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## Fall 2022 Student Textbook Survey Results

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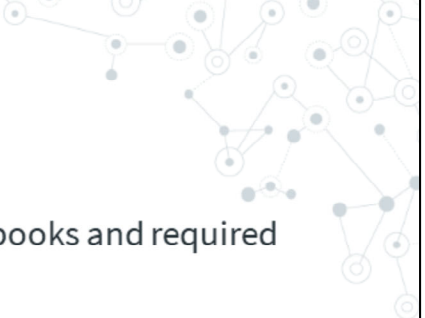


# Fall 2022 Student Textbook Survey Results

**Krystie Wilfong**

Associate College Librarian for Collection Management and  
Scholarly Communications

A study coordinated by the Oberlin Group - Open and Equitable  
Working Group



## Research Questions:

1. How much money do students spend on textbooks and required course materials?
2. What strategies do students use to reduce textbook costs?
3. How are students affected by textbook costs?



We began our project with three research questions in mind.

1. We wanted to find out how much money our students spend on textbooks and required course materials.
2. What strategies they use to reduce those costs.
3. And how are they are affected by those costs.

## Methodology

- ⊙ 9 survey questions (all optional)
- ⊙ 8 demographic questions (all optional)
- ⊙ 1 prize drawing question (optional per school)
- ⊙ Qualtrics platform used
- ⊙ Administered in September 2022 (open for 3 weeks)
- ⊙ Survey data was cleaned and prepared for analysis using Excel and SPSS.

For our methodology, we developed 9 survey questions adapted from both the 2016 Florida Virtual Campus survey and the 2019 Gettysburg College survey. Some questions asked students to “mark all that apply” (please keep this in mind when we review the data). We also asked 8 demographic questions to figure out if the response group represented the entire student body and if the cost of textbooks affect some student groups differently than others. Finally, to incentivize completion of the survey, we had one prize drawing question which was optional per school.

The survey was administered on the Qualtrics platform (provided by Bates College) in September 2022 and the survey was open for 3 weeks. We did not do a random sampling but rather encouraged all our students to take the survey. Promotional efforts varied by institution.

Our survey data was cleaned and prepared for analysis using Excel and SPSS.


## Who Participated:

- ⊙ Bates College
- ⊙ Colby College
- ⊙ Connecticut College
- ⊙ Gettysburg College
- ⊙ Haverford College
- ⊙ Lafayette College
- ⊙ Macalester College
- ⊙ Middlebury College
- ⊙ Mount Holyoke College
- ⊙ Skidmore College
- ⊙ University of the South


These are the participating Oberlin Group schools that disseminated the survey.

As an aggregate, there were 3601 responses providing an average response rate of 15%. Our institution's response rate was 22%.

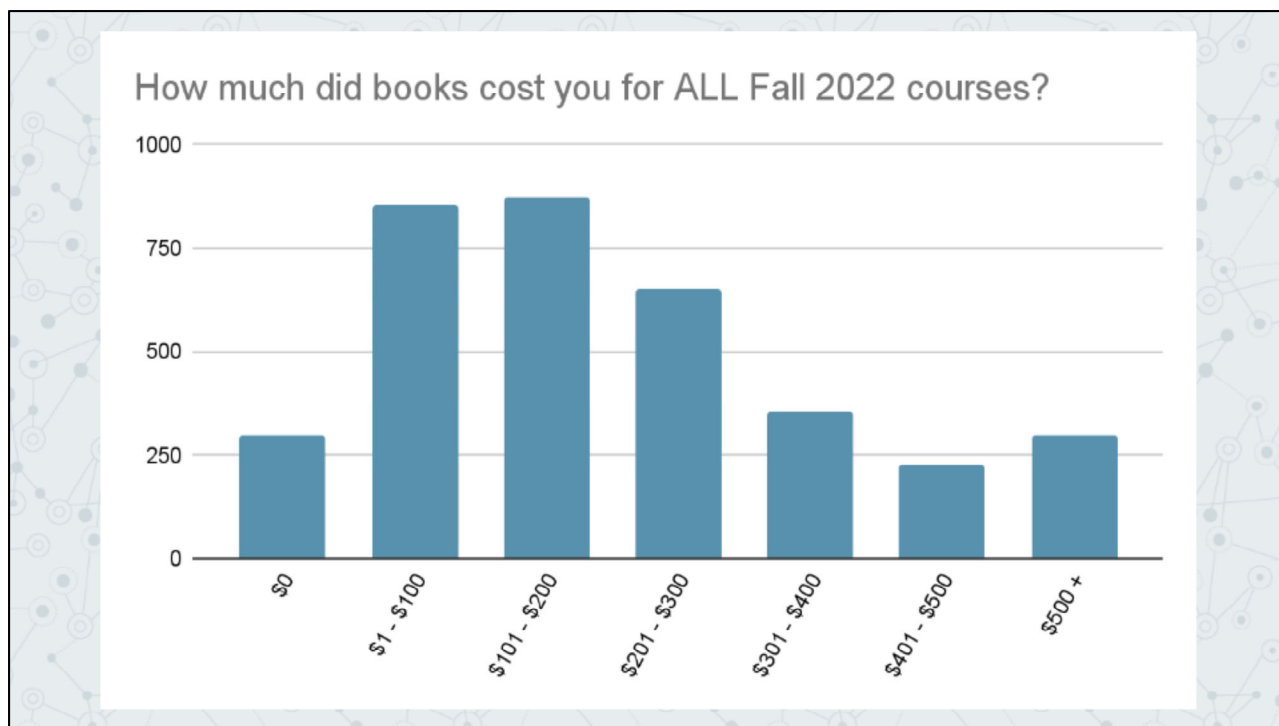
Today we'll be reporting the results of the large group.



How much did books  
(textbooks, novels, ebooks)  
cost you for ALL Fall 2022  
courses?



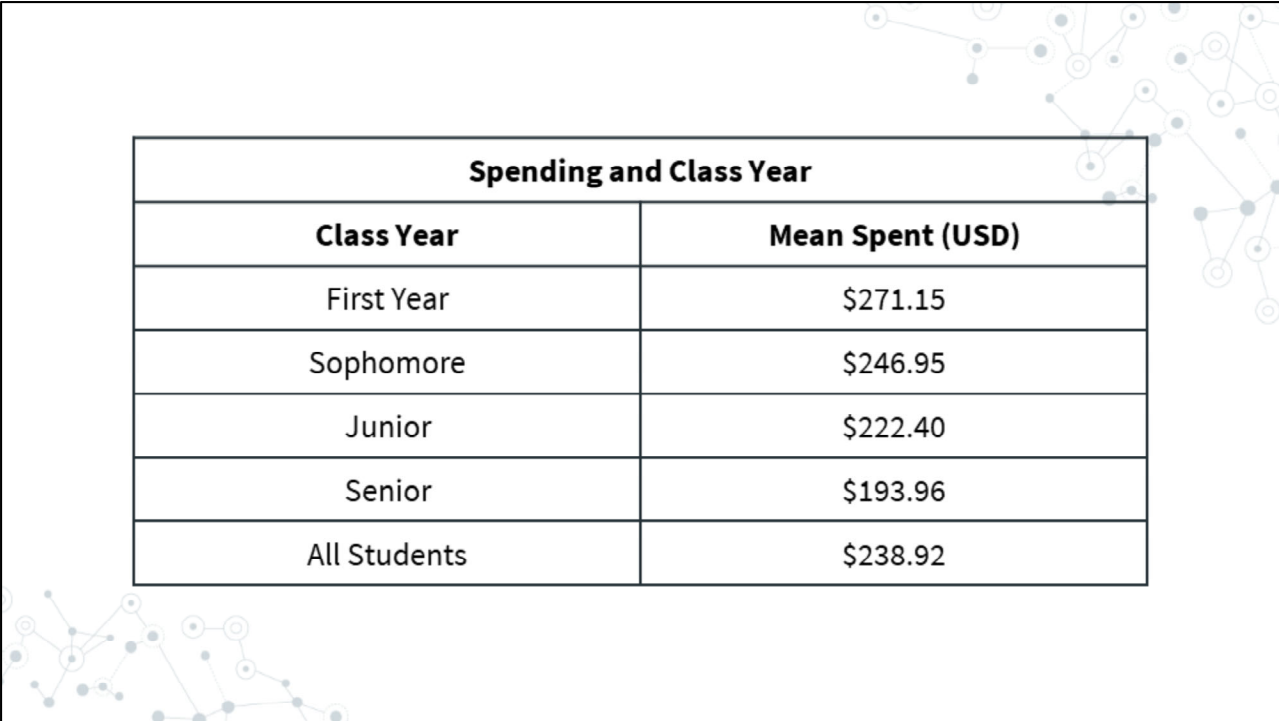
We asked students how much books cost for all their Fall 2022 courses.



The mean cost for all respondents was \$239.18, and the most common response was \$200.

In the “Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2022” report, the College Board indicates that students at private, nonprofit, four-year on-campus colleges spend \$340 on course materials annually (<https://research.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/trends-in-college-pricing-student-aid-2022.pdf>).

Our findings roughly support this statistic, though students at these Oberlin group schools may be paying more.

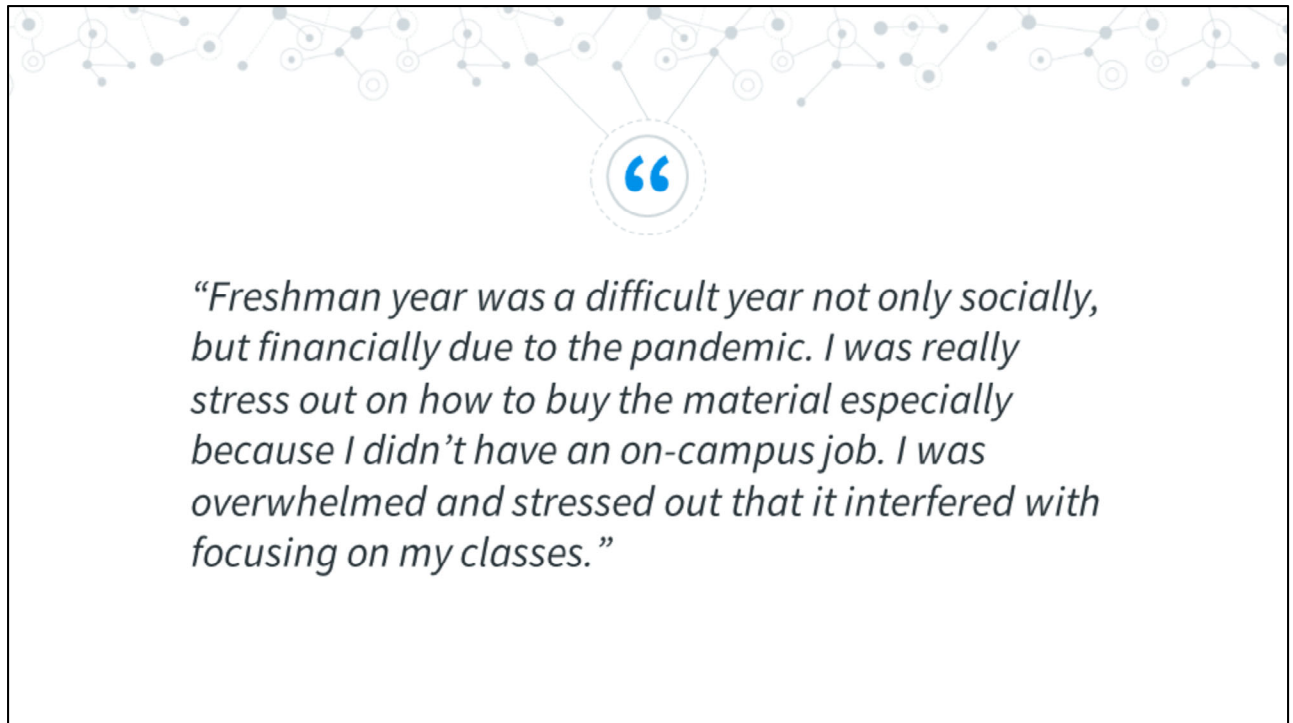


<b>Spending and Class Year</b>	
<b>Class Year</b>	<b>Mean Spent (USD)</b>
First Year	\$271.15
Sophomore	\$246.95
Junior	\$222.40
Senior	\$193.96
All Students	\$238.92

Cost differed significantly by class year with first-years spending the most and seniors spending the least.

This supports the the idea that first-year students do not yet have the knowledge of what resources they have on hand at the institution or measures they can take to reduce the cost. Introductory classes could also have higher cost texts.





Throughout this presentation I will be inserting the student voice by reading their free text comments.

<b>Average cost of Fall 2022 Textbooks (First-gen status)</b>	
	<b>Mean*</b>
First-generation students	\$312.94
Non-first-generation students	\$217.66

<b>Average cost of Fall 2022 Textbooks (Pell status)</b>	
	<b>Mean*</b>
Pell Grant recipients	\$259.67
Non Pell Grant recipients	\$234.10

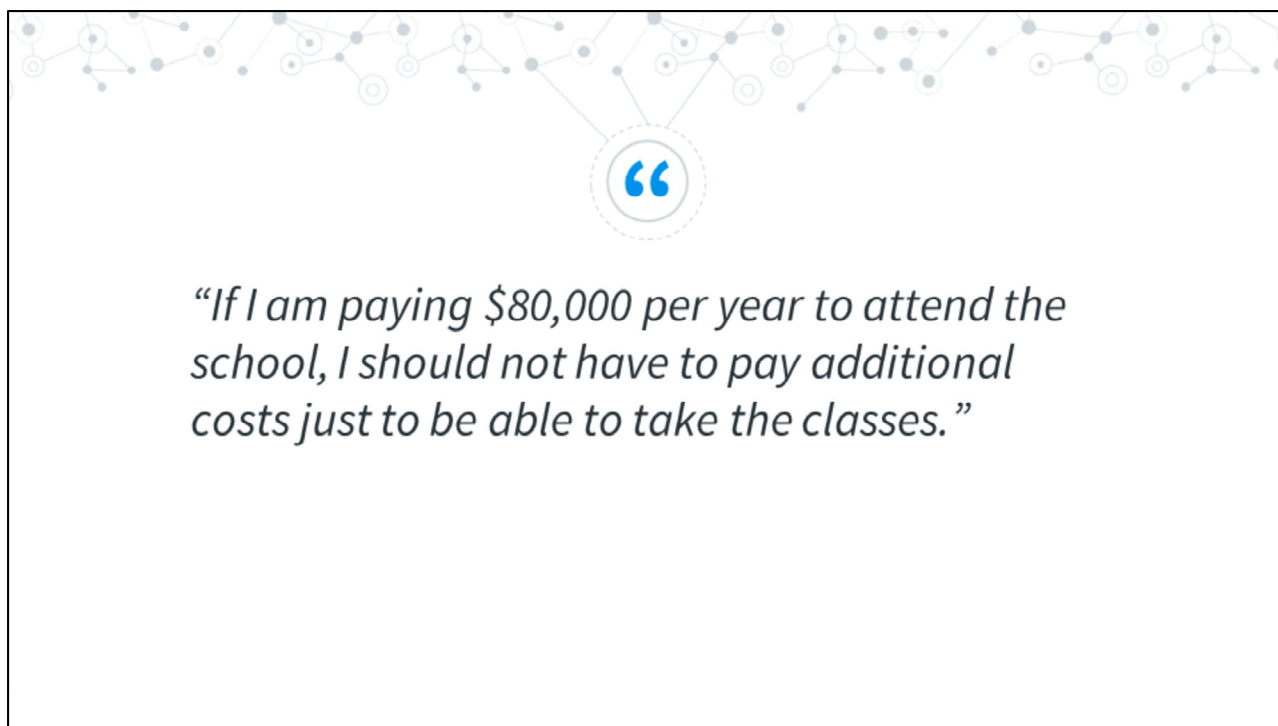
\*chi-squared test indicates means differ significantly

We were especially interested in how book costs affected first-generation students and Pell Grant recipients, so you'll see us isolate those results throughout this presentation.


For average cost of fall textbooks, means varied significantly for both groups.

First generation students spent an average of nearly \$100 more than non-first-gen students.


Pell grant recipients spent an average of \$26 more than non-Pell students.



*“If I am paying \$80,000 per year to attend the school, I should not have to pay additional costs just to be able to take the classes.”*

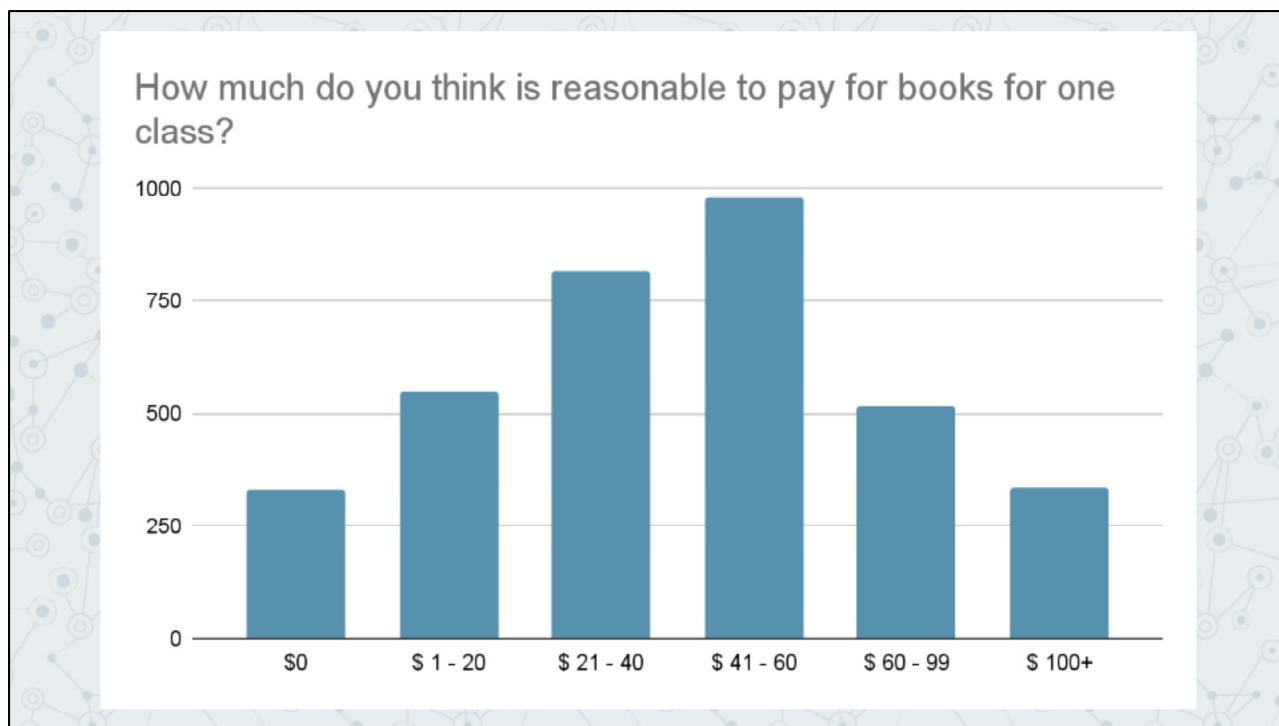


How much do you feel is reasonable to pay for all books and required course materials for a SINGLE class?



We then asked students to provide us with a number they think is reasonable to pay for a single class.

What do you think our students said?



\$50 was the most common response. The mean for all respondents was \$62.37 and it did not vary significantly by class year.

Affordable Learning Georgia labels "low-cost materials" as \$40 or under. ([https://www.affordablelearninggeorgia.org/about/course\\_catalog\\_designators](https://www.affordablelearninggeorgia.org/about/course_catalog_designators)) so our students are giving faculty an extra \$10 to work with.

Clearly most students think it's reasonable to pay some amount for course materials, just not a large amount.

<b>Student perceived reasonable cost for single class (First-gen status)</b>	
	<b>Mean*</b>
First-generation students	\$77.80
Non-first-generation students	\$58.26
<b>Student perceived reasonable cost for single class (Pell status)</b>	
	<b>Mean*</b>
Pell Grant recipients	\$68.71
Non Pell Grant recipients	\$60.43

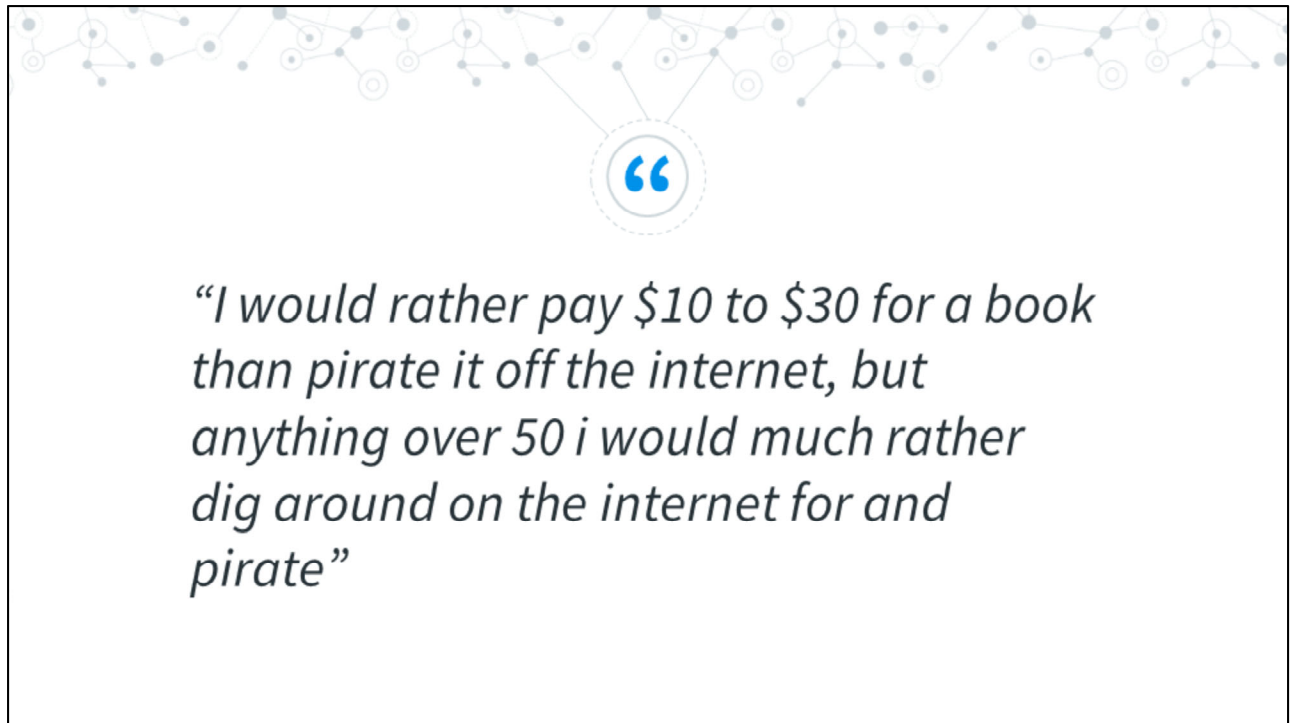
\*chi-squared test indicates means differ significantly

Again, we looked at what first-gen and Pell Grant students thought was a reasonable cost for a single class, and the mean response varied significantly among both groups.


For first-generation students, reasonable cost per class was \$77.80 compared to \$58.26 for non-first-gen students. To confirm: first-gen students' perception of what books should reasonably cost is HIGHER than non-first-gen students.

For Pell grant recipients, the effect was similar though less pronounced.


So far we've learned that first-generation and Pell students pay more for books and also named a higher reasonable per-class book cost than non-first-gen and non-Pell students - we found this a bit surprising!



*“I would rather pay \$10 to \$30 for a book than pirate it off the internet, but anything over 50 i would much rather dig around on the internet for and pirate”*



What measures have you taken to reduce your required book costs for the Fall 2022 semester?



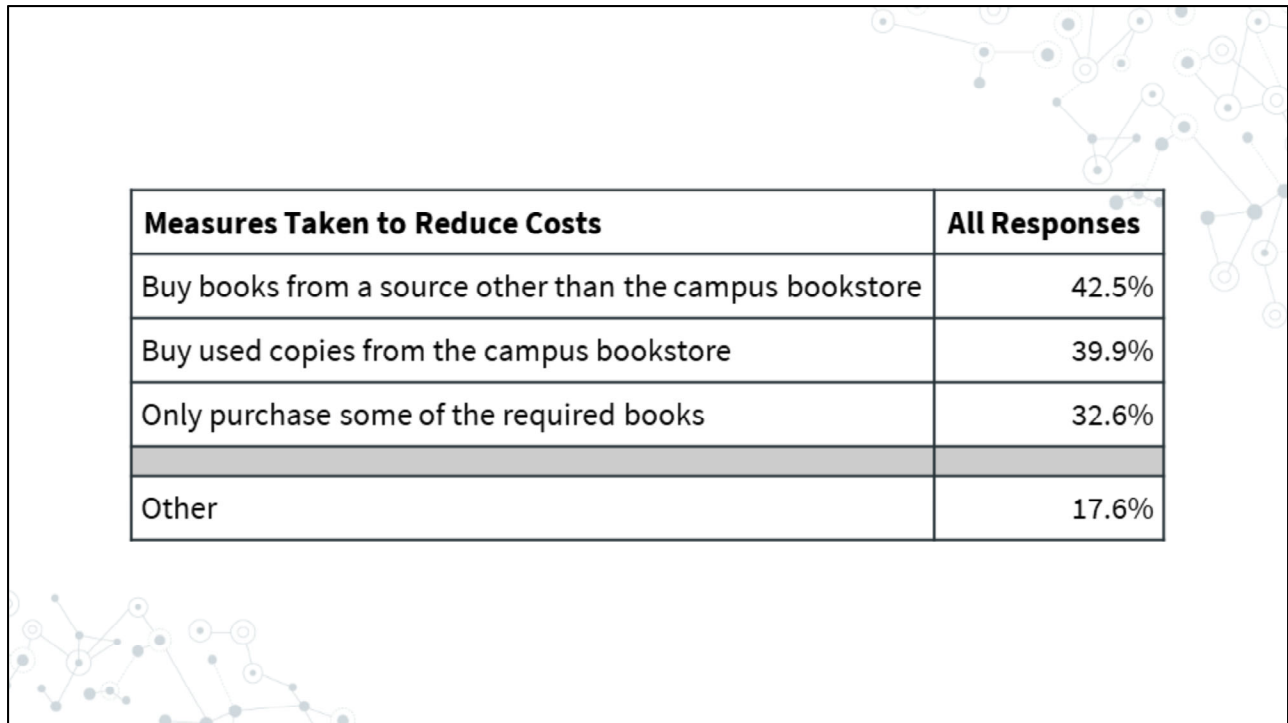
We asked students to identify the measures they have taken to reduce book costs.



Measures Taken to Reduce Costs	All Responses
Buy books from a source other than the campus bookstore	42.5%
Buy used copies from the campus bookstore	39.9%
Only purchase some of the required books	32.6%
Rent a copy from the campus bookstore	27.7%
Rent books from a source other than the campus bookstore	26.6%
Share books with classmate	23.5%
Check out course materials from the library	23.1%
Use a reserve copy from the campus library	21.9%
Other	17.6%
Worked additional hours at my job to pay for books	15.8%
Sell used books	15.0%
Buy lifetime access to a digital version of a book	13.1%
I do not attempt to reduce book costs	5.5%

Here you will see all the measures taken to reduced costs listed by frequency. The slide deck will be shared so you can examine the list more closely. For now, the following slides will highlight a few responses.

I quickly did want to point out that only 5% of respondents said they do not reduce book costs so most students are doing something.



<b>Measures Taken to Reduce Costs</b>	<b>All Responses</b>
Buy books from a source other than the campus bookstore	42.5%
Buy used copies from the campus bookstore	39.9%
Only purchase some of the required books	32.6%
Other	17.6%

To focus in on our highest responses to this question, respondents were most likely to buy books from a source other than the college bookstore and to buy used books from the college bookstore as a way to control costs, but **nearly a third** do not purchase all of the required books for a class.

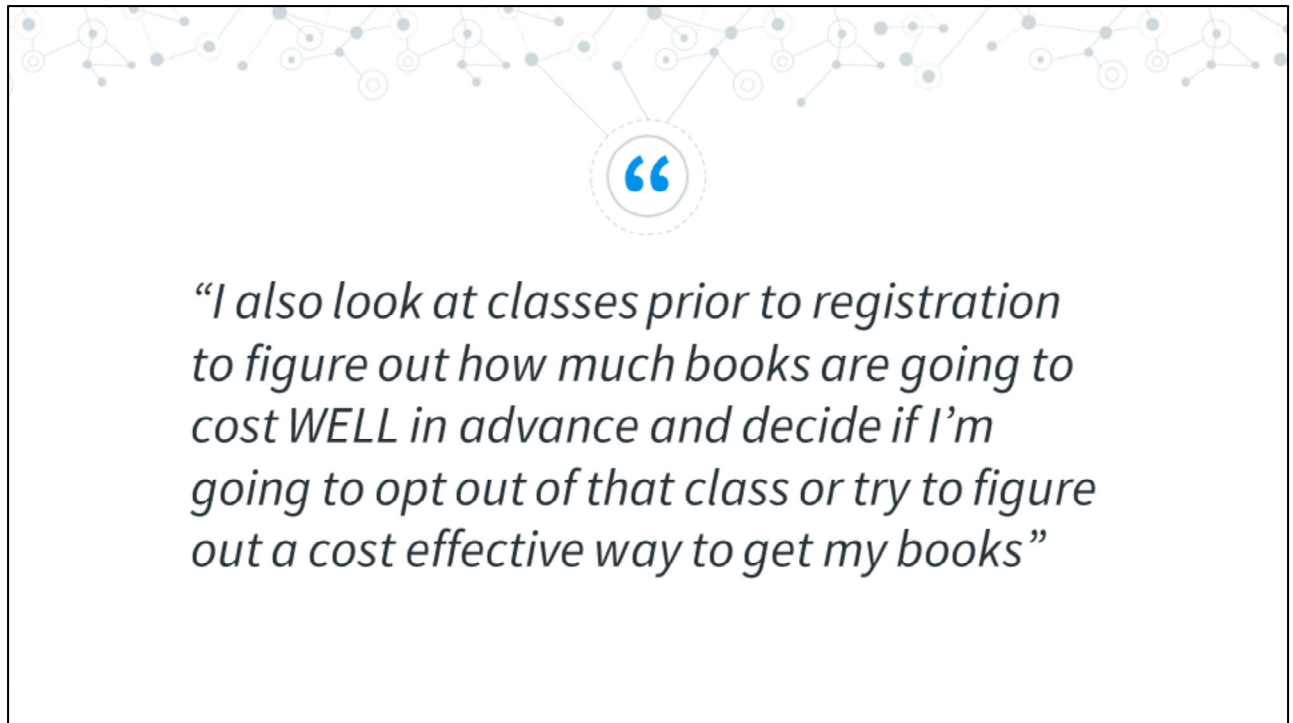
Going further, Students were given the option to self-report other types of measures used to control costs. Of note, it appears that some form of “download from the web” or extralegal activities (actions taken that are not regulated or allowed by law) were by far the most common response.

<b>Measures Taken to Reduce Costs (First-gen status)</b>			
	<b>First-gen</b>	<b>NOT First-gen</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Check out course materials from the library	30.2%	21.1%	9.1
Worked additional hours at my job to pay for books	21.9%	13.9%	8.0
Use a reserve copy from the campus library	27.8%	20.0%	7.8


  

<b>Measures Taken to Reduce Costs (Pell status)</b>			
	<b>Pell</b>	<b>NOT Pell</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Worked additional hours at my job to pay for books	23.8%	13.3%	10.5
Check out course materials from the library	29.1%	21.7%	7.4
Use a reserve copy from the campus library	27.0%	20.3%	6.7


These charts isolate some of the biggest differences in measures taken from our First-generation and Pell grant students responses listed in order of greatest difference. These students are more likely to utilize the library and work additional hours to pay for books.



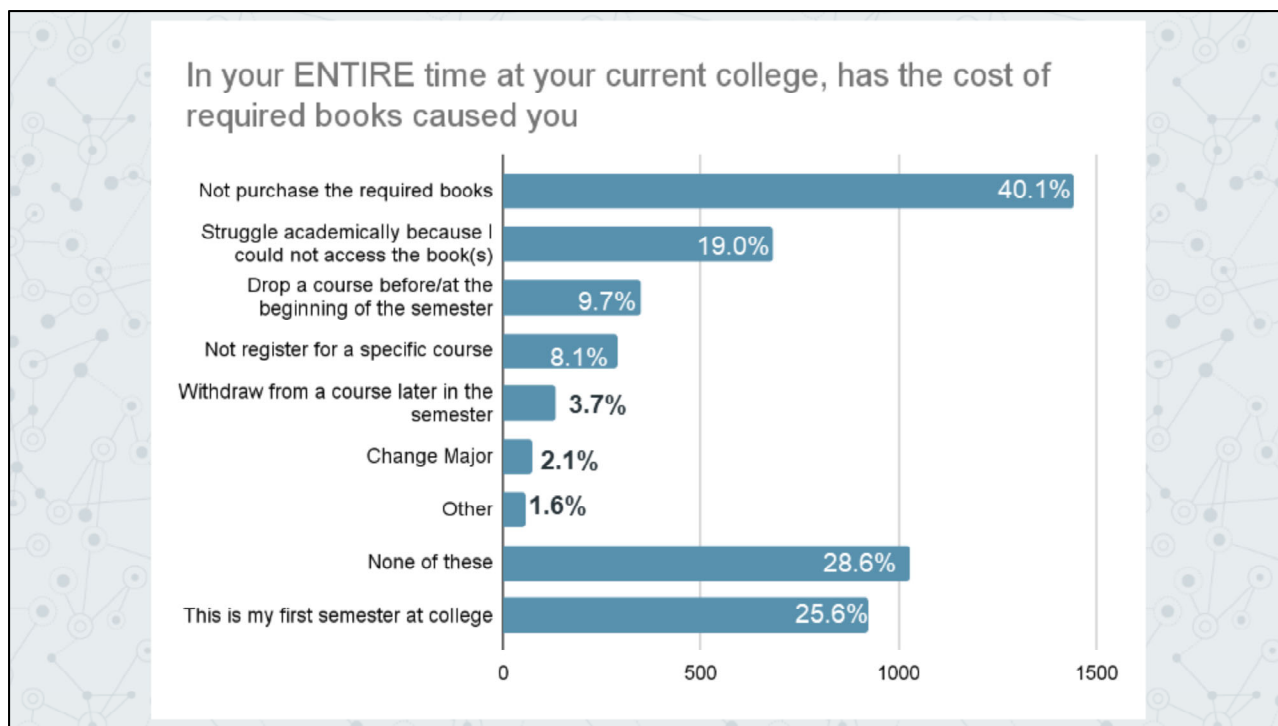
*“I also look at classes prior to registration to figure out how much books are going to cost WELL in advance and decide if I’m going to opt out of that class or try to figure out a cost effective way to get my books”*



In your ENTIRE time at  
your current college, has  
the cost of required books  
caused you to...?



We then asked students to tell us what the cost of required books has impacted them over their entire college career. Note that this question is different than previous questions where we asked specifically about the Fall 2022 semester.

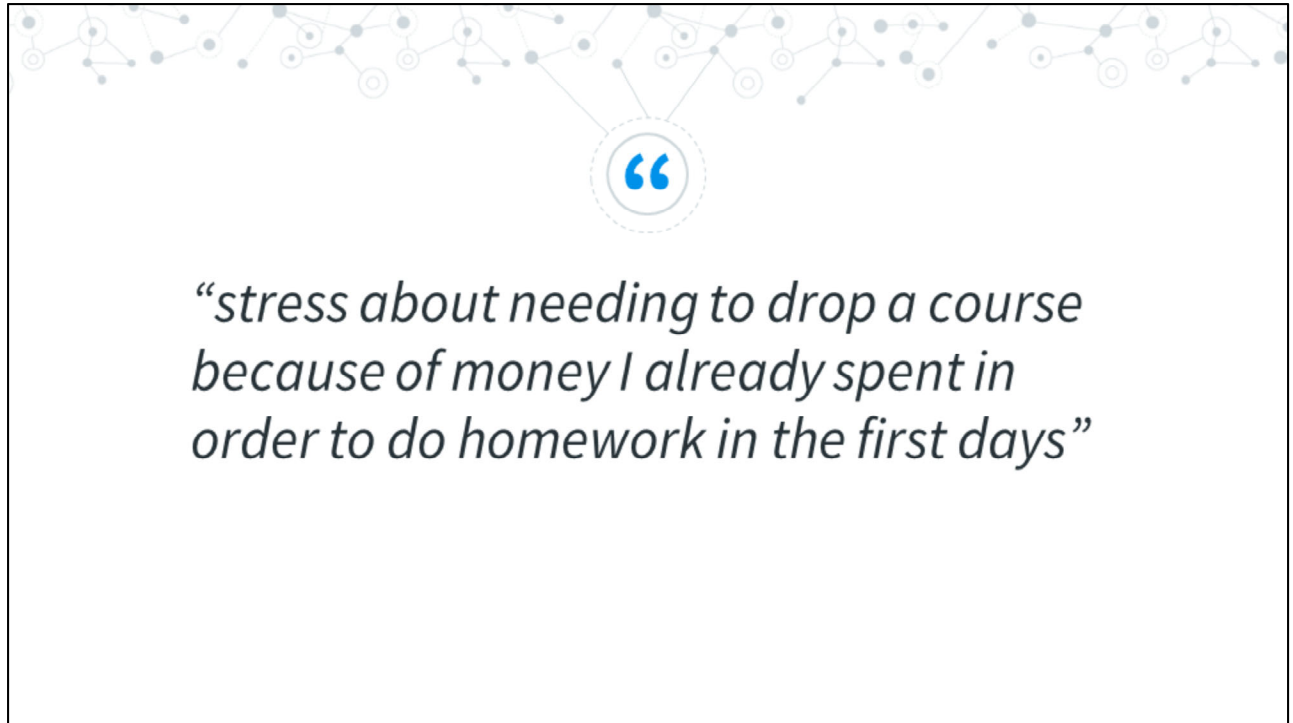


The most common impact of the cost of books and materials is that students do not buy all the required books (also evidenced when posed as a measure to save money). However, nearly 29% of respondents indicated that they did not experience any of the possible response options. This may mean that costs did not impact them/they were able to control costs, and it may also mean that there were different impacts not listed here. It is important to note that **19% of the students struggled academically because they did not have the book for a class**. Nearly 10% dropped a course because of the cost of the books and 8% choose not to register for a specific course because of the cost.

We also had an option for first year and transfer students to select “no effect because it was their first semester at college.” This was to separate students who simply are not impacted by textbook costs from those who have not been on campus long enough to feel effects (remember, the survey was administered during the first few weeks of the fall semester).


<b>Cost of required books caused you to... (First-gen status)</b>			
	<b>First-gen</b>	<b>NOT First-gen</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Struggle academically because I could not access the book(s)	29.9%	15.6%	14.3
Drop a course before/at the beginning of the semester	20.1%	6.5%	13.6
Not purchase the required books	45.1%	39.1%	6.0
<b>Cost of required books caused you to... (Pell status)</b>			
	<b>Pell</b>	<b>NOT Pell</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Struggle academically because I could not access the book(s)	32.8%	14.6%	18.2
Drop a course before/at the beginning of the semester	18.2%	7.1%	11.1
Not purchase the required books	48.3%	38.3%	10.0

There is some variation by first generation student status and Pell grant recipient status. In general, first generation students are much more likely to be affected by costs than students who are not. Struggle academically because they could not access the book(s) had the biggest difference between student groups.




*“stress about needing to drop a course because of money I already spent in order to do homework in the first days”*

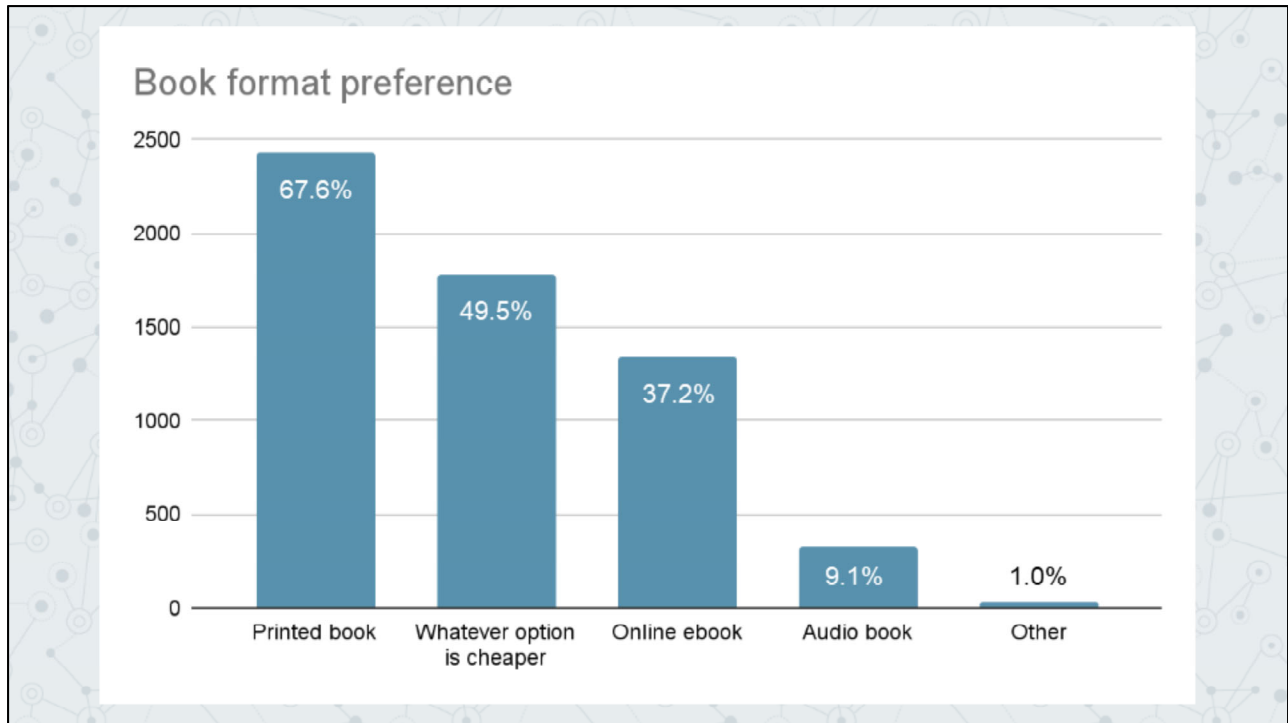




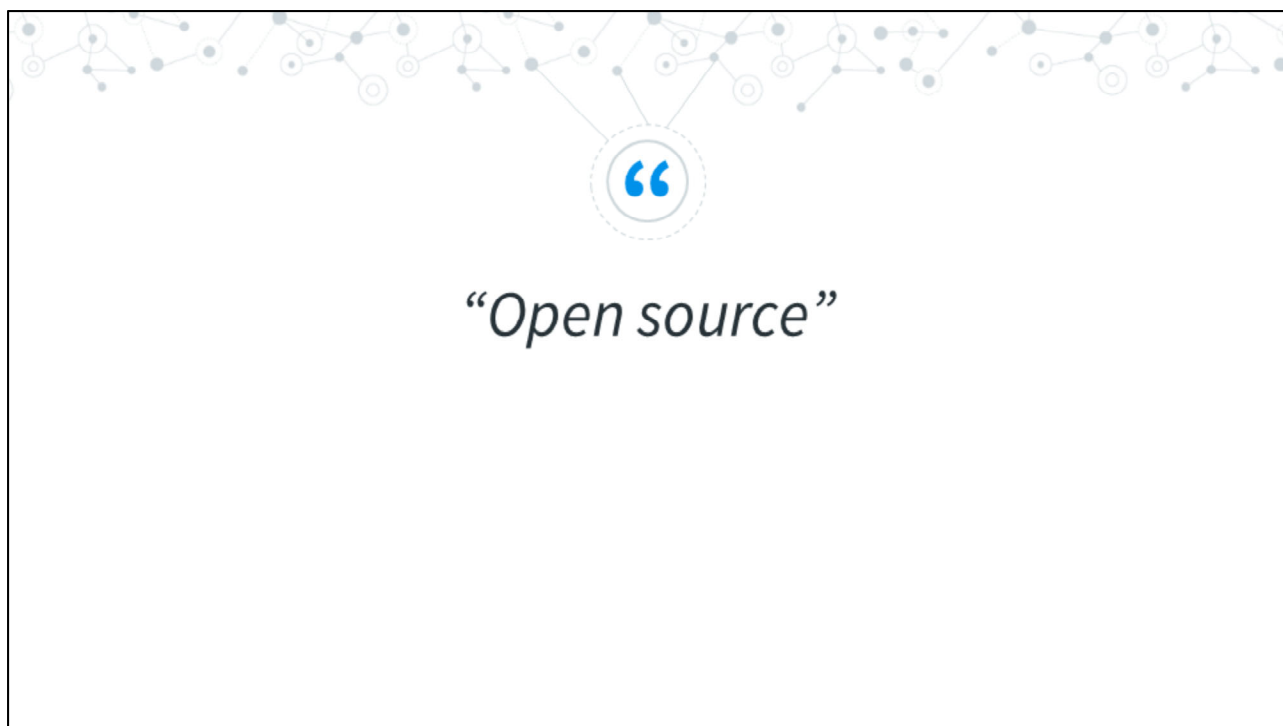
## Which book formats do you prefer?




We then asked students which book format they preferred.




Students prefer printed books significantly more than the other options, but half of all respondents also indicated that they prefer whatever is cheaper.



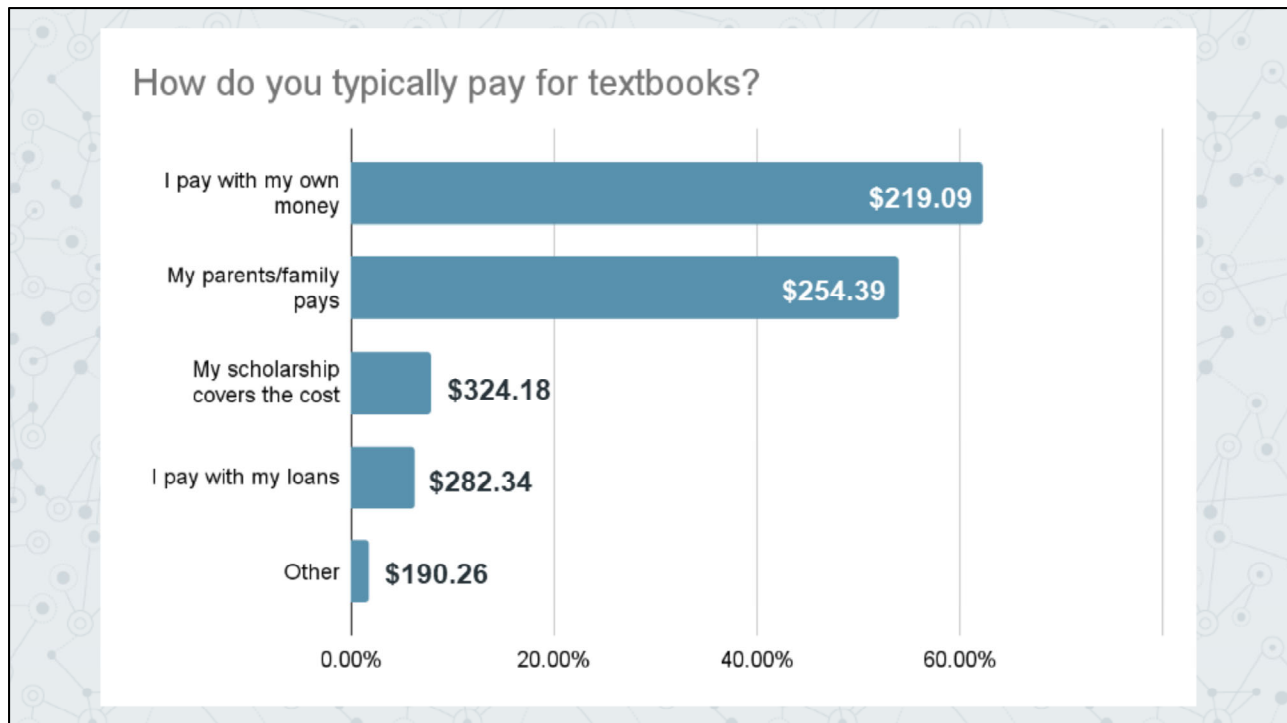
*“Open source”*



## How do you typically pay for your textbooks?



We asked students who pays for their textbooks.

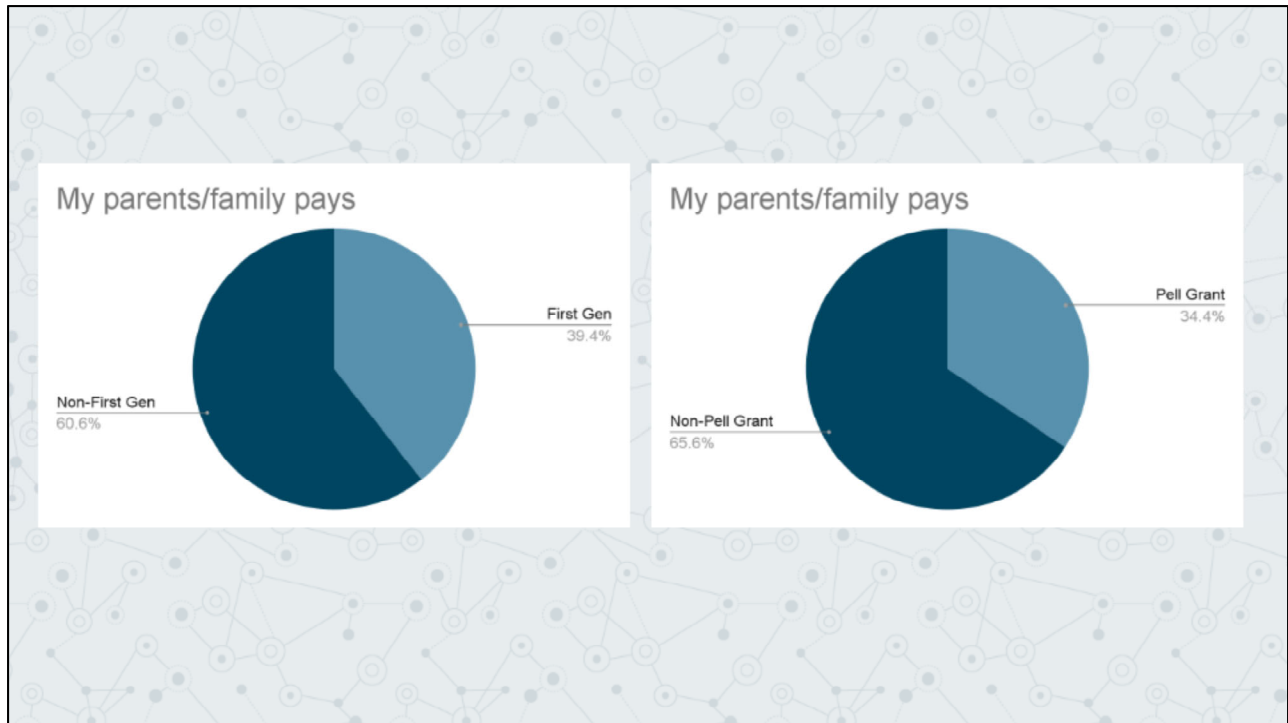


Students tend to pay with their own money and/or their parents/family pays for their books. Student perception is that scholarships/loans are not a large source of funding for textbooks.

Not many students have awards that specifically cover the costs of books, but when they do they spend more (paying for more of their required texts or buying new versions).

**[animation to fade in spend amounts]**

Let me illustrate this point now - here are the total mean spends for each category. Students who do not pay with their own money and/or their family/parents pay spent more than those who do pay with their own money and/or whose parents do not pay. Students whose scholarship pay for books spend more on average than any other group. All of these differences are statistically significant.




If we isolate our first generation and Pell Grant recipient students we see that they are much less likely to have parental/family support for textbook costs.




“

*“Coming from a low income single parent household, I find that the cost of course materials is extremely limiting. Although I get fair financial aid, I feel like the cost of course materials isn't factored in. My parent can't afford to pay for my books for me so that leaves me to either go in debt or work extra hours to make ends meet. I feel like its really unfair and may limit students in the courses they feel comfortable taking. I think this is a huge issue that should be addressed and I like that certain departments such as the Math department have made course materials free to access online.”*

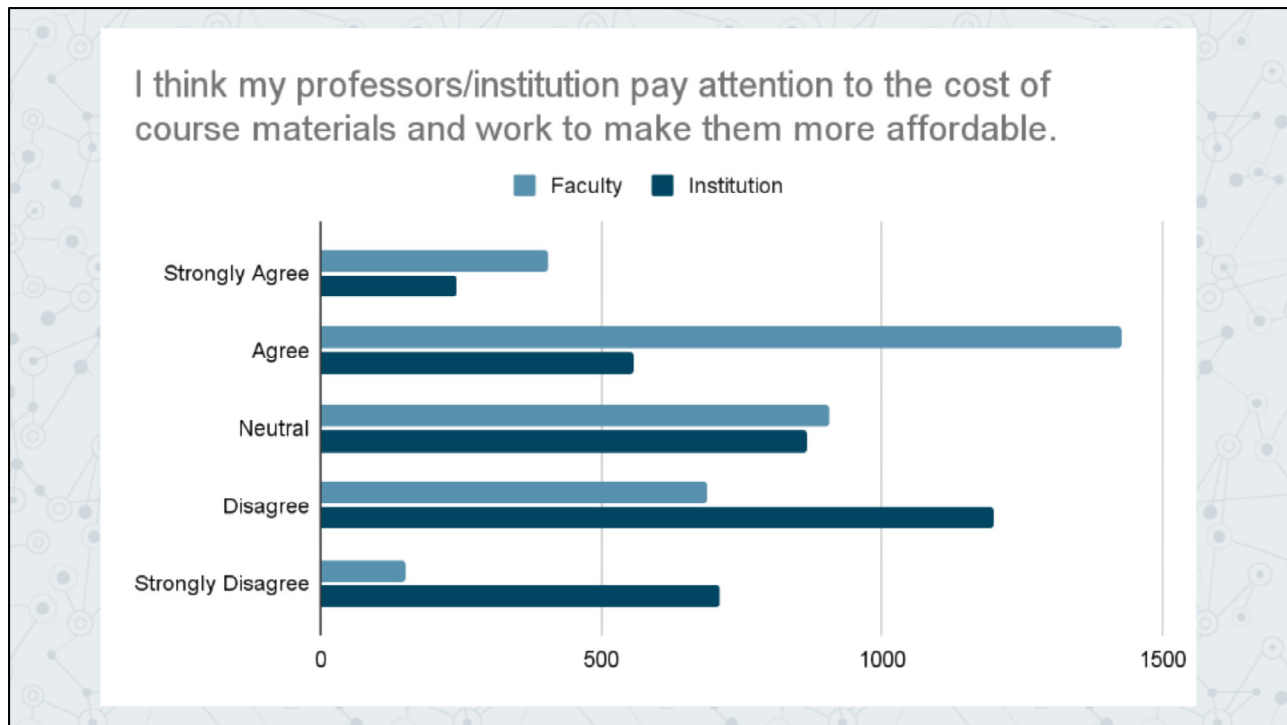


**I think my professors/  
institution pay attention to  
the cost of course materials  
and work to make them  
more affordable.**



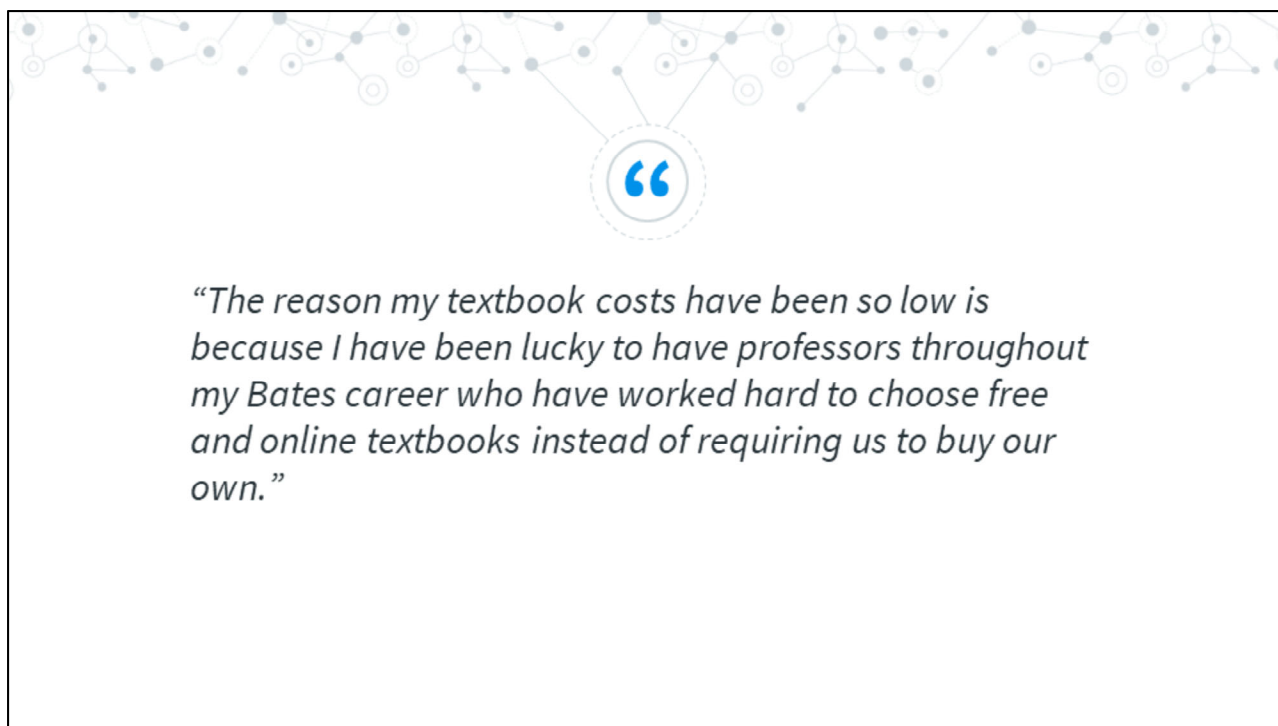
We had students rate how they believe their professors vs the institution acknowledge textbook cost. This was asked in two separate questions, but we are combining responses in one slide.





Half of all students agree or strongly agree that their professors pay attention to the cost of course materials and works to make them more affordable. A quarter are neutral and another 25% do not agree.

On the other hand, students do not think the college or university pays attention to costs, with 53% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement.



*“The reason my textbook costs have been so low is because I have been lucky to have professors throughout my Bates career who have worked hard to choose free and online textbooks instead of requiring us to buy our own.”*



*“i think the institution should stop thinking that all students are financially privileged and are fully supported by their family. also, they should not expect the professors to figure the problem out on their own. it is the institution’s responsibility to make higher education available to all students with different backgrounds and levels of support they have outside of school.”*

## Key Takeaways

- ⦿ First-year students, first generation students, and Pell Grant recipients suffer the largest consequences from textbook costs.
- ⦿ As students become “savvier”, the methods they use to acquire course materials expand, including extra-legal activities.
- ⦿ \$50 is the cutoff for what students view as affordable.
- ⦿ While some individual faculty are addressing book costs, institutional-level actions are needed to accelerate student impact.

Boiling this survey down to these key takeaways we believe:

1. **[click]** First-year students, first generation students, and Pell Grant recipients suffer the largest consequences from textbook costs.
2. **[click]** As students become “savvier”, the methods they use to acquire course materials expand, including extra-legal activities.
3. **[click]** \$50 is the cutoff for what students view as affordable.
4. **[click]** While some individual faculty are addressing book costs, institutional-level actions are needed to accelerate student impact.

## What can WE do?

- ⦿ Library reserves program for all course-required textbooks
- ⦿ Annually review textbook costs
- ⦿ Allowing students to acquire older editions
- ⦿ Peer-to-peer sharing or student exchanges
- ⦿ Institutional support for faculty who use openly licensed materials instead of costly commercial textbooks
- ⦿ Course marking for free or low-cost books
- ⦿ Institutional support at time of tenure and promotion for faculty who use open educational practices

There ARE things we as a community can do to influence the textbook affordability environment here on campus!

**[click]** Libraries traditionally do not acquire materials designated as textbooks due to their high cost and ever changing editions. However, at Ladd we developed a policy many years ago that prioritized the purchasing of all required course materials. This evolving policy was heavily influenced by students who raised concerns that the price of assigned textbooks was negatively influencing their choice of majors and their learning experience. Every semester the College Store provides us the textbook list so that all required books are available for short-term loan - we even expanded the program to acquire ebooks when available for library purchasing thus opening up even more copies to students. It is so important that faculty communicate their course adaptations to the College Store and the library even if they are freely available materials. In fact, perhaps the biggest key to this puzzle is clear communication. Promotion of this option is essential and everyone can help spread the word from students to faculty and staff. Going one step further, if anyone is here from Advancement, fundraising or endowing the reserves budget would be amazing and would provide us even more opportunity to acquire more copies of these needed texts and sustainability of the whole program!

**[click]** Faculty, have you looked at the price of your required materials lately? Make it a habit to annually check and ask your students about their experiences with obtaining books.

**[click]** Faculty, have you considered allowing your students to use older editions of your textbooks? While considering this option will mean reviewing your syllabus to make sure pagination details are accurate, students will thank you.

**[click]** Peer-to-peer sharing networks are also helpful for students. A few years back some Bates students developed the Bates Book Exchange but the mere act of sharing texts can help.

**[click]** Faculty, have you considered using Open Educational Resources (OER) which are free textbooks or learning materials and often have low-cost print on demand options? This may be a viable solution for many subjects especially introductory courses.

**[click]** Course marking - what is that? Well I know we strive to meet the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) requirement by listing out the cost of course materials for our students in advance of enrollment but what about marking the courses that utilize an Open textbook or low-cost book for our students in our course registration system thus providing transparency and giving students agency? This solution is gaining traction around the country. New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) has just received Hewlett grant funding to pilot this type of project at several New England institutions.

**[click]** On an institutional level, the way to make this actually work is to support faculty who choose to use OER or open educational practices in the classroom at the time of their tenure and promotion. Tenure and promotion is the system that our faculty work within - why don't we use it to increase equity.

## Getting Started with OER:

- ◎ [OER Starter Kit and Workbook](#)
- ◎ [OER Starter Kit for Program Managers](#)
- ◎ [OER Accessibility Toolkit](#)
- ◎ List of OER Repositories and Federated Search Tools:
  - [The Open Textbook Library](#)
  - [BCCampus Open Textbooks](#)
  - [Iowa State University Library Guide to OER](#)
  - [SUNY's Openly Available Sources Integrated Search \(OASIS\)](#)
  - [George Mason OER Metafinder](#)
  - [MERLOT](#)

Of course, the solution with the most potential for transformative change on a campus is for faculty to adopt, adapt or create Open Educational Resources (OER) instead of assigning traditional textbooks.

While I can't go into this subject too far, if you are interested in getting started with OER, we listed some resources on this slide.

OER Starter Kit and Workbook - <https://cuny.manifoldapp.org/projects/the-oer-starter-kit-workbook>

OER Starter Kit for Program Managers - <https://press.rebus.community/oerstarterkitpm/>

OER Accessibility Toolkit - <https://open.ubc.ca/oer-accessibility-toolkit/>

List of OER Repositories and Federated Search Tools:

The Open Textbook Library - <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks>

BCCampus Open Textbooks - <https://open.bccampus.ca/browse-our-collection/>

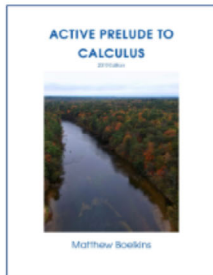
Iowa State University Library Guide to OER - <http://instr.iastate.libguides.com/oer/findbysubject>

SUNY's Openly Available Sources Integrated Search (OASIS) - <https://oasis.geneseo.edu/>

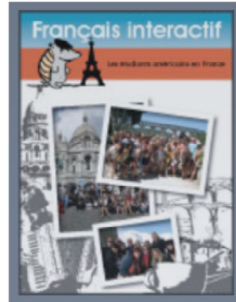
George Mason OER Metafinder - <https://oer.deepwebaccess.com/oer/desktop/en/search.html>

MERLOT - <https://www.merlot.org/index.htm>

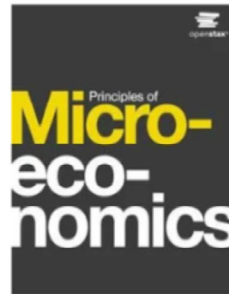
## Examples of some OERs used on our campus



MATH 105 & 106  
**645** students  
impacted since  
**2019**



FRE 101 & 102  
**105** students  
impacted since  
**2018**



ECON 101 & 103  
**275** students  
impacted since  
**2018**



NS/PY 357  
Created by Professor  
Michelle Greene and  
students  
<https://scarab.bates.edu/u/oer/1/>

We actually already have a number of faculty using OER in the classroom. Here are just some examples including an OER developed by our students!:



## Beware industry “solutions”

- ⦿ Digital books
- ⦿ “Inclusive access” programs - <https://www.inclusiveaccess.org/>

As we are thinking about how we can address this issue, we should be aware of how the commercial publishers are responding - the same people who caused the problem to begin with!

Textbook publishers have embraced the digital format. Prices may be lower for students, especially for rentals, but students do not retain access to content after the license period which can vary a lot. Also, digital books cannot be resold, thereby depriving students of a way to recoup some of their initial costs. And let's not forget that the majority of our student respondents told us that they actually prefer the print format!

Then there is this program called “inclusive access,” which sounds good because “inclusion” is desirable... but it is more accurately described as an **automatic textbook billing program**. In this model, all enrolled students automatically receive access to the digital textbook chosen by the professor, and they are billed for it. They have no choice in book format and are not given the opportunity to save costs by using other cost-saving strategies. Publishers emphasize the lower prices they charge in this model, but how much lower? Sure, it's a discount off list price, but is it that different from standard discounts by online booksellers? There are also issues related to academic freedom. We don't have time to get into all the details about this model, but you can learn much more at the link on the slide.

# Thanks!

Slides and speaker notes:

[http://scarab.bates.edu/ils\\_scholarship/10](http://scarab.bates.edu/ils_scholarship/10)

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