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The effect of high course material costs on UTC students

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Introduction

We explored the effects of high course material costs by conducting a survey of the entire UTC student body. There were 167 valid responses to the survey, reflecting an overall response rate of 1.48%. Two broad research questions guided this study:

- What is the impact of course material costs on educational equity among UTC students?
- How does UTC data about course materials compare to other universities?

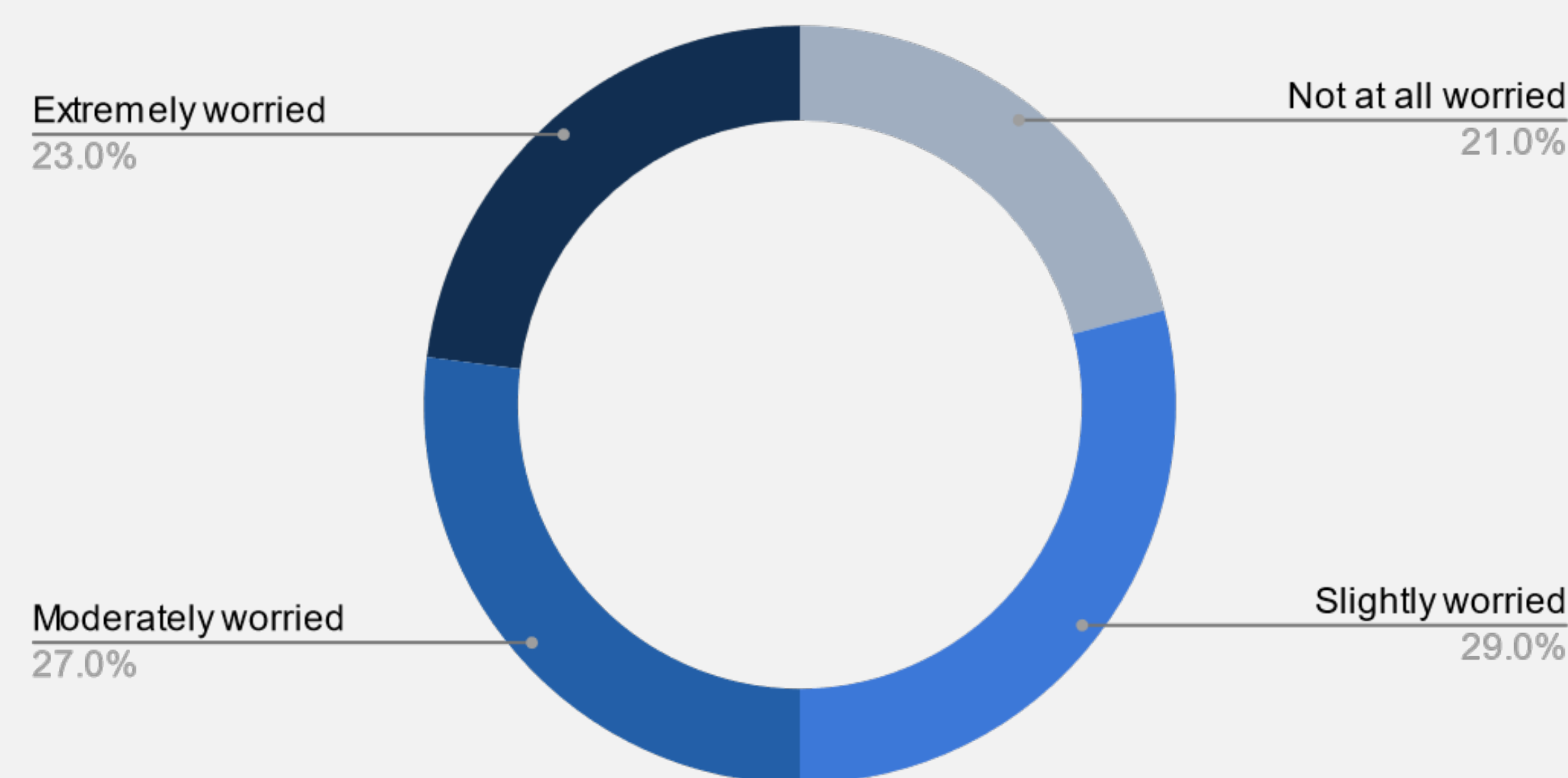
The resulting data shows how course material costs affect UTC students and the disproportionate impact these costs have on historically marginalized populations.

Results

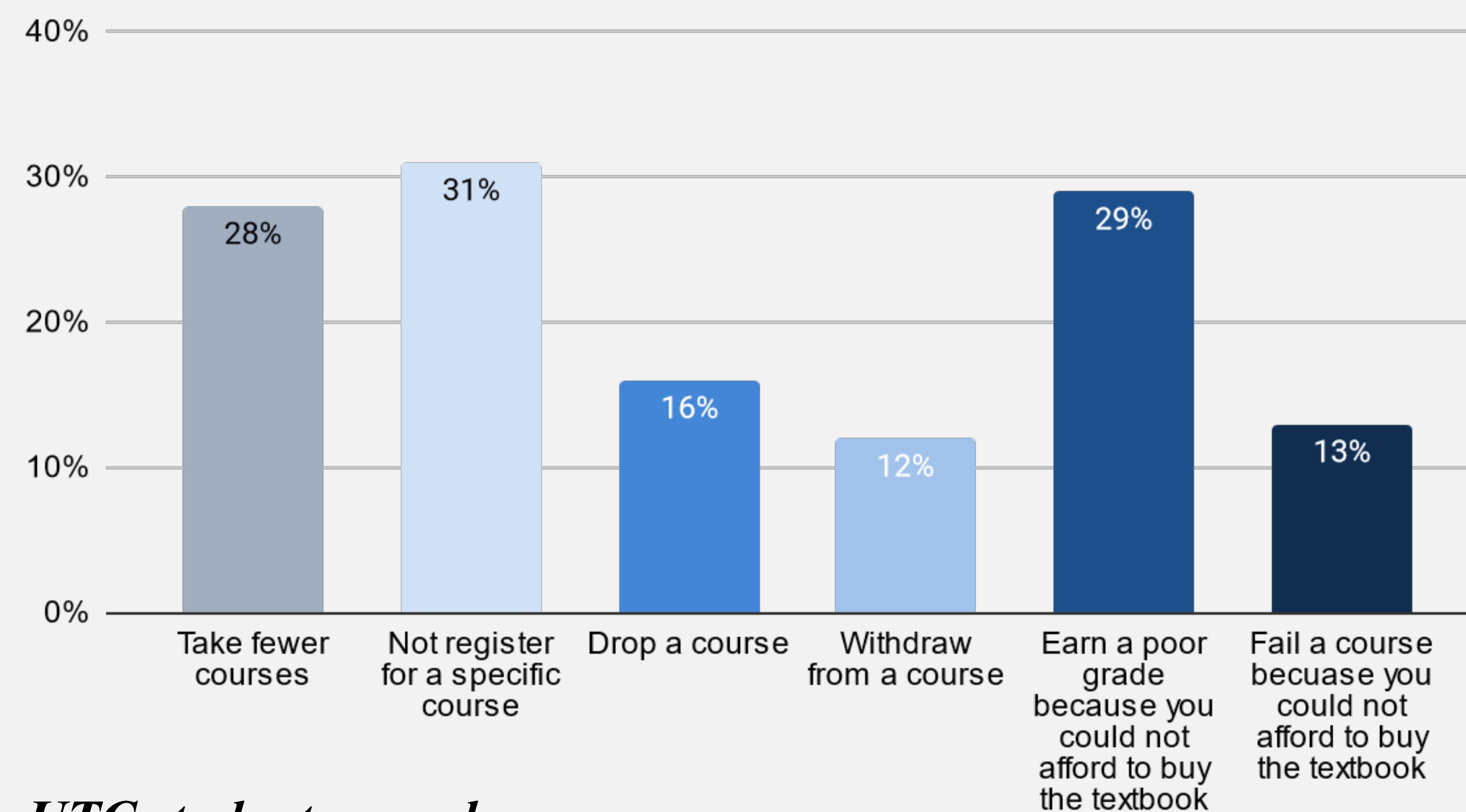
Course material costs cause students worry.

79% of respondents reported some level of worry about meeting course material costs. These findings emphasize the stress that the expense of course materials puts on students.

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

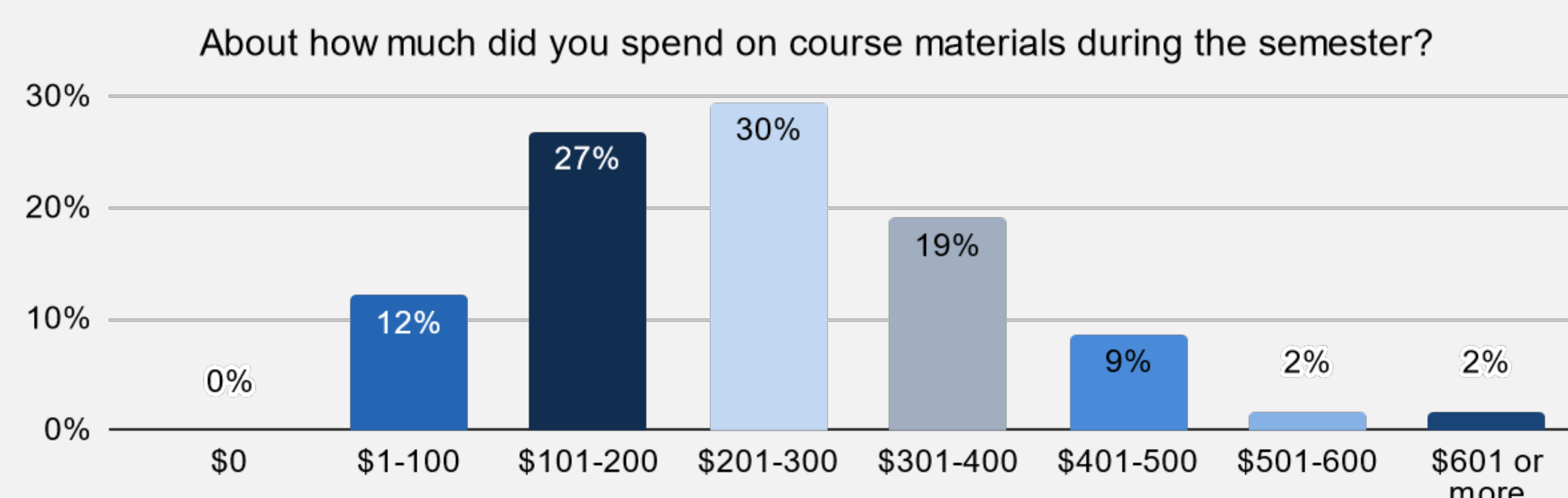


In your academic career, has the cost of required course materials caused you to:



UTC students spend an average of \$201-300 on course materials each semester.

Students estimated the amount spent on course materials this semester, whether bought, rented, or leased, and reported within a range of dollar numbers. **\$201-300** had the largest percentage of answers (30%).



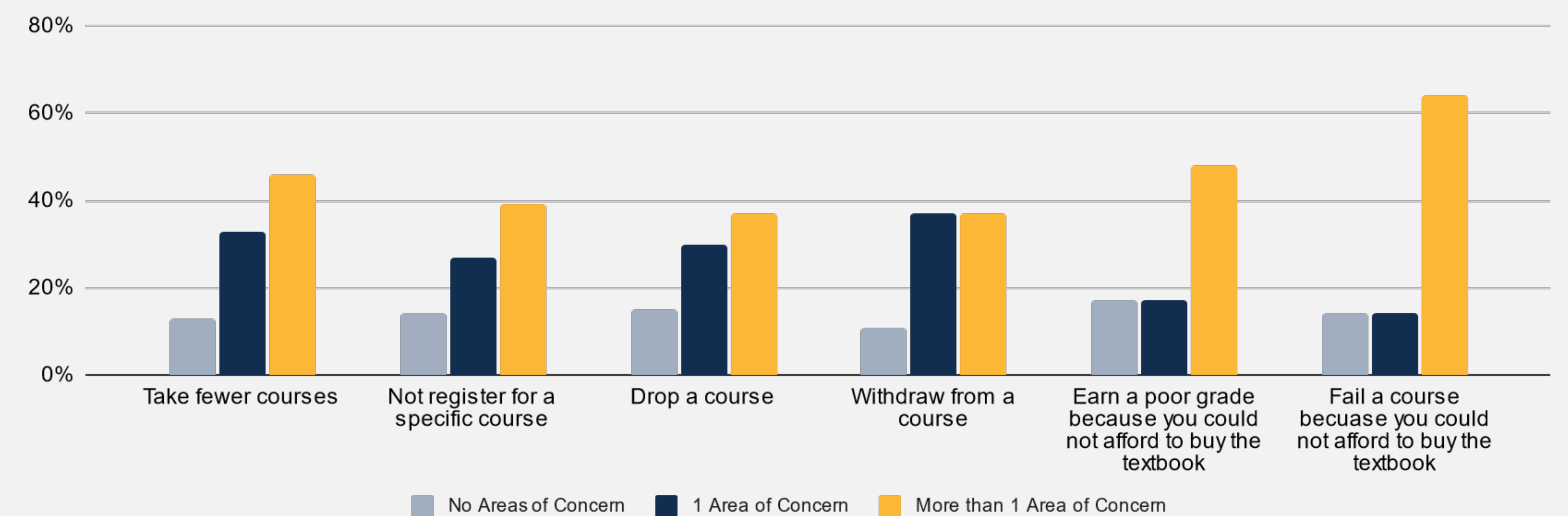
High course materials costs cause harm to students' academic careers.

The findings demonstrate how substantially **course material expenses affect students' academic careers**, including **development opportunities** (31% have not registered for a specific course), and **achievement** (29% have earned a poor grade and 13% have failed a course).

Cost further amplifies the disparities between students.

Seven social and financial areas of concern were identified when exploring the impact of course material costs on educational equity. These areas of concern include Pell Grant program, Educational Loans, Full Time Job(s), Non-White Only, First Generation student, Caretaker, and Disabled. **When examining areas of concern, a compounding effect is associated with the number of areas of concern and negative outcomes.**

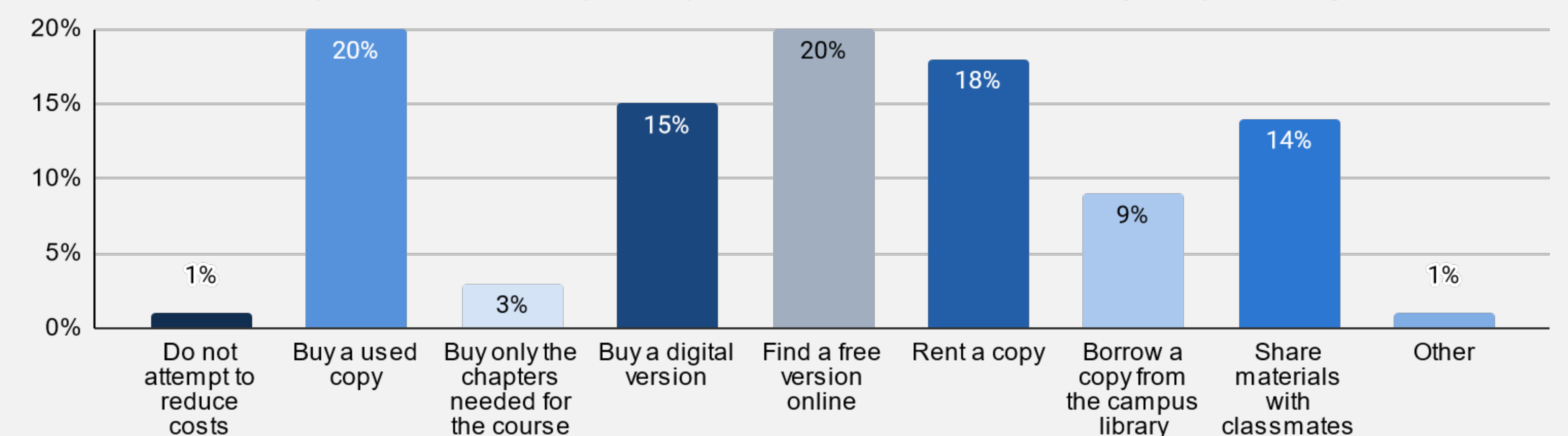
In your academic career, has the cost of required course materials ever caused you to:



Students use several different approaches to lower the cost of required course materials.

99% of students at UTC attempt to reduce the cost of required course materials in many ways, including renting, borrowing, finding a free version online, or sharing materials.

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



UTC data reflect national survey data.

Preliminary results show that UTC follows national trends reported by major studies in Virginia¹ and Florida², which have shown that **the effects of course material costs are widespread and prevalent challenges in higher education**. This survey shows that national data are largely representative, and the expense of higher education, which includes the price of course materials, is a barrier to students' performance and overall well-being.

1. VIVA. (2021). *Virginia Course Materials Survey*
2. Florida Virtual Campus. (2019). 2019 Florida Student Textbook & Course Materials Survey. Tallahassee, FL.
This survey is adapted from the Virginia Course Materials Survey © 2021 by VIVA used under CC BY-NC SA 4.0 Survey data was collected Spring 2023 under IRB approval (IRB #22-139).