).

Figure 25: Full- and part-time attendance status of student respondents



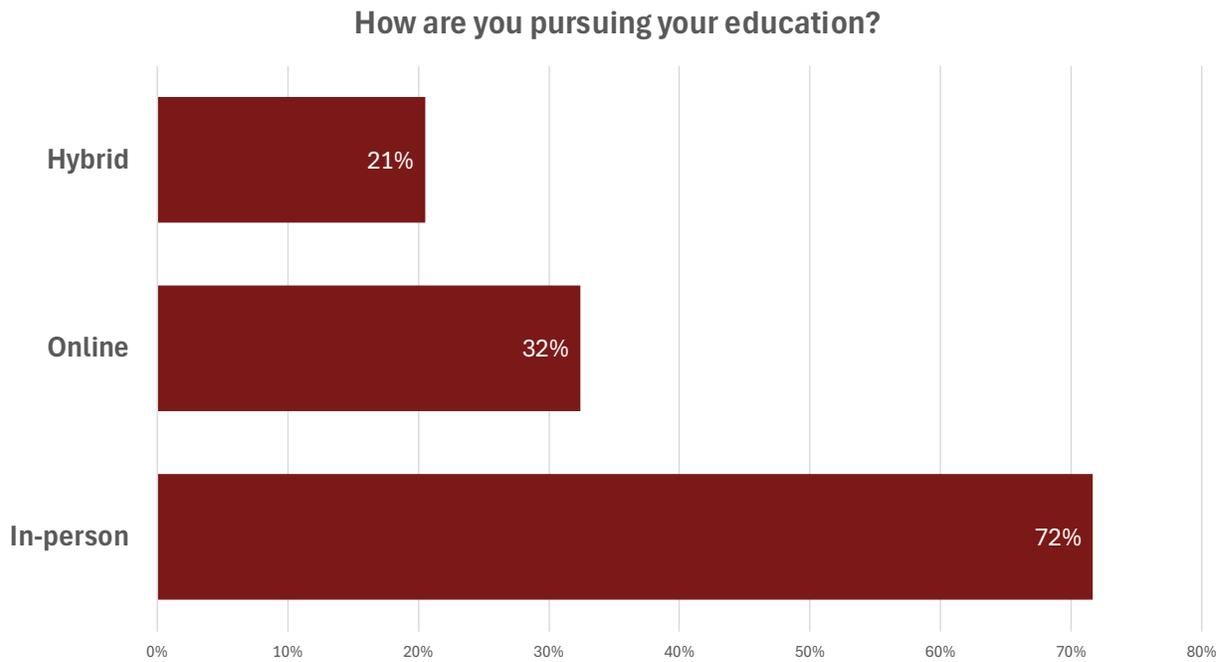
The share of part-time students is much higher (41%) at two-year colleges compared to four-year colleges, which range from 8% to 11% (see Figure 26).

Figure 26: Full- and part-time attendance status of student respondents by type of institution



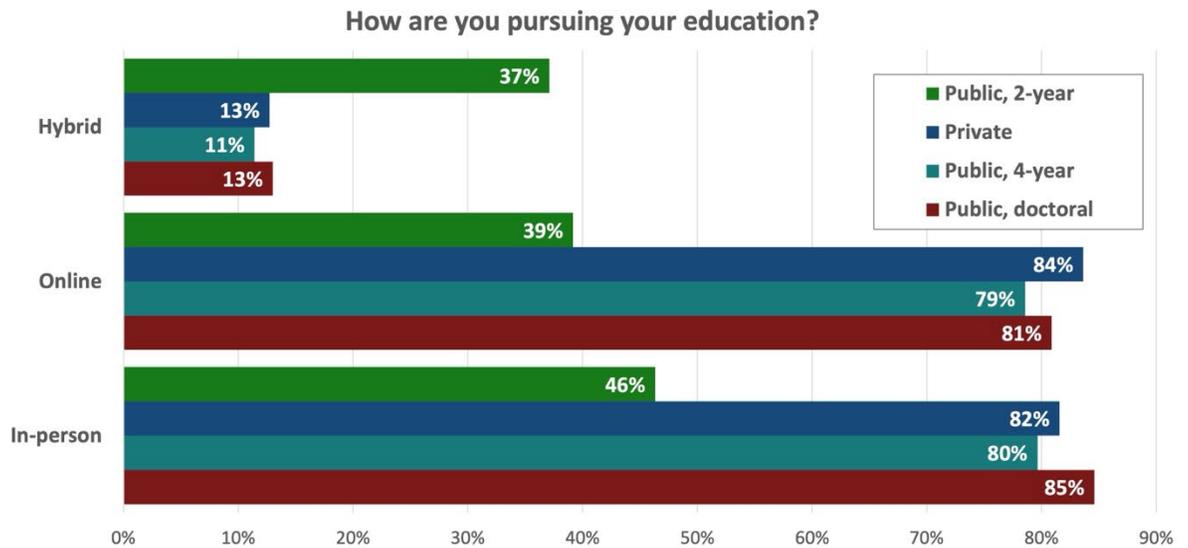
Most students (72%) took at least some courses in person, while 32% enrolled in at least one online course, and 21% participated in at least one course with both in-person and online components (see Figure 27).

Figure 27: Mode of instruction of student respondents



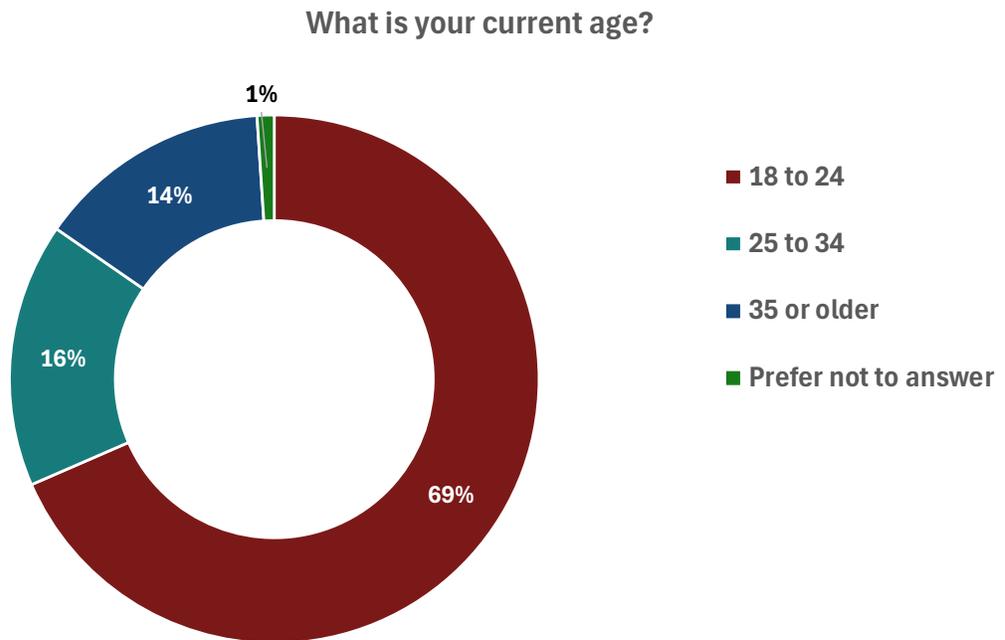
The distribution of course delivery methods differs greatly at two-year institutions, with a higher proportion of hybrid and fully online courses compared to four-year institutions (see Figure 28).

Figure 28: Mode of instruction of student respondents by type of institution



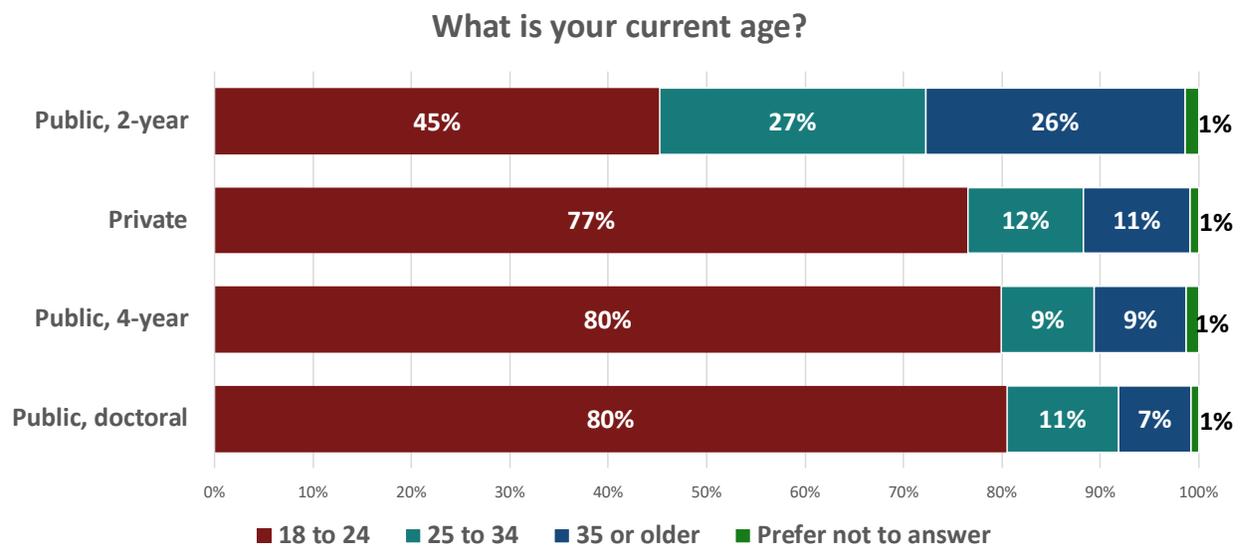
The survey respondents primarily consist of younger students, with 69% aged between 18 and 24. The rest of the students are almost evenly split between those aged 25 to 34 and those 35 or older (see Figure 29).

Figure 29: Age distribution of student respondents



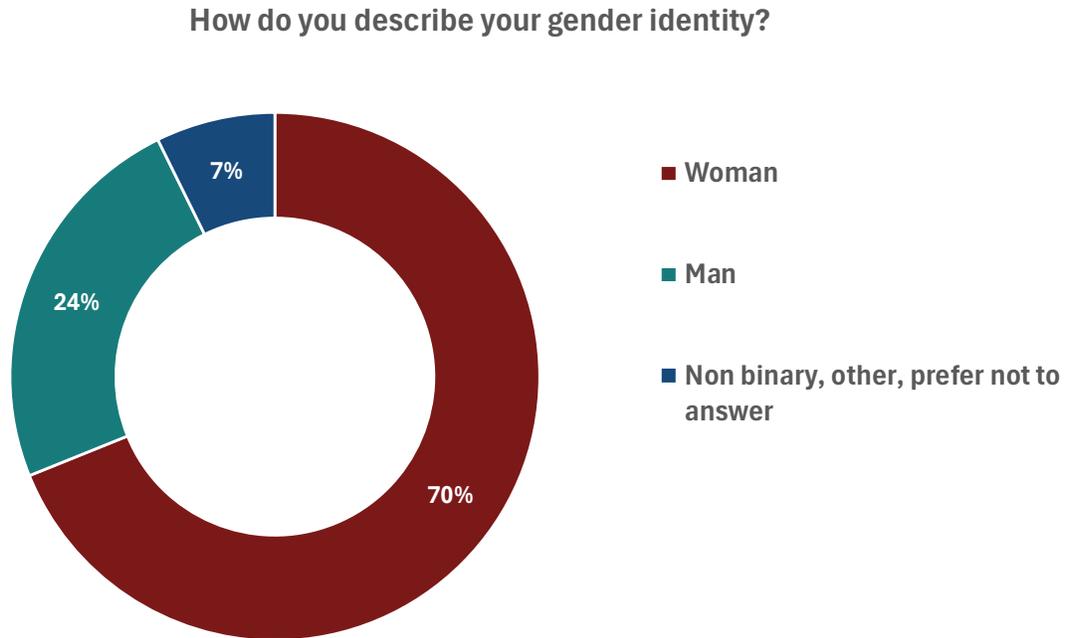
Student respondents at two-year colleges tend to be older than those at four-year colleges, with fewer than half reporting they are between 18 and 24 years old, compared to more than three-quarters of students at four-year colleges who report the same age range (see Figure 30).

Figure 30: Age distribution of student respondents by type of institution



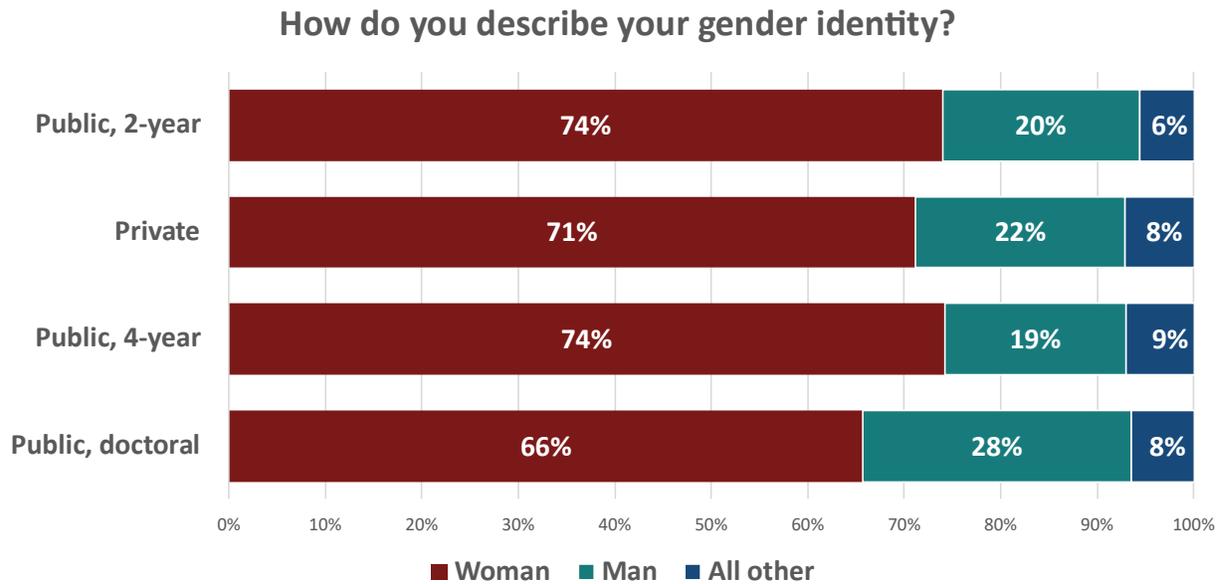
Less than one-quarter of respondents identified their gender as "man," while 70% identified as a "woman" (see Figure 31).

Figure 31: Gender identity of student respondents



There is little difference in the gender distribution across institution types, with public doctoral institutions having the lowest percentage of women respondents (66%) compared to 74% at two-year institutions (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: Gender identity of student respondents by type of institution



## Appendix 2

# Virginia Course Materials Survey © 2025

**Attribution:** This work, Virginia Course Materials Survey, is a derivative of the Florida Student Textbook Survey © 2012 by Florida Virtual Campus used under [CC BY NC 3.0](#), the [ALPA © 2023 Survey on Course Material Affordability in Pennsylvania](#) by used under [CC BY-NC SA 4.0](#), and the [Virginia Course Materials Survey © 2021](#) by [VIVA](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC SA 4.0](#).



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## Consent Form

### Research Procedures

This research is being conducted to evaluate the impact of textbook costs on the student experience, what features students want to see in their course materials, and to understand the barriers presented to students due to course material costs so that they can be categorized and addressed by stakeholders. The estimated number of participants expected to participate in this study is 5,500.

### Risks

The risks to participants are minimal, and may include some discomfort and stress responding to survey questions as they are asked to reflect on potential negative experiences, such as poor grades and/or dropped classes, as well as their concerns around course material costs.

### Benefits

There are no direct benefits to the participants.

## Participation

This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party. Respondents can choose to be entered into a random drawing for only one of five \$100 gift cards / one of 180 \$25 dollar gift cards. There is no link between your answers and the information form to enter the drawing. Under the U.S. federal tax law you may have individual responsibilities for disclosing the dollar value of the incentive received on this study. All questions regarding compensation should be directed toward the research team and/or the information described on the Amazon platform. You must be at least 18 years of age and not have an incarcerated status to participate.

## Confidentiality

The data in this study will be confidential. All responses are anonymous, and no names or other identifiers will be placed on the research data. The de-identified data could be used for future research without additional consent from participants. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee that monitors research on human subjects may inspect study records during internal auditing procedures and are required to keep all information confidential. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission. Participants may review Qualtrics' website for information about their privacy statement by clicking [here](#). Participants may review Bay View Analytics' website for information about their privacy statement by clicking [here](#).

## Contact

This research is being conducted by VIVA, Virginia's academic library consortium. The Principal Investigator is Sophie Rondeau in the University Library at George Mason University. She may be reached at 703-993-2694 or [wrondeau@gmu.edu](mailto:wrondeau@gmu.edu) for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703-993-4121 or [IRB@gmu.edu](mailto:IRB@gmu.edu) if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research. Please reference STUDY00000231.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research. The consent form may be downloaded [here](#).

By clicking the button below to take the survey, you confirm that you have read this form, all of your questions have been answered by the research staff, you are 18 years of age or older, you do not have an incarcerated status, and you agree to participate in this study.

## 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey

What degree or award are you currently pursuing:

- Associate
- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctorate
- Non-degree seeking
- Certificate or Diploma
- Other (please specify in the box below):

Are you currently attending full-time or part-time?

- Part Time Student
- Full Time Student
- Prefer not to answer

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If What degree or award are you currently pursuing: = Associate

- Approximately how many credit hours have you completed?
- Fewer than 30 credit hours completed
- 30 or more credit hours completed
- I don't know

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If What degree or award are you currently pursuing: = Bachelor's

What is your current academic level?

- Freshman (usually 0-30 credit hours completed)
- Sophomore (usually 31-60 credit hours completed)
- Junior (usually 61-90 credit hours completed)
- Senior (usually 91-120 credit hours completed)
- I don't know

How are you pursuing your education? *Check all that apply.*

- In-person
- Online
- Hybrid

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

- Yes
- No

How many courses are you taking during the current term?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 +

How many of your current term courses **required** you to buy, rent, or lease textbooks or instructional material, regardless of whether you acquired or paid for them?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 +

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If How many of your current term courses required you to buy, rent, or lease textbooks or instructio... != 0

For how many of these courses did you actually buy, rent, or lease all of the required course materials?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 +

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If How many of your current term courses required you to buy, rent, or lease textbooks or instructio... != 0 AND For how many of these courses did you actually buy, rent, or lease all of the required course mat... != 0

How much did you spend on course materials, whether purchased, rented, or leased, during this semester? A guess is OK.

- \$0
- \$1-100
- \$101-200
- \$201-300
- \$301-400
- \$401-500
- \$501-600
- \$601 or more

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

- Not at all worried
- Slightly worried
- Moderately worried
- Extremely worried

In your academic career, has the cost of required course materials caused you to:

Take fewer courses

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently

Not register for a specific course

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently

Drop a course

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently

Withdraw from a course

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently

Earn a poor grade because you could not afford to buy the textbook

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently

Fail a course because you could not afford to buy the textbook

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently

Not purchase the required textbook

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently

Delayed the purchase of course materials

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently

Other (please describe in the box below)

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently

Have any of the following large decisions been based at all on the cost of course materials? *Check all that apply.*

- Selecting a major
- Selecting a minor
- Selecting the institution you attend
- Other (please describe in the box below):

Can you please tell us more about how the cost of course materials has influenced your educational progress? [Text box]

What measures have you taken to reduce your required course material costs throughout your college career? *Check all that apply.*

- Do not attempt to reduce costs
- Buy a used copy
- Buy books from a source other than the campus bookstore
- Use earlier editions
- Buy only the chapters needed for the course
- Buy a digital version
- Find a free version online
- Rent a copy (print or digital)
- Borrow a copy from the campus library (print or digital)
- Share materials with classmates
- Do without
- Other

***SURVEY LOGIC:*** Display this question: If What measures have you taken to reduce your required course material costs throughout your colleg... = Other

Please describe what other measure(s) you have taken to reduce course material costs in the box below. [Text box]

When you have other options for getting your course materials (like renting or through access codes), did you choose to buy them?

- Yes, I have purchased course materials
- No, I didn't want to purchase the course materials
- No, the materials were not available to purchase

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If When you have other options for getting your course materials (like renting or through access cod... = Yes, I have purchased course materials

What about the format or cost led you to purchase the materials (not related to the content of the materials)? Check all that apply.

- Could afford to buy them
- Wanted a different format
- Costs were part of my financial aid package
- Could sell the materials when the course is over
- Was easier to share with other people
- Other
- No, I did not purchase because format or cost

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If When you have other options for getting your course materials (like renting or through access cod... = Yes, I have purchased course materials

What about the content led you to purchase the materials? Check all that apply.

- Author(s) shared my identities
- Includes diverse views and experiences
- Technical content
- Anticipated need for future use
- Other
- No, I did not purchase because of the content

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If What about the format or cost led you to purchase the materials (not related to the content of th... = Other OR What about the content led you to purchase the materials? Check all that apply. = Other

Please describe the other reason(s) you would choose to buy your course materials [Text box]

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

- Print
- Digital/electronic
- It depends
- No preference

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If the cost is the same, which format do you prefer for your course materials? = Digital/electronic OR If the cost is the same, which format do you prefer for your course materials? = It depends OR If the cost is the same, which format do you prefer for your course materials? = Print

Please tell us more about your format preferences: [Text box]

Are you familiar with programs that provide course materials available through access codes that are bundled in with tuition or student fees? These are often called Day One, First Day, inclusive access, or equitable access programs. They are most commonly provided by commercial publishers to provide digital access to all students in a class or program on a subscription basis (typically for the duration of the course).

- I know about them and have used them in my courses
- I know about them but have not used them in my courses
- I do not know about them

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If Are you familiar with programs that provide course materials available through access codes that... = I know about them and have used them in my courses OR Are you familiar with programs that provide course materials available through access codes that... = I know about them but have not used them in my courses

Were you aware of the opt-out policy associated with course materials using access codes?

- Yes
- No

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: *If Are you familiar with programs that provide course materials available through access codes that... = I know about them and have used them in my courses*

For your courses that use access codes, are you aware of the required costs?

- Yes, I know the exact amount
- Yes, I know a general amount
- No, but I know how to find out
- No, and I don't know how to find out

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: *If Are you familiar with programs that provide course materials available through access codes that... = I know about them and have used them in my courses*

How do you prefer to pay for your course materials?

- I prefer the cost be added to my tuition/student fees and distributed through access codes and/or the bookstore.
- I prefer to find and buy them outside my tuition/student fees.
- I don't have a preference for buying my course materials.

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: *If Are you familiar with programs that provide course materials available through access codes that... = I know about them and have used them in my courses OR Are you familiar with programs that provide course materials available through access codes that... = I know about them but have not used them in my courses*

Please share any thoughts on your experiences with the use of access codes that are bundled in with tuition or student fees for your courses. [Text box]

What percentage of your required course material costs is covered or reimbursed by financial aid for this term?

- I do not have any financial aid
- 0% (none)
- 1-25% (up to a quarter)
- 26-50% (a quarter to half)
- 51-75% (half to three-quarters)
- 76-99% (at least three-quarters but not all)
- 100% (entirely)
- Don't know

How helpful to your learning are the following digital/electronic course material features?

Ability to access them from anywhere (e.g. offline)

- Not Helpful
- Helpful
- Very Helpful
- Not Applicable

Effective display via a cell phone or other small device

- Not Helpful
- Helpful
- Very Helpful
- Not Applicable

Ability to print content or access a print copy

- Not Helpful
- Helpful
- Very Helpful
- Not Applicable

Lifetime access

- Not Helpful
- Helpful
- Very Helpful
- Not Applicable

Interactive technology and exercises

- Not Helpful
- Helpful
- Very Helpful
- Not Applicable

Compatible with assistive technologies

- Not Helpful
- Helpful
- Very Helpful
- Not Applicable

Other (please specify in the box below)

- Not Helpful
- Helpful
- Very Helpful
- Not Applicable

The following questions will help us understand if course material costs impact students differently. Your privacy is deeply important to libraries, and all responses are completely anonymous.

Which of the following sources are you using to fund your education? *Check all that apply.*

- Pell Grant program
- GI Bill
- Other federal grant programs
- Education loans
- Work-study program
- Part-time on-campus job
- Full-time on-campus job
- Scholarships
- Part-time job(s) off campus
- Full-time job(s) off campus
- Employer funded
- Family contribution
- Personal savings
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

***SURVEY LOGIC:*** Display this question: If Which of the following sources are you using to fund your education? Check all that apply. = Other

Please specify the other source(s) you use to fund your education. [Text box]

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If Which of the following sources are you using to fund your education? Check all that apply. = Part-time on-campus job OR Which of the following sources are you using to fund your education? Check all that apply. = Full-time on-campus job OR Which of the following sources are you using to fund your education? Check all that apply. = Part-time job(s) off campus OR Which of the following sources are you using to fund your education? Check all that apply. = Full-time job(s) off campus

How does your employment affect your academic success?

- Mostly positive
- A mix of positive and negative
- Mostly negative
- Not at all
- I am not sure
- Prefer not to answer

Do you identify as having a disability as defined by the American Disabilities Act?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If Do you identify as having a disability as defined by the American Disabilities Act? = Yes

Does your disability affect how you use course materials?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If Does your disability affect how you use course materials? = Yes

How does your disability affect your use of course materials (optional)? [Text box]

Which race/ethnicity do you identify with? Check all that apply.

- American Indian or Alaskan
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black
- Hispanic
- Multi-Race
- White
- Another race or ethnicity not listed here
- Prefer not to answer

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If Which race/ethnicity do you identify with? Check all that apply. = Another race or ethnicity not listed here

Please specify the race or ethnicity you identify with (optional). [Text box]

How do you describe your gender identity? Check all that apply.

- Woman
- Man
- Nonbinary
- Another option not listed here
- Prefer not to answer

**SURVEY LOGIC:** Display this question: If How do you describe your gender identity? Check all that apply. = Another option not listed here

Please specify your gender identity (optional).

Do you identify as a First Generation Student, defined here as having no parent or guardian who completed at least an Associate's degree or higher?

- o Yes
- o No
- o I don't know
- o Prefer not to answer

Are you currently taking care of children, parents, or other family members?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

What is your current age?

- 18 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 or older
- Prefer not to answer

Is there any aspect of your identity that we have not covered in the preceding questions that we may want to consider including in future studies? Please use the space below. [Text box]