

2022

Student Textbook and Instructional Materials Survey

Executive Summary



Office of Distance Learning
& Student Services

September 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From March through May 2022, more than 13,000 students from Florida’s public colleges and universities participated in the 2022 Student Textbook and Instructional Materials Survey (“2022 survey”) conducted by Florida Virtual Campus (FLVC). Previous surveys were conducted in 2018, 2016, 2012, and 2010. As in those past surveys, students were asked how the cost of textbooks and instructional materials affects their educational experience. They were also asked about purchasing behaviors, study aids, fee-based inclusive access programs, and online educational resources.

The survey collected data from March 14 to May 13, 2022.

The purpose of the 2022 survey was to identify:

1. The amount of money that Florida’s public college and university students spent on textbooks and instructional materials in the fall 2021 and spring 2022 terms.
2. The frequency with which students buy textbooks that are never used.
3. How students are affected by the cost of textbooks.
4. Which study aids do students perceive to be most beneficial to their learning?
5. Whether students are familiar with fee-based inclusive access programs, and if so, are they receiving benefits from participating in such programs.
6. If students are being provided with any open educational resources (OERs).
7. Changes in student responses from previous surveys.

Following requests for participation from the Florida College System (FCS) and the Board of Governors (BOG) office for the State University System (SUS), thirty institutions agreed to participate in the 2022 survey. Those requests for participation contained information about the survey, its purpose, and a request for an institutional point of contact. Links to the survey and all subsequent communication were handled by FLVC staff, while the points of contact at participating institutions directed the process of sending the links to their students.

The survey form included 17 multiple-choice, multiple-select, and free-text response items that were drawn from previous surveys, as well as some new questions for the 2022 survey. The goals, research questions, and survey items were developed in consultation with the FCS, BOG, and SUS, as well as with industry professionals from commercial publishers. The estimated time to complete the survey was ten minutes. Demographics such as degree type, institution, and area of study were also collected.

This report is intended to assist FLVC, the Florida Legislature, and higher education institutions in better understanding the significant impact that high textbook and course materials costs have on the state’s public college and university students. It is also intended to support the development of recommendations, best practices, and legislative changes that result in an effective, statewide approach to textbook and course materials affordability.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Key Finding 1:

Textbook costs continue to decrease but remain a substantial problem for students. This downward trend was first reflected in the 2018 survey and continued with the 2022 survey.

Results of the 2022 survey indicate a continued downward trend in the cost of student textbooks. However, high textbook costs remain a substantial problem for many students. Across both semesters surveyed, a majority of students spent \$300 or less on textbooks.

Across the board, the percentages of students spending less are increasing while those spending higher amounts are decreasing. This mirrors the findings of the 2018 survey and represents a positive trend in the study population.

Key Finding 2:

Florida's students are utilizing a variety of strategies to reduce costs, though some numbers have shifted.

Although the percentage has dropped since the 2016 and 2018 surveys, a majority (50.6%) of surveyed students in 2022 indicated they are buying books from a source other than their on-campus bookstore. Additionally, a similar number of them (50.5%) are renting digital textbooks. Students are buying used textbooks from their campus bookstores (40.4%) and renting printed textbooks (29.1%) as strategies to reduce their overall costs.

Key Finding 3:

The average number of textbooks required, but not used, has declined.

After spiking to 3.6 in the 2018 survey (up from 2.3 in 2016), the average number of textbooks that students were required to purchase – but did not use – dropped to 2.6 in the 2022 survey. This survey item incorporates the entire academic career of the respondents.

Key Finding 4:

A significant percentage of students continue to be impacted by high textbook costs. However, we do see some improvement in some places over previous years.

Despite some overall improvement over previous surveys, the cost of textbooks and instructional materials remains a burden for many students. In the 2022 survey, more than half (53.5%) of all respondents indicated that they simply did not purchase a required textbook due to its cost. Other impacts of high textbook costs included students taking fewer courses (43.7%), not registering for a specific course (38.5%), earning a poor grade due to not being able to afford the textbook (32.4%), and dropping out of a course (24.2%). The results are mixed across the categories. While the 2022 survey's data reflected a decrease in the percentage of students who did not purchase a required textbook, data in the other categories increased slightly, or worsened. Overall, the issue of textbook costs and their negative impact on students continues to be a substantial problem.

Key Finding 5:

Interactive practice questions continue to be the most popular digital study aid for students in their learning.

Two-thirds (65.9%) of students in the 2022 survey indicated that they are using interactive practice questions online as a study aid. Videos (59.7%), PowerPoint slide shows (50.9%), and flashcards (44.3%) are popular as well.

Key Finding 6:

Students seeking a bachelor's degree tend to spend more on textbooks than associate degree seekers, graduate students, and those not seeking a degree.

Based on the 2022 survey's findings, students working towards their bachelor's degree were the most likely to spend more than \$300 per term on textbooks. Master's degree seekers, as well as those not pursuing a degree, were the least likely to spend that much money. Students working towards an associate degree or doctorate fell in between.

Key Finding 7:

Students in some areas of study are spending more on textbooks than others.

Students majoring in some areas of study – particularly those studying medical-related fields – are more likely to be spending more than \$300 per semester than other students. In looking at the top ten areas of study, across both semesters in the study period, 43.3% of Medical Science students, 42.4% of Health Professions and Related Programs students, and 38.7% of Biological and Biomedical Sciences students indicated that they are spending more than \$300 per semester on books. Within those top ten areas of study, only 24.8% of History students, 26.4% of Education students, and 28.5% of Computer Science students are spending that much.

Key Finding 8:

Students are not well-informed about some cost savings programs.

Since the 2018 survey, commercial textbook companies have developed a range of new initiatives, many of which have been designed around digital delivery at a reduced cost when compared to traditional hard-copy sales models. Some cost savings programs are subscription based, where a student might pay a fee each semester, or annually, for digital access to a range of content resources. In some cases, that range of content can be quite large. In other models, certain textbooks are included in an umbrella program that provides lower pricing levels. These models are frequently referred to as “inclusive access programs.”

A majority of survey respondents (54.8%) are not sure if cost savings programs exist at their college or university.

Key Finding 9:

Access to physical or paper textbook copies is still very important to students.

Though the delivery of textbooks and instructional materials in digital format has increased since the 2018 survey, having a physical or paper textbook copy is still very important to students surveyed in 2022. A very strong majority of students (82.4%) wanted to have the option to purchase a paper copy at a lower cost.

Key Finding 10:

The use of open educational resources (OERs) is making progress, but there is more that can be done.

The movement to develop and utilize open educational resources has been slowly growing for years. In the 2022 survey, most students (55.6%) did not have OERs available for their courses, while 44.4% of students surveyed were provided at least one OER. Increasing the availability of OERs is crucial to reducing some of the burden that high textbook and materials costs places on students pursuing higher education in Florida.

Key Findings: Conclusion

Overall, student responses to the 2022 survey indicate that the amount of money they are spending on textbooks has decreased. Since FLVC's last survey in 2018, new initiatives to help mitigate the cost of commercial textbooks and instructional materials have included system- and institution-level efforts to negotiate lower pricing from commercial publishers, legislation designed to better inform and empower students in their search for lower cost options, and an increase in the use of open educational resources in place of commercial content for courses and programs.

During this same period, the continued shift toward digital sales and delivery of textbooks and instructional materials by commercial publishers has also offered lower pricing for students. While such digital sales programs have provided benefits to students in terms of pricing and convenience, consequently they have reduced the availability of physical textbooks and resources. Survey data reflects a decline in all the previously mentioned cost mitigation methods involving a physical textbook. It is likely that the growth of digital sales and distribution models will continue to significantly reduce, or eliminate, those options for students in the future. The ability to purchase, sell, share, and borrow used or new physical copies from the library has been a major source of savings for students in the past.

Results of the 2022 survey suggest that while more work remains to significantly reduce the impact of textbook costs on students, the proliferation of open educational resources – with 44% of survey respondents benefiting from one or more courses where OERs were utilized – is encouraging. Replacing commercial content with OERs or other already licensed content requires support from college and university faculty to do the work necessary to curate or develop such resources. However, such efforts, combined with better-negotiated pricing for commercial content, represent a solid approach to making higher education more affordable for Florida's public postsecondary students.