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2022 Gettysburg College Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey Executive Summary

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2022 Gettysburg College Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey Executive Summary

Abstract

In Fall 2022, Musselman Library conducted its second course materials survey, this time in collaboration with 10 other liberal arts colleges from around the country. The results from this new survey illuminate how students are affected by textbook and course material costs, how they cope with these costs, and how effects and behaviors have changed since our 2019 survey.

This report summarizes the background of the project, key findings, and recommendations.

Keywords

Textbook affordability, Open education, Gettysburg College, Scholarly Communications, Musselman Library, undergraduates

Disciplines

Higher Education | Library and Information Science | Scholarly Communication

Comments

Local survey results were first shared with the campus during our Friday Forum presentation: "[Spend, Stress, and Struggle: Gettysburg College Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey 2022](#)"

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2022 Gettysburg College Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey

Executive Summary

Janelle Wertzberger, Mary Elmquist

Find this report in **The Cupola**: cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/169

Background The 2022 Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey was conducted in collaboration with 10 other liberal arts colleges, led by a team of librarians from Bates College and Gettysburg College. The survey asked nine questions about students' behaviors and experiences with textbook purchasing. These questions also act as a follow-up to Gettysburg's 2019 student textbook survey¹, providing insight into how the course materials landscape has changed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

- ◆ How much money do students spend on textbooks and required course materials?
- ◆ What strategies do students use to reduce textbook costs?
- ◆ How are students affected by textbook costs?

Participating Institutions

Bates	Haverford	Mount Holyoke
Colby	Lafayette	Skidmore
Connecticut	Macalester	Sewanee
Gettysburg	Middlebury	

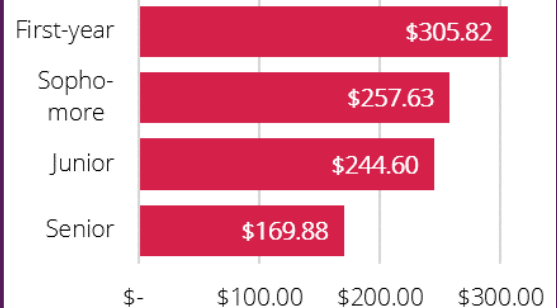
Summary of Key Findings

Results from Gettysburg College

I. Students spent less on books in 2022 than they did in 2019

Just over half of respondents reported spending \$200 or less in Fall 2022, up from about 36% in 2019. The mean response to the question of spending dropped by about \$35 and the most common response went from \$300 in 2019 to \$200 in 2022. First-year students still spend the most, with average spending dropping each class year.

Mean book cost by class year



1. <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/134/>

2. All students are employing more strategies to save on book costs—and feeling more negative effects

Students use many strategies to save money on books; only 3% said they didn't attempt to reduce costs at all. Almost all strategies saw more common use in 2022 than in 2019.

- 28% of all respondents said that they **did not purchase a required text** in Fall 2022 in order to save on their bill, almost twice as many as used this strategy in 2019.
- More students said the cost of books caused them to not buy required materials or **struggle academically** at some point in their whole college career.
- Students are **using library resources to save on book costs**. The percentage of students saying they used course reserves and checked out assigned books from the regular collection both doubled since 2019!

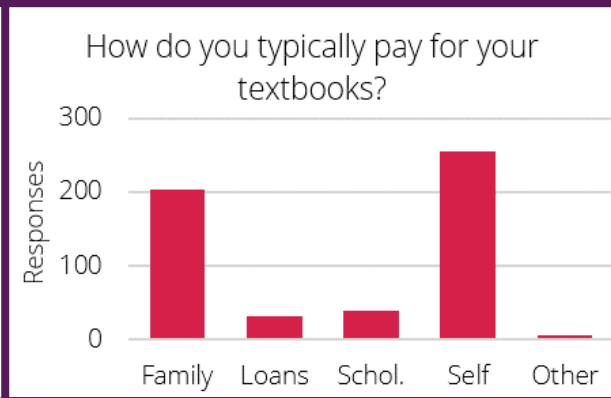
3. Certain groups are disproportionately affected by book costs

First-generation students and Pell Grant recipients experienced more negative effects from book costs than students who didn't belong to these groups. Compared to 2019, first-generation students in 2022 were even more likely than their counterparts to have not purchased books and to have struggled academically due to book costs.

Cost of required books caused you to...	2022		2019	
	1G	Not 1G	1G	Not 1G
Not purchase the required books	42.9%	28.3%	30.4%	21.1%
Struggle academically because I could not access the book(s)	33.3%	10.5%	22.3%	11.1%
	Pell	No Pell	Pell	No Pell
Not purchase the required books	43.9%	27.0%	33.3%	18.9%
Struggle academically because I could not access the book(s)	36.8%	10.8%	27.0%	8.7%

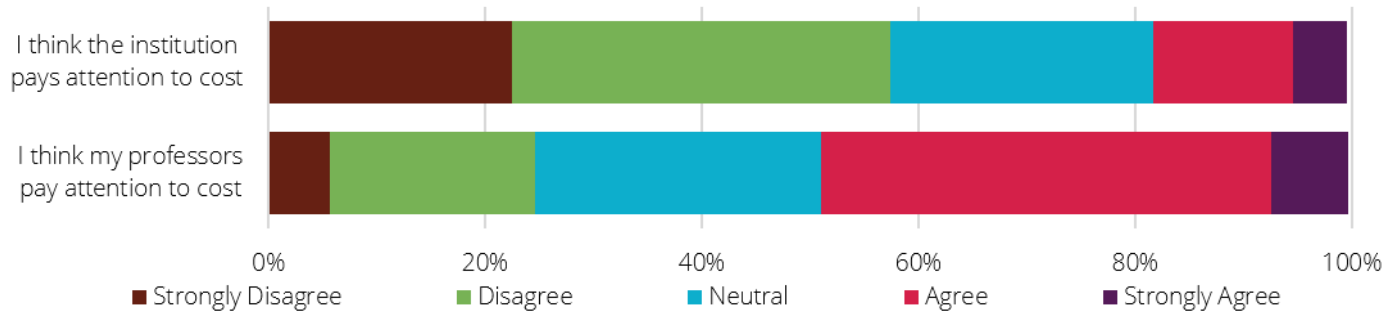
4. Books are usually purchased with out-of-pocket money

Most students pay for their textbooks with their own money (65.9%) and/or with contributions from parents or family (52.5%). Only 10% of respondents indicated that they used scholarship monies to pay, and only 8% said they used funds from their loans. Both first-gen students and Pell recipients were less likely to have financial help from family for books than students not in those groups.



5. Students think instructors pay attention to costs but that Gettysburg College does not

When asked, just about half of respondents said they “strongly agree” or “agree” that their professors paid attention to the cost of course materials and worked to make them more affordable. When asked the same question, however, only 18% thought that the institution attended to materials costs.



6. \$50 is (still) a reasonable cost per class

\$50 was the most common and median response when students were asked how much was reasonable to pay for all materials in a single class. This number has stayed the same since the 2019 survey, and was also consistent across the entire group of schools who participated in this survey. \$50 was, and will continue to be, the library's threshold when discussing low-cost courses at Gettysburg College.

In Their Own Words

Student Comments

“It's frustrating that semester after semester, students and faculty that actually care share that the costs of textbooks is hurtful to students and nothing changes. I'm taking a requirement course in a field that is not relevant to my degree or post-graduate work and is intended for non-majors, meaning it will basically never be relevant to students. I had to pay over \$100 for it. Why?”

“textbooks are too expensive and I appreciate the professors that don't make you buy them”

“The cost of textbooks has caused severe financial instability for me and my family in the past.”

“i think professors should make the effort to send emails to the class before the start of the semester to let the students know when each book will be used so that we aren't spending 100+ dollars at the start of the semester. it would be ideal if we could work, save up, and then have enough money by the time the books are actually needed in class”

“As a first Gen student it's very hard to know what you need and what you can get for free there aren't people teaching the ins and out about how to afford books and other resources”

“Classes that require students to purchase books, rather than textbooks, consistently have lower costs, higher resale value at the end of the semester, and make borrowing from the library easier. I would like to see more classes use those instead of textbooks.”

What Can You Do?

Recommendations

Communicate openly and transparently with students about the cost of books.

The facts that book costs are not included in the basic college bill and that book prices are highly variable across courses still take too many students by surprise. These additional costs are especially difficult for **first-generation students, international students, and first-year students**. Textbook costs are part of the problematic “hidden curriculum” of college. We should strive both to lower the impact of these additional costs and to ensure that no one is surprised by these costs after moving to campus.

Instructors and departments should actively attempt to reduce the cost of their course materials, especially in first-year courses and high-enrollment courses.

Instructors can use a combination of strategies to reduce the cost of their course materials, including:

- adopting openly-licensed materials
- adopting library-licensed materials (like multi-user ebooks and journal articles)
- using the library's Course Reserves service to make copies of assigned texts available to students

While not every course is an ideal candidate to be zero-cost, there are many high-cost courses that could cost much less.

Do not rely on a campus office to subsidize book costs.

Very limited funding sources are available for students who need help buying books. Increasing the amount of book aid is a shortsighted and unsustainable approach that only enriches commercial publishers. Instead, we should increase the number of professors who address the problem at the course level.

Further Reading

- Full report on the results of the 2022 Gettysburg College Survey: cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/170
- “Spend, Stress, and Struggle: Gettysburg College Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey 2022” (Friday Forum Presentation, April 2023): cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/168/
- Fall 2022 Student Textbook Survey Results (Presentation featuring results from all 11 participating schools): scarab.bates.edu/ils_scholarship/11/
- “Inequitable Impacts of Textbook Costs at a Small, Private College: Results from a Textbook Survey at Gettysburg College” (article based on 2019 survey results): cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/150
- 2019 Gettysburg College Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey Executive Summary: cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/134

