



Virginia Course Materials Survey 2021

INITIAL RESULTS, FEBRUARY 22, 2022

*A FORMAL REPORT IS FORTHCOMING IN
SPRING 2022*

“I ration my grocery bill during the summer and fall to afford textbooks, so not eating as much as I should impacts my ability to focus on all of my classes for the majority of the semester.”

- STUDENT RESPONDENT

Virginia Course Materials Survey

Conducted from October 1-December 31, 2021

More than 5,600 valid student responses from 41 institutions were received, reflecting an overall response rate of 10%.

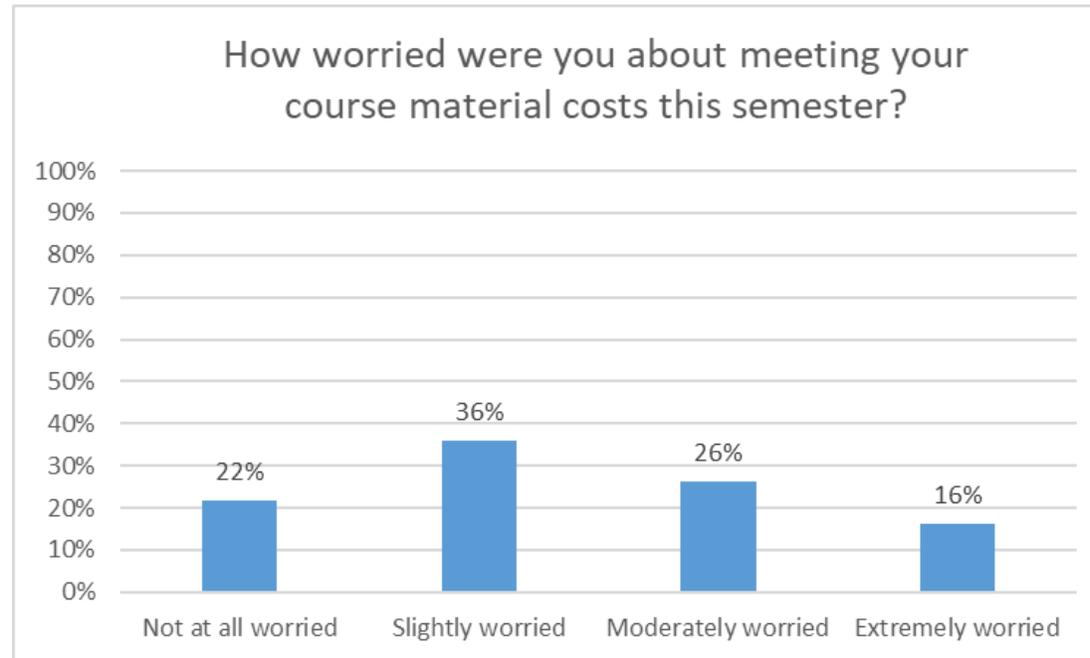
Overarching research questions of the survey:

- 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 full survey instrument is available here: <https://vivalib.org/va/open/survey>.

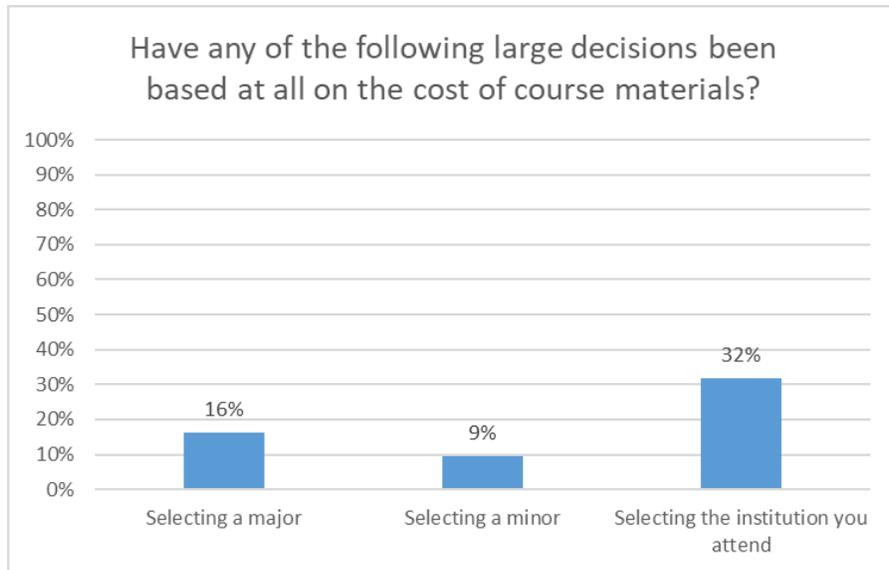
Examining the Impact on Students

Worry about Course Material Costs



16% of all student respondents were “Extremely Worried” about meeting their course material costs, and 78% had some level of worry.

Impact on Large Decisions



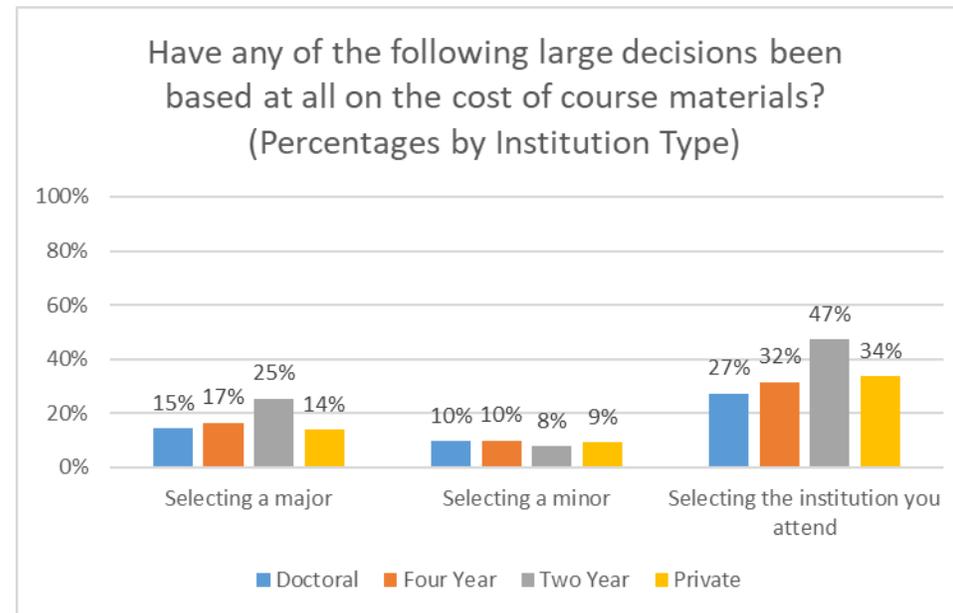
“Often times in stem courses I couldn't afford the books, which led me to not pursuing my original major.”

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

“I was originally a biology major, but am now an English major. The biology textbooks were extremely expensive and hardly ever fully used.”

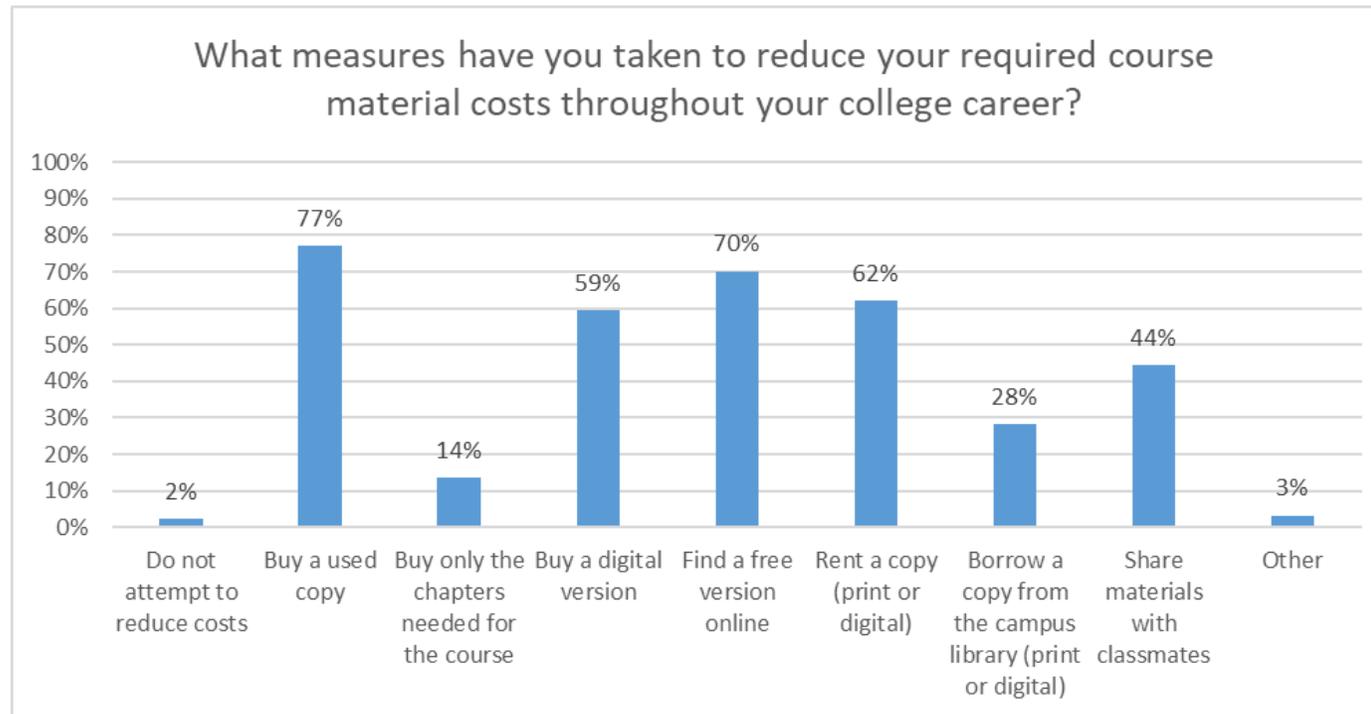
Course material costs were a factor for many students in the large decisions of major/minor/institution selection.

Impact on Large Decisions



The impact of major selection and selecting the institution attended was especially great on students at two year institutions.

Measures to Reduce Costs

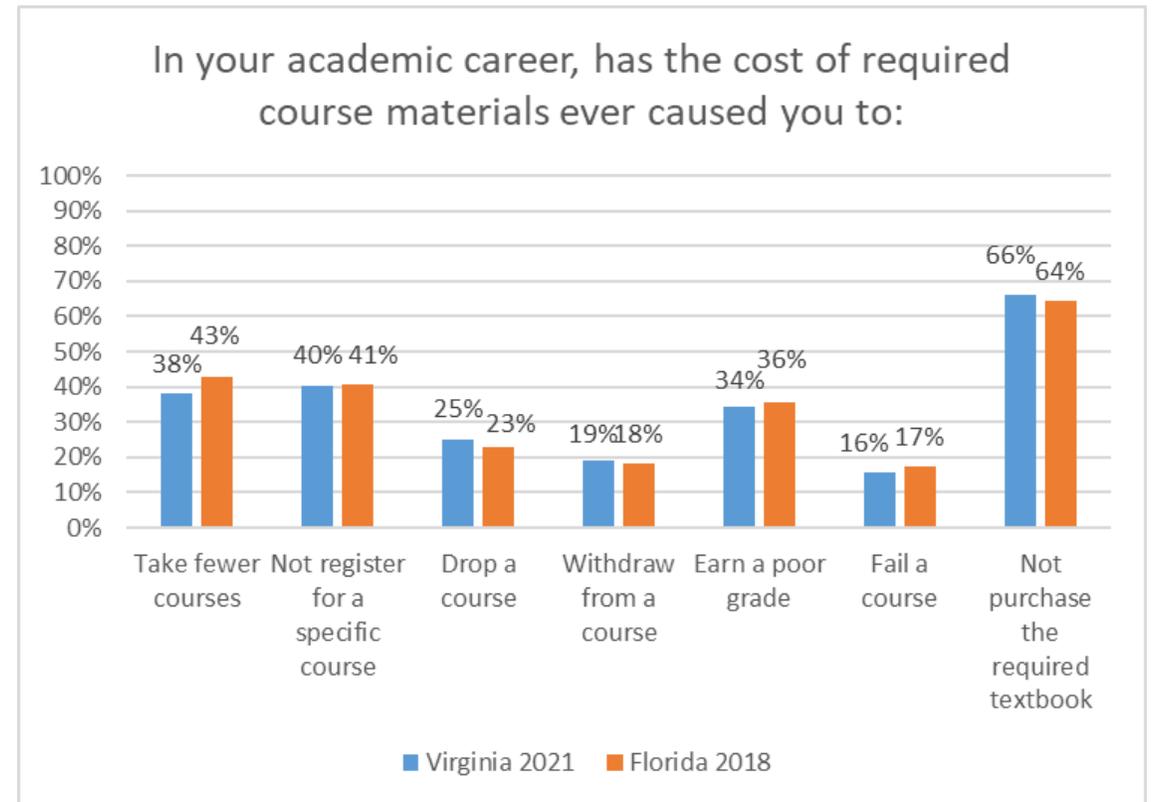


Only 2% of students do not attempt to reduce their course material costs, with the most common approaches being buying used copies or finding a free version online.

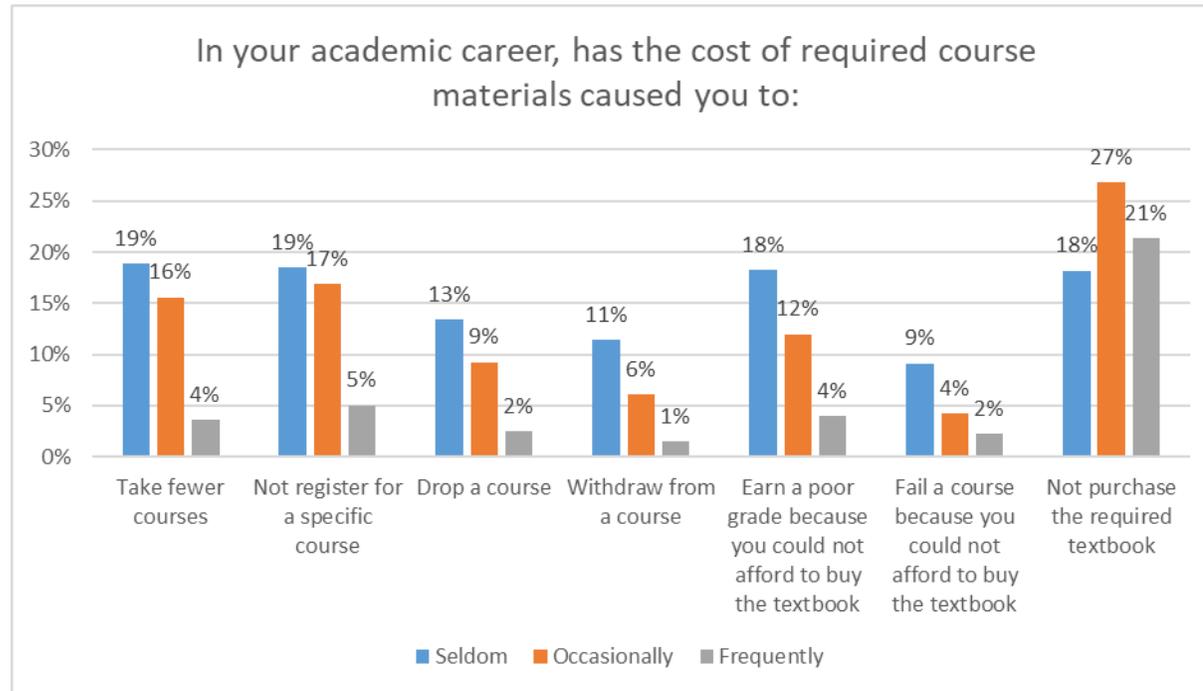
Academic Career Impact

The results show the deep impact of course material costs on Virginia students' academic careers, from progress (38% have taken fewer courses) to opportunity (40% have not registered for a specific course) to success (34% have earned a poor grade and 16% have failed).

These results closely mirror the results of the [2018 Florida Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey](#), further validating that they are broad, shared challenges in higher education.



Academic Career Impact



“High cost of course materials is a form of classism, truly. If a student is unable to purchase what they need for a class, they are already behind from the beginning.”

Looking more closely at the students who have had these experiences, there are smaller but important subsets of students who have had these difficult situations happen “Frequently.”

Course-Level Impact

“In the past I have specifically selected courses with a zero cost text option.”

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

“I struggled to take one course my Freshman year due to a textbook that cost upwards of \$200 - it was required for my major but I was forced to put it off.”

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

Students described course by course decisions based on course material costs, often mentioning the challenge of homework programs/access codes.

Broad Impact

“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.”

“I have to buy books and a parking pass and literally have all of \$70 left to buy groceries and that’s hard.”

“Didn’t feel like I could provide for my family or continue my education because I had to choose between food and a roof over our head or a textbook.”

Students also mentioned the impact of course material costs on their life and wellness.

Examining Educational Equity

Identified Areas of Concern

The Survey Task Force identified seven demographic areas of particular concern:

Funding Sources:

28.9% are using the Pell Grant Program to fund their education

35.4% are using Education Loans to fund their education

16.3% are using Full Time Job(s) to fund their education

Social Aspects:

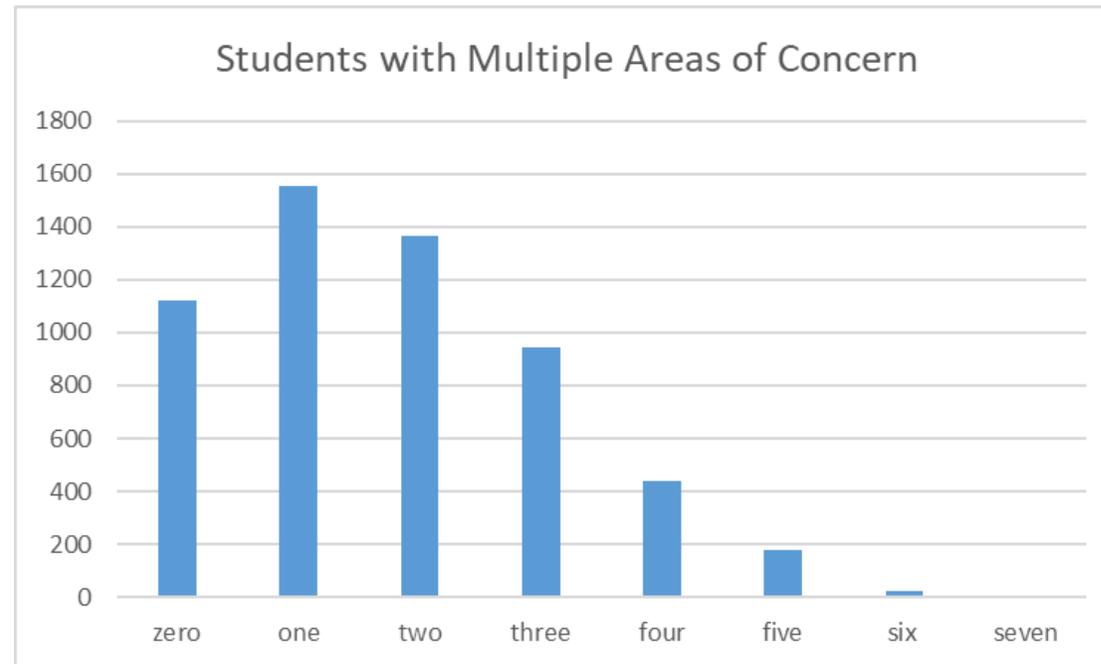
41.9% selected a race/ethnicity other than or in addition to White (defined here as Non White-Only)

30% identify as First Generation students

18% are currently taking care of children, parents, or other family members

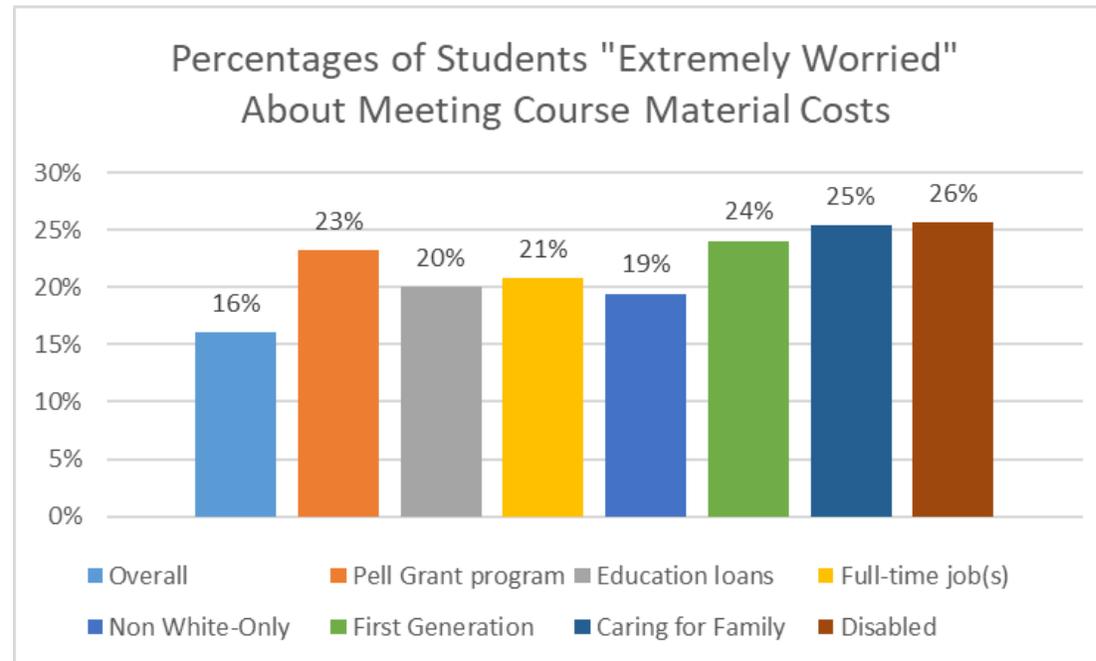
8.6% identified as having a Disability, and over half of these said that their disability affects how they use course materials

Populations of Concern



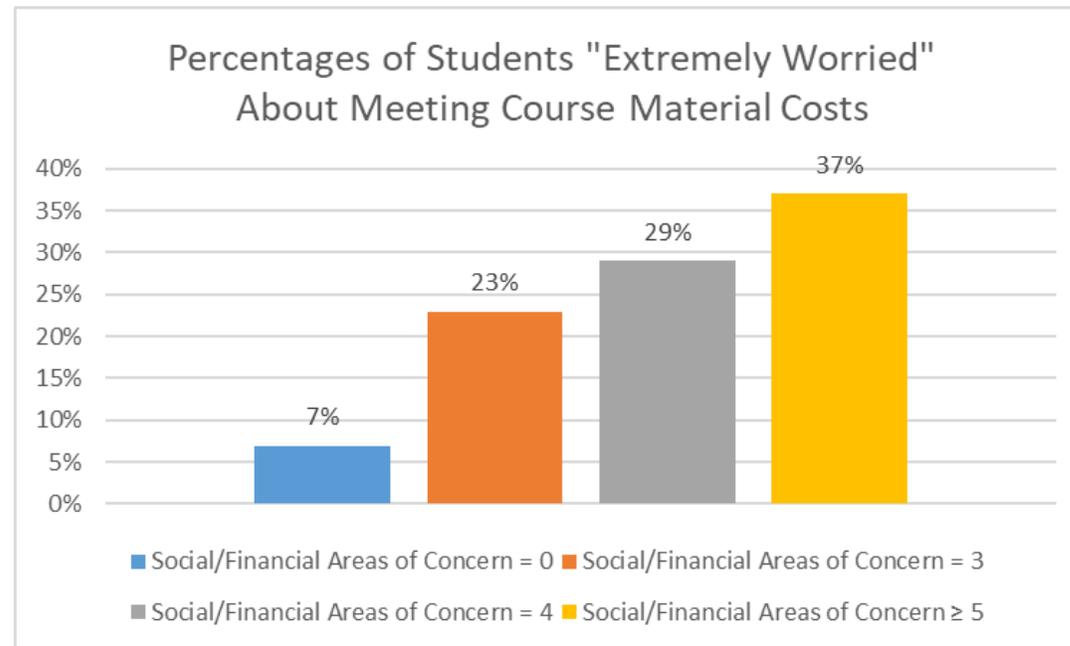
The number of areas of concern an individual student had was tracked to see if there were patterns in responses.

Worry about Course Material Costs



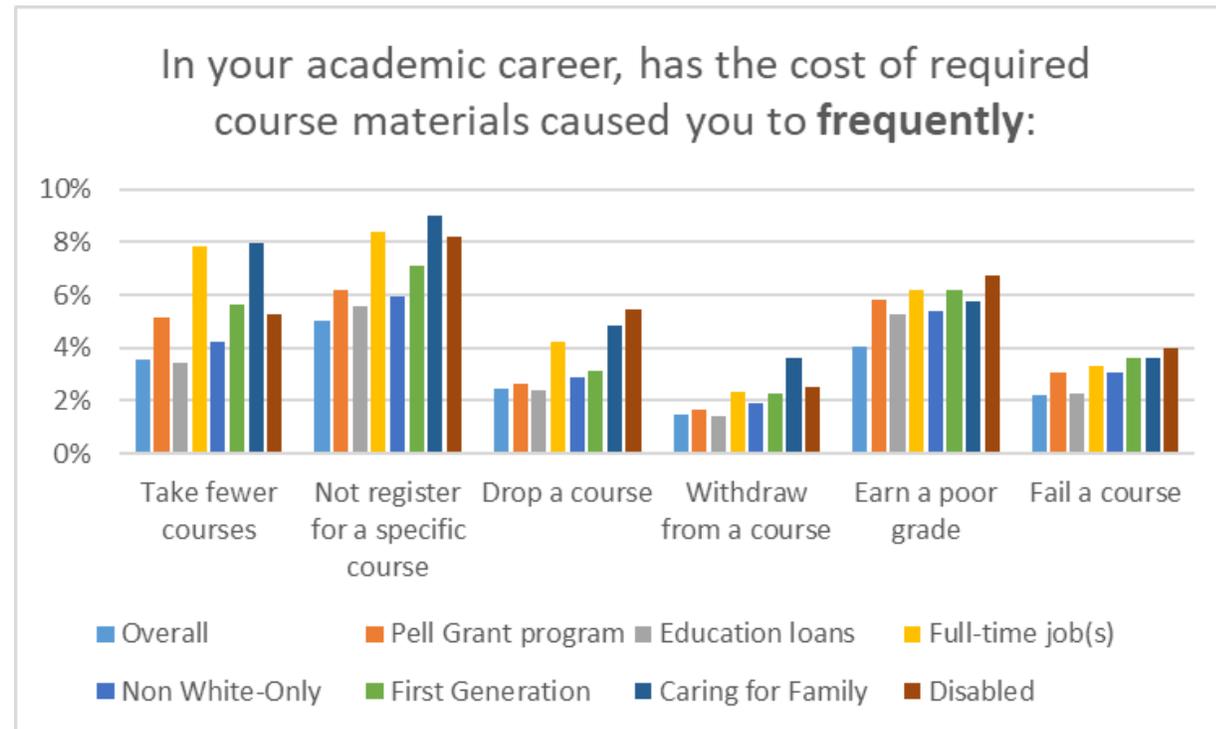
Each of the areas of concern had higher proportions of people who were “Extremely worried” about meeting their course materials costs than the overall group.

Worry about Course Material Costs



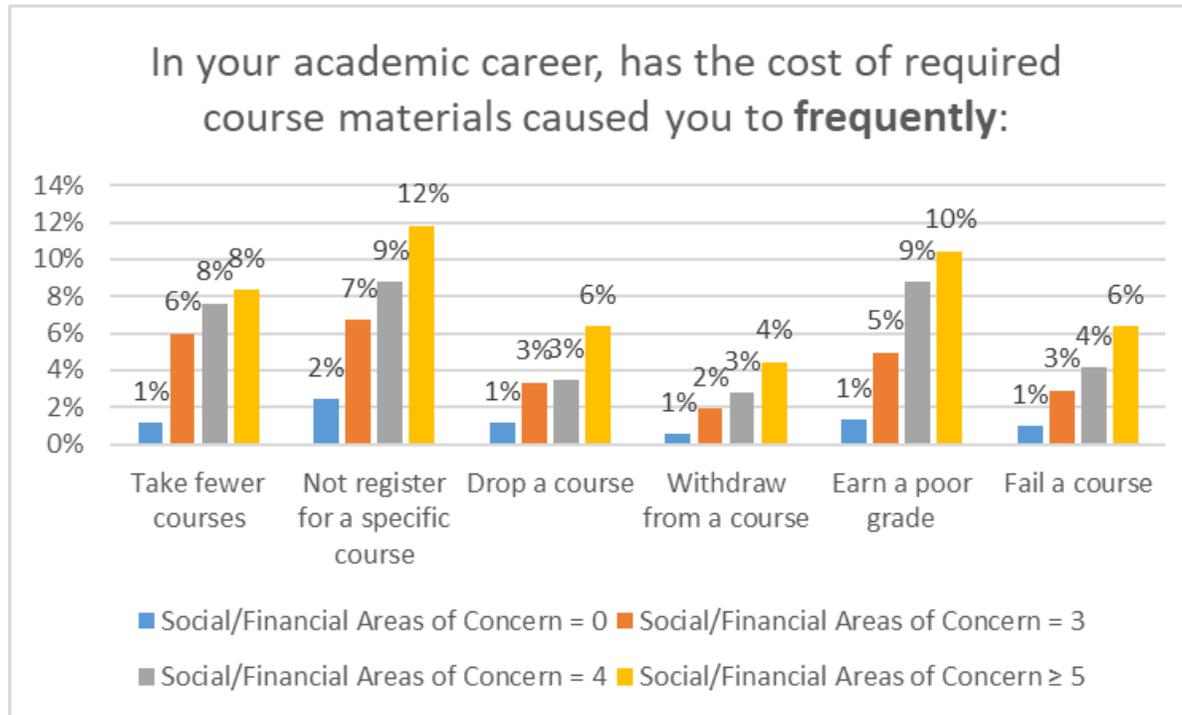
The effect on student worry grew with increasing numbers of the seven areas of concern identified. A First Generation, disabled student using Pell Grant funding, for example, would be more likely to be “Extremely Worried” about meeting course material costs than a student without any of the areas.

Academic Career Impact



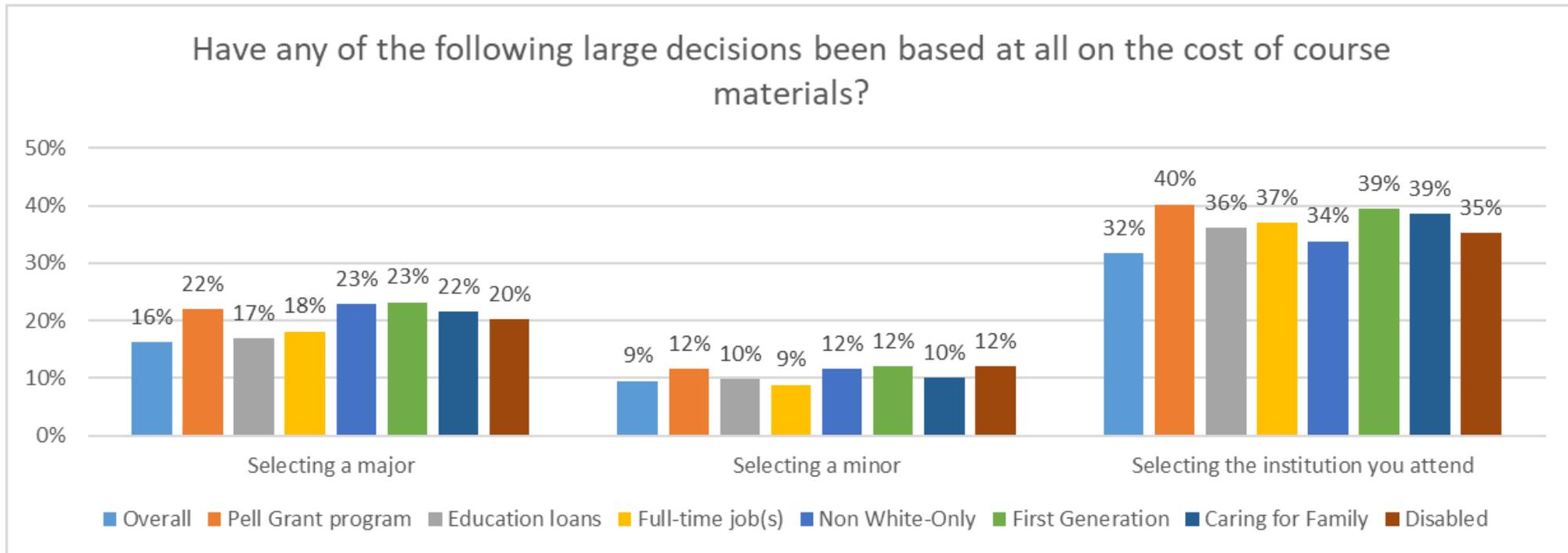
Of chief concern are students who frequently had these issues. Students in the areas of concern consistently showed higher percentages in these areas than the overall population.

Academic Career Impact



The effect on academic career challenges grew with increasing numbers of the seven areas of concern identified.

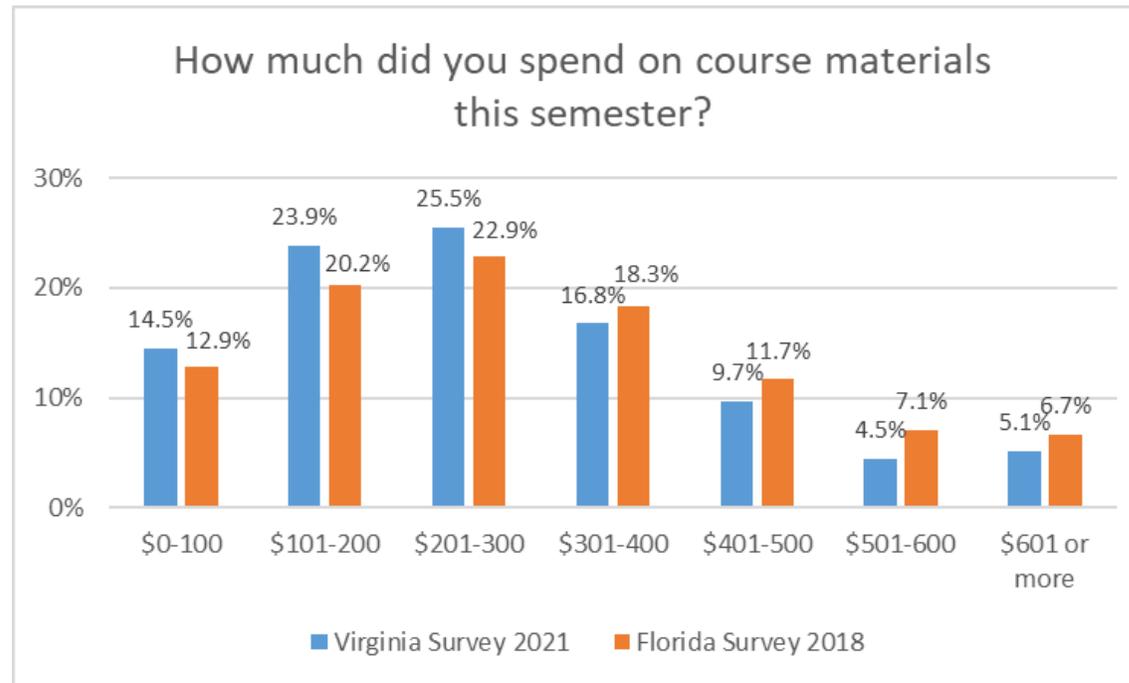
Impact on Large Decisions



The large decisions of major/minor/institution selection tended to have larger percentages of impact for students in areas of concern.

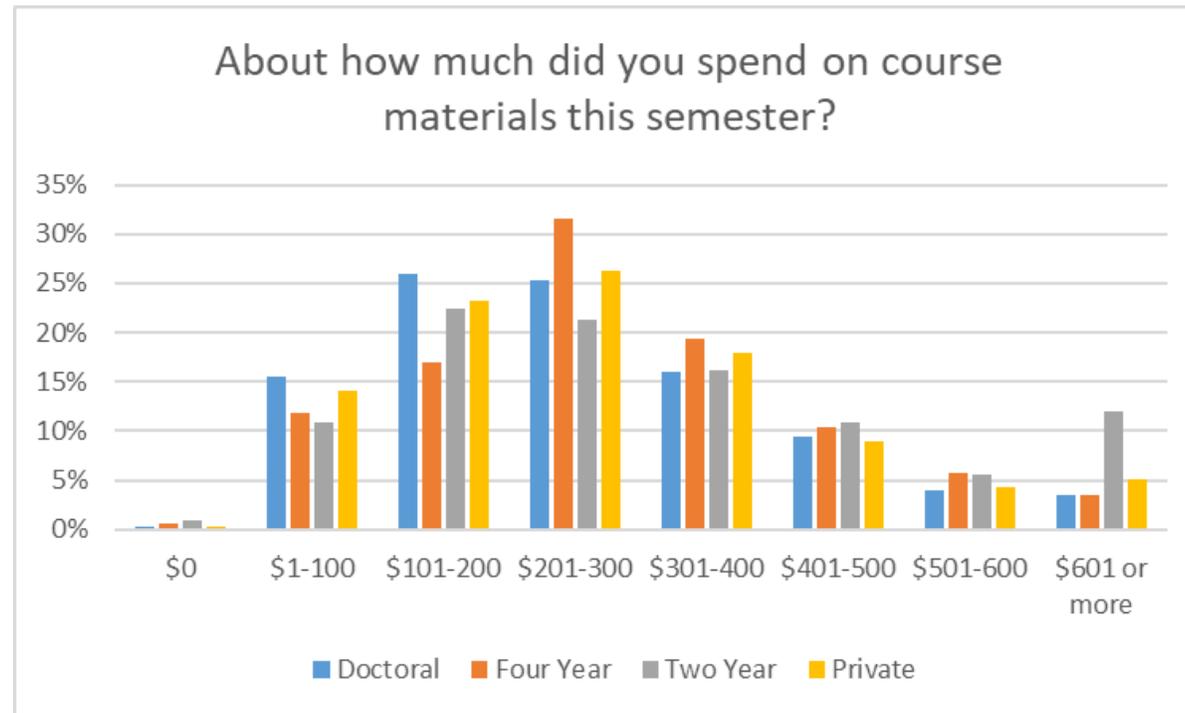
Examining Course Materials

Course Materials Expenditures



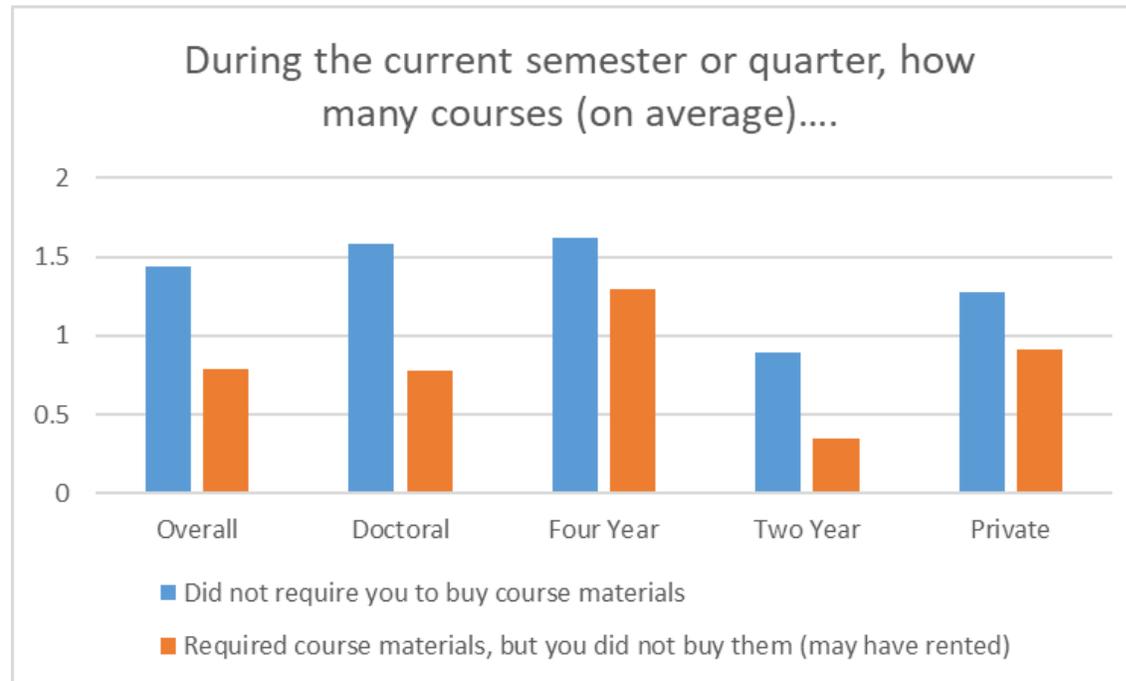
The results for the course material expenditures were similar to the results of the 2018 Florida Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey (<https://dlss.flvc.org/colleges-and-universities/research/textbooks>).

Course Materials Expenditures



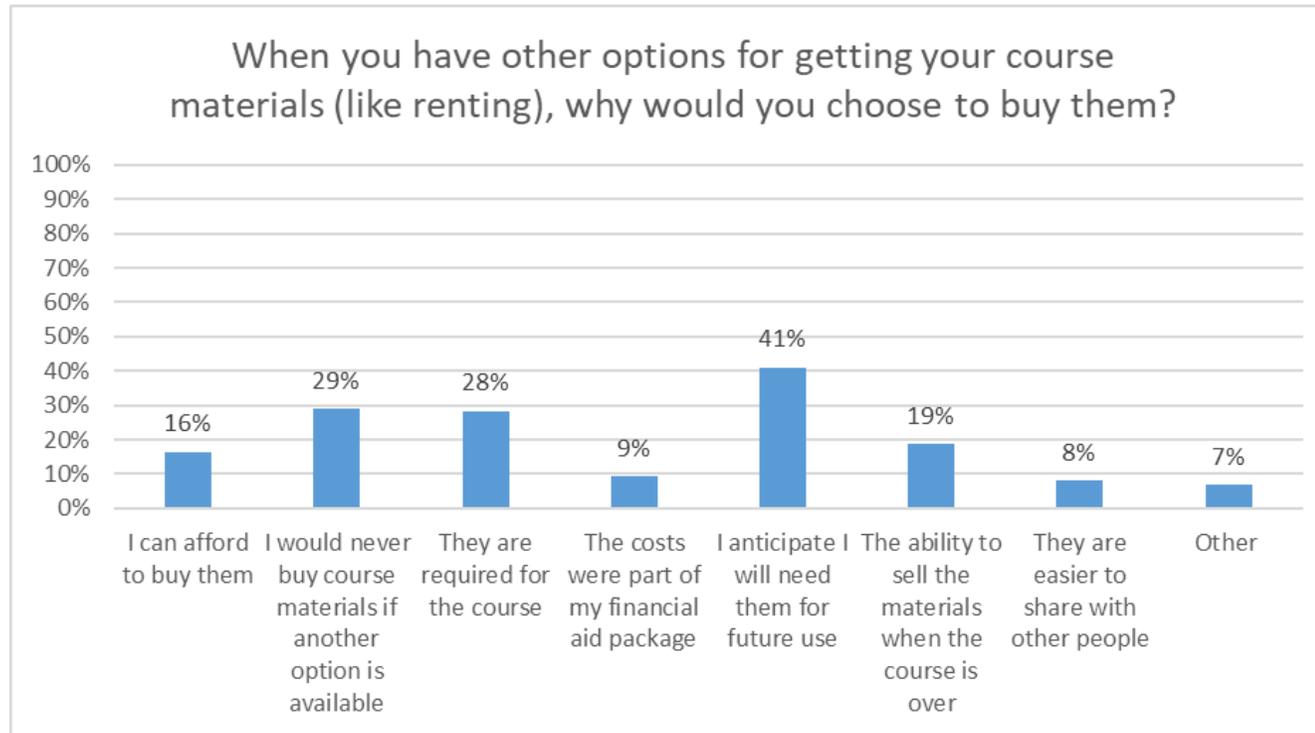
A notable departure from the pattern was the large percentage of students at two year institutions spending over \$601 in the current semester.

Required Materials



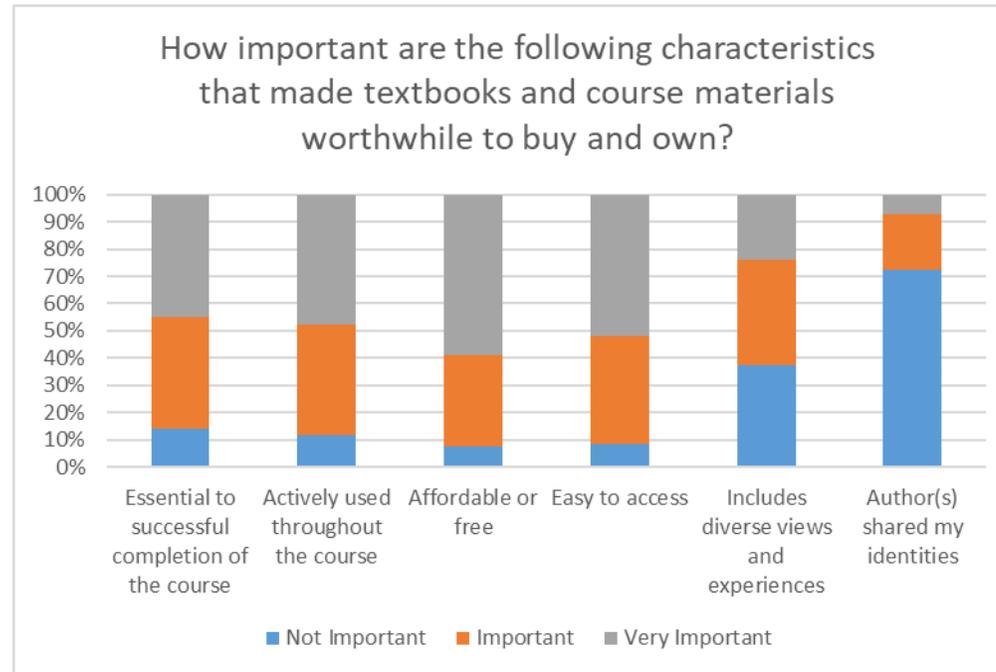
The number of courses in a given semester not requiring materials varied by institution type, as did trends in not buying (but possibly renting) required course materials.

Course Materials Value



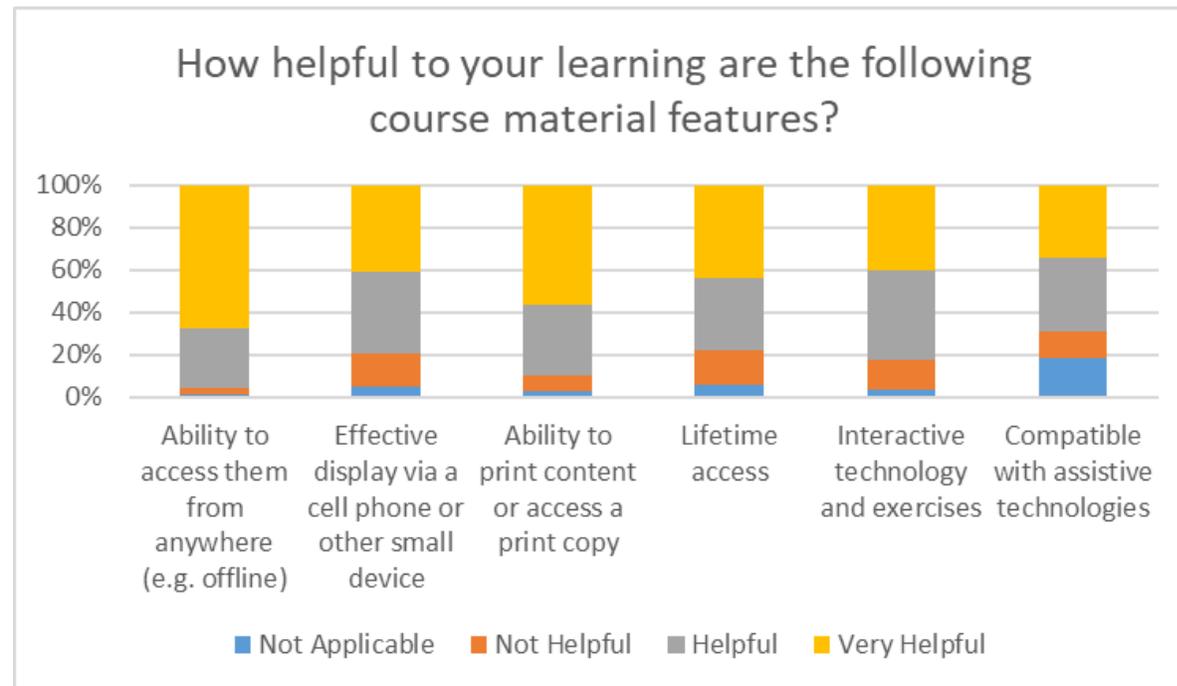
The most commonly cited reason to buy (rather than rent) course materials was anticipation of future use.

Course Materials Value



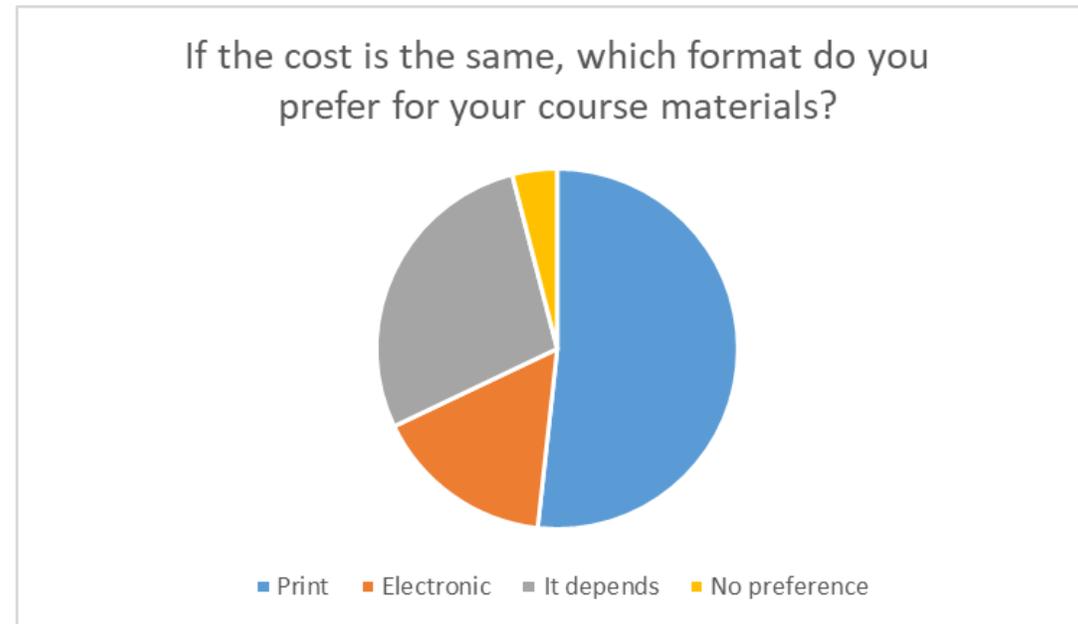
The most important characteristics that made course materials worthwhile to buy and own were that they were affordable/free, easy to access, actively used throughout the course, and essential to successful completion of the course.

Course Materials Value



The most helpful aspects of course materials were the ability to access them from anywhere (e.g. offline) and the ability to obtain a print version.

Print vs. Electronic

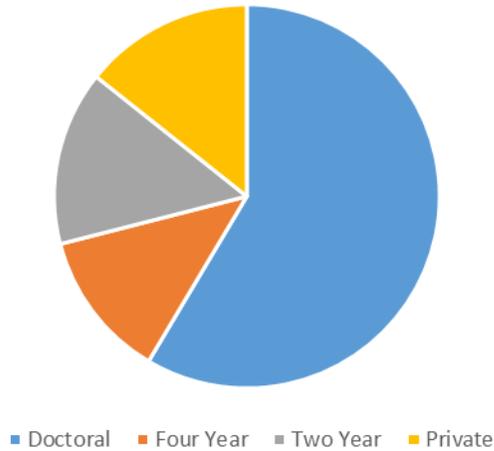


Slightly more than half of respondents preferred the print format for course materials, although over a quarter said that it depends.

Survey Demographics

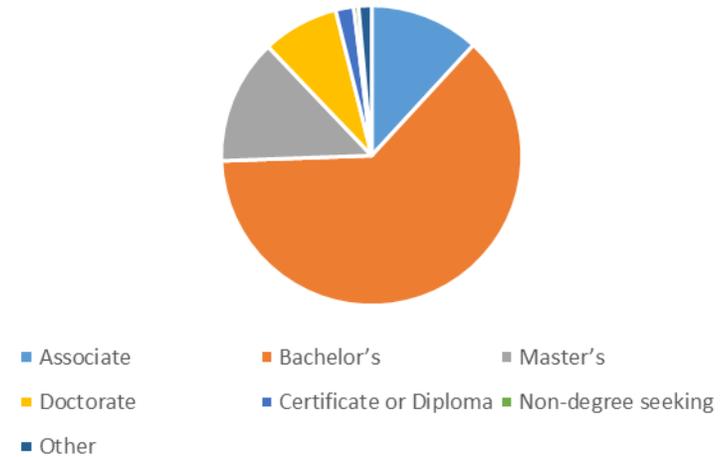
Response Descriptors

Response Count by Institution Type



All four VIVA institution types were represented, with the largest response from public doctoral institutions.

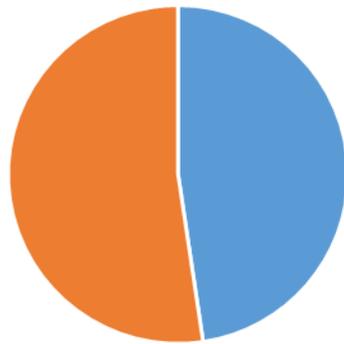
Response Count by Degree/Award



Many degree and award types were represented, with the largest response from students seeking Bachelor's degrees.

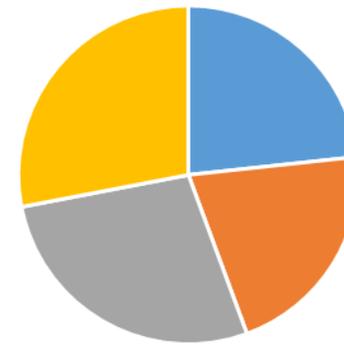
Response Descriptors

Associate's Degree Response Count by Credit Hours Completed



■ Less than 30 credit hours completed ■ More than 30 credit hours completed

Bachelor's Degree Response Count by Academic Level



■ Freshman ■ Sophomore ■ Junior ■ Senior

Students seeking Associate's and Bachelor's degrees were well-balanced by degree progress.

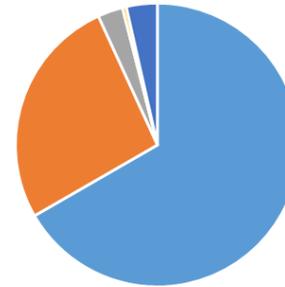
Response Descriptors

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



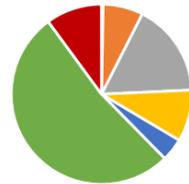
- American Indian or Alaskan
- Black
- Multi-Race
- Another not listed
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- White
- Prefer not to answer

Gender Identity (Check all that apply)



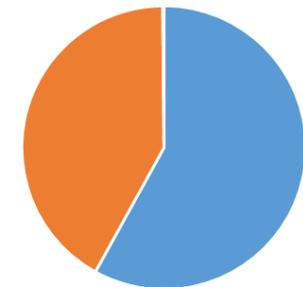
- Woman
- Man
- Nonbinary
- Another not listed
- Prefer not to answer

SCHEV Race/Ethnicity, Fall 2020



- American Indian/ Native American (NH)
- African American or Black (NH)
- Multi-Race (NH)
- Unknown/ Unreported (NH)
- Asian (NH)
- Hispanic
- White, Caucasian American (NH)

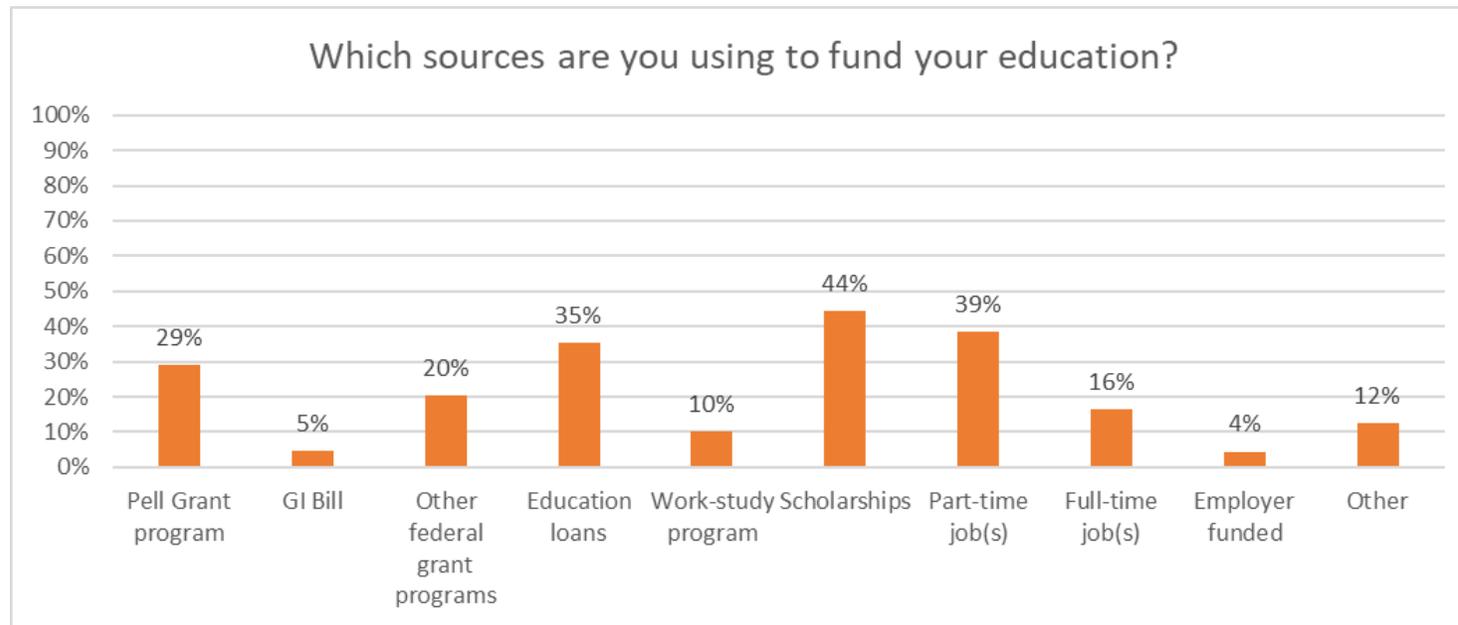
SCHEV Gender, Fall 2020



- Women
- Men
- Unknown/Unreported

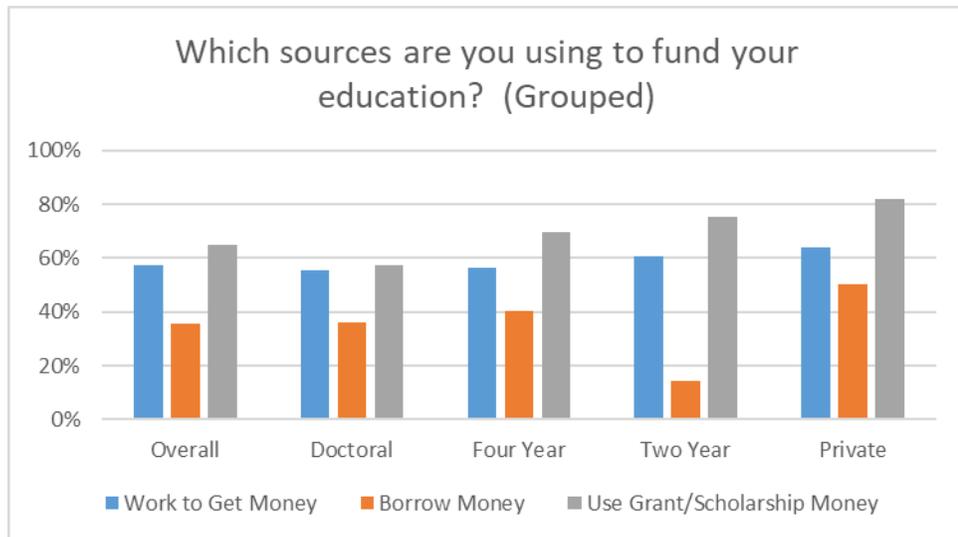
Race/ethnicity and gender identity reporting were similar to SCHEV/statewide population levels for higher education, with a strong response from respondents identifying as Women.

Funding Sources



The most common funding sources were scholarships, part-time job(s), and education loans.

Funding Sources



- **Work to get money:** Work study, PT job, FT job, Employer funded
- **Borrow money:** Education loans
- **Use grant/scholarship money:** Pell Grant, GI Bill, other federal grant programs, scholarships

Grouped funding sources varied by institution type.

Next Steps

This is intended to be a soft release of initial findings so that institutions can begin to discuss the local and statewide implications of the results.

A formal report is planned for Spring 2022.

If you have any questions, please contact viva@gmu.edu.