

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY 2021

RESULTS AND
FINDINGS

VIVA

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2021 VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

In 2019, VIVA, Virginia's academic library consortium, was charged by its Steering Committee to investigate the impact that course material costs have on educational equity for Virginia students. The Virginia Course Materials Survey, administered in Fall 2021, was VIVA's response to this charge.

VIVA serves 71 of the non-profit academic libraries in Virginia, including all 39 public colleges and universities, 31 independent universities, and the Library of Virginia.

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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.

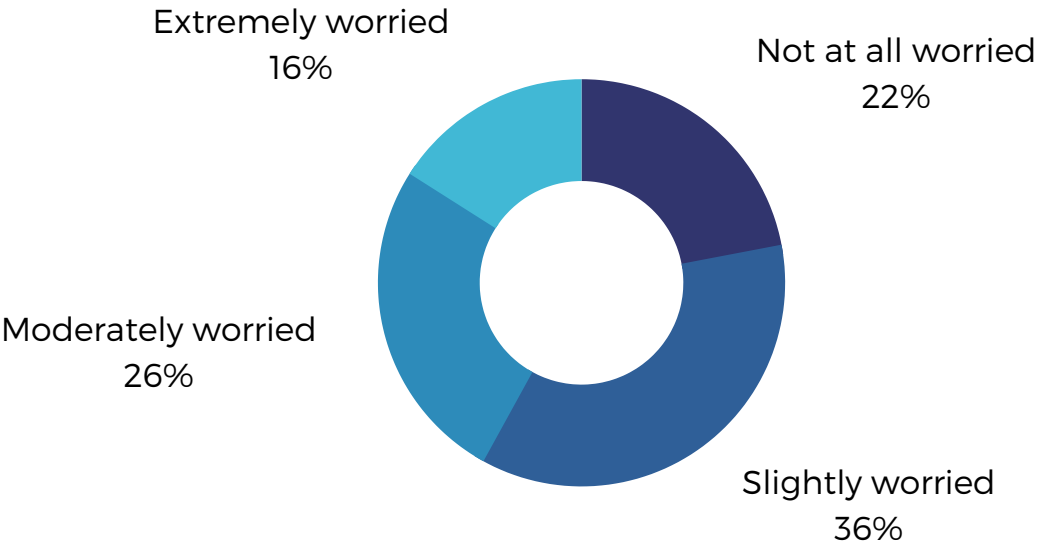
KEY FINDINGS

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?

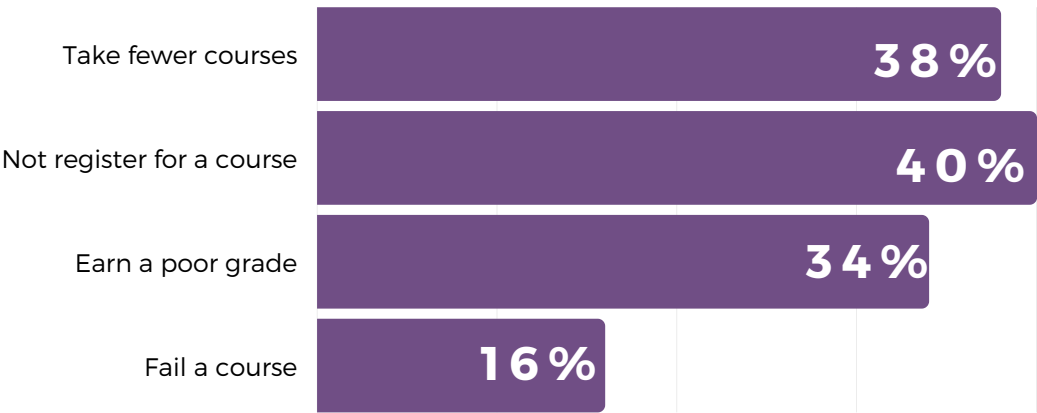


2

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."

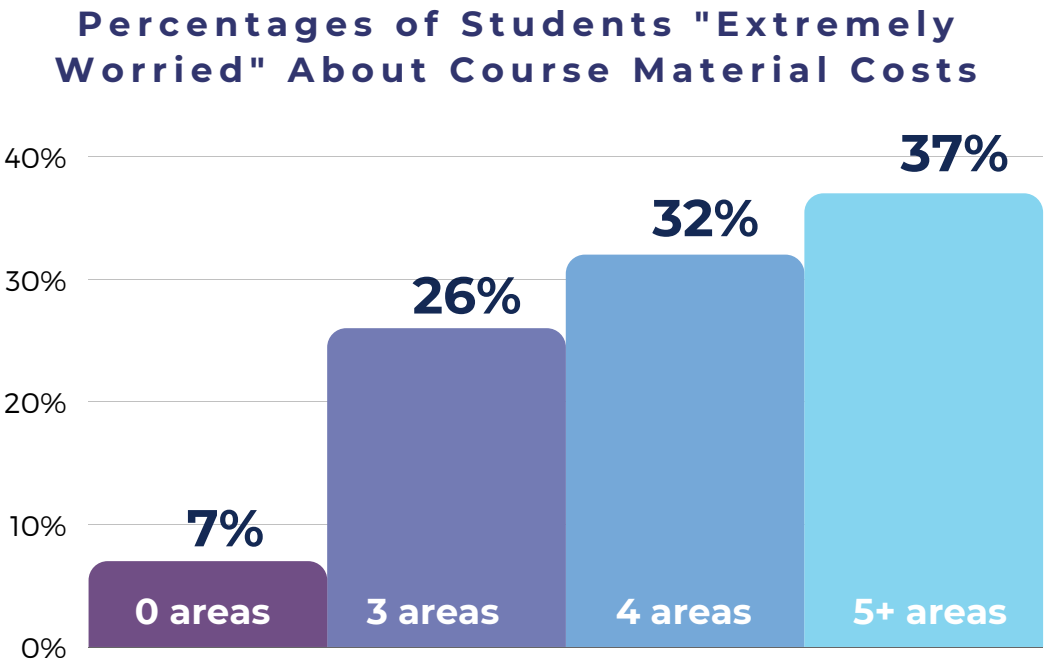
KEY FINDINGS

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.

5

COURSE MATERIALS WORRIES ARE AMPLIFIED BY AREAS OF CONCERN

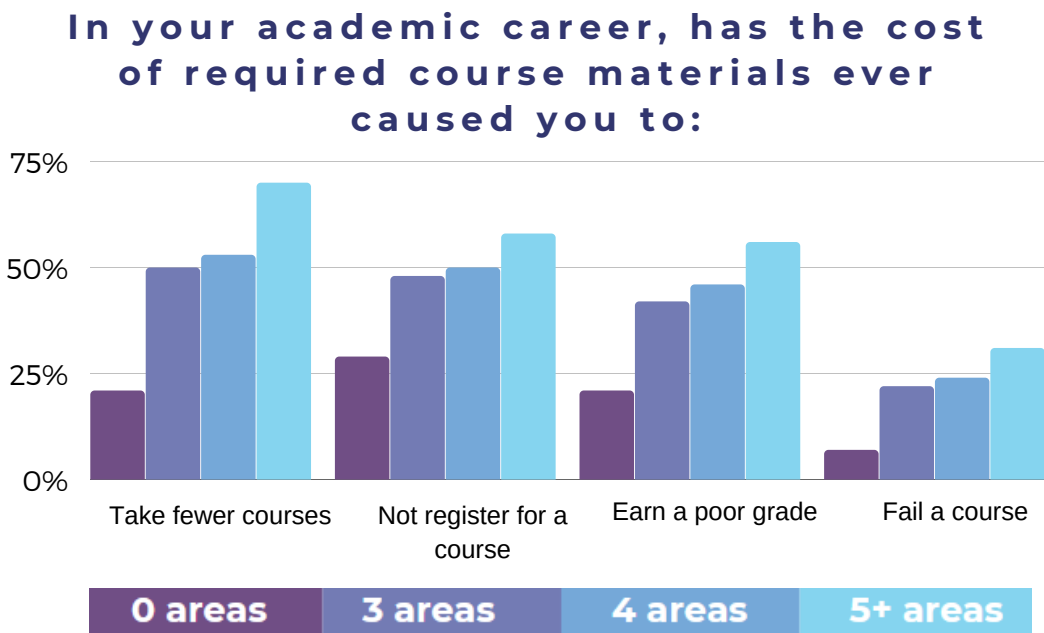
A student with **three areas of concern** (disabled, First Generation, and using Pell Grant funding, for example) would be **more likely to be “Extremely Worried”** about meeting course material costs than a student without any of the areas of concern.



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.



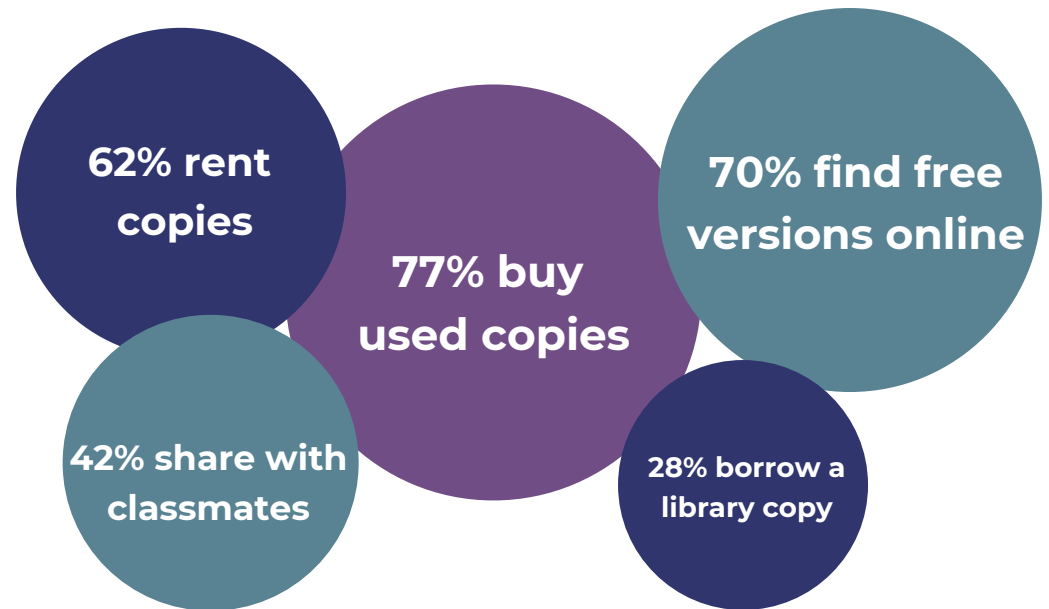
KEY FINDINGS

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...."

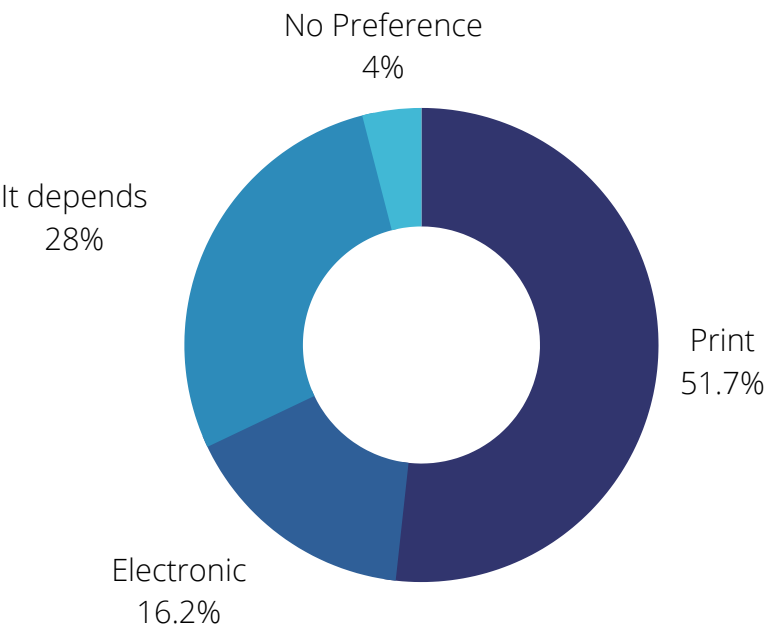
KEY FINDINGS

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?

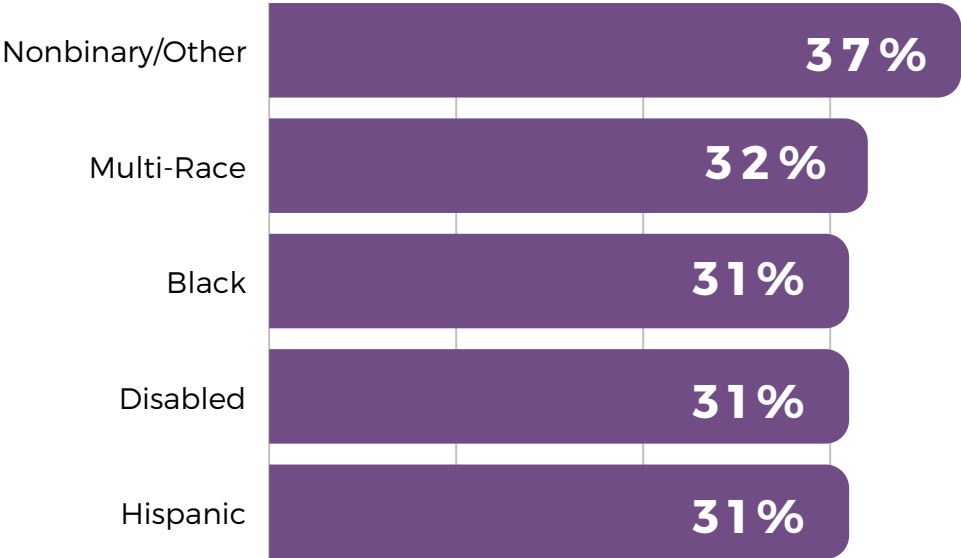


10

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?



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In late 2019, the VIVA Steering Committee convened a working group to conduct a survey exploring the relationships between student success and course materials, cost savings, and educational equity for Virginia students. Such localized data would be used to support VIVA and SCHEV to better understand the impact of course materials costs on Virginia higher education students, and would allow for data-driven development of VIVA's open and affordable course content programs to meet specific needs.

This initial working group began outlining the scope of the survey and drafting research questions. While there are many topics related to student success, course materials, and open education, the group believed that a more focused approach would better generate the data needed to shape VIVA priorities. Ultimately, the group felt that the survey should explore two related topics:

- The relationship between textbook costs and educational equity. This broad topic provides space to focus on the factors that influence student decisions about acquiring course materials and the impact that cost-driven decisions have on shaping academic careers, completing school, promoting learning, and academic success.
- Which course materials features are most beneficial to student learning. This topic provides space to focus on key positive features in course content (both open and commercial) as well as what is missing from assigned course content.

These topics would shape the direction of support and ensure that VIVA efforts would benefit as many Virginia students as possible, especially the most vulnerable populations. Further, this work would result in recommendations for how to create OER that would be the most beneficial for student learning.

In Summer 2020, VIVA partnered with the Virginia Assessment Group to grow the initial working group into a task force to develop the survey instrument and determine survey dissemination practices. The task force was comprised of members of VIVA staff, OER-focused librarians from VIVA institutions (representing all four institution types), and members of the Virginia Assessment Group.

SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

At the start of survey development, the task force reviewed similar studies. Virginia itself, through SCHEV, had explored textbook costs and purchasing practices in Fall 2005 in response to a legislative request (SCHEV, 2006). Looking outside of the state, the field of open education includes numerous investigations into the impact of textbook costs on students. Some of these studies gathered data at the national level (e.g. OER Research Hub, n.d.; Naigle & Vitez, 2020), while others have gathered data at the state or institutional level (Florida Virtual Campus).

The task force decided to use the 2012 Florida Student Textbook Survey as a starting point for the current survey. The Florida survey is a standard in the open education community due to its useful questions, large respondent pool, and multiple iterations, which allow analysts to track trends over time. In addition, it touched on both topics being explored, while many other tools focused on only a subset. While the 2012 version is not the most recent incarnation of the survey, this version was the only one that published the survey instrument under an open license, allowing for re-use.

The task force closely reviewed the 2012 Florida survey questions for alignment with the central driving questions of the project:

- 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?

Although these two central topics are related, each required separate data collection. In other words, outside of demographics, few, if any, questions could be asked which would collect data in response to both questions. Due to this, the task force had an eye on maximizing question real estate, limiting the total number of questions on the survey to ensure student survey completion. For each question, the group asked:

- Would the question collect an important data point for this study?
- Would the question generate actionable data for VIVA and its member institutions?

If the answer was no to either of these, the question was either adjusted or deleted. For example, while the Florida survey asked students' about their familiarity with open textbooks, the task force decided this was out of scope of the study and should be omitted.

In addition, each retained question's wording and responses were reviewed to ensure there were no gaps due to changes in the eight years since the original survey was disseminated or due to differing priorities between the two surveys. The task force worked to ensure that the questions and responses fully and succinctly addressed the project's primary research questions while also ensuring that the results could be compared to earlier research on the cost of course materials. For some questions, especially those exploring student preferences or choices, free response questions were added to assist in gathering additional contextual information that might be missed in the available responses.

Ultimately, only one question remained unedited from the Florida survey: "In your academic career, has the cost of required textbooks caused you to...." While the task force acknowledged the given responses might not be universal, this question and responses are commonly shared statistics in textbook affordability initiatives. As such, it was important to leave it unaltered to be used as a comparison and benchmark for the impact of textbook costs on Virginia students as compared to those in Florida and elsewhere in the United States.

Since the survey aimed to explore educational equity, special care was taken when developing the demographic questions. These questions were primarily based on the framework presented by Fernandez, et al (2016) and attempted to create a comprehensive yet inclusive survey experience. In addition to the given

answers, free response options were provided for those who selected "other" to further the inclusivity of the survey design.

As with the main sections of the survey, the task force strove to strike a balance between a manageable number of questions and maximizing the depth and breadth of questions needed to explore educational equity. Ultimately, the task force chose to collect information on race, gender, disability, educational funding sources, age, enrollment status (full time/part time) and other identities (e.g. first generation or caretaker). While socioeconomic status could be an additional factor, the task force opted to use Pell grant eligibility, an educational funding source, as a stand in, a standard practice in the open education field (e.g. Colvard, et al).

After initial development, the draft survey was shared with students working with task force members to test both recruitment language and the survey instrument for clarity and length. On the whole, the survey received a positive response and small edits were made as the survey was finalized. In early 2021, the survey was submitted to the George Mason Institutional Review Board (IRB), approved, and slated for dissemination in the Fall 2021 semester.

SURVEY DISTRIBUTION

For each participating institution, the Qualtrics survey was distributed via email to a 20% random sample or 100 students, whichever was greater. The variability among participating institutions necessitated a common sampling approach, and a simple random sample was deemed most appropriate. The community colleges discussed as a group that they should exclude dual-enrollment and prison student populations, due to their status as protected populations.

VIVA staff worked with institutional contacts to confirm participation and outline the distribution approach. They shared a link to the online survey with unique embedded location data to each participating institution, which enabled activity tracking and troubleshooting of issues during distribution. Location data also allowed the classification of participating institutions into institution type categories for reports. Institutions received a recruitment email message that included the survey link, as well as a reminder message. Participating institutions with at least 25 responses received summary-level data of their student responses without any individually identifying information about respondents.

DATA ANALYSIS

There were 6,691 total responses to the survey, and 5,632 of these were complete responses, which were used to create the set for the analysis.

The results were exported to Microsoft Excel for the quantitative portion of the analysis. Two variables were created to enable the analysis of many-to-one responses to demographic questions:

- Respondents were encouraged to check all that apply with a number of race/ethnicity identities. To enable analysis, a variable was created that differentiated between Non-White-Only and White-Only.
- Respondents were encouraged to check all that apply with a number of gender identities. To enable analysis, a variable was created with the options Man-Only, Nonbinary, Woman-Only, and Prefer Not to Answer.

Seven areas of concern, or characteristics that have historically been shown to have a negative impact on students' academic careers, were identified. Three are financial: using Pell Grant funding, education loans, and/or a full time job to fund the respondent's education, and four are social: race/ethnicity other than or in addition to White (defined here as Non White-Only), First Generation student, currently taking care of children, parents, or other family members, and having a disability. The cumulative counts of these areas of concerns were created as calculated

variables for each respondent. A First Generation student with a disability, for example, would be identified as having two areas of concern.

The results were imported into Qualtrics TextIQ for the qualitative portion of the analysis so that thematic codes could be applied. Responses were reviewed and a codebook was developed based on recurring topics. Some responses received multiple codes, as students shared several aspects of their experiences. The questions that elicited the most responses included:

- Can you please tell us more about how the cost of course materials has influenced your educational progress? (1,618 responses)
- Please tell us more about your format preference, including any relevance to accommodations: (1,903 responses)

RESULTS

The first research question this survey was designed to answer was what is the impact of course material costs on educational equity among Virginia students. A few questions attempted to gain an understanding of the general state of student experience with regard to course materials. Respondents were asked a sequence of questions about the current semester or quarter: how many courses are you taking; how many of those courses required you to buy course materials; and for how many of these courses did you actually buy (as opposed to rent) all of the required course materials.

These questions showed that, on average, students had around 1.4 courses in the given semester or quarter that did not require them to buy course materials. The average responses varied by institution type with the lowest average for students at two year institutions. In addition, on average, students did not buy course materials (although they may have rented them) for around 0.8 courses that required students to purchase course materials. Once again, the lowest average was for students at two year institutions (see Chart 1).

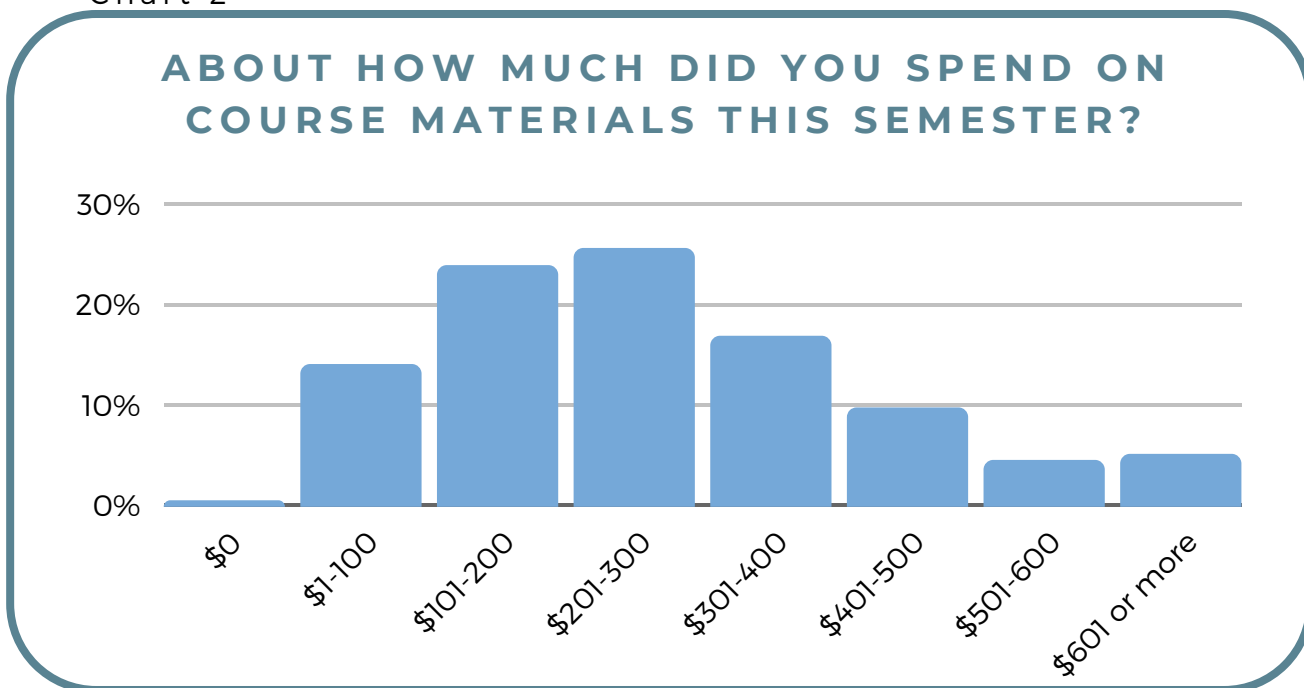
Chart 1

DURING THE CURRENT SEMESTER OR QUARTER, HOW MANY COURSES (ON AVERAGE)...



Students were asked to report an estimate of how much they spent on course materials, whether purchased, leased, or rented, during this semester, within particular ranges of amounts. The highest level of responses (26%) was for \$201-\$300 with levels falling off in both directions. Less than 1% of students reported that they did not spend any money, and around 5% reported that they spent more than \$601 (see Chart 2).

Chart 2



These results tracked closely with a similar question on the 2018 Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey conducted by the Florida Office of Distance Learning and Student Services (see Chart 3).

A notable difference among the institution types can be seen with the larger percentage of students at two year institutions, around 12% compared to 4% (doctoral), 3% (four year), and 5% (private) paying more than \$600 (see Chart 4).

Chart 3

HOW MUCH DID YOU SPEND ON COURSE MATERIALS THIS SEMESTER?

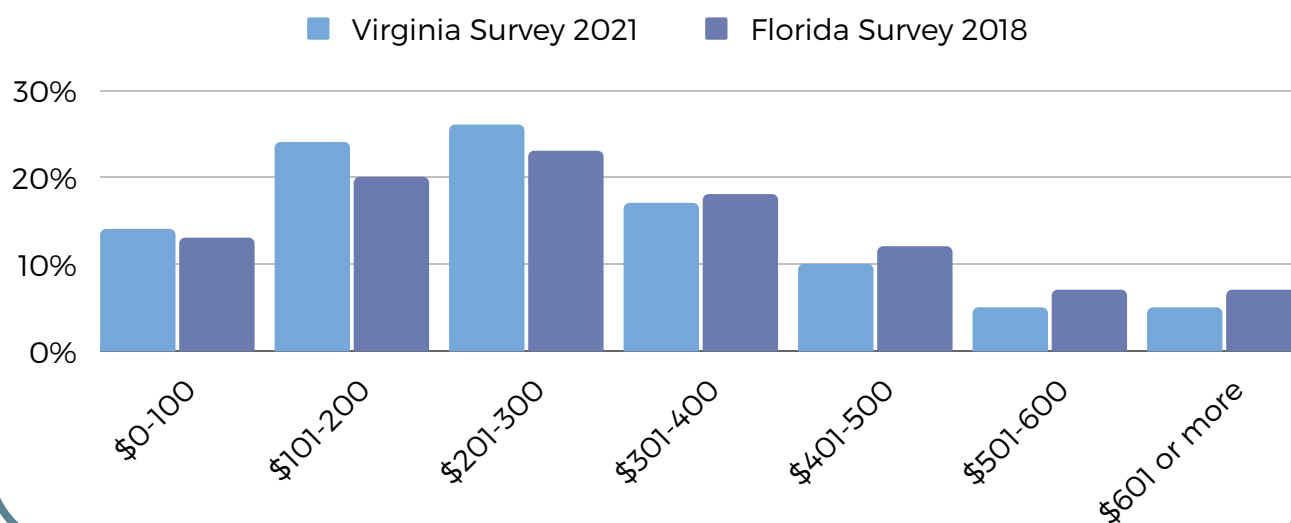
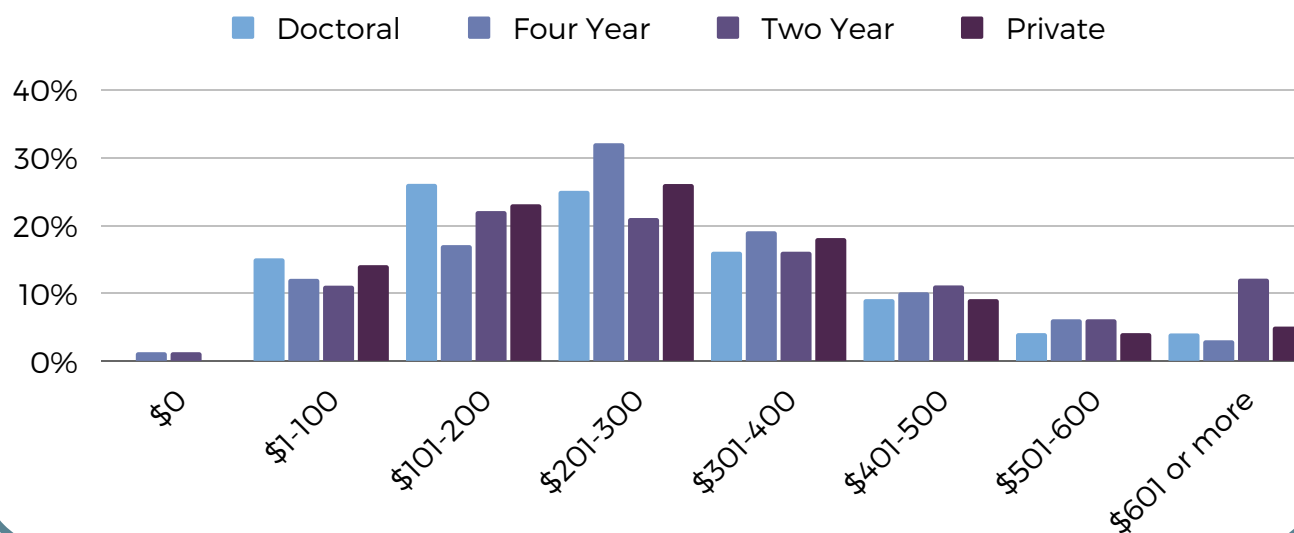


Chart 4

ABOUT HOW MUCH DID YOU SPEND ON COURSE MATERIALS THIS SEMESTER?

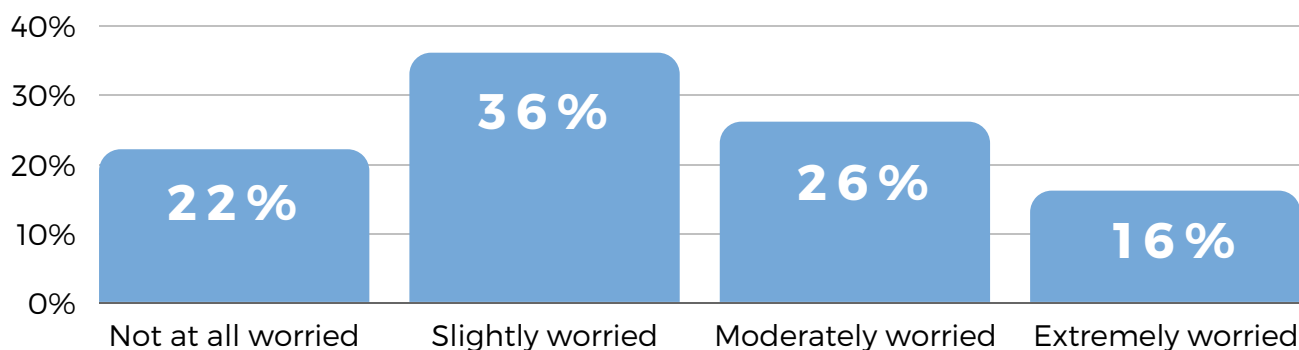


KEY FINDING 1: COURSE MATERIALS CAUSE STUDENTS WORRY

A basic but important question of the survey asked respondents: “How worried were you about meeting your course material costs this semester?” with four available responses: Not at all worried, Slightly worried, Moderately worried, and Extremely worried. Over three-quarters (78%) expressed some level of worry about meeting their course material costs, and 42% felt moderate to extreme worry about course material costs. These results highlight the stress placed on students by course material costs (see Chart 5).

Chart 5

HOW WORRIED WERE YOU ABOUT MEETING YOUR COURSE MATERIAL COSTS THIS SEMESTER?



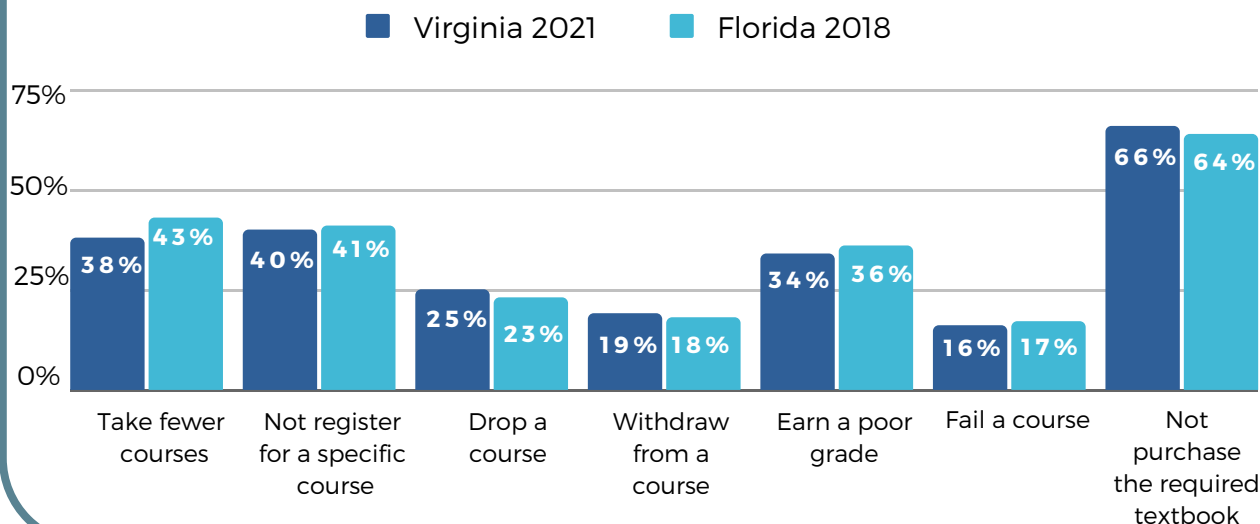
KEY FINDING 2: STUDENTS' ACADEMIC CAREERS ARE DAMAGED BY COURSE MATERIAL COSTS

One of the goals of this survey was to compare a core question of the Florida Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey to a new population of higher education students. To this end, the same question from the 2012 openly-licensed version of the Florida survey was used. This question asked “In your academic career, has the (cost of required course materials caused you to...” for a variety of outcomes, all ranked by frequency (Never, Seldom, Occasionally, or Frequently). The results from this survey 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 (see Chart 6).

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

Chart 6

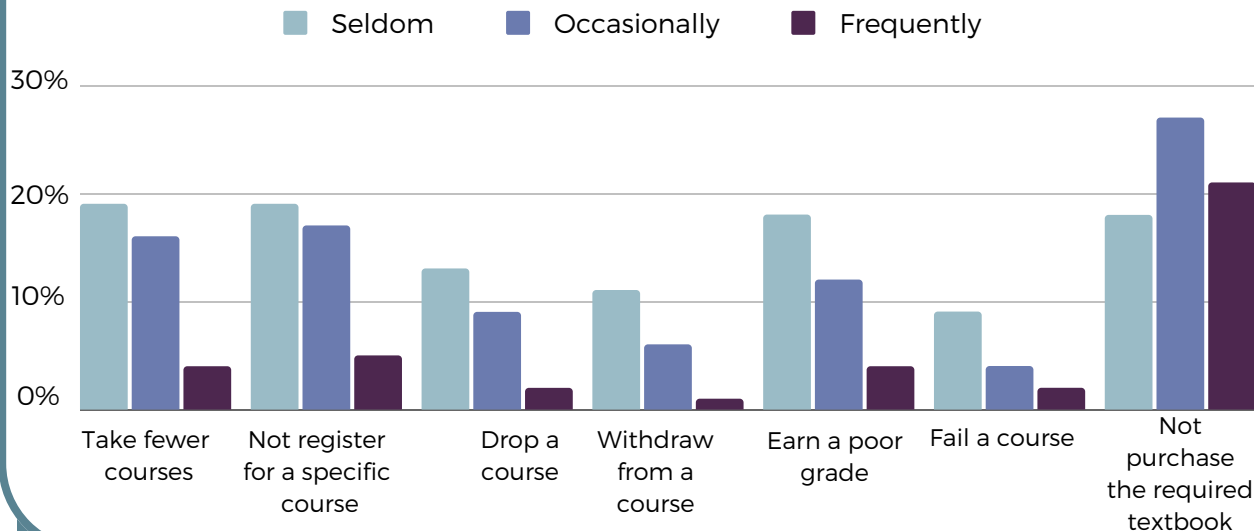
IN YOUR ACADEMIC CAREER, HAS THE COST OF REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS CAUSED YOU TO:



The results also show the deep impact of course material costs on Virginia students' academic careers, from progress (38% have taken fewer courses, 25% have dropped a course, and 19% have withdrawn from a course) to opportunity (40% have not registered for a specific course) to success (34% have earned a poor grade and 16% have failed). Two thirds of students have not purchased the textbook because of the cost. For a small subset of students (with the exception of not purchasing the required textbook, which had over one fifth of students frequently having this outcome), these experiences are frequent (see Chart 7).

Chart 7

IN YOUR ACADEMIC CAREER, HAS THE COST OF REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS CAUSED YOU TO:



Many survey respondents took the time to add additional context to their responses, highlighting the specific ways in which costs had impeded educational goals. Students reported starting behind in classes because they did not have funds to purchase materials at the start of the semester, and were busy finding alternative or cheaper options.

"I didn't have enough money to buy the textbook at first, so I had to wait to earn enough money until I actually could afford it. By then, we had already had our first test, and I didn't do well because I hadn't read the textbook."

Further corroborating the quantitative results, students frequently asserted in comments that they were making choices about which courses to pursue based on costs rather than educational interest.

"I have had to drop entire programs within the [retracted] college system because I couldn't afford books. Also, colleges seldom tell you that there's a cap on how much financial aid you can use in the bookstore at a given time. I've almost never had textbooks within that range. Programs such as the Paramedic & Nursing programs have books that you need to BUY, not rent, for over \$1000 by the first semester. Most classes now require Pearson codes, too, so you can't rent textbooks at a more affordable rate because you have to spend \$100+ on an access code anyway."

Respondents also often noted that they were dropping classes if costs were too high, and even occasionally making large programmatic decisions about majors and minors based on course material costs.

"I have not taken classes I was interested in or switched professors because I could not afford the required materials. This was especially the case when I was a STEM major."

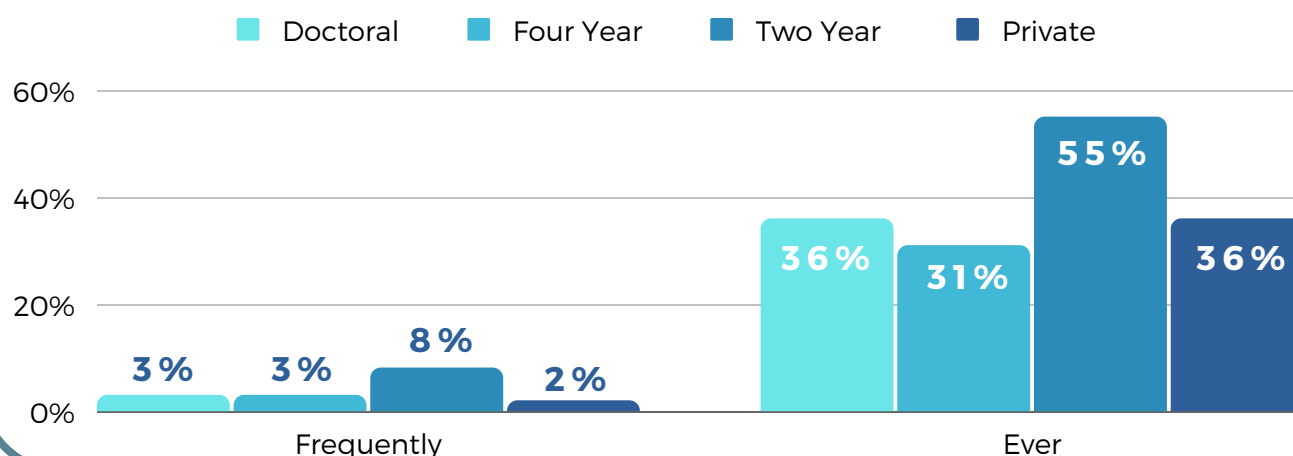
"The cost of course materials has greatly influenced my educational progress. As the questions have asked above, I've either dropped courses or received poor marks because of the cost of these materials. This means I've missed out on classes I am actually interested in, and have taken less enticing substitutes."

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

One of the key areas of difference between the two year institution respondents and those from other institutional types was the impact of course material costs on degree progress, or taking fewer courses. Both in the case of students who frequently or ever (seldom, occasionally, or frequently) experience this, the two year respondents had a much higher rate (see Chart 8).

Chart 8

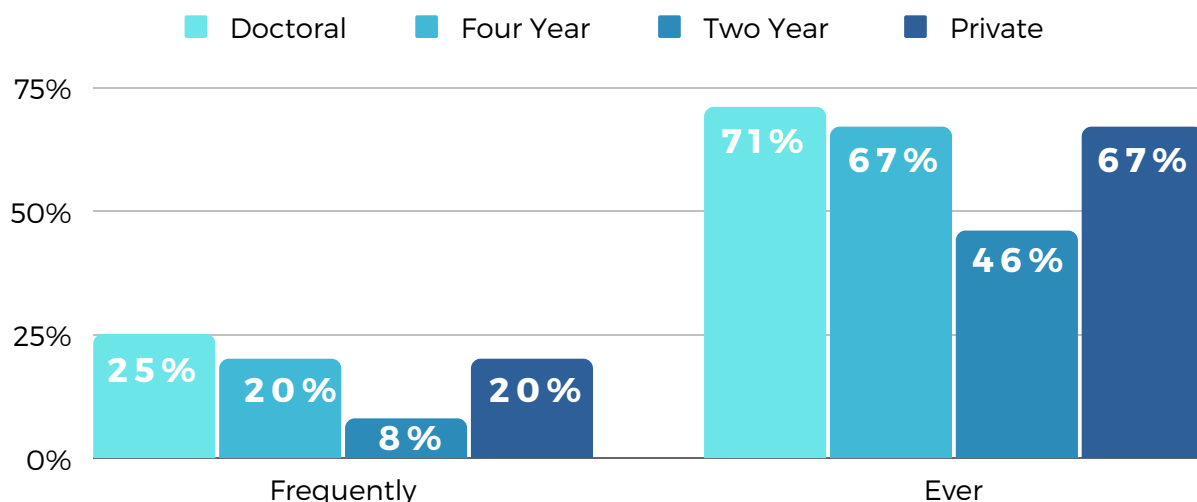
IN YOUR ACADEMIC CAREER, HAS THE COST OF REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS CAUSED YOU TO TAKE FEWER COURSES?



The opposite trend was true for the impact of course material costs on not purchasing the required textbook. Both in the case of students who frequently or ever experience this, the two year respondents had a lower rate (see Chart 9).

Chart 9

IN YOUR ACADEMIC CAREER, HAS THE COST OF REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS CAUSED YOU TO NOT PURCHASE THE REQUIRED TEXTBOOK?

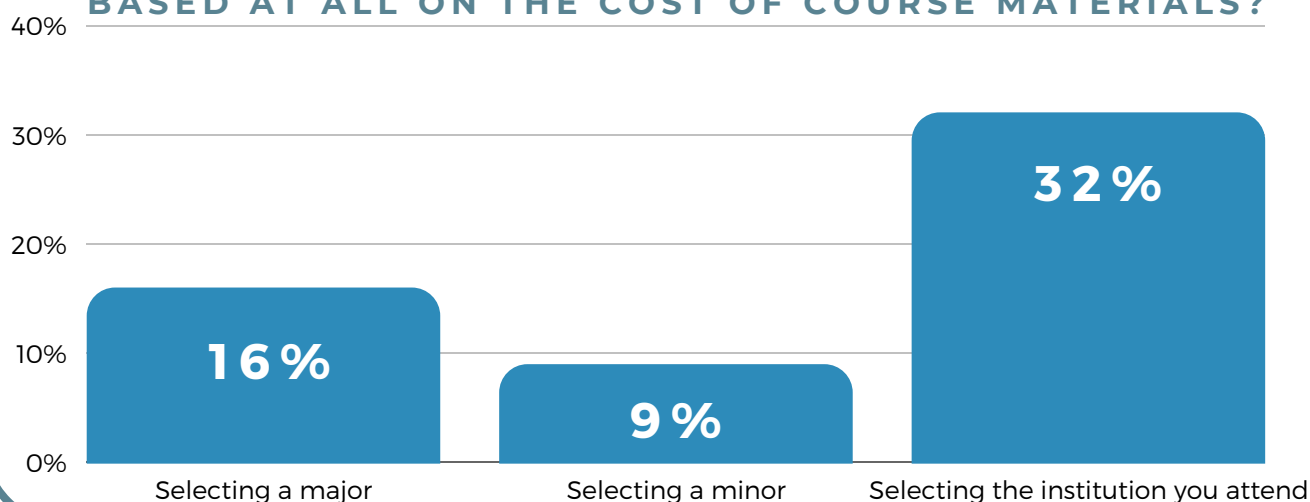


KEY FINDING 3: COURSE MATERIAL COSTS ARE A FACTOR IN LARGE ACADEMIC CAREER DECISIONS

Some of the most significant decisions that students make during their academic careers are which institution to attend and what their major(s) and minor(s) will be. It was clear from the results that many students are thinking about course material costs as they weigh the factors in these large decisions, as nearly a third (32%) indicated that course material costs were a factor in deciding which institution to select, and 16% chose their major and 9% chose their minor based, at least in part, on course material costs (see Chart 10). Student comments illuminated the role that discipline might play here, with particular concerns about STEM-related courses. For example, "Often times in stem courses I couldn't afford the books, which led me to not pursuing my original major" and "I was originally a biology major, but am now an English major. The biology textbooks were extremely expensive and hardly ever fully used."

Chart 10

HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING LARGE DECISIONS BEEN BASED AT ALL ON THE COST OF COURSE MATERIALS?



Qualitative survey results reveal that in addition to making large decisions, students also make elective course selections based on course material costs, choosing not to pursue courses of interest, or switching to a different professor.

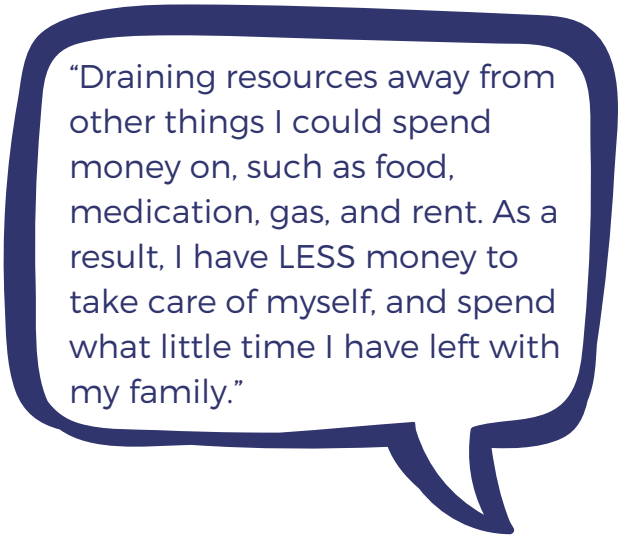
"As a student on scholarships that don't necessarily cover the cost of my materials, I am careful to check sites like RateMyProfessor before registering for a class. I do this because if materials for the course are required and aren't available to me at a good price, I end up having to not take that class. This has cost me many credits that I would've enjoyed instead of taking a course as a last resort."

KEY FINDING 4: THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF COURSE MATERIAL COSTS GOES BEYOND ACADEMIC CAREER CHALLENGES

Many respondents noted the negative impact of course material costs on their life and wellness. Even though survey respondents were not specifically asked about this area, they overwhelmingly chose to provide additional information on the larger impacts on their lives of these costs when responding to open-ended questions. Concerns about meeting basic needs were often expressed as students negotiated the challenge of finding funds to purchase course materials. Respondents also noted that the stress of course material costs compromised their mental health and sometimes created or added to feelings of distrust towards faculty, institutions, and higher education in general. This sometimes led to feelings of inequity, as some respondents reported being acutely aware of their disadvantaged status in comparison to peers who had the resources to acquire all their course materials. Student debt was also an area of significant concern, with many respondents reporting the costs of course materials as a factor in the cumulative total of their student debt. A number of respondents reported needing to work more hours and/or more jobs to be able to meet the costs, which had an adverse impact on their academic achievement. These areas are examined in more detail below.

BASIC NEEDS

Many students expressed having to compromise on basic needs in order to afford and acquire course materials.



“Draining resources away from other things I could spend money on, such as food, medication, gas, and rent. As a result, I have LESS money to take care of myself, and spend what little time I have left with my family.”

Students repeatedly mentioned sacrificing well-being in order to afford course materials by limiting the money they spent on groceries or health needs, such as medication:

"There have been multiple occasions when I have had to choose between paying for a textbook or buying groceries for myself. There have been multiple occasions when I had to not take a prescription medicine because I could not afford to pay for my meds and my textbooks."

One student articulated the extreme life challenges students face in order to receive a post-secondary education, noting the survey's focus on academics was shortsighted:

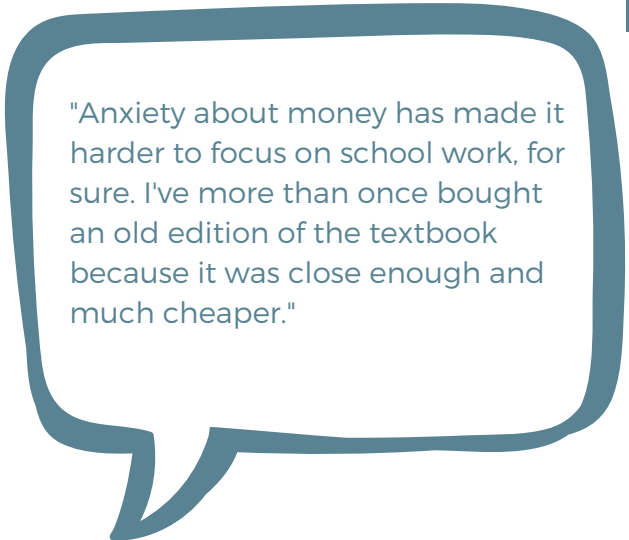
"You're REALLY focused on the academic aspect of all of this. Do you realize that most students will skip meals, forego transportation, work multiple jobs, in order to pay for their books before they do things like drop a required course or, worse, get a bad grade in a course from their program?"

Some students reported that the ability to focus academically was impacted by having fewer funds to meet basic needs:

"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."

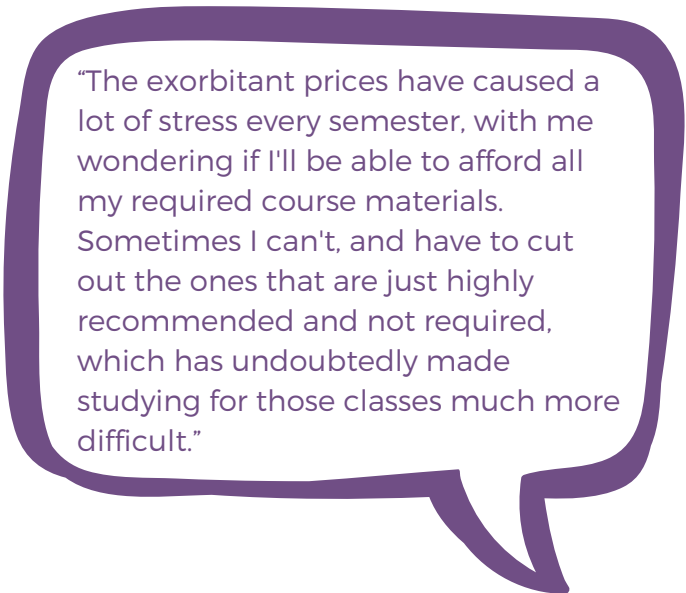
MENTAL HEALTH

Many students reported feeling stress, anxiety, and worry about how they were going to meet their course material costs. Some commented on how their mental state was impacting their ability to focus on their academic pursuits:



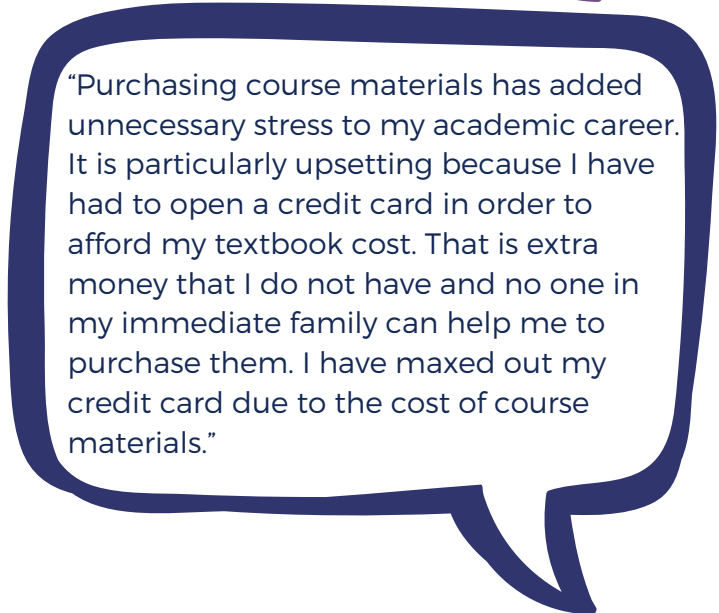
"Anxiety about money has made it harder to focus on school work, for sure. I've more than once bought an old edition of the textbook because it was close enough and much cheaper."

Being unable to afford the course materials and pursuing the class without the required materials created stress and anxiety about succeeding in the course:



"The exorbitant prices have caused a lot of stress every semester, with me wondering if I'll be able to afford all my required course materials. Sometimes I can't, and have to cut out the ones that are just highly recommended and not required, which has undoubtedly made studying for those classes much more difficult."

Finding the funds or using credit cards to pay for their course materials contributed to feelings of stress:



"Purchasing course materials has added unnecessary stress to my academic career. It is particularly upsetting because I have had to open a credit card in order to afford my textbook cost. That is extra money that I do not have and no one in my immediate family can help me to purchase them. I have maxed out my credit card due to the cost of course materials."

A small subset of students also reported feeling shame at not having the means to acquire their materials:

"The shame and guilt of struggling in a class when the materials cost so much money has been hard to escape. This leads to mental fatigue and sadness, which hinder my academic performance overall."

DISTRUST

Feelings of being misled by the higher education system suggest that students do not have confidence in their academic communities. This can be seen in a strong sense of distrust articulated by many respondents:

"It has caused frustration and distrust of individual courses. Many of my classes have required textbooks (\$100 and up) only to not open the book once during the semester. What a waste of time."

These negative perceptions also colored students' experience of coursework:

"...I've either dropped courses or received poor marks because of the cost of these materials. This means I've missed out on classes I am actually interested in, and have taken less enticing substitutes. Additionally, spending more on materials makes me go into courses begrudgingly, rather than with a positive outlook."

Several expressed frustration with faculty who assign a self-authored textbook and felt they were being exploited by this practice, as well as it being a conflict of interest for the faculty author:

"Many of my courses have required very expensive, tailor-made textbooks that can't be bought from Amazon or other retailers for cheaper. These textbooks are often created by or have had some influence by professors. This clearly shows that many professors are benefiting and making money by requiring their textbooks to be used for courses. Most of the time, these professor-made textbooks are actually rarely used in class and is a huge waste of money for students, yet profitable for professors."

Feelings of exploitation extended to the university and higher education system more broadly, and some students felt that higher education was partnering with big publishers at their expense:

"It makes me hate and distrust the university when they partner with highwaymen like Pearson and Cengage."

DEBT

Students expressed concerns about accumulating debt and the cost of course materials that adds to this burden:

"I have had to take out extra loans to cover the cost of course materials, loans that will take years to pay back because a degree doesn't even guarantee better jobs/compensation. I have considered dropping out."

"It caused me using my credit card and eventually having a hard time paying it off."

One respondent noted that the survey's focus on academic success was shortsighted because of the greater importance of costs:

"This survey is missing the point. As a student, I have had to pay anywhere from \$300-1,000 for books. Since we don't make a lot of money, that money usually comes out of student loans. An extra \$2,000 per year in student loans means that I will end up paying something like \$5,000 with interest while I pay back those loans. Multiply that by 4 years for a BA, and you are looking at a likely total of around \$20,000. For books. It's ridiculous."

Some had doubts about whether higher education is worth the cost, especially given their debt accumulation:

"Cost of course materials is very likely to cause me to take out more student loans and end up with more debt at the end of my college journey. Student loans/debt is something that causes me a lot of stress/anxiety and fuels a doubt in my mid [sic] as to whether or not attending college is worth it."

DOUBT

Students expressed feelings of doubt and/or frustration that they are paying a high price for tuition and are expected to buy course materials too:

"Textbooks and course materials are way too expensive considering how much we pay for school already."

"I pay my own tuition which ranges from \$6000 - \$8000 a semester. Add mandatory costs of parking pass, gas, food, necessities, textbook costs are the biggest hassle and sometimes unnecessary. Professors will say we need a required textbook and only use a couple chapters from it."

Some students also questioned the value of their education when they are being asked to teach themselves the materials or learn through online homework platforms.

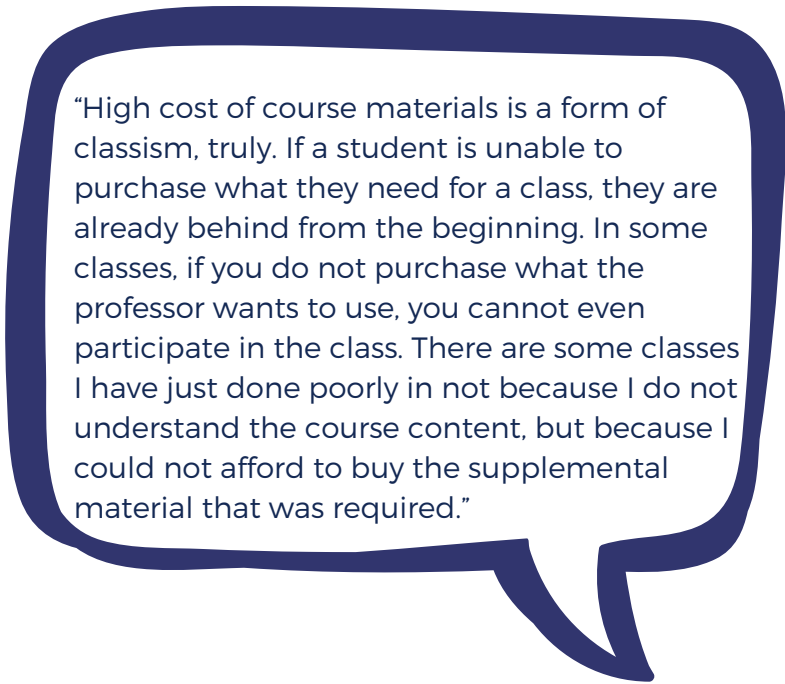
INEQUITABLE

Many students shared that they felt disadvantaged as a result of course material costs:



"It has consistently made it far more difficult to meet my basic material needs and, on several occasions, I have had to either extralegally acquire academic materials or avoid getting them entirely. At a minimum, my ability to acquire course materials persistently makes me feel as if I am operating at a disadvantage when compared to my peers."

Some students experienced this disadvantage as a form of classism:



"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. In some classes, if you do not purchase what the professor wants to use, you cannot even participate in the class. There are some classes I have just done poorly in not because I do not understand the course content, but because I could not afford to buy the supplemental material that was required."

Feelings of being disadvantaged also contributed to the classroom experience as some students commented on how not having the course materials has impacted their ability to contribute to discussions:

"By spending money on materials, I couldn't spend money on other needs (groceries, bills, gas) or supplies (pencils, paper, binder) that were needed. I become worried about cost and budgets rather than focus on my class and grades. If I didn't buy or rent the book, I would have to ask to borrow from my friends or hope that it was available in the library. Or I just couldn't read the required chapters, so part of my education is missing and I wouldn't be able to contribute to class discussion so part of my education became lacking."

WORK

Many students shared that they felt disadvantaged as a result of course material costs:

"I have had to go to part time before and work two jobs to pay for books and tuition. I then overwork myself and that showed in my grades."

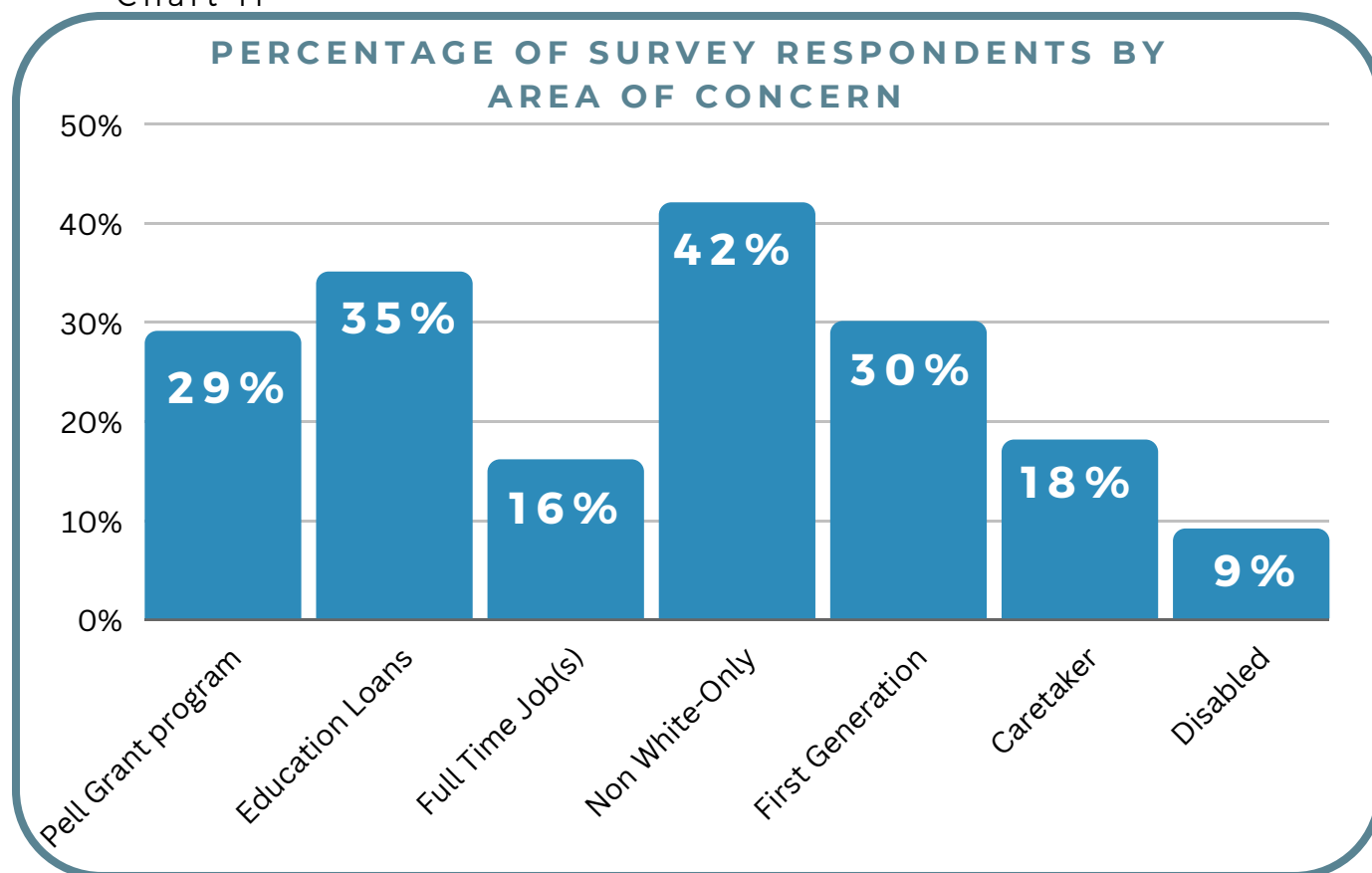
"It has held me back from taking more courses and doing school clubs because I need to work."

AREAS OF CONCERN

Central to the question of the impact of course material costs on educational equity was an exploration of traditional areas of concern. In order to better understand any possible relationships here, seven areas of financial or social concern were identified.

Three are financial: using Pell Grant funding, education loans, and/or a full time job to fund the respondent's education, and four are social: race/ethnicity other than or in addition to White (defined here as Non White-Only), First Generation student, currently taking care of children, parents, or other family members, and having a disability. These areas had the following prevalence in the survey responses (see Chart 11). Over half of those who identified as having a disability said that their disability affects how they use course materials.

Chart 11

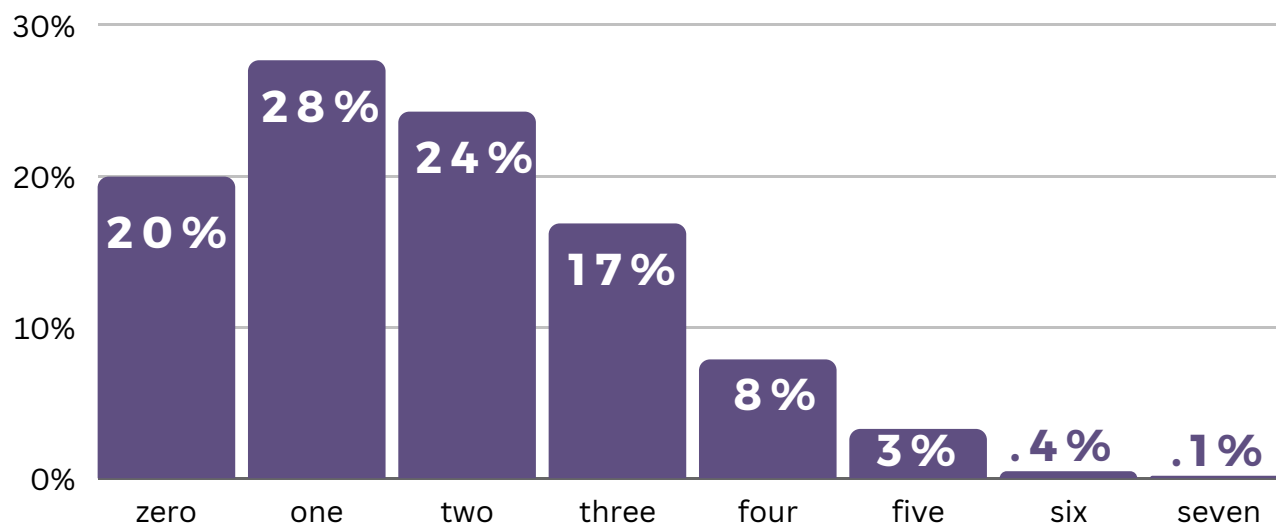


A second level of review of this data was to examine overlapping areas of concern. In order to do this, the respondents were analyzed for how many of the seven identified areas of concern they had. As can be seen in the chart below, the category with the largest number of respondents was those who had one area of concern, such as only using education loan(s) to fund their education or only a First Generation student.

There are substantial numbers of respondents, however, who have three, four, five, and even more areas of concern (see Chart 12).

Chart 12

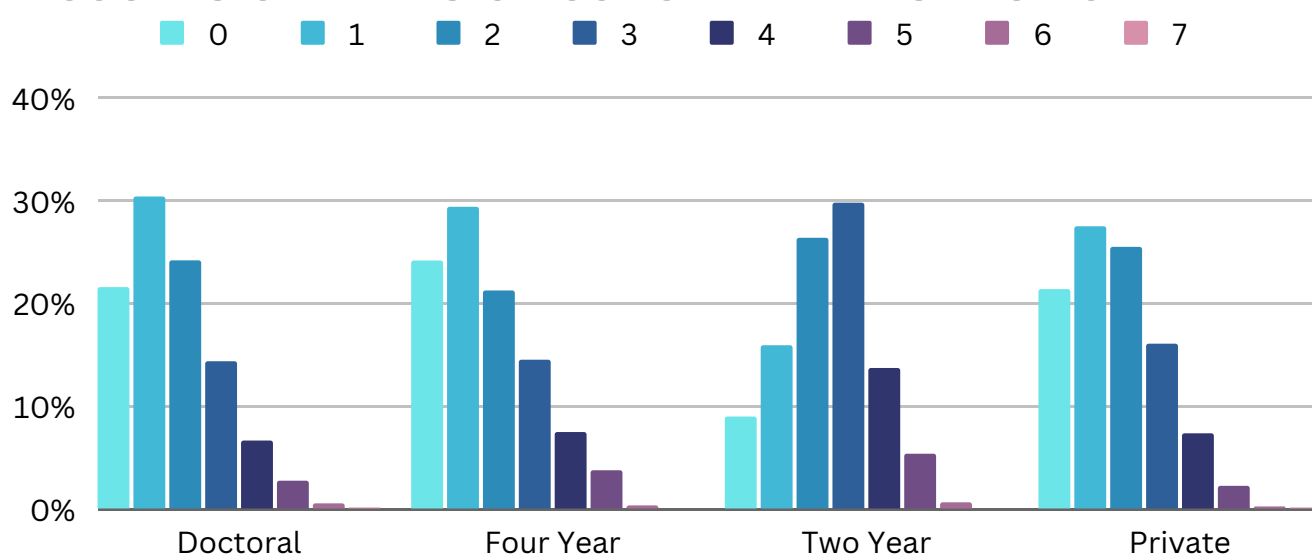
RESPONDENTS BY COUNTS OF AREAS OF CONCERN



It is worth noting that two year institution students have a different pattern than the other institution types with regard to counts of the seven areas of financial and social concern. While the other three types tend to peak at one area of concern (such as only having a disability), the two year institution students tend to peak at three areas of concern (such as using the Pell Grant program to fund their education, non White-only, and a First Generation student) (see Chart 13).

Chart 13

COUNTS OF AREAS OF CONCERN BY INSTITUTION TYPE



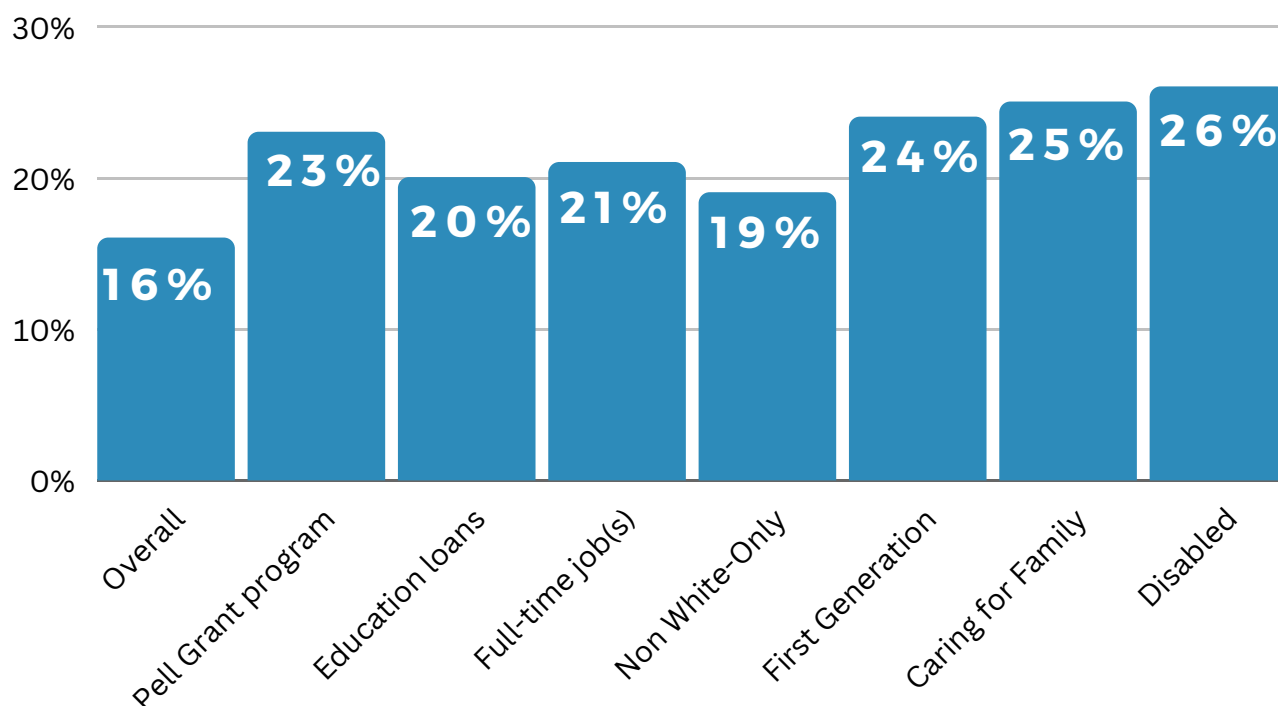
Given the strong connection between increasing numbers of areas of concern and increasing challenges demonstrated by the survey data, as documented later in the report, the student populations at two year institutions seem of particular concern within this context.

KEY FINDING 5: COURSE MATERIALS WORRIES ARE AMPLIFIED BY AREAS OF CONCERN

A core question of this survey was the level of worry respondents had for meeting their course material costs, and each of the individual areas of concern had higher proportions of people (ranging from 19-26%) who were “Extremely worried” about meeting their course materials costs than the overall group (16%) (see Chart 14).

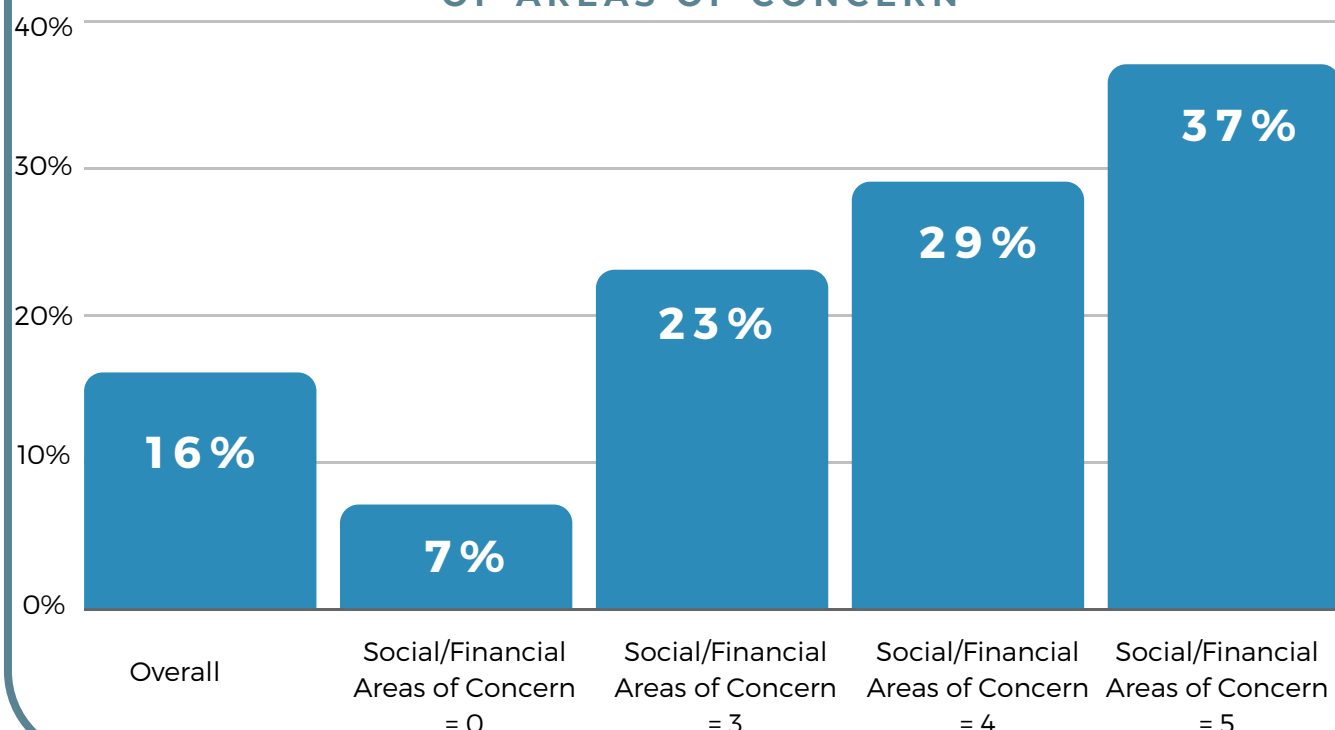
Chart 14

PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS "EXTREMELY WORRIED" ABOUT MEETING COURSE MATERIAL COSTS BY AREA OF CONCERN



The effect on student worry diminished when considering only students with zero areas of concern (only 7% of respondents in this group were “Extremely worried” compared to 16% in the overall group) and grew with increasing numbers of the seven areas of concern identified. A First Generation, disabled student using Pell Grant funding (three total areas of concern), for example, would be more likely to be “Extremely Worried” about meeting course material costs than a student without any of the areas. For those students with five to seven areas of concern, a group that represents around 4% of the survey respondents, over a third are “Extremely worried” (see Chart 15).

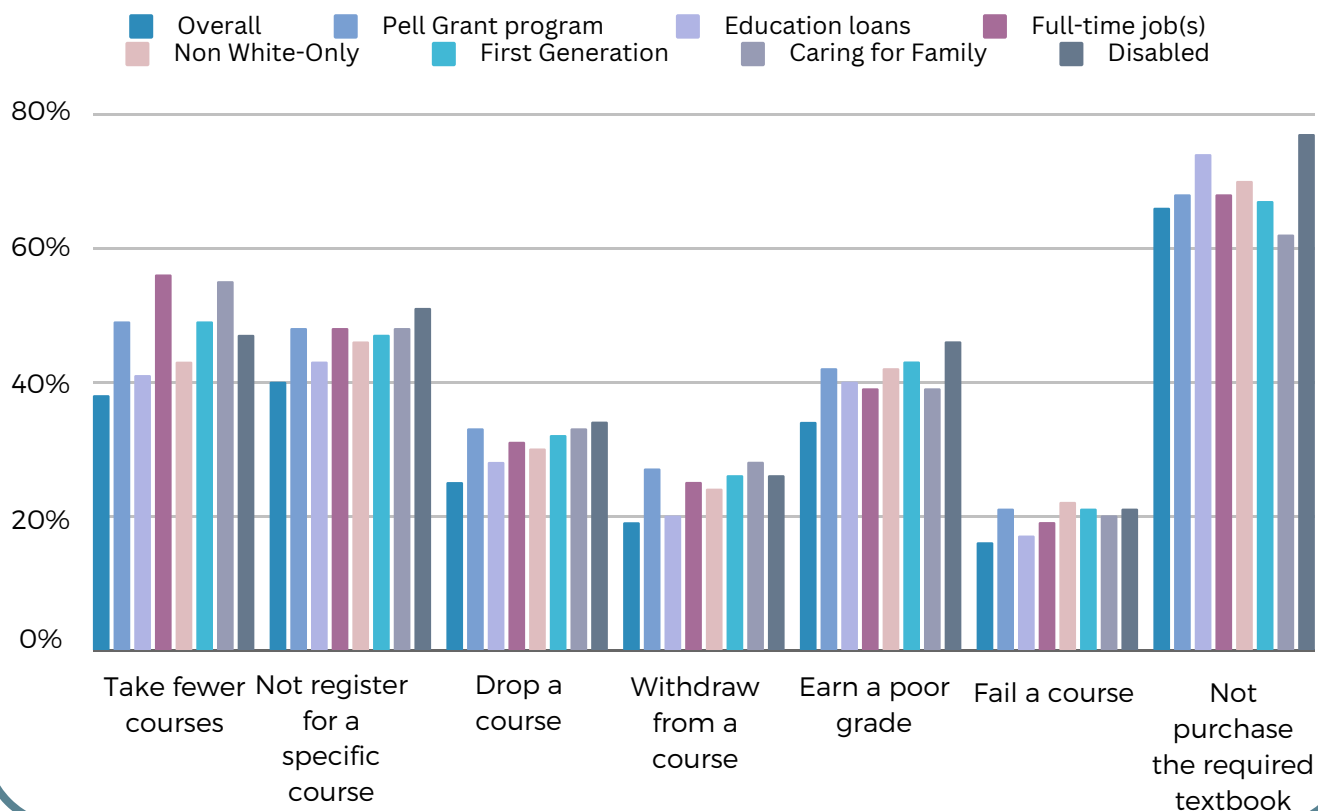
Chart 15

PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS "EXTREMELY WORRIED" ABOUT MEETING COURSE MATERIAL COSTS BY NUMBER OF AREAS OF CONCERN**KEY FINDING 6: ACADEMIC CAREER DAMAGE FROM COURSE MATERIAL COSTS IS AMPLIFIED BY AREAS OF CONCERN**

The academic career impact of course material costs is a central concern of this survey. Individual financial and social areas of concern typically showed an increased likelihood that the student had experienced challenges with progress, opportunity, and success related to course material costs compared to the overall group. Notable examples include students with full-time job(s) being more likely to take fewer courses and disabled students being more likely to earn a poor grade or not purchase the required textbook (see Chart 16).

Chart 16

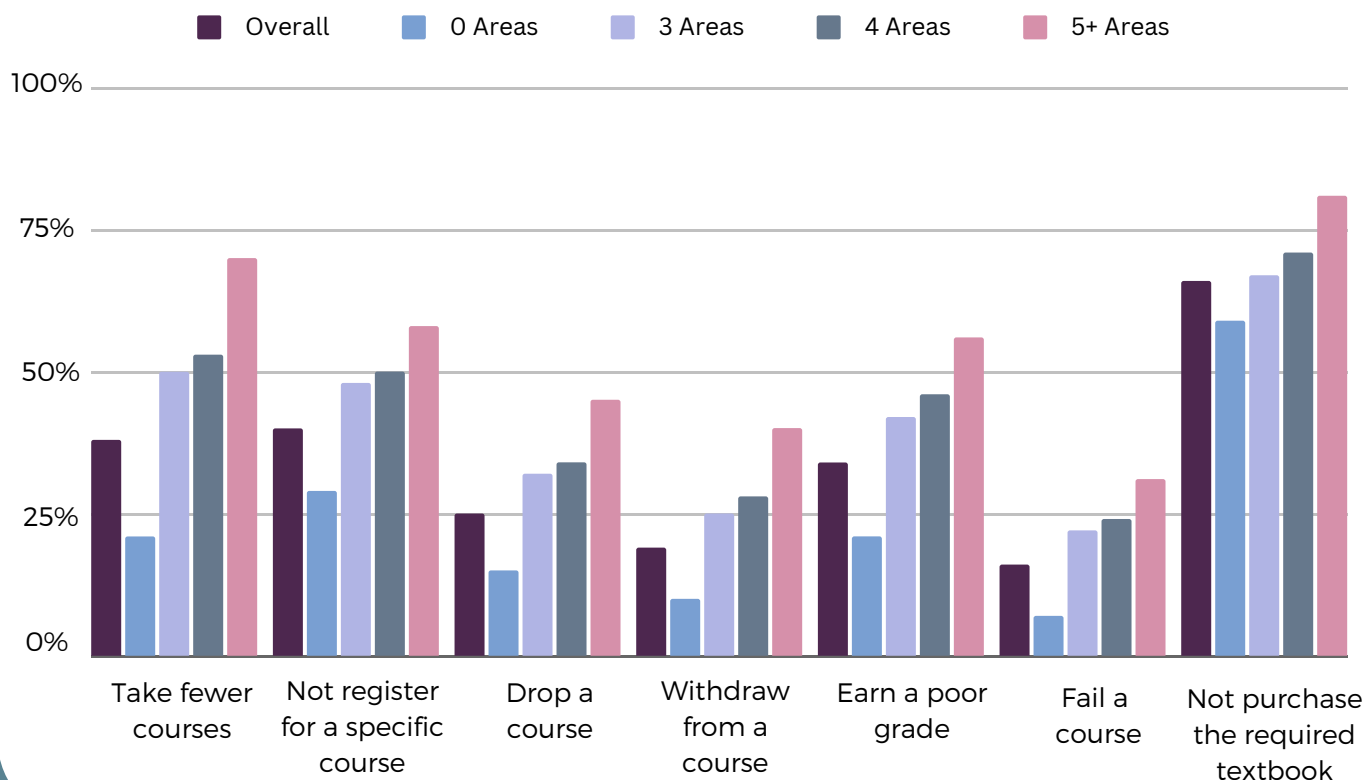
IN YOUR ACADEMIC CAREER, HAS THE COST OF REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS EVER CAUSED YOU TO:



The effect on academic career challenges diminished when considering only students with zero areas of concern (only 21% of respondents in this group have taken fewer courses, for example, compared to 38% overall) and grew with increasing numbers of the seven areas of concern identified. A non White-only student using loans to fund their education and taking care of family members (three areas of concern), for example, would be more likely to take fewer courses, not register for a specific course, drop/withdraw/fail a course, earn a poor grade, and not purchase the required textbook than a student without any of the areas of financial or social concern. For those students with four, five, or more areas of concern, the likelihood of having all of these challenges goes up (see Chart 17).

Chart 17

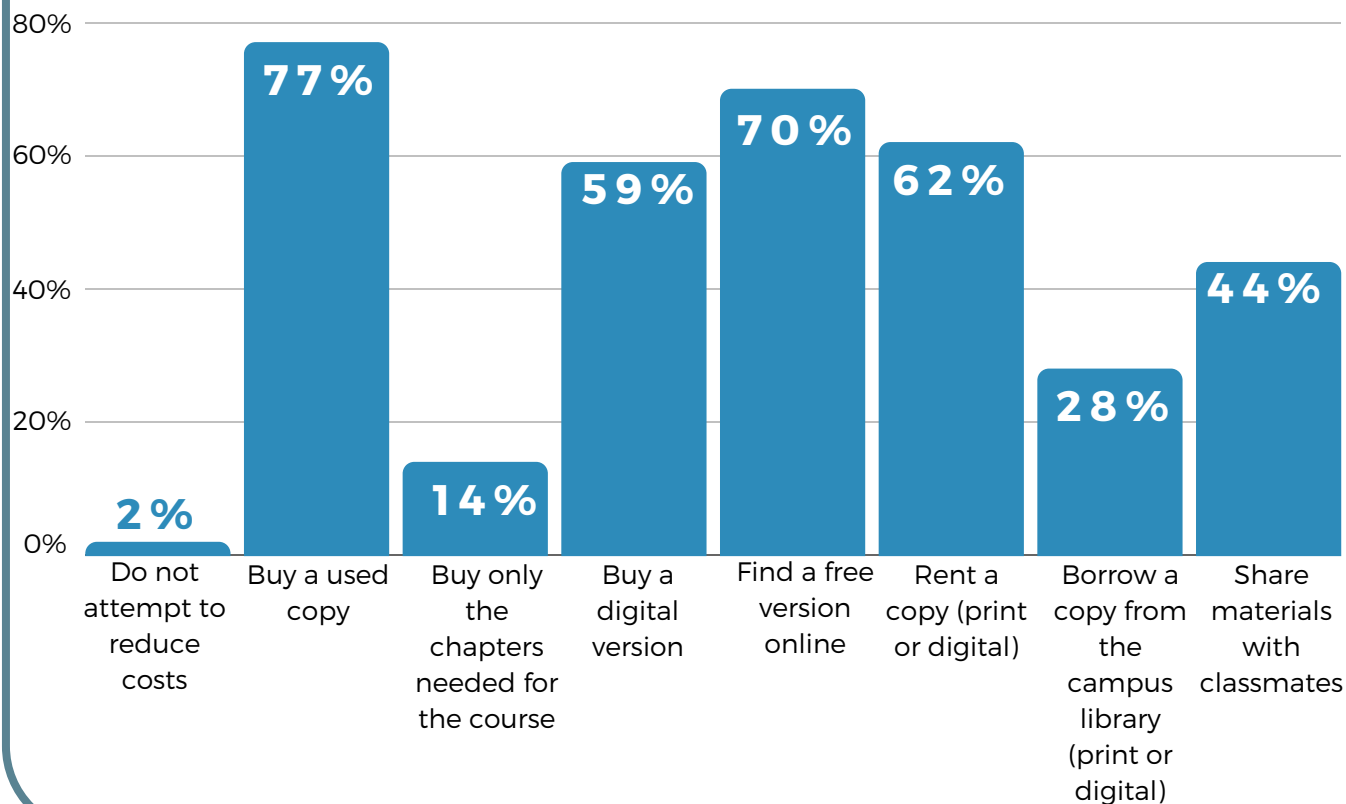
IN YOUR ACADEMIC CAREER, HAS THE COST OF REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS EVER CAUSED YOU TO:



KEY FINDING 7: STUDENTS NEED TO USE MANY DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO REDUCE COURSE MATERIAL COSTS

The survey asked students if they had taken a variety of measures to reduce their required course material costs. Seventy-seven percent reported buying a used copy, 70% indicated they find a free version online, and 62% report renting a print or digital copy (see Chart 18). Overall, 98% of students used alternate approaches to reduce their course material costs.

Chart 18

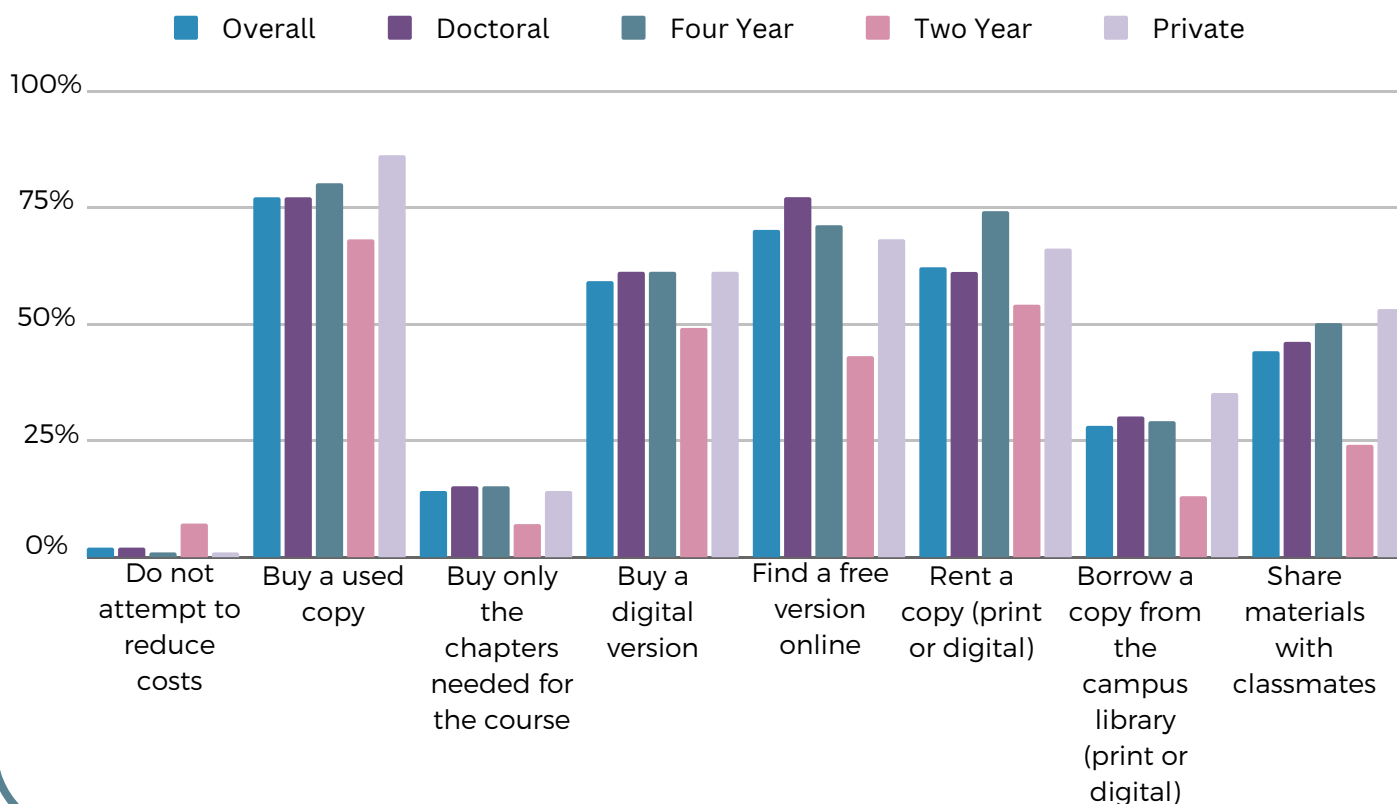
WHAT MEASURES HAVE YOU TAKEN TO REDUCE YOUR REQUIRED COURSE MATERIAL COSTS THROUGHOUT YOUR COLLEGE CAREER?

Many of the measures, including buying a used copy, finding a free version online, borrowing a copy from the library, and sharing materials with classmates, would be unavailable to students in an inclusive access or access code-required course materials situation. A number of measures also have inherent challenges with possible reliance on older editions of a text, and one, finding a free version online, has the potential to include situations when there is unauthorized sharing of content. From the survey comments it is clear that an important strategy employed, regardless of whether or not a student ultimately purchases the required text or finds alternative access to the content, is to wait or delay the decision to acquire required course materials until they have had time to assess the extent to which they will need the materials to be academically successful in a given course.

Patterns of difference for the two year institution respondents were apparent with regard to measures taken to reduce required course material costs. Students at two year institutions are more likely to not attempt to reduce their cost and less likely to use the various methods to reduce costs, such as buying used copies, finding free versions online, or borrowing a copy from the campus library, although as mentioned above in Key Finding 2, students at two year institutions are more likely to take fewer courses, and this can be another way to reduce course material costs (see Chart 19).

Chart 19

WHAT MEASURES HAVE YOU TAKEN TO REDUCE YOUR REQUIRED COURSE MATERIAL COSTS THROUGHOUT YOUR COLLEGE CAREER?

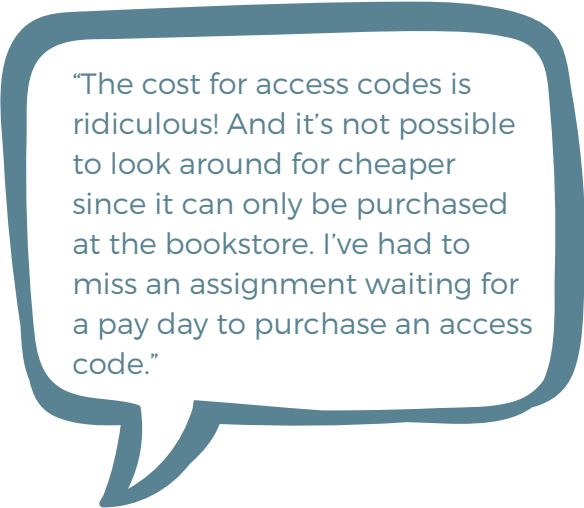


KEY FINDING 8: ACCESS CODES ARE ESPECIALLY CHALLENGING FOR STUDENTS

Students described course by course decisions based on course material costs, often mentioning the challenge of homework programs/access codes. Access codes and homework programs were cited as particularly stressful because there are not affordable alternatives, such as buying a used copy:

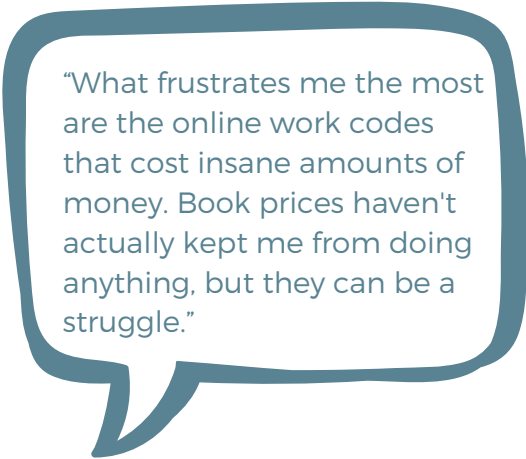
A dark blue speech bubble with a white background and a dark blue border. The text is in a dark blue font.

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

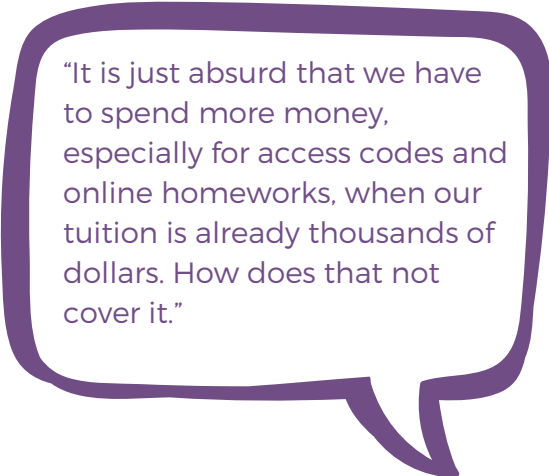
A teal speech bubble with a white background and a teal border. The text is in a teal font.

“The cost for access codes is ridiculous! And it’s not possible to look around for cheaper since it can only be purchased at the bookstore. I’ve had to miss an assignment waiting for a pay day to purchase an access code.”

As institutions move toward vendor and publisher-based affordable content solutions, access codes are an area of special concern:

A teal speech bubble with a white background and a teal border. The text is in a teal font.

“What frustrates me the most are the online work codes that cost insane amounts of money. Book prices haven’t actually kept me from doing anything, but they can be a struggle.”

A purple speech bubble with a white background and a purple border. The text is in a purple font.

“It is just absurd that we have to spend more money, especially for access codes and online homeworks, when our tuition is already thousands of dollars. How does that not cover it.”

COURSE MATERIAL FEATURES

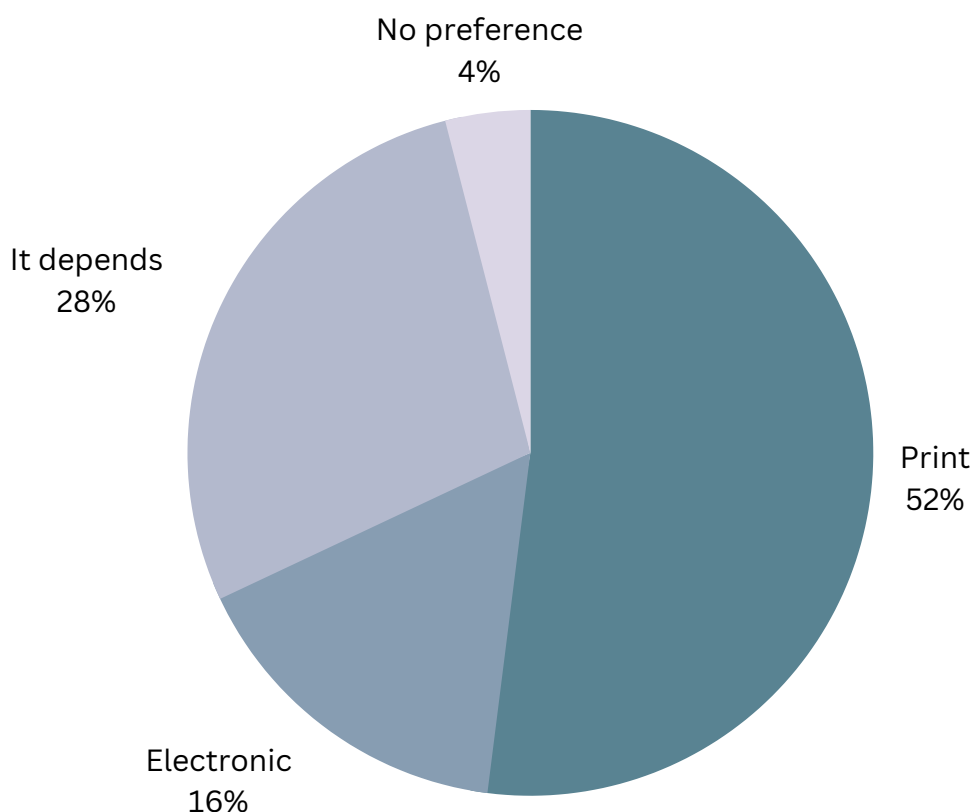
The second research question this survey was designed to answer was what course content materials do students find to be most beneficial to their learning.

KEY FINDING 9: STUDENTS PREFER PRINT FORMATS FOR COURSE MATERIALS

A basic question in this area was format preference, as students were asked if the cost is the same, which format do you prefer for your course materials? The majority of students reported preferring print to other formats for their course materials. Slightly over half (52%) of respondents said that they prefer print, 16% said electronic, 28% it depends, and 4% no preference (see Chart 20).

Chart 20

IF THE COST IS THE SAME, WHICH FORMAT DO YOU PREFER FOR YOUR COURSE MATERIALS?



Respondents were invited to share more about their format preferences through an open-ended question. Responses illustrated that format preference is nuanced, with both electronic and print materials serving student learning needs.

Students make format decisions based on course discipline, frequently citing a preference for print in humanities and electronic for STEM courses:

"I prefer my English and history textbooks in print while math and science electronic."

Ease of use is an important factor in format preference, and both print and electronic course materials have features that make them easier to use:

"Electronic books are easily accessible from anywhere, and offer search tools that make it easier to find topics within the book."

"If it's a huge book and will largely stay at home, or has a lot of diagrams, I prefer print. I like being able to read off-screen, and diagrams don't carry over to e-readers well (except PDFs, which I don't like to read for long periods of time). I don't like having a digital copy if it requires an app or internet connection to read. But I do like the searchability of some digital formats...."

"The electronic format is easier to annotate and reference, often featuring tools such as Table of Contents indexing, search, highlighting, and more."

"I prefer print because I can highlight what I need to study, it's convenient for me because I can take it anywhere"

Anticipated future use was a reason students preferred print to electronic. It is important to note the correlation between print preference for anticipated future use and subscription-based electronic materials with finite access periods:

"Electronic access often is taken away or discontinued at the end of the semester, print copies can still be read in the future for review or reference."

Physical difficulties related to extended screen time reading and heaviness of print textbooks were commonly reported format concerns:

"The textbook is heavy and takes up a lot of space in my backpack. Electronic is convenient, accessible, and has a command F function"

"After a while reading on a screen hurts my eyes and I prefer to read a physical paper."

Relatedly, format preference is also informed by disability and accommodation needs:

"I am neurodivergent (ADHD) and tangible, printed copies are a sensory thing for me. I study better, and retain the information better, when I have a physical copy of the text or information required. I often have to print information that is digital in courses that don't offer physical copies of a text or information due to my unique study habits and information retention issues. A physical copy helps me to not only study better but also retain the information."

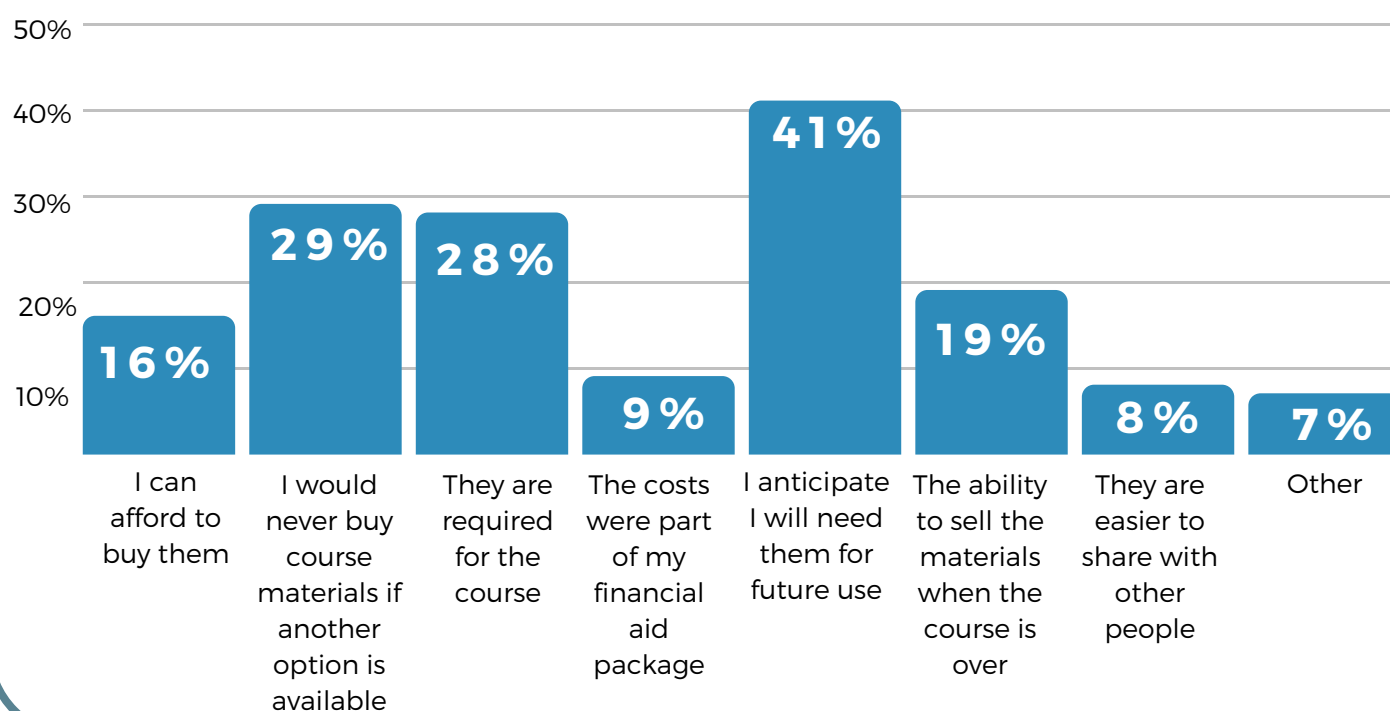
"For ADHD it is easier to use a speech to text application on textbook passages with digital formats"

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

Another key question in this area asked students why they would choose to buy materials, rather than rent them. In this category, 41% of students said they would buy materials if they anticipated needing them for future use, with 28% noting they would only purchase them if they were required, and 29% noting similarly that they would never buy them if another option was available. Additionally, the ability to sell the materials when the course was over, and the ability to share with others were noted as reasons to buy the materials (Chart 21).

Chart 21

WHEN YOU HAVE OTHER OPTIONS FOR GETTING YOUR COURSE MATERIALS (LIKE RENTING), WHY WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO BUY THEM?



Commenting on reasons for why buying is preferred to renting, respondents mentioned a variety of benefits, such as for future reference and format preferences:

"Renting materials is not significantly less expensive than buying materials. I care about the things I'm learning, and would like to have the textbooks to reference again in the future."

"If the price difference between buy and rent isn't that great, I would rather own the material. Sometimes rentals offer only digital versions, and I prefer print textbooks if I am going to have to read a lot. Even \$50 to rent an e-book feels a bit insulting to me, especially if you have to read it in a proprietary app."

Others noted that alternate options were often no longer being available by the time they needed to acquire the materials and that their learning and studying preferences (e.g. annotation, referencing print, ease of retention) were supported better by owning the text.



"I had no choice but to buy the textbook for my current class because I didn't have enough time to rent one or buy one cheaper and it be shipped to me."

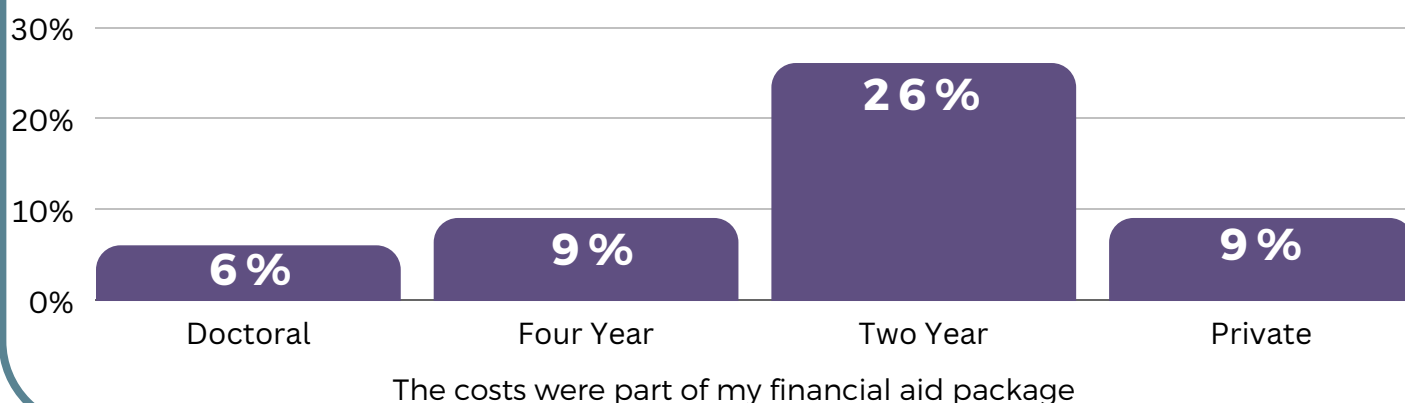
"I learn better if I am able to write and highlight in my books, which I cannot do on an online version or a rented book"

"It is easier for me to learn if I'm able to mark in the books- not something I can do if I rent. Plus if I have to pay, say half the price, to rent as compared to purchasing it seems more logical to pay a bit more so that I can refer back to the book in future courses."

A difference between two year respondents and those from other institution types related to the relevance of financial aid for course materials. When asked, "When you have other options for getting your course materials (like renting), why would you choose to buy them?", a much higher proportion of two year respondents said that it would be because the costs were part of their financial aid package (see Chart 22).

Chart 22

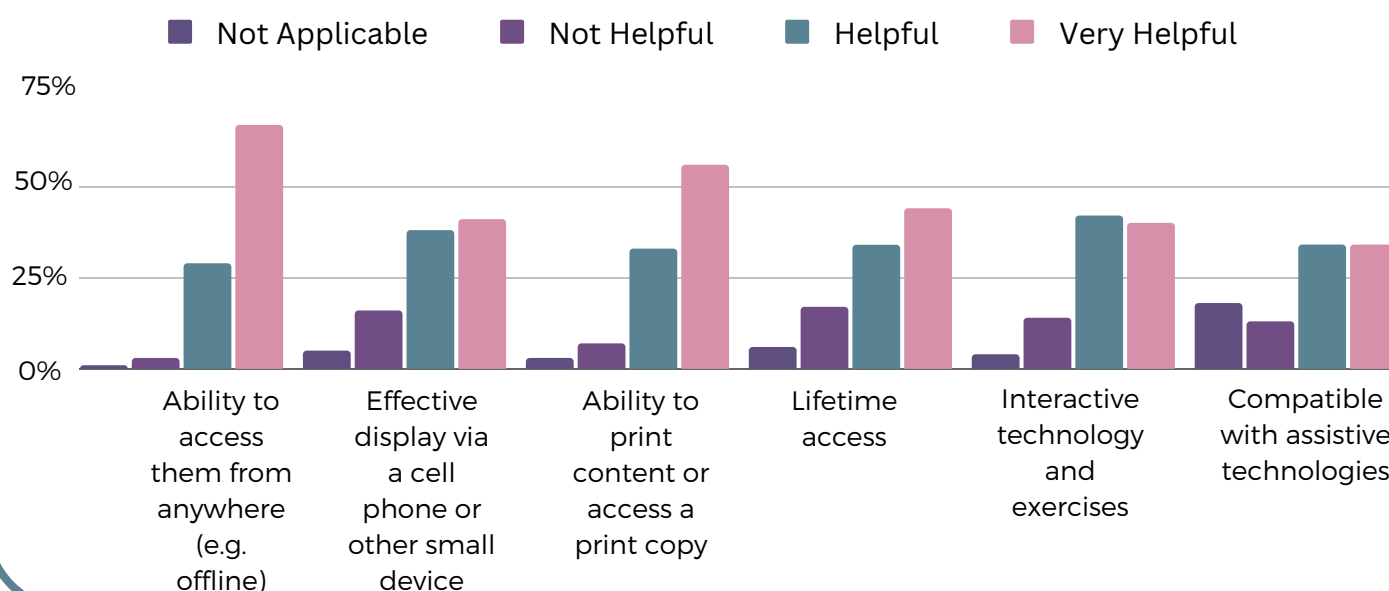
WHEN YOU HAVE OTHER OPTIONS FOR GETTING YOUR COURSE MATERIALS (LIKE RENTING), WHY WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO BUY THEM?



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 (see Chart 23).

Chart 23

HOW HELPFUL TO YOUR LEARNING ARE THE FOLLOWING COURSE MATERIAL FEATURES?

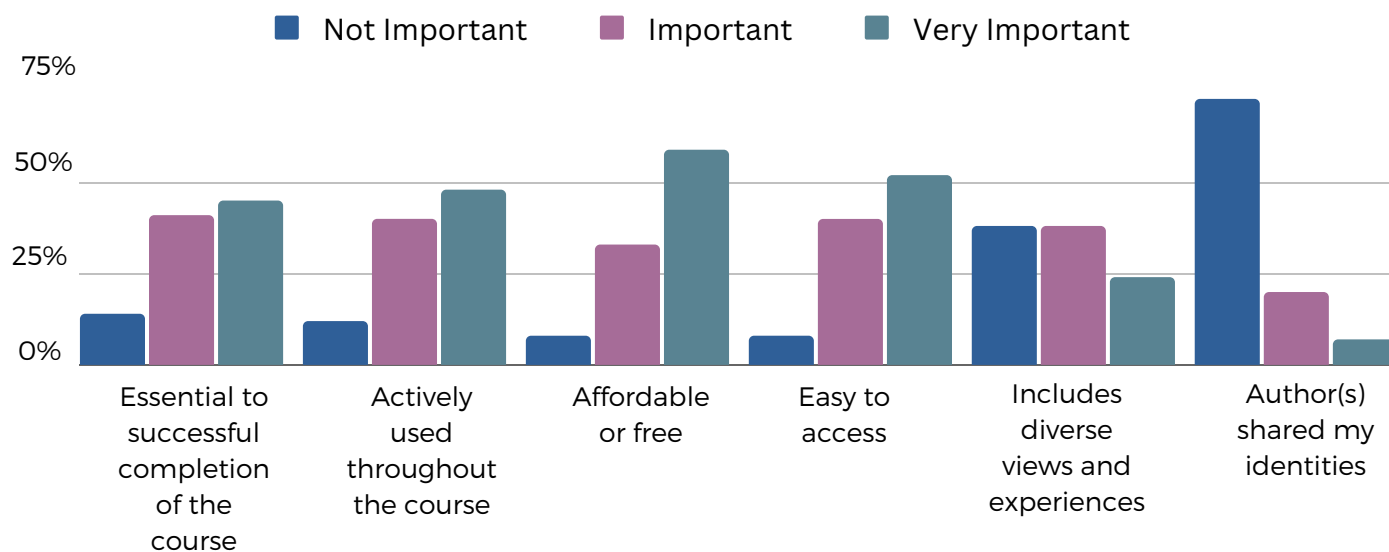


KEY FINDING 10: REPRESENTATION IN MATERIALS WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO CERTAIN STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Students were asked in the survey, “Think back to past textbooks and course materials that you have chosen to buy and own instead of borrowing or renting. How important are the following characteristics that made them worthwhile to have?” As can be seen in the chart below, the quality “Affordable or free” has the lowest percentage of “Not important” responses followed closely by “Easy to access.” These qualities represent the barriers to access within the options, and it is interesting to see that they are paired together as top priorities. Also in a pairing were the qualities “Actively used throughout the course” and “Essential to successful completion of the course,” which many students found to be either “Very important” or “Important.” These qualities relate to the teacher’s use of the materials, and it is clear that they are of similar levels of high importance (see Chart 24).

Chart 24

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS THAT MADE TEXTBOOKS AND COURSE MATERIALS WORTHWHILE TO BUY AND OWN?



Although the qualities “Includes diverse views and experiences” and “Author(s) shared my identities” had larger percentages of students who found these areas to be “Not important” for buying and owning the materials, in the consideration of equity, they merited a closer look. When the demographic aspects of respondents were put into context with this question, it became clear that certain groups were more likely to have responded that these qualities were “Very important.” In particular, having course materials that are written by authors who share students’ identities (see Chart 25) and that represent diverse views and experiences (see Chart 26) were especially important to Black, Hispanic, Multi-Race, Nonbinary, Disabled, and Non-Traditional students.

Chart 25

IS INCLUDING AUTHOR(S) WHO SHARE YOUR IDENTITIES IN COURSE MATERIALS YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO BUY AND OWN VERY IMPORTANT?

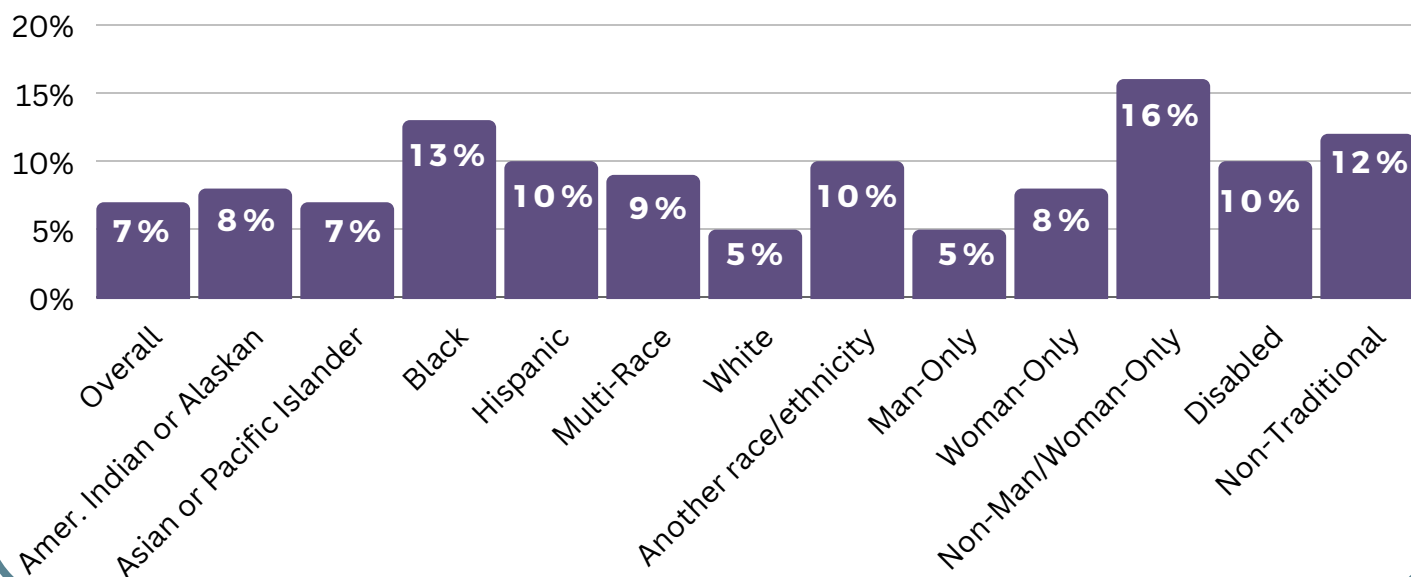
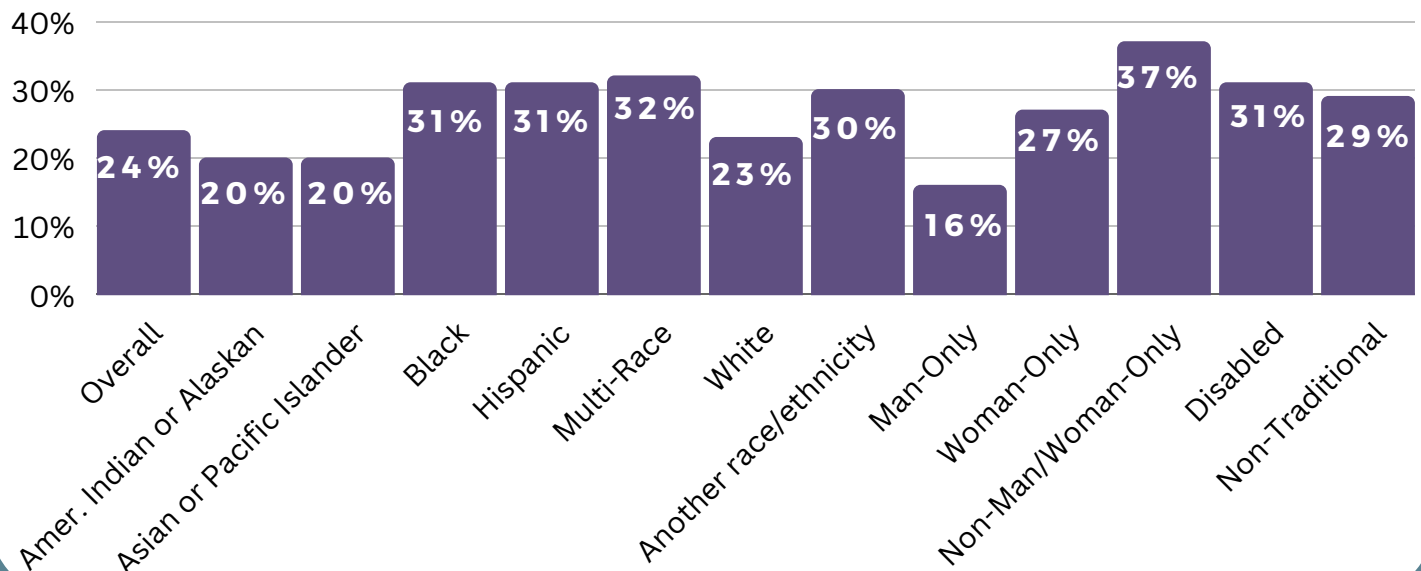


Chart 26

**IS INCLUDING DIVERSE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES IN
COURSE MATERIALS YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO BUY AND
OWN VERY IMPORTANT?**



CONCLUSION

The results of this survey have both philosophical and practical applications to how course materials are handled in Virginia and beyond. It is clear that course material costs cause many students to worry and some experience significant difficulty and distress, such as when they need to make choices between textbooks and groceries or rent. Access codes, because they are a cost that cannot be ameliorated in the usual ways such as buying a used copy, sharing a text with a classmate, or using a library reserves copy, have the potential for making a difficult situation worse for many students. Either students face increased financial hardship to afford the access codes, or their academic success suffers because they cannot have their assignments graded.

The results also revealed the cascading impact of course material costs into students' academic careers and progress. Not only were there increased challenges in specific areas, such as taking fewer courses, earning poor grades, or failing a course, but course material costs were also a factor in large decisions students make related to their post-secondary education, such as deciding which institution to select and which major/minor to select. The role of course material costs in student debt and even distrust of the educational system is important to consider with regard to institutional and statewide policy.

Although the connection between financial and social areas of concern and greater challenges with academic success and progress might seem intuitive, the results put real numbers on this. The quantified, compounding effect of the seven areas of concern (students using education loans, first-generation students, students with caretaking responsibilities, etc.) causing increased worry related to course material costs and more frequent experience of negative impacts to academic careers was clear. It paints a stark picture of what some students are dealing with but also puts context around a route to helping those facing greater challenges.

The features and formats of course materials were also shown to be important to the student experience. An overemphasis on e-only materials, for example, might neglect a real and meaningful preference for print. Paying attention to the reasons that students choose to invest their limited funds in course materials and what they find more useful can help increase the effectiveness of course materials in the classroom.

Overall, the cost of higher education is a real barrier to student well-being and success, and this includes the cost of course materials. The results of this survey suggest that investment in approaches that decrease direct student costs for course materials are important, but so is maintaining student flexibility and autonomy.

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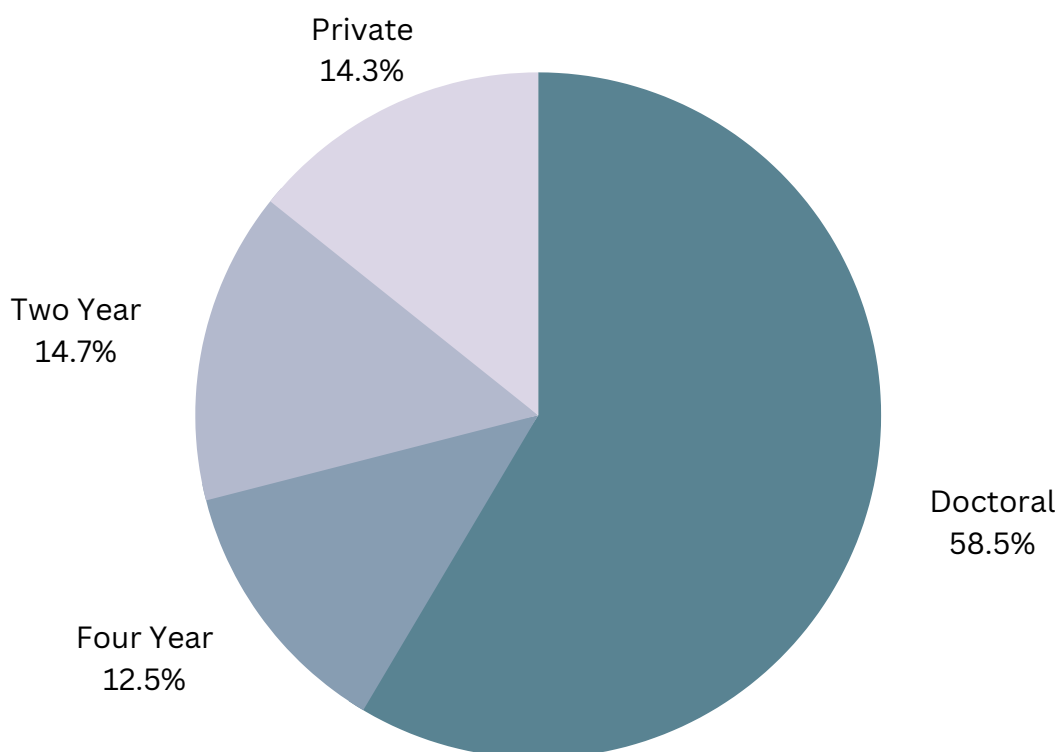
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APPENDIX 1: INSTITUTIONS AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

41 of VIVA's 70 institutions of higher education agreed to participate in the survey. They were asked to send the invitation email to a simple random sample of 20% of their student population, or 100 students, whichever was greater. (The community colleges discussed as a group that they should exclude dual-enrollment and prison student populations.) In all, 55,846 email invitations were sent by the 41 institutions, and there were 5,632 valid responses, demonstrating an overall response rate of 10%. All four VIVA institution types were represented, with the largest response from public doctoral institutions.

RESPONSE COUNT BY INSTITUTION TYPE



The participating institutions were:

Public Doctoral:

- George Mason University
- Old Dominion University
- University of Virginia
- Virginia Commonwealth University
- Virginia Tech
- William & Mary

Public Four Year/Comprehensive:

- James Madison University
- Norfolk State University
- Radford University
- University of Mary Washington
- Virginia Military Institute

Public Two Year/Community:

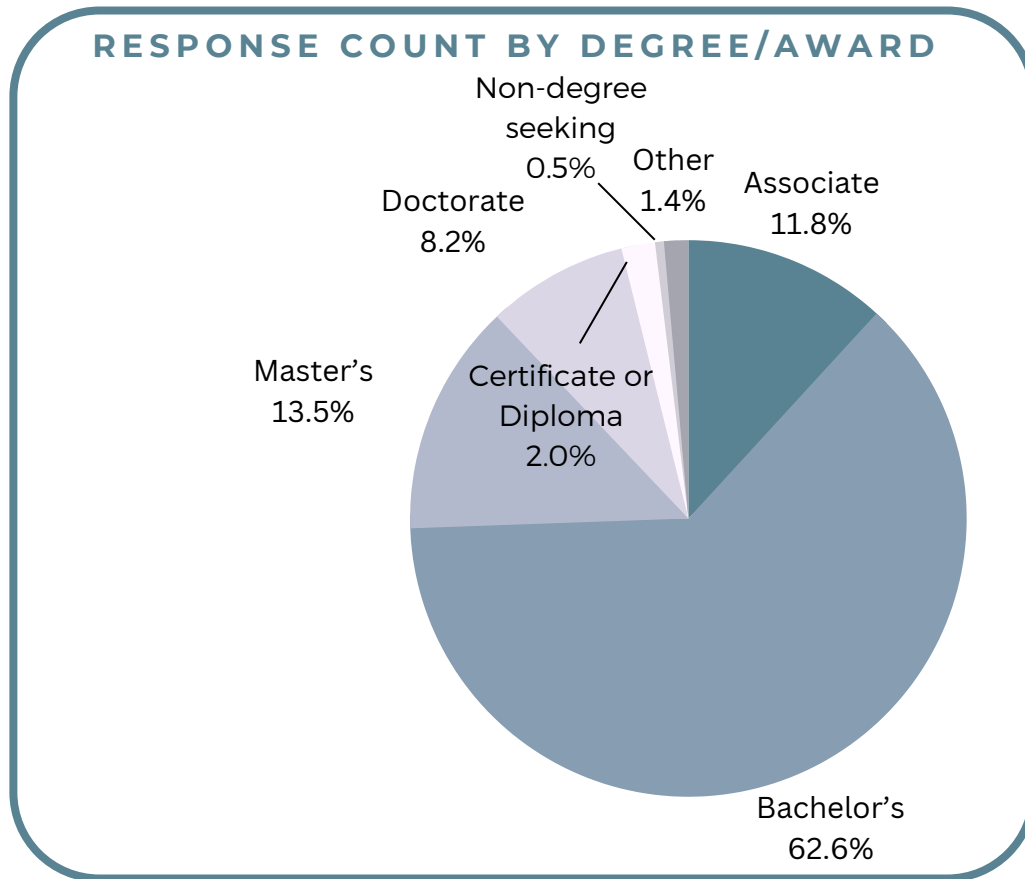
- Blue Ridge Community College
- Central Virginia Community College
- Dabney S. Lancaster Community College (now Mountain Gateway Community College)
- Germanna Community College
- J Sargeant Reynolds Community College
- John Tyler Community College (now Brightpoint Community College)
- Lord Fairfax Community College (now Laurel Ridge Community College)
- Paul D Camp Community College
- Rappahannock Community College
- Southwest Virginia Community College
- Tidewater Community College
- Thomas Nelson Community College (now Virginia Peninsula Community College)
- Virginia Highlands Community College
- Virginia Western Community College

Private/Independent:

- Appalachian School of Law
- Bridgewater College
- Emory & Henry College
- Eastern Mennonite University
- Ferrum College
- Hollins University
- Hampden-Sydney College
- Liberty University
- Mary Baldwin University
- Randolph College
- Randolph-Macon College
- Roanoke College
- Sweet Briar College
- Shenandoah University
- Virginia Union University
- Virginia Wesleyan University

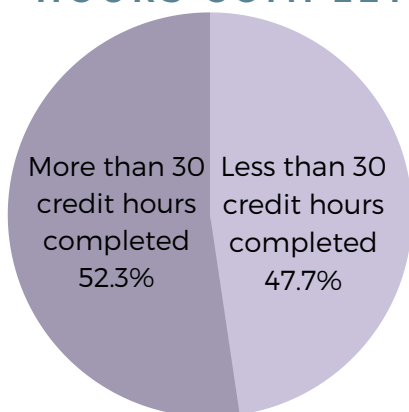
DEGREES AND AWARDS

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

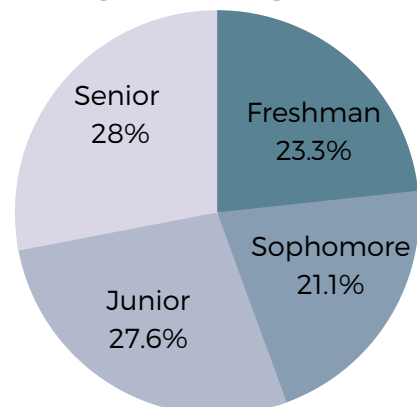


Students seeking Associate's and Bachelor's degrees were well-balanced by degree progress.

ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE RESPONSE COUNT BY CREDIT HOURS COMPLETED



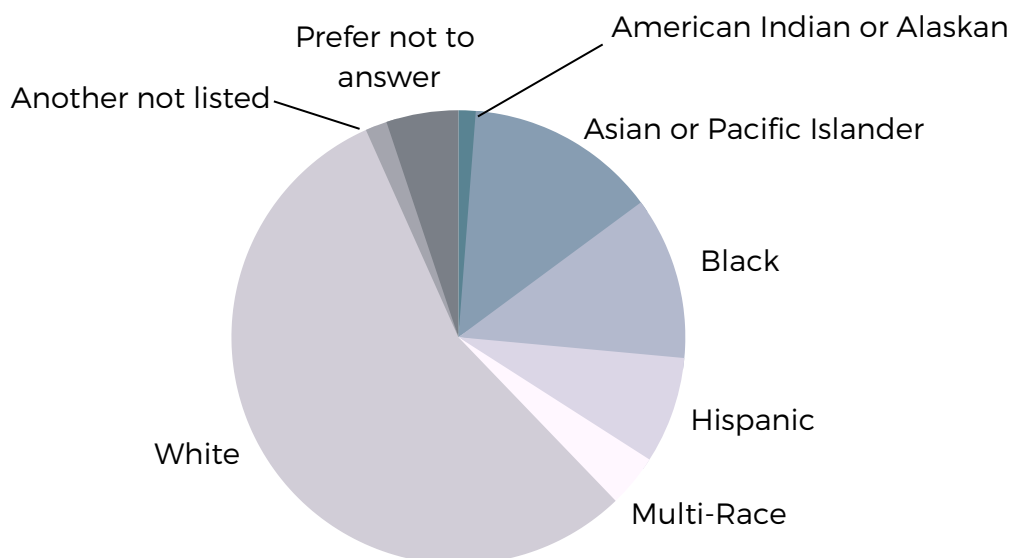
BACHELOR'S DEGREE RESPONSE COUNT BY ACADEMIC LEVEL



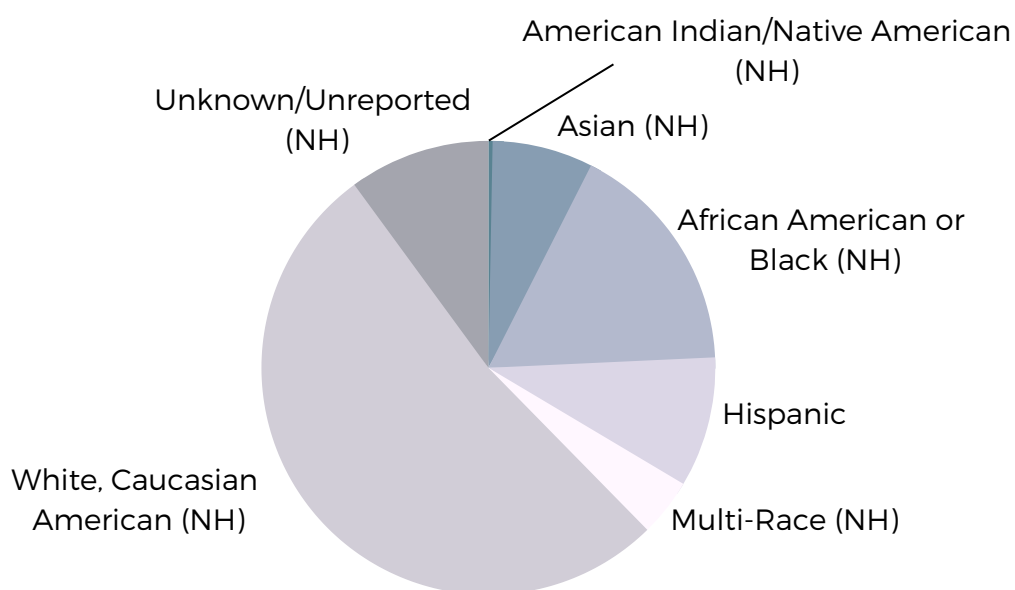
SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Race/ethnicity reporting was similar to SCHEV/statewide population levels for higher education (Report E16: Enrollment by Race-Ethnicity, Gender, and Program Detail).

WHICH RACE/ETHNICITY DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

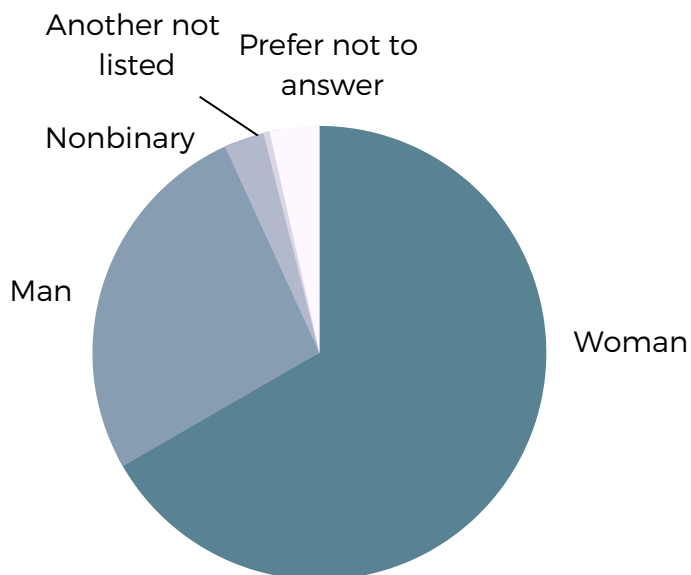


SCHEV RACE/ETHNICITY, FALL 2020

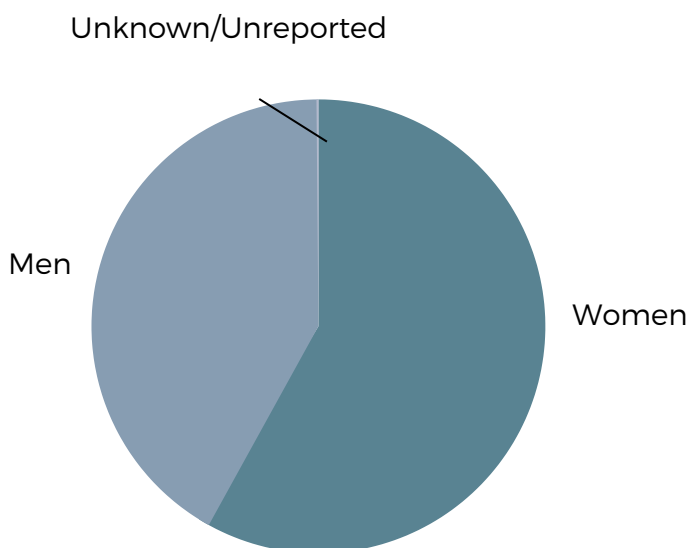


Gender identity reporting was similar to SCHEV/statewide population levels for higher education, with a strong response from respondents identifying as Women (Report E16: Enrollment by Race-Ethnicity, Gender, and Program Detail).

GENDER IDENTITY (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)



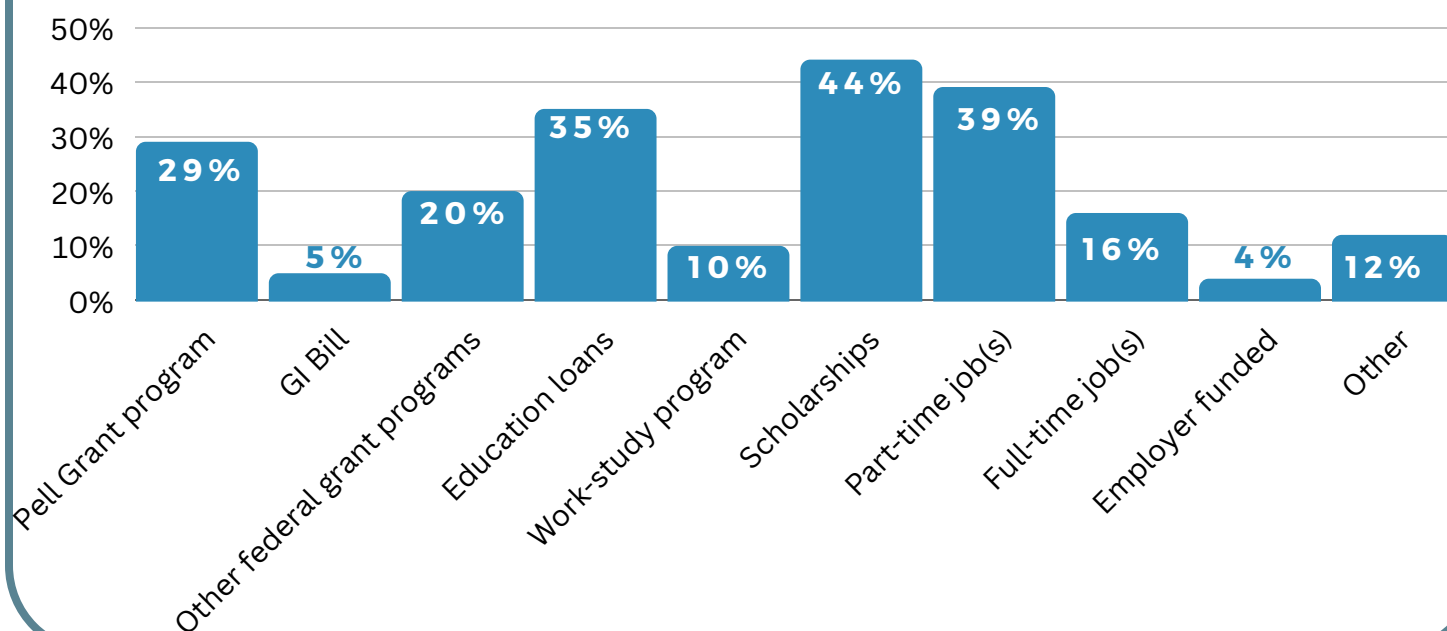
SCHEV GENDER, FALL 2020



VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

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

WHICH SOURCES ARE YOU USING TO FUND YOUR EDUCATION?



- 8.6% identified as having a Disability, and 56% of these said that their disability affects how they use course materials.
- 30% identified as First Generation Students.
- 18% were currently taking care of children, parents, or other family members.
- 5.3% identified as an International Student.
- 0.30% identified as a DACA Student.
- 14% identified as a Part-Time Student, and 86% identified as a Full-Time Student.
- The average age given when starting the current academic program was 22, and Non-Traditional Students (defined as 25 or older at the start of their Associates and Bachelors degrees) were 12% of respondents.

APPENDIX 2: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

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.

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LEGEND

⊗ Refers to exclusive answer setting on survey platform.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This research is being conducted to evaluate the impact of textbook costs on the student experience and what qualities students want to see in their course materials. If you agree to participate and are 18 years of age or older, you will be asked to complete a brief online survey. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research. Respondents can choose to be entered into a random drawing for five \$100 Amazon gift cards and 180 \$25 Amazon gift cards. There is no link between your answers and the information form to enter the drawing.

The data in this study will be confidential, and your participation is voluntary. All responses are anonymous, and no names or other identifiers will be placed on the research data. The anonymous 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.

This research is being conducted by the Virginia Course Materials Survey Task Force. The Principal Investigator is [INSERT PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR NAME AND TITLE]. She/he/they may be reached at [INSERT PHONE NUMBER AND EMAIL HERE] for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the [INSERT IRB CONTACT INFORMATION HERE] if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research. Please reference IRBNet number: [INSERT IRBNET NUMBER HERE].

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

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, and you agree to participate in this study.

Academic Level, Course Completion, and Spend

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):
-

Display This Question:

If What degree or award are you currently pursuing: = Associate

Approximately how many credit hours have you completed?

- ☐ Less than 30 credit hours completed
- ☐ More than 30 credit hours completed
- ☐ I don't know

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

During the current semester or quarter, how many courses are you taking?

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

During the current semester or quarter, how many courses required you to buy course materials (e.g. textbooks, access codes, courseware, online subscriptions)?

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

Display This Question:

If During the current semester or quarter, how many courses required you to buy course materials (e.... != 0

For how many of these courses did you actually buy (as opposed to rent) all of the required course materials?

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

Display This Question:

If For how many of these courses did you actually buy (as opposed to rent) all of the required cours... != 0

And During the current semester or quarter, how many courses required you to buy course materials (e.... != 0

About how much did you spend on course materials, whether purchased, leased, or rented, 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 semester?

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

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

Impact of Course Material Costs

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

	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Frequently
Take fewer courses	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not register for a specific course	☐	☐	☐	☐
Drop a course				
Withdraw from a course	☐	☐	☐	☐
Earn a poor grade because you could not afford to buy the textbook	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fail a course because you could not afford to buy the textbook	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not purchase the required textbook	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please describe in the box below):	☐	☐	☐	☐

Display This Question:

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

Or In your academic career, has the cost of required course materials caused you to: [Occasionally] (Count) >= 2

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

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

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):

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 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
- ☐ Other

Display This Question:

If What measures have you taken to reduce your required course material costs throughout your colleg... = Other

Please describe the other measure you have taken to reduce course material costs in the box below.

Course Material Features

When you have other options for getting your course materials (like renting), why would you choose to buy them? Check all that apply.

- ☐ I can afford to buy them
- ☒ I would never buy course materials if another option is available
- ☐ They are required for the course
- ☐ The costs were part of my financial aid package
- ☐ I anticipate I will need them for future use
- ☐ The ability to sell the materials when the course is over
- ☐ They are easier to share with other people
- ☐ Other

Display This Question:

If When you have other options for getting your course materials (like renting), why would you choose... = Other

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

Please describe the other reason you would choose to buy your course materials.

Think back to past textbooks and course materials that you have chosen to buy and own instead of borrowing or renting. How important are the following characteristics that made them worthwhile to have?

	Not Important	Important	Very Important
Essential to successful completion of the course	☐	☐	☐
Actively used throughout the course	☐	☐	☐
Affordable or free	☐	☐	☐
Easy to access	☐	☐	☐
Includes diverse views and experiences	☐	☐	☐
Author(s) shared my identities	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify in the box below):	☐	☐	☐

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

- ☐ Print
- ☐ Electronic
- ☐ It depends
- ☐ No preference

Display This Question:

If the cost is the same, which format do you prefer for your course materials? != No preference

Please tell us more about your format preference, including any relevance to accommodations:

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

Course Materials and Learning

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

	Not Helpful	Helpful	Very Helpful	Not Applicable
Ability to access them from anywhere (e.g. offline)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Effective display via a cell phone or other small device	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ability to print content or access a print copy	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lifetime access	☐	☐	☐	☐
Interactive technology and exercises	☐	☐	☐	☐
Compatible with assistive technologies	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify in the box below):	☐	☐	☐	☐

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

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to answer

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

Demographics

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 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

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.

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

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

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.

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
- ☐ Scholarships
- ☐ Part-time job(s)
- ☐ Full-time job(s)
- ☐ Employer funded
- ☐ Other

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 you use to fund your education.

Display This Question:

If Which of the following sources are you using to fund your education? Check all that apply. = Part-time job(s)

Or Which of the following sources are you using to fund your education? Check all that apply. = Full-time job(s)

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

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

VIRGINIA COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY

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

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Do you identify as any of the following? Check all that apply.

- ☐ International Student
- ☐ DACA Student
- ☐ Part Time Student
- ☐ Full Time Student
- ☒ Prefer not to answer

How old were you when you started your current academic program? (enter a number in the text box below)

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.
