



2018 Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey

Executive Summary



Office of Distance Learning & Student Services

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During March and April 2018, more than 21,000 students participated in a Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey conducted by the Florida Virtual Campus's (FLVC) Office of Distance Learning and Student Services. The survey examined textbook affordability and acquisition at Florida's public higher education institutions. Previous surveys were conducted in 2010, 2012 and 2016. In this survey, students were asked to use their recent personal experiences to provide insight on how the cost of textbooks and course materials impact their education, purchasing behaviors, academic completion and success, the study aids they find most beneficial to their learning, and their use of financial aid to address these costs.

The purpose of the 2018 Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey was to identify:

1. The amount of money that Florida's public college and university students spent on textbooks and course materials during the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 semester,
2. The frequency with which students buy textbooks that are not used,
3. How students are affected by the cost of textbooks,
4. Which study aids students perceive to be the most beneficial to their learning,
5. Changes in student responses from previous surveys.

All of Florida's higher education institutions participated in the study. The Florida College System (FCS) sent requests for participation and reminder emails to college Chief Academic Officers. The Board of Governor's (BOG) sent requests to university Provosts to solicit participation. The requests for participation contained a link to the questionnaire, purpose, and request that the questionnaire be administered between March 1, 2018, and April 30, 2018. Institutions were asked to use their campus communication avenues to direct students to participate in a short survey.

The questionnaire included 14 multiple-choice, multiple-select, and constructed response items drawn from the 2016 cost-related questions as well as additional response items that reflected the current legislative status and concerns in Florida. The goals, research questions, and questionnaire items were developed in consultation with the Board of Governors (BOG) of the State University System of Florida and the Florida College System (FCS). The estimated time to complete the questionnaire was 10 minutes. The first few items addressed basic demographics (e.g., degree, institution, area of study). The remainder of the questionnaire addressed money spent on texts, textbook use, academic impact of textbook costs, and perceived value of different study aids.

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 For the first time since the 2012 survey, the overall textbook costs trended lower.

Close to half (45.8%) of students spent more than \$300 on textbooks during the Fall 2017 term, and 14.7% spent more than \$500. In Spring 2018, 43.8% students spent more than \$300 on textbooks and 13.8% spent over \$500. The finding suggests that students were spending less money on textbooks in Spring 2018 compared to Spring 2016. Compared to the 2016 survey (Spring 2018 vs. Spring 2016), there was a significant decrease in the cost categories above \$300 from 53.2% to 43.8%, while cost categories of below \$300 increased from 45.3% to 56.0%.

In addition to textbooks, 10.4% and 8.3% of students reported spending \$300 or more on required course materials in Spring 2017 and Spring 2018 respectively. Course materials include items such as handbooks, guides, course packets, and other print or digital learning materials. Overall, as reported for textbooks, there was a slight decline in instructional materials costs for students in the 2018 survey.

Key Finding 2 Florida students were reducing their textbook costs by a variety of means.

The most-used cost-saving measure reported by students was purchasing books from a source other than the campus bookstore (66.0%). Buying used copies from the campus bookstore (53.0%), renting printed textbooks (47.8%), and renting digital textbooks (41.4%) ranked second, third, and fourth respectively.

It is worth noting that there was an increase of using strategies to reduce cost in almost all categories when compared to 2016 survey. The top two increased categories were renting digital textbooks (increased by 11.8%) and buying used copies from the campus bookstore (increased by 4.2%).

Key Finding 3 The cost of textbooks continues to negatively impact student access, success, and completion.

The findings suggest that the cost of textbooks was negatively impacting student access to required materials and learning. The top 5 highest percentage answers as a result of the high cost of textbooks are: not purchasing the required textbook (64.2%); taking fewer courses (42.8%); not registering for a specific course

(40.5%); earning a poor grade (35.6%); and dropping a course (22.9%).

Compared to the Spring 2016 Survey, it is worth noting that the percentage of each negative impact category was decreased by 2 to 5 percent. The result is in line with the trend of the overall decrease of the textbook costs and the increase in the use of strategies to reduce textbook costs.

Key Finding 4 **More required textbooks were purchased but not always used in course instruction.**

The average survey participant purchased 3.6 textbooks that were not used during his or her academic career. That is a statistically significant increase from the 2.6 textbooks indicated in the 2016 survey. It is worth noting that in the 2012 Textbook Survey, students reported that 1.6 purchased textbooks were not used in their academic career. This may, in part, be due to faculty and students relying more on digital resources that accompany the purchase of textbooks or textbook and software bundles.

Key Finding 5 **Students in Associate or Bachelor's degree programs spent more on textbooks than students in Master's or Doctorate degree programs.**

In Spring 2018, for those students seeking an Associate degree, Bachelor's degree with 0-60 credit hours, or Bachelor's degree with 61 or more credit hours, 42.2%, 48.7% and 47.5%, respectively, reported having spent \$301 or more on textbooks. By comparison, 28.4% of students seeking a Master's degree, and 36.9% of students seeking a Doctorate degree, reported having spent \$301 or more. The trend holds similarly for the Fall 2017 term.

Key Finding 6 **Students were more and more willing to rent print and digital textbooks.**

We see trends of willingness to rent textbooks. The majority of students (59.0%) were willing to rent either print or digital textbooks, compared to 51.0% in the 2016 Survey. When asked the strategies to reduce textbook costs, renting digital textbooks jumped from 29.6% in the 2016 Survey to 41.4% in the 2018 Survey.

Key Finding 7 **Students indicated that interactive practice questions were most beneficial in their learning.**

Interactive practice questions were favored by 57.2% of students, followed by PowerPoint slide decks (44.8%), videos (44.2%), and interactive "try it now" activities (32.2%) were reported as the most beneficial to students in their learning.