

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY 2021

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

VIVA

September 2022

<https://vivalib.org/>



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

VIVA, Virginia's academic library consortium, conducted the Virginia Course Materials Survey from October 1-December 31, 2021. The overarching research questions of the survey were:

- What is the impact of course material costs on educational equity among Virginia students?
- What course content materials do students find to be most beneficial to their learning?

The survey included 23 questions addressing course materials cost and features as well as a wide array of demographic areas. It was intended to build on the work of previous surveys, such as the Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey conducted by the Florida Office of Distance Learning and Student Services. This survey expands on earlier research by examining questions of educational equity as informed by demographic information.

There were more than 5,600 valid responses to the survey, reflecting an overall response rate of 10%. Responses represent feedback from students at 41 of the 70 VIVA higher education institutions, and include representation from all four VIVA-categorized institution types: public doctoral, public four year, public two year, and private non-profit.

This report is intended to assist VIVA and its parent body, the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV), to more clearly understand the impact that course material costs have on Virginia higher education students. The resulting findings can then be applied to VIVA's Open & Affordable Course Content program and by its member institutions to strategically improve students' experiences with course materials.

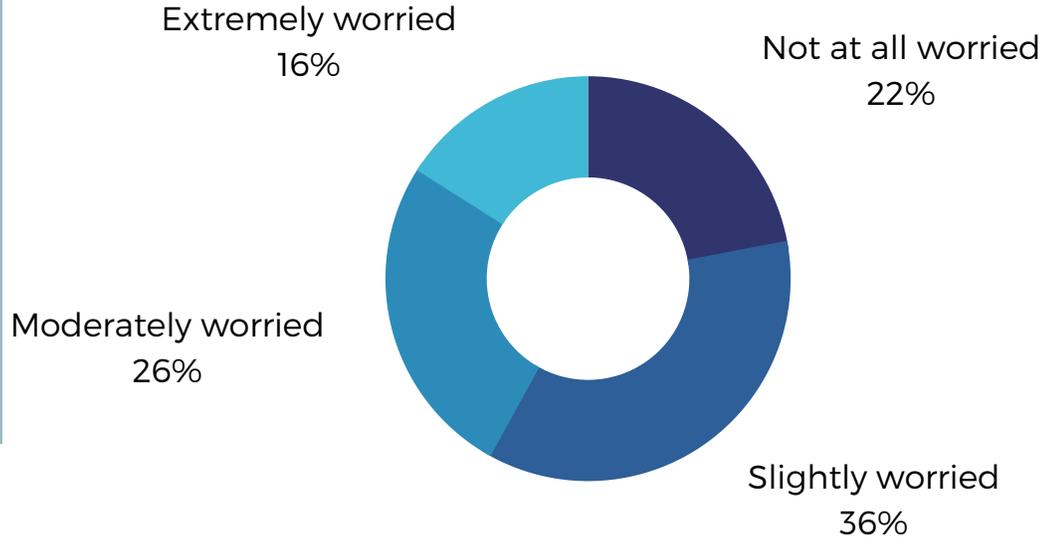
KEY FINDINGS

1

COURSE MATERIALS COSTS CAUSE STUDENTS WORRY

78% of all respondents expressed some level of worry about meeting their course material costs in Fall 2021, and **42%** classified themselves as moderately or extremely worried.

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

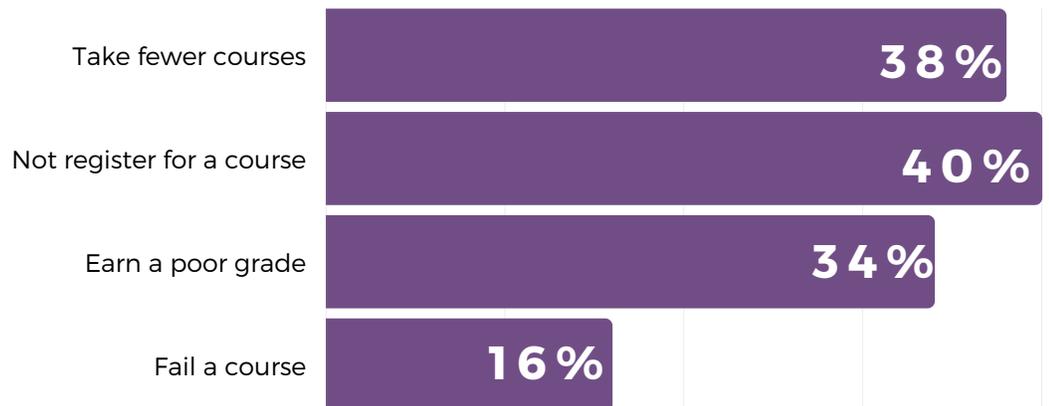


2

STUDENTS' ACADEMIC CAREERS ARE DAMAGED BY COURSE MATERIAL COSTS

Course material costs have hurt students' academic careers in the areas of **progress** (taking fewer courses), **opportunity** (not registering for specific courses), and **success** (earning poor grades and failing). For a subset of students, these experiences are frequent.

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



KEY FINDINGS

3

COURSE MATERIAL COSTS ARE A FACTOR IN LARGE ACADEMIC CAREER DECISIONS

32% of respondents indicated that course material costs were a factor in deciding which institution to select, and **16%** chose their major based, at least in part, on course material costs.

"I changed my bachelor's major to something that required less expensive and more accessible materials."

"Often times in stem courses I couldn't afford the books, which led me to not pursuing my original major."

4

THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF COURSE MATERIAL COSTS GOES BEYOND ACADEMIC CAREER CHALLENGES

Compromised mental health, basic needs insecurities, distrust of the education system, and debt were **challenges students experienced** as a result of costs.

"Spending money on textbooks and other required course materials has caused major setbacks in saving for housing, food, and other educational opportunities like study abroad programs."

"There have been multiple occasions when I have had to choose between paying for a textbook or buying groceries for myself."

"The shame and guilt of struggling in a class when the materials cost so much money has been hard to escape."

KEY FINDINGS

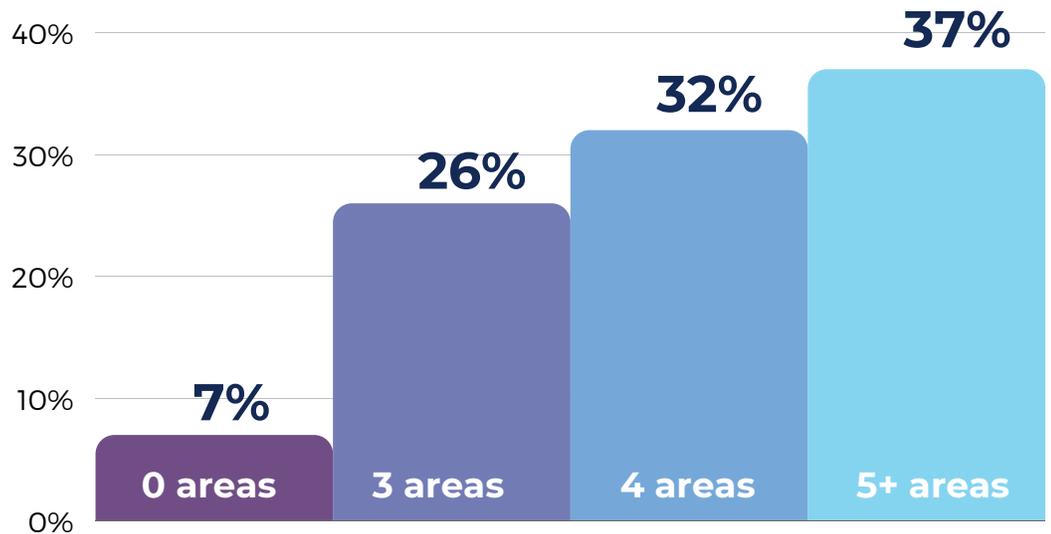
Areas of Concern: Seven areas of financial or social concern were identified: Pell Grant funding, education loans, full time job(s), race/ethnicity other than White-only, First Generation, taking care of family members, disabled.

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COURSE MATERIALS WORRIES ARE AMPLIFIED BY AREAS OF CONCERN

A student with **three areas of concern** (disabled, First Generation, and using Pell Grant funding, for example) would be **more likely to be “Extremely Worried”** about meeting course material costs than a student without any of the areas of concern.

Percentages of Students "Extremely Worried" About Course Material Costs



6

ACADEMIC CAREER DAMAGE FROM COURSE MATERIAL COSTS IS AMPLIFIED BY AREAS OF CONCERN

Students with 5+ areas of concern were **four times** as likely to have failed a course and **three times** as likely to take fewer courses due to course material costs, for example, than students with 0 areas.

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



KEY FINDINGS

7

STUDENTS NEED TO USE MANY DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO REDUCE COURSE MATERIAL COSTS

98% of students attempt to reduce their course material costs. **Many different approaches** to reduce costs, such as renting, borrowing, or sharing materials, were used by students to make their course material costs more affordable.

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



8

ACCESS CODES ARE ESPECIALLY CHALLENGING FOR STUDENTS

Access codes and homework programs were cited as **particularly stressful** because students lose their ability to find affordable alternatives, such as buying a used copy.

“Access codes especially are a stressor because it is almost impossible to find a more affordable alternative.”

“[B]uying used copies is not an option for most classes because they require online access codes which makes textbook costs even greater.”

“There were some classes that required homework programs that I had to pay for and it caused me to drop the class...”

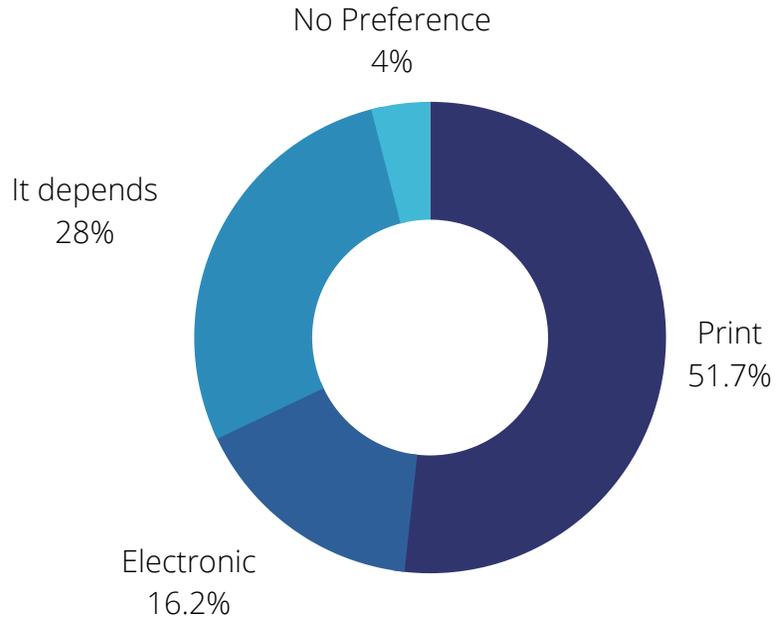
KEY FINDINGS

9

STUDENTS PREFER PRINT FORMATS FOR COURSE MATERIALS

The majority of students reported **preferring print** to other formats for their course materials.

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



10

REPRESENTATION IN MATERIALS WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO CERTAIN STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Having course materials that represent **diverse views and experiences** was very important to many Nonbinary/Other gender, Multi-Race, Black, Disabled, and Hispanic students.

Is including diverse views & experiences in course materials you have chosen to buy and own very Important?

