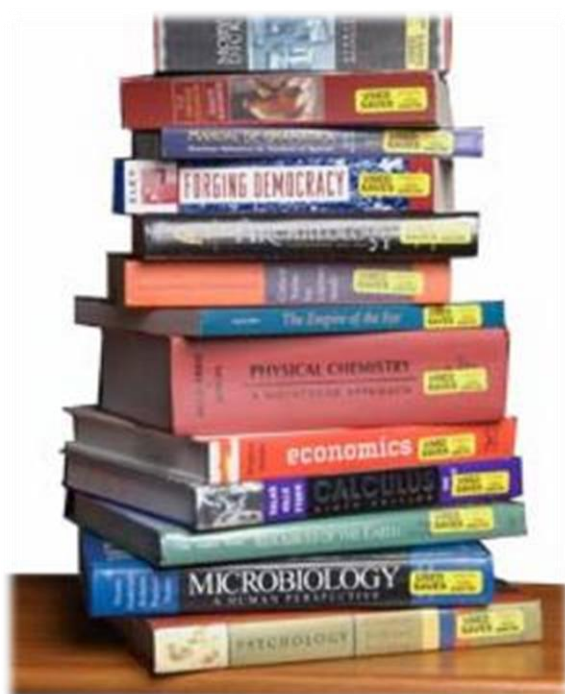


Textbook Survey Report

July 2012



Prepared by

The Minnesota State University Student Association, Inc.

www.msusa.org

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Executive Summary

The Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA) surveyed students in the spring of 2012 regarding textbook use and the impact that the cost of textbooks and other course materials has on students. 1,231 students responded to the voluntary survey, which was sent out via email to all state university students and promoted on state university campuses. The data collected in the survey support the anecdotal responses frequently heard from students regarding this issue.

It is the hope of MSUSA that this data can be used to inform decision makers and other stakeholders of the issues related to textbooks for students, as well as contribute to system, statewide and national conversations about how to resolve this growing concern.

Survey Topics:

The survey asked students about the following topics:

- Overall impact of textbook costs
- Decisions made by students as a result of cost (ex. using old editions of textbooks)
- Use of financial aid to pay for textbooks
- How/where textbooks are purchased
- Use of textbook rental options
- Use of electronic textbooks
- The practice of book bundling
- Access to/availability of textbook information
- Availability of information on how to reduce textbook costs

Key Findings:

- Nearly all (94%) of student respondents indicated that the cost of textbooks and course materials impacts their ability to afford college, with nearly one-third stating that textbook costs greatly impacted their ability to fund their education.
- Many students (70%) responding to the survey indicated that they have purchased old editions of textbooks to save money, and more than half of those responding said that they have chosen not to purchase a textbook at all based on its cost.
- Although financial aid can be used at campus bookstores to buy textbooks and other course materials, some student respondents expressed concern about the high prices at those bookstores compared to other options (ex. buying directly from other students, buying online).
- One-fourth of student respondents indicated that they have rented textbooks from an online source, with a large majority stating that it was a positive experience for them.
- One-third of student respondents have used electronic textbooks, with most indicating that it provided a less costly alternative to traditional textbooks.
- More than two-thirds of student respondents indicated that they have had to buy a “bundled” version of a textbook because no other option was available, even though more than one-third of those students said that their professor did not require use of the bundled materials.
- Some students raised a concern about access codes to websites or homework sites that are bundled with new textbooks, making it impossible for them to look for a used textbook and significantly reducing the textbook’s resale options.
- The majority of students indicated that it is easy for them to find textbook information for their classes, although 40% stated that the information is not available to them in a timely manner that would allow them to buy books from sources other than the campus bookstore.

Survey Findings

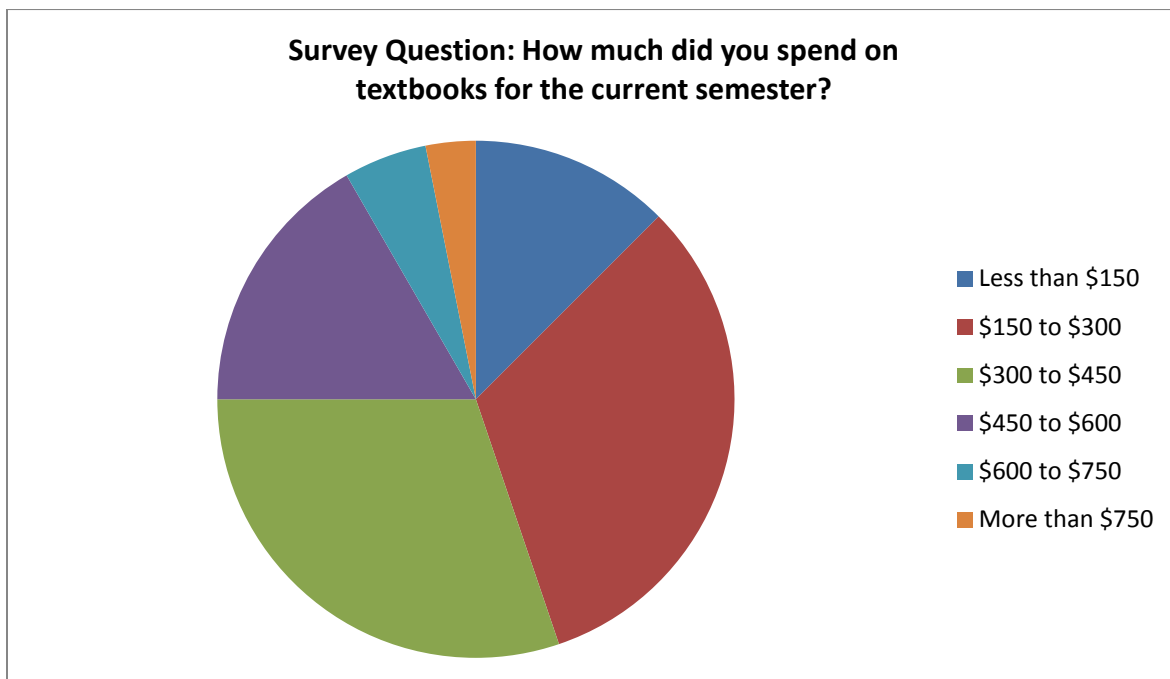
I. The Impact of Textbook Costs

After the cost of tuition, textbook costs are one of the most prevalent issues heard from students. Students are concerned about their ability to afford to pay for textbooks and other course materials, with most paying hundreds of dollars every semester for books. The cost of textbooks significantly impacts a student's ability to attend college and complete a degree, especially at a time when students are increasingly concerned about growing student loan debt.

Students taking part in the survey were asked questions about how much was spent on textbooks, as well as the overall impact of textbook costs. Students indicated the amount spent on textbooks as follows:

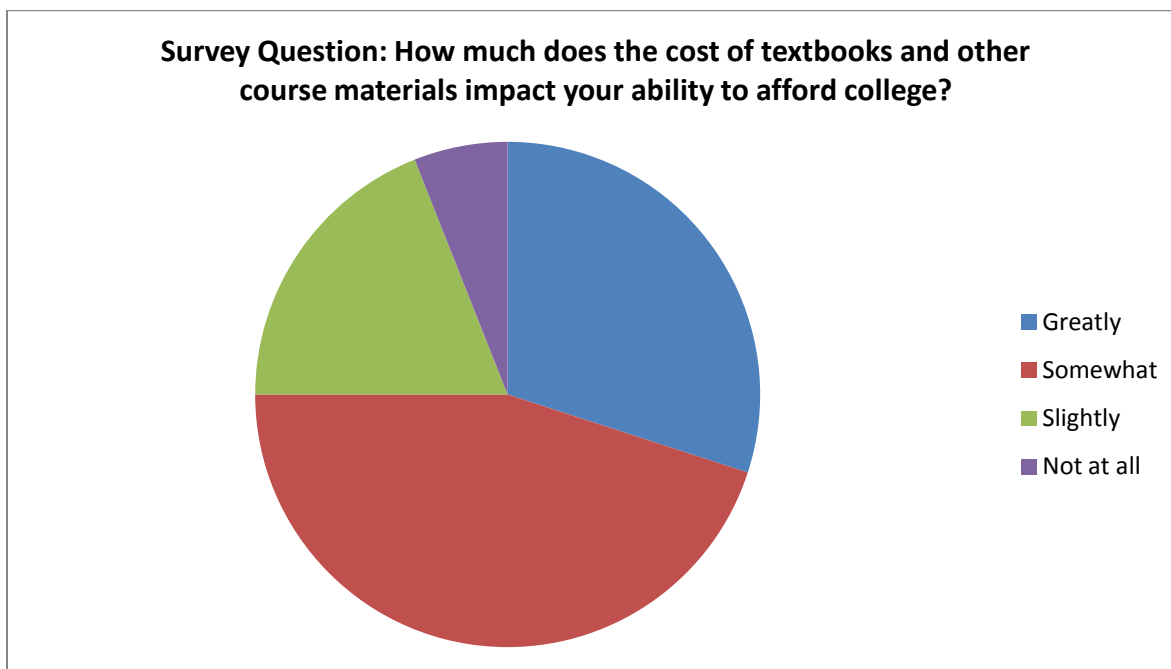
- 31% of students spent \$150 to \$300 on textbooks for a semester
- 29% of students spent \$300 to \$450 on textbooks for a semester
- 16% of students spent \$450 to \$600 on textbooks for a semester
- 12% of students spent less than \$150 on textbooks for a semester
- 5% of students spent \$600 to \$750 on textbooks for a semester
- 3% of students spent more than \$750 on textbooks for a semester
- A small number of students indicated that they do not purchase their textbooks.

Although the responses regarding a semester's cost for textbooks was fairly consistent across majors, students with majors in the areas of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), social sciences, business/administration and education were slightly more likely to pay more for their textbooks than their peers in other majors.

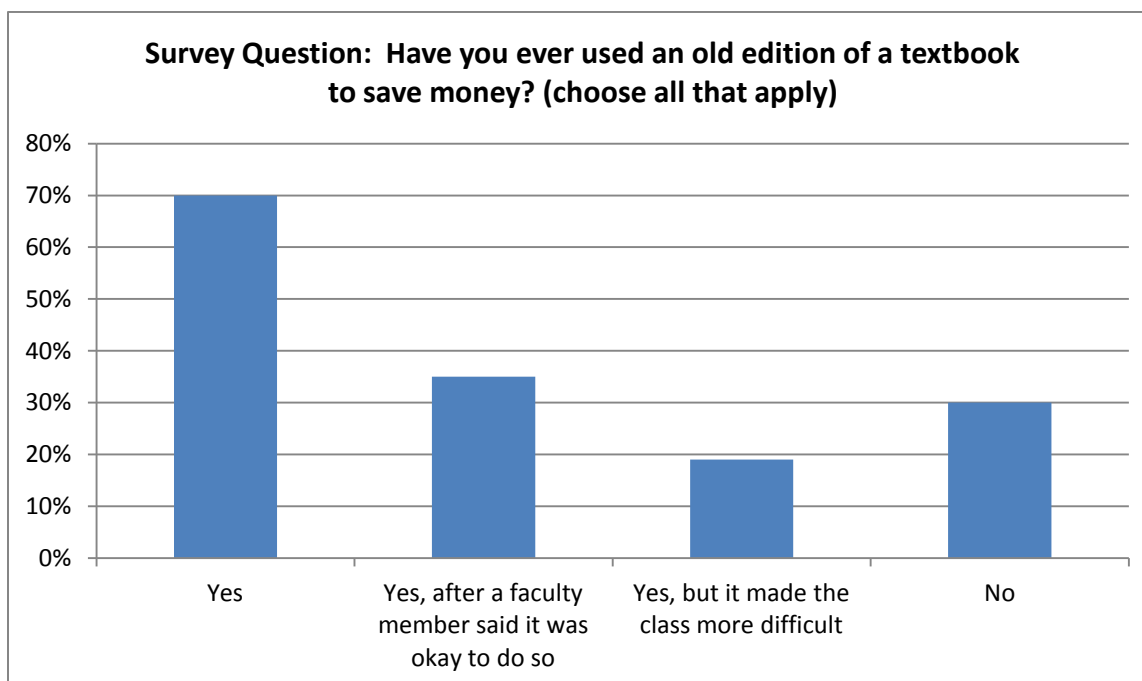


94% of student respondents indicated that the costs of textbooks and other course materials did impact their ability to afford college, with 45% indicating that it had somewhat of an impact, and 30% stating that textbook costs greatly impact their ability to afford their education. A number of students added

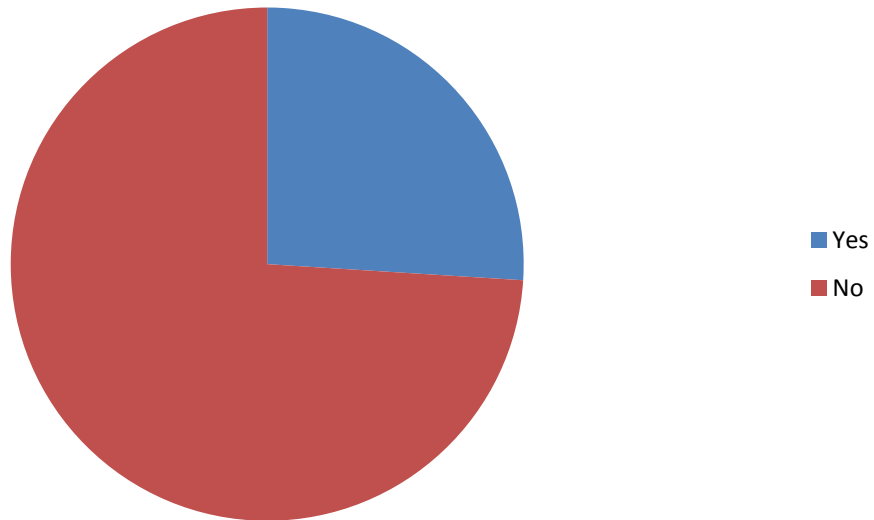
comments that they look at the price of the textbook when making decisions about which classes or sections to take, often deciding to take the course with a less expensive textbook to save money.



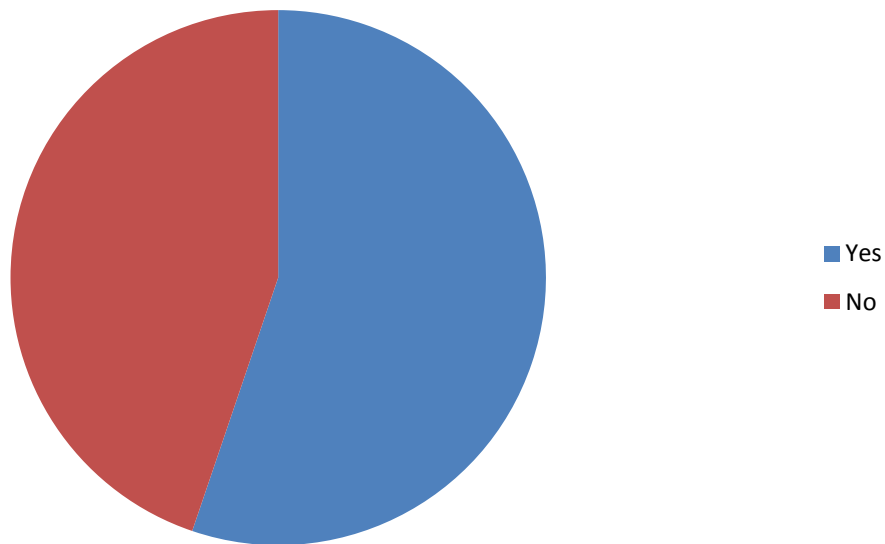
Students are often forced to make difficult choices when it comes to purchasing textbooks. Students may purchase an old edition of a book to save money, use textbooks at a campus library instead of purchasing them, or forego purchasing a textbook because of its high cost. Several questions in the survey asked students about these choices, including the common use of old editions of textbooks to save money. Although many students responding to the survey (70%) said they have used an old edition of a textbook to save money, nearly 20% said that it made the class more difficult. One-fourth of students responding to the survey have used textbooks at their campus library instead of purchasing them, and more than half of students responding have chosen not to purchase a textbook because of its cost.



Survey Question: Have you ever used textbooks at your campus library instead of purchasing them?

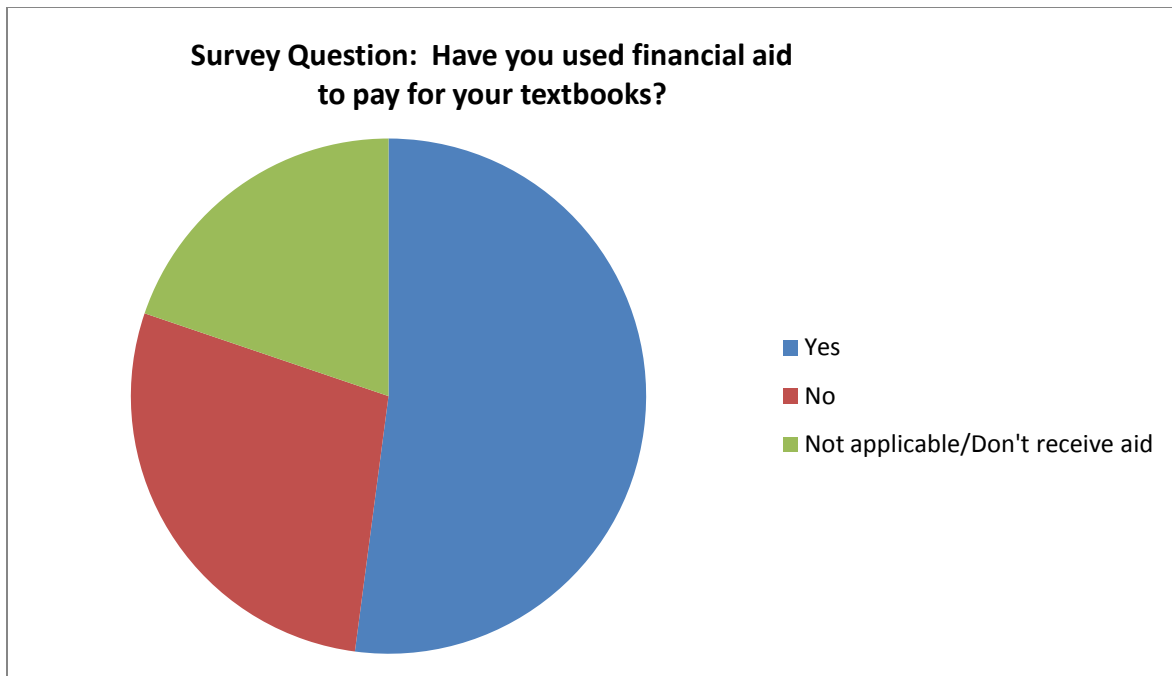


Survey Question: Have you ever chosen not to purchase a textbook because of its cost?



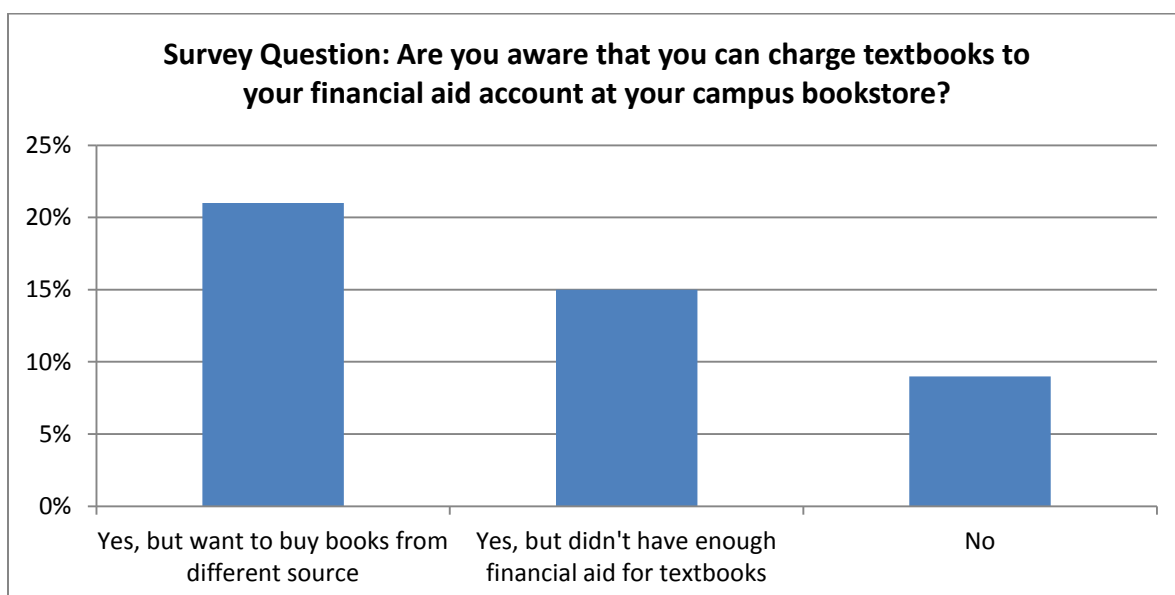
II. The Use of Financial Aid to Pay for Textbooks

There is no question that financial aid is essential in making higher education affordable for many students. 50% of students responding to the survey indicated that they have used financial aid to pay for their textbooks.

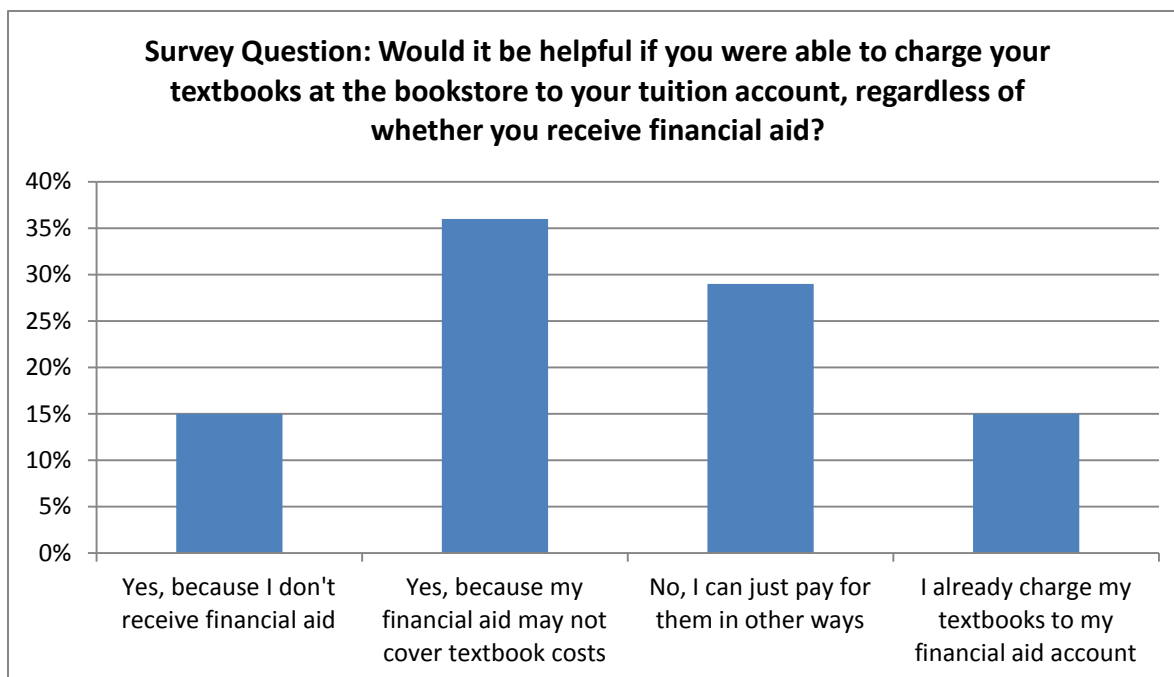


Of those students who indicated that they have used financial aid to pay for their textbooks, 58% indicated that they have had to wait for their financial aid overage to arrive before they could purchase textbooks. Although the majority of students (91%) responding to the survey were aware that they could charge textbooks to their financial aid account at the campus bookstore, many indicated that they preferred to buy their books from other sources or didn't have enough financial aid available to cover the cost of their textbooks at the campus bookstore.

A number of students responding to the survey also indicated that they face financial difficulty if they wish to buy their textbooks from a less expensive source than the campus bookstore, as they do not have access to their financial aid overage until two weeks after classes start and cannot afford to buy them without financial aid. Unfortunately, this means that lower-income students may pay the most for their textbooks, simply because charging them to a financial aid account at the campus bookstore may be the only way for them to obtain the books in time for the start of classes.

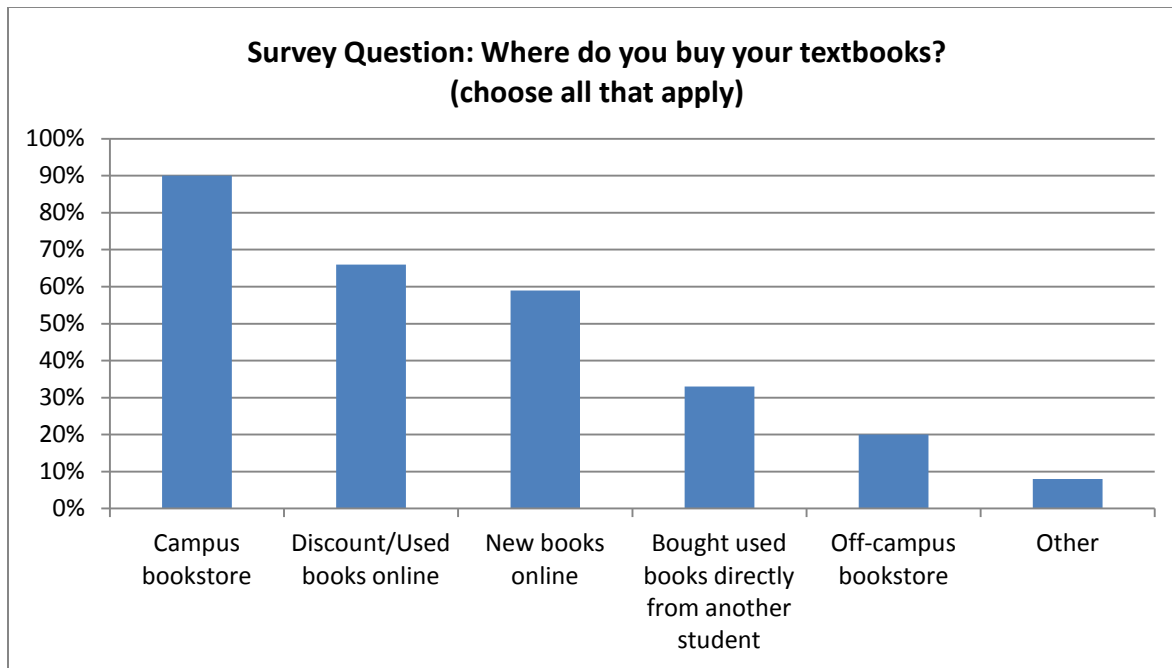


At least one state university campus (Winona State University) allows all students to charge their textbooks at the campus bookstore to their university account, regardless of whether they are financial aid recipients. This practice allows students to pay for their textbooks as a part of their overall tuition payment plan (if they choose to have one), which is much less costly for students than some other means of payment. 68% of students responding to the survey have used a credit card to pay for their textbooks, which can mean high interest for students who already face increasing costs related to higher education. More than half of students responding to the survey indicated that it would be helpful for them to be able to charge their textbooks to their tuition accounts, regardless of whether they receive financial aid.

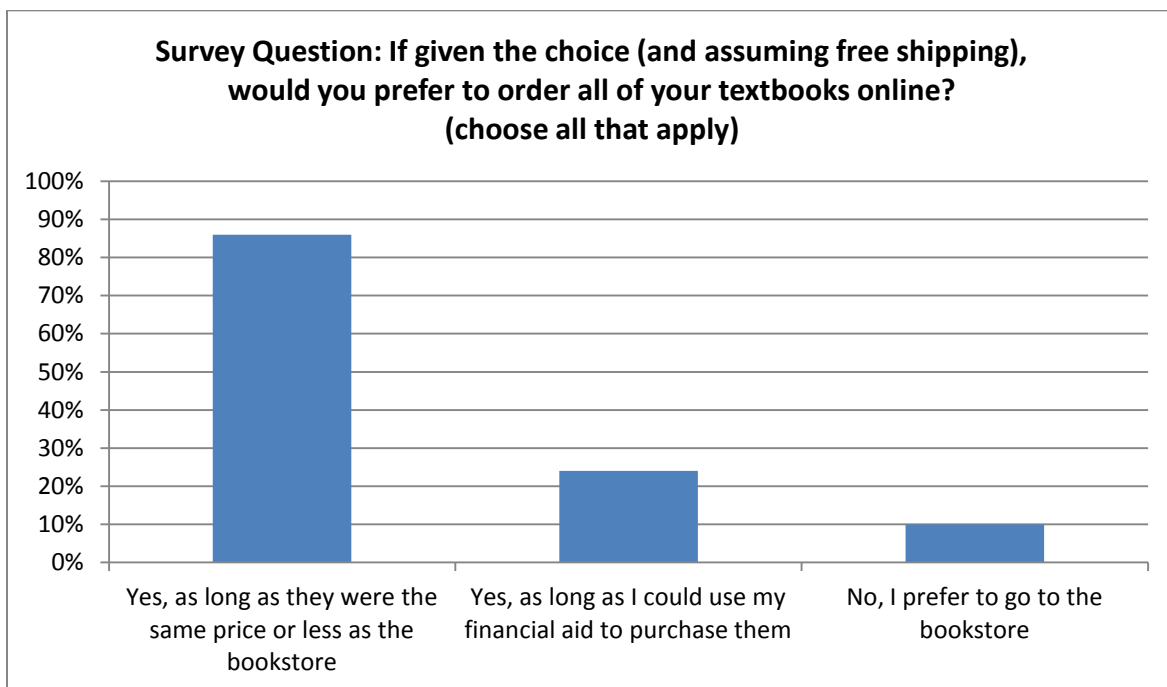


III. Buying versus Renting Textbooks

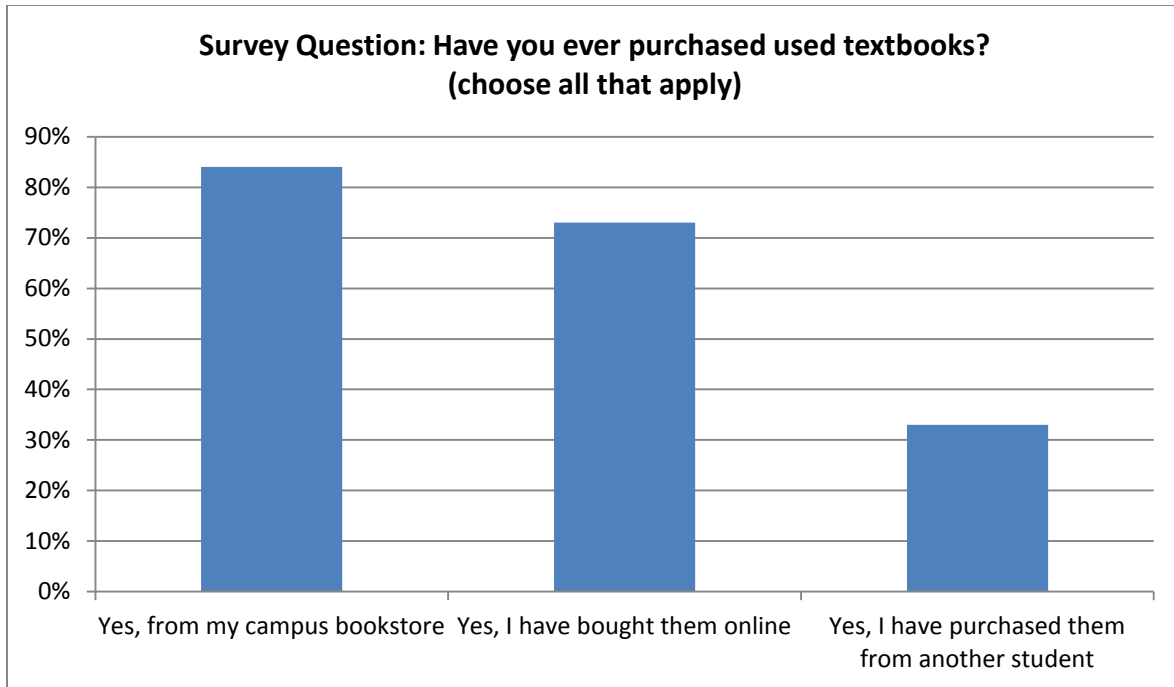
Students obtain their textbooks and course materials from a variety of places, including campus bookstores, buying books directly from other students, purchasing books online and renting books. Of those students responding to the survey who purchase textbooks, 90% purchase books at the campus bookstore, followed by two-thirds who said they buy new or used books online, and one-third who buy books directly from other students.



Given the large number of students who currently buy their textbooks online, students responding to the survey were also asked about their preference related to the possibility of purchasing all of their textbooks online, with a large majority (90%) indicating that they would prefer to order all textbooks online as long as they were the same price or less than the campus bookstore and financial aid could be used to purchase the books.

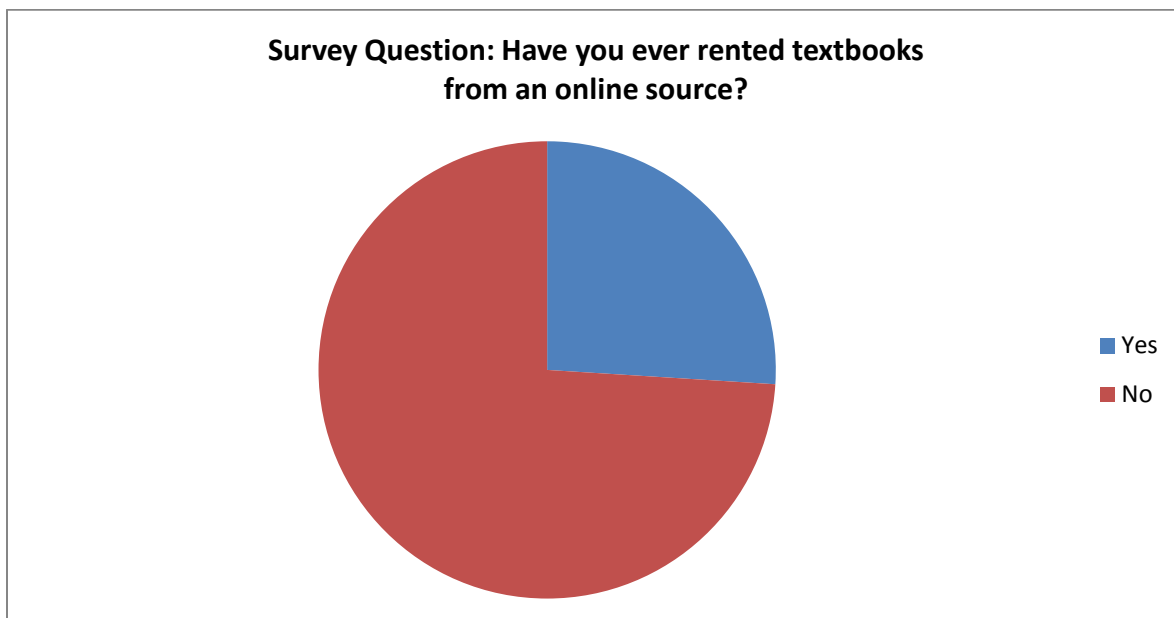


Many students try to save money by purchasing used books and by selling their books at the end of a semester. However, a number of students responding to the survey offered comments about the textbook buyback programs at campus bookstores, indicating concerns about the low amount they received when they sold their books back to the bookstore compared to what they paid for the books at the beginning of the semester.

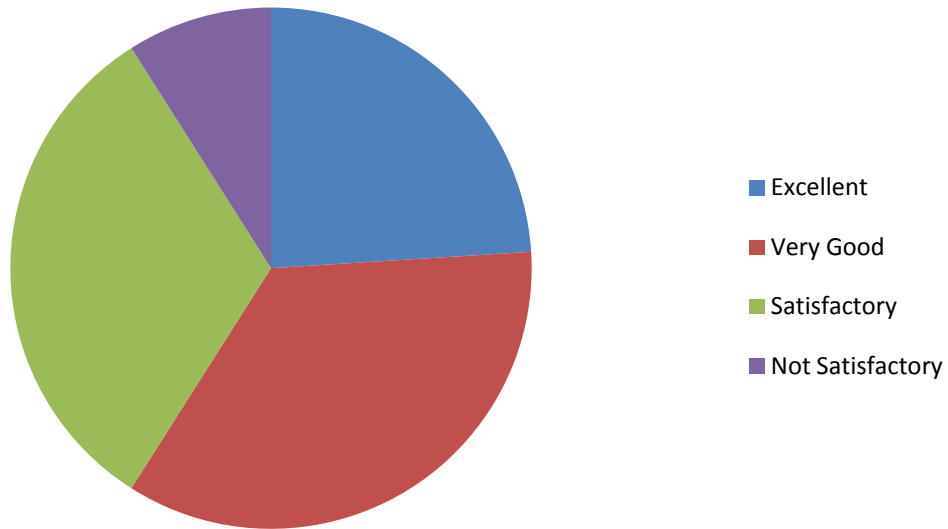


More and more students are renting their textbooks from online sources to save money. One-fourth of the students responding to the survey indicated that they have rented textbooks from an online source, with a large majority indicating that it was a positive experience for them. Students were also asked to indicate their cost savings in one semester by renting textbooks instead of buying them. More than 10% indicated a savings of \$300 or more in one semester, with the responses as follows:

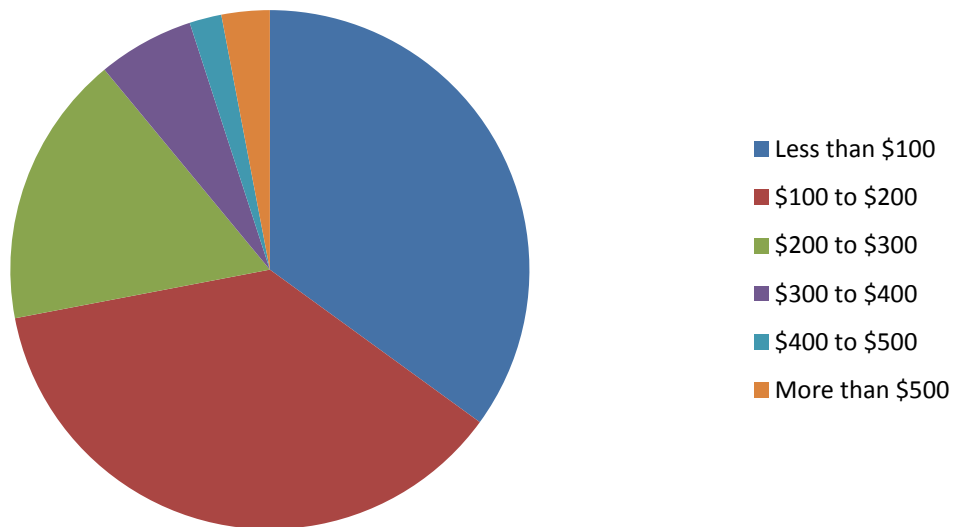
- 35% indicated savings of less than \$100
- 37% indicated savings of \$100 to \$200
- 17% indicated savings of \$200 to \$300
- 6% indicated savings of \$300 to \$400
- 2% indicated savings of \$400 to \$500
- 3% indicated savings of more than \$500



Survey Question: Please indicate how you would rate your experience with renting textbooks.



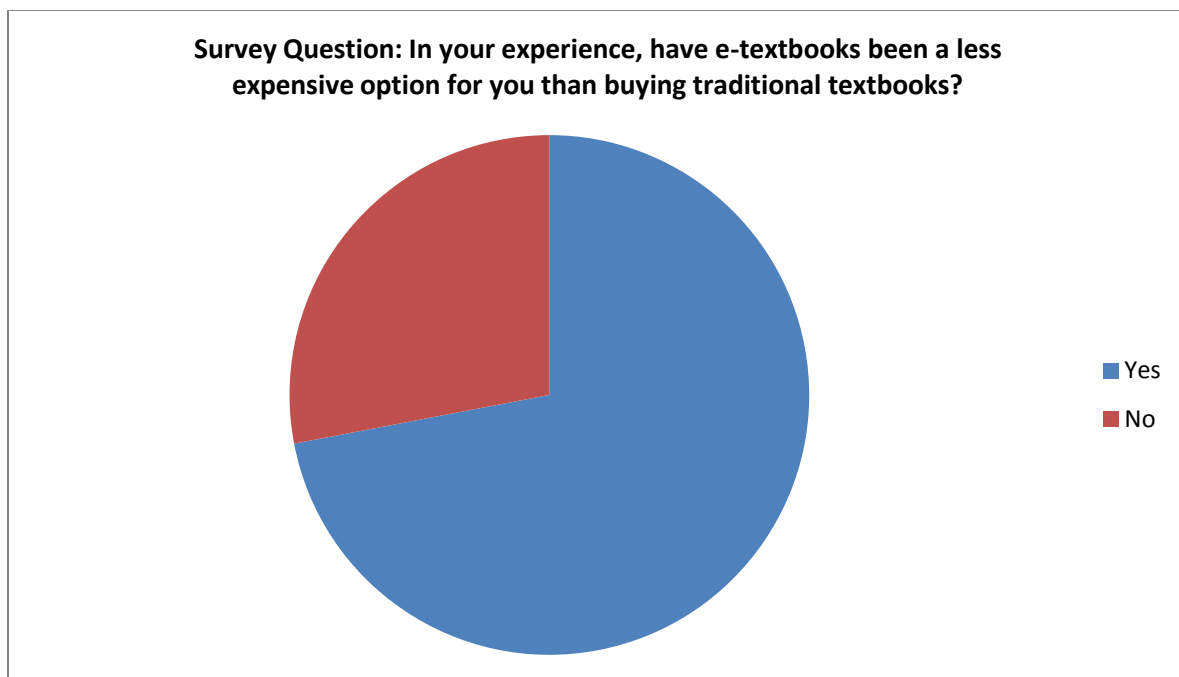
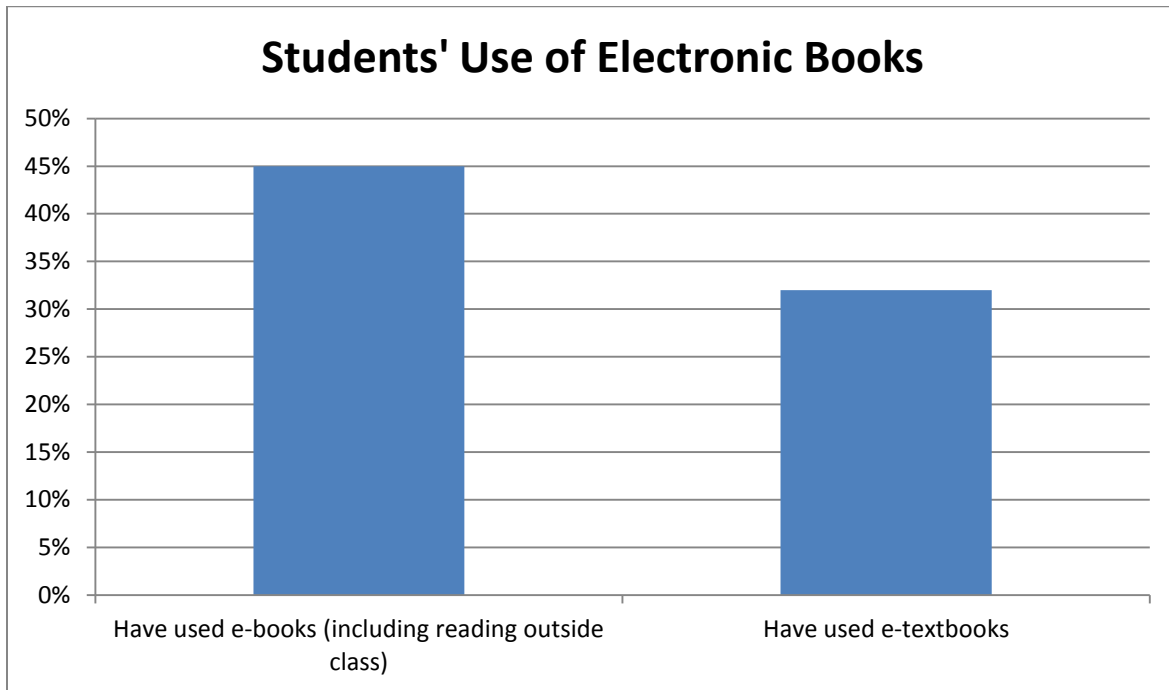
Survey Question: Approximately how much did you save in one semester by renting textbooks instead of buying them?

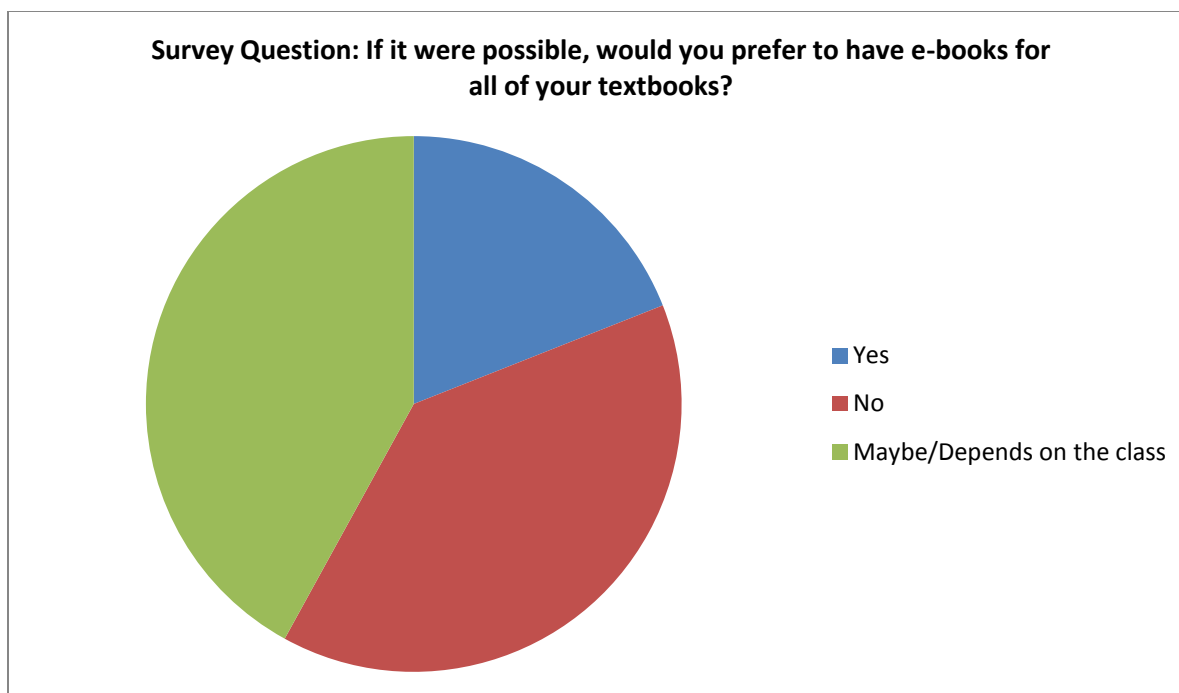


IV. The Use of Electronic Books and Course Materials

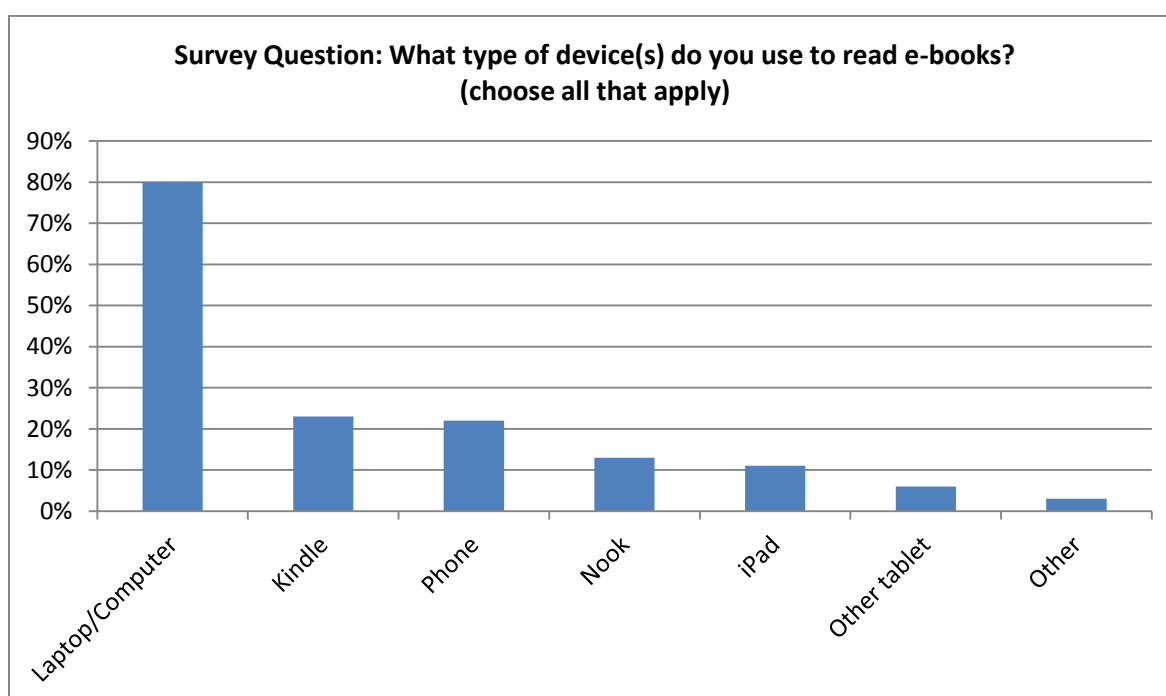
Society's growing use of electronic books has spilled over into the textbook industry, with more and more students using electronic textbooks. Nearly half of students responding to the survey indicated that they use electronic books for reading (including reading outside of class), with one-third of students stating that they have used e-textbooks. Nearly three-fourths of those students responding to the survey who use electronic textbooks indicated that they have been a less expensive option for them than purchasing

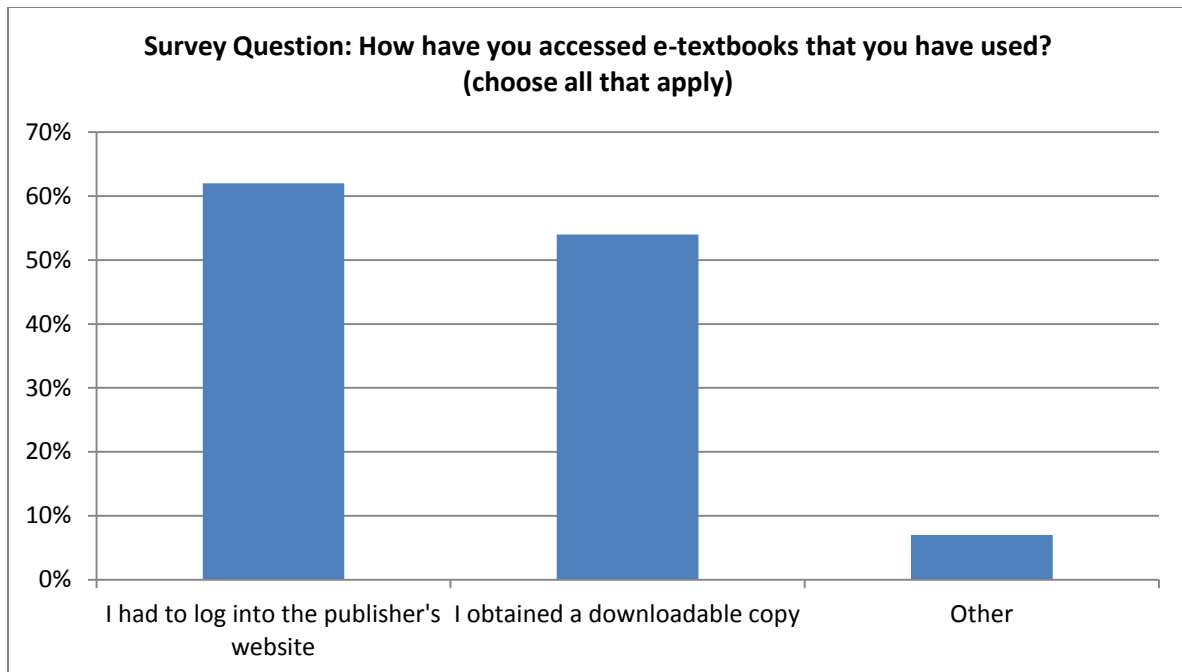
traditional textbooks. Of those who used e-textbooks, 19% indicated a preference to have e-books for all of their textbooks, with 42% indicating that their interest in e-textbooks depends on the class.



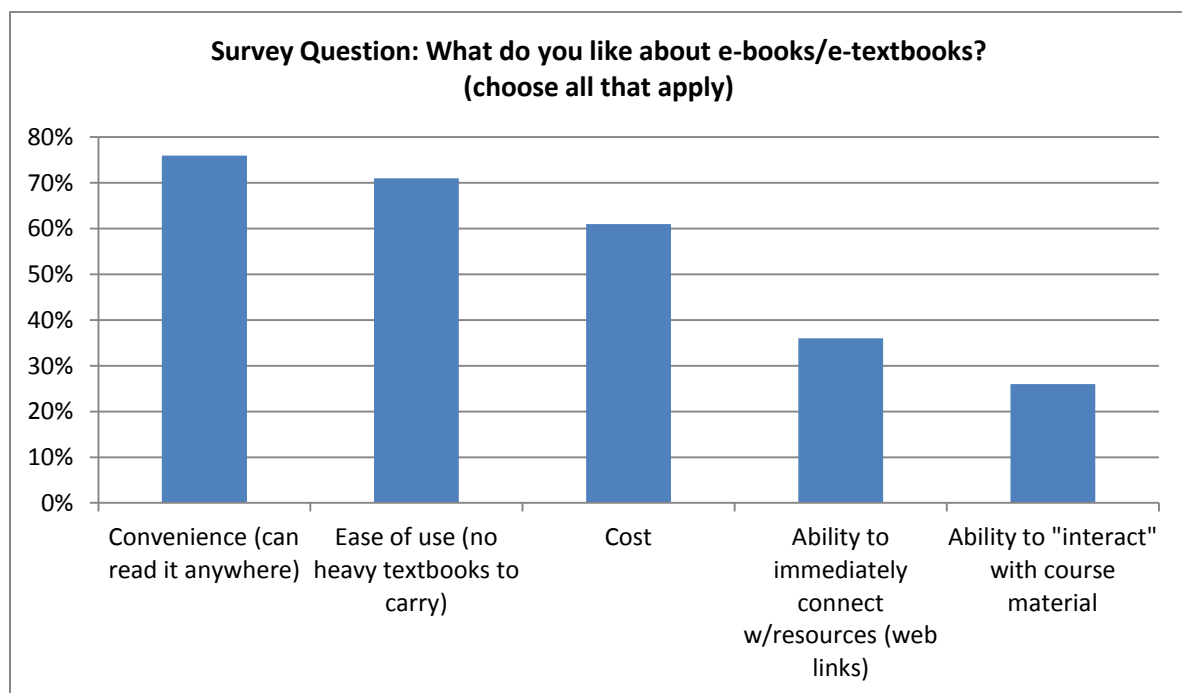


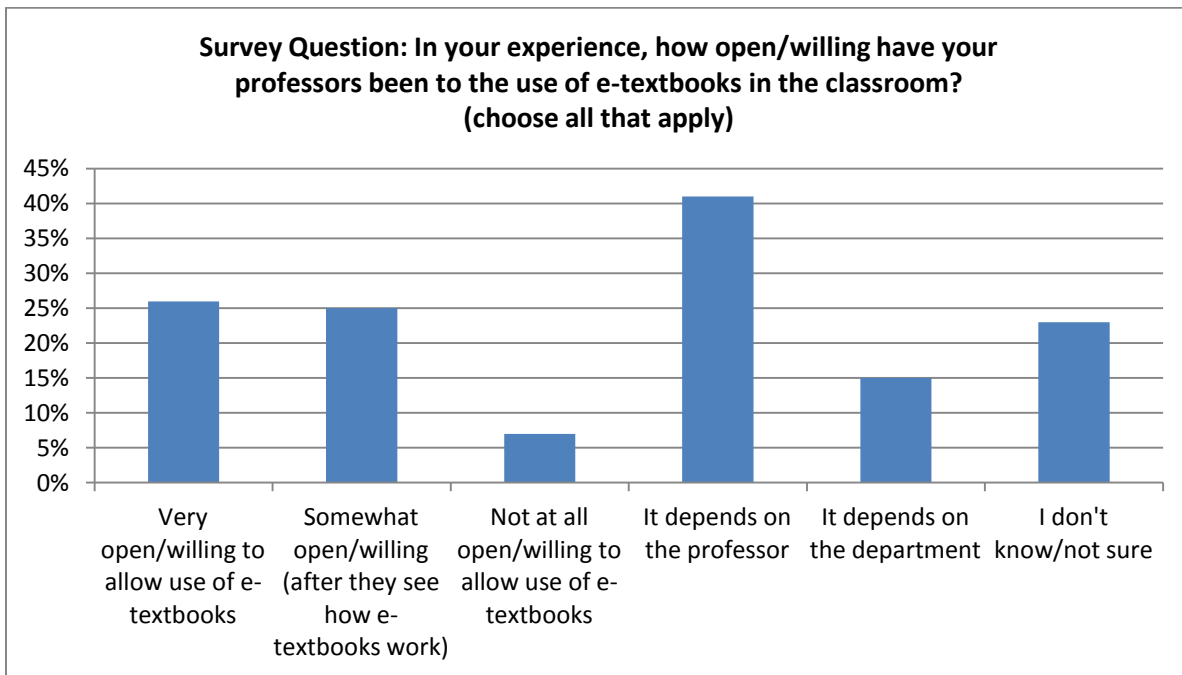
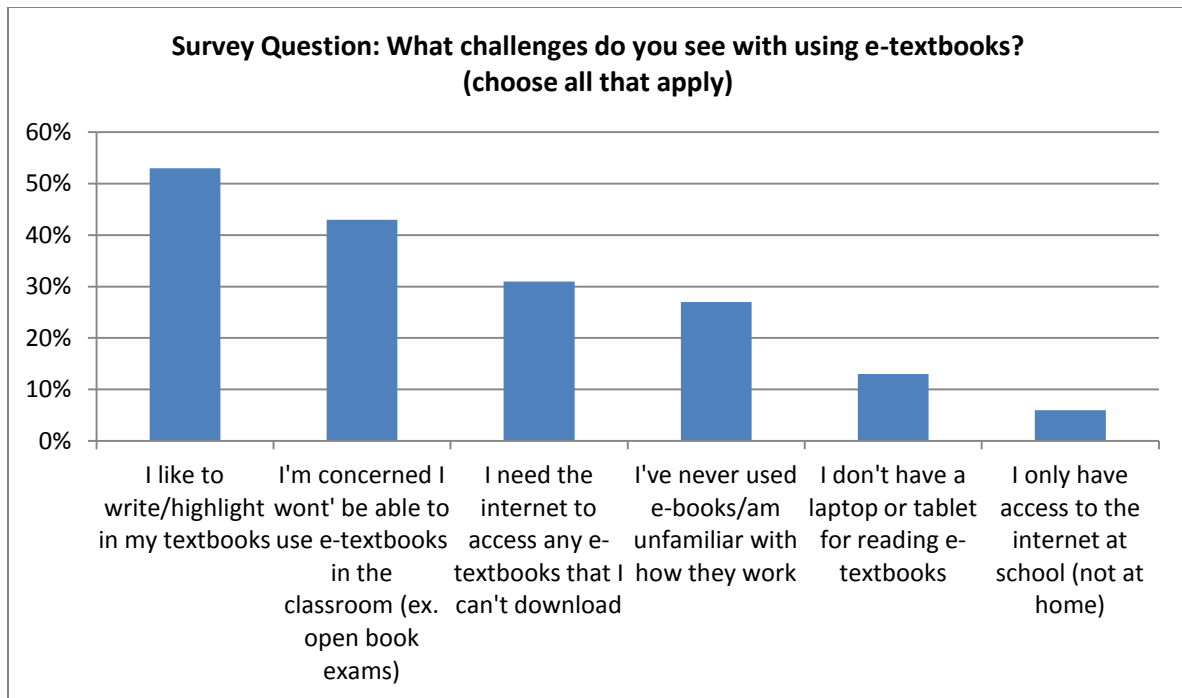
Students indicated that they read electronic books using a variety of devices, including use of laptops/computers, tablets and phones. Students who responded to the survey were also asked to indicate how they accessed the electronic textbooks they have used, with 54% stating they have been able to obtain a downloadable copy and 62% stating that they had to log into the publisher's website to read the textbook. In the past, there has been concern expressed by students about the need for internet access each time they want to read their textbooks, which should be a consideration with future use of electronic textbooks.





Electronic textbooks provide benefits to students who wish to use them, but are not without their challenges. Students responding to the survey cited convenience, ease of use and cost as the three greatest benefits to e-books/e-textbooks. However, there was some concern expressed by students in the survey as well, including an inability to write/highlight, the need for internet access and concern about whether they would be allowed to use e-textbooks in the classroom (ex. for an open book exam). In general, students indicated that their professors have been open to the use of e-textbooks in the classroom, with just 7% saying that their professors were not at all open/willing to allow the use of e-textbooks.



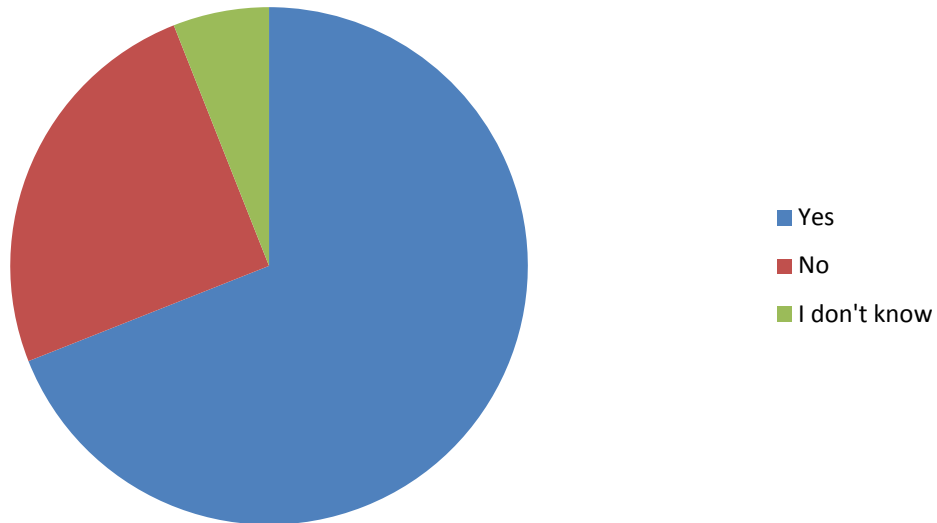


V. Book Bundling

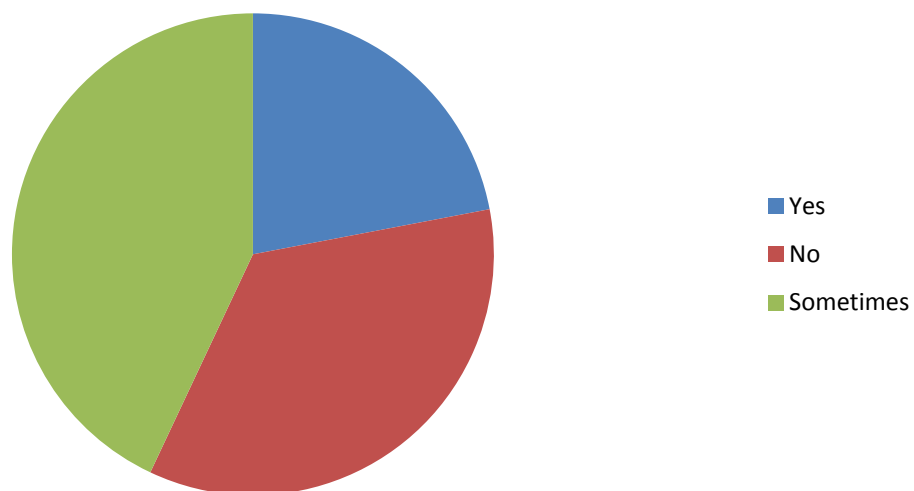
Much concern with regard to textbooks in recent years has centered around a practice known as “bundling,” in which a required textbook is bundled together with other items (workbooks, CD-ROMs, etc) that may or may not be used in the classroom. Students responding to the survey were asked about their experiences with regard to book bundling. More than two-thirds of students indicated that they have had to buy a “bundled” version of a textbook because no other option was available at the campus bookstore, even though more than one-third of those students said that their professor did not require use

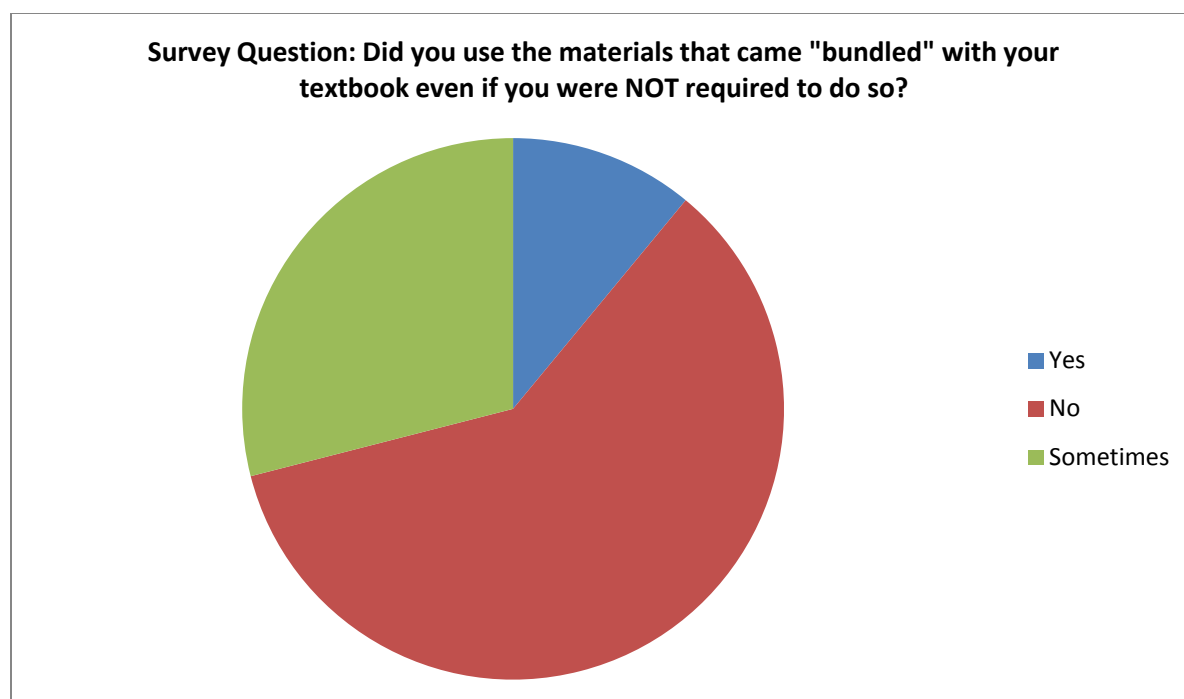
of the bundled materials. One concern raised by student comments related to book bundling is that there may be “access codes” for websites or homework sites bundled with textbooks that may only be used once, essentially rendering the book worthless when trying to sell it back to the campus bookstore.

Survey Question: Have you ever had to buy a "bundled" version of a textbook because no other option was available at your campus bookstore?



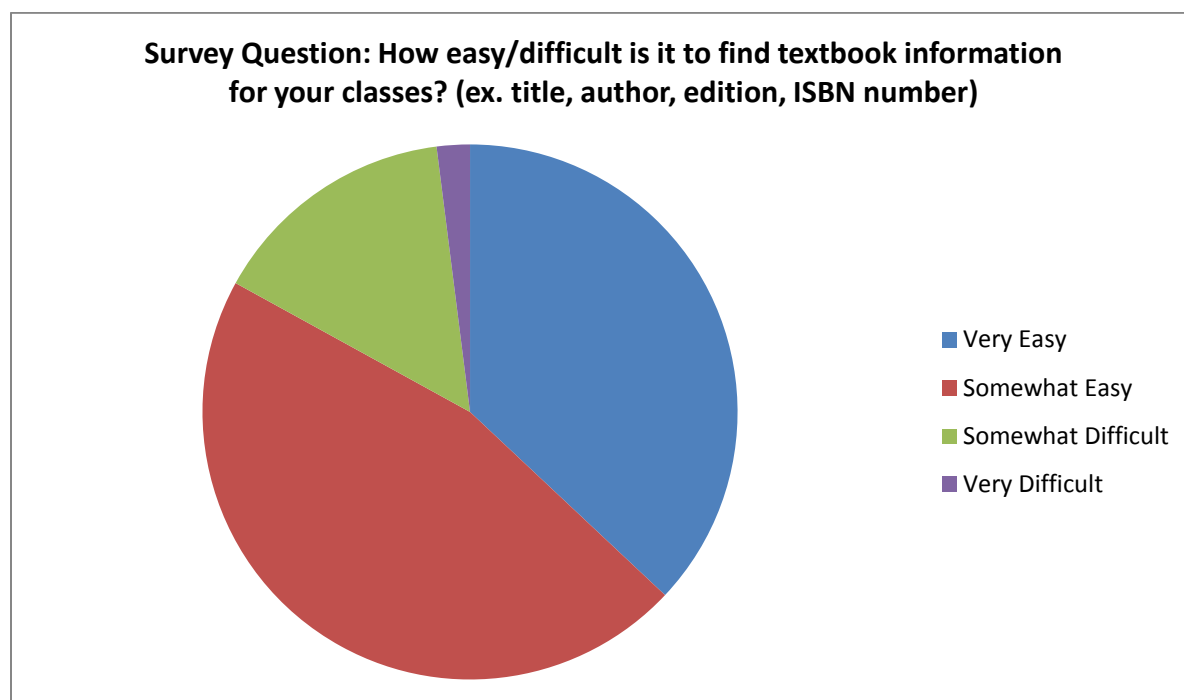
Survey Question: After you purchased the "bundled" version of your textbook, did your professor require the use of the materials that came bundled with the textbook?

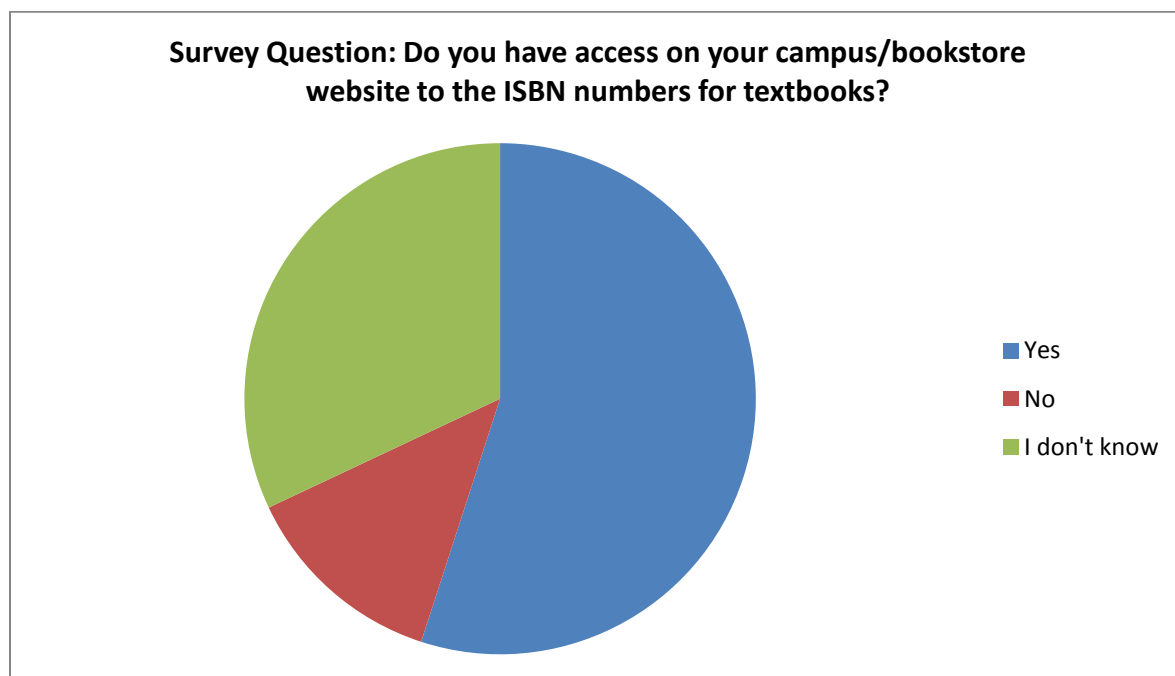
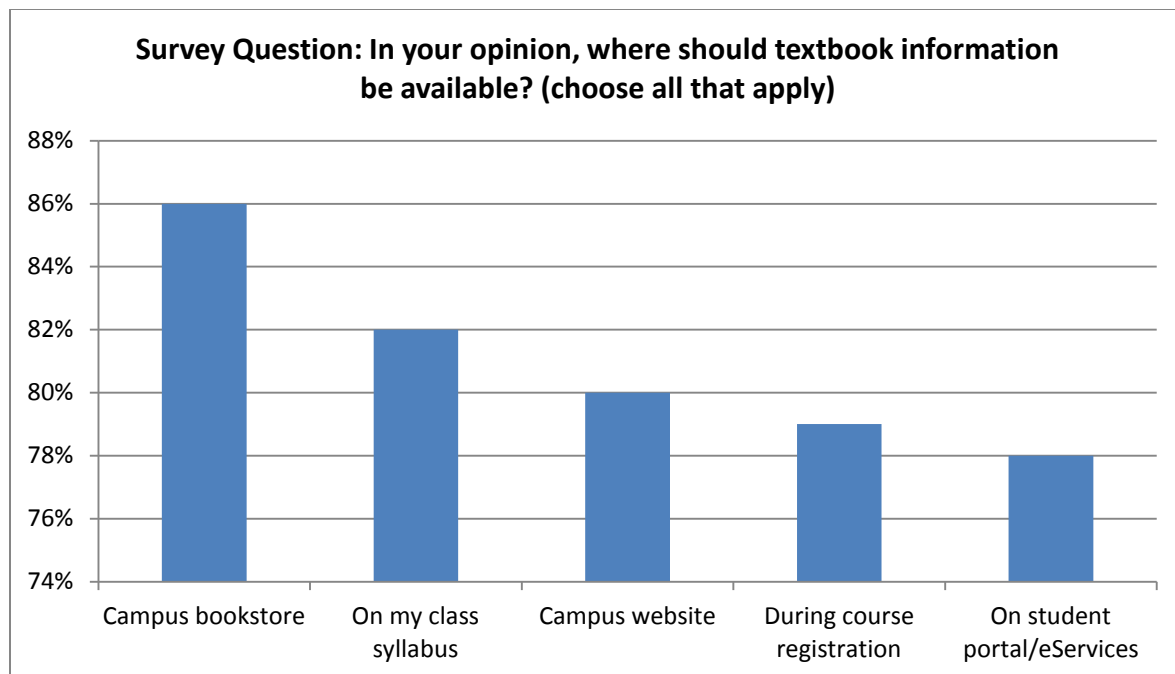




VI. Access to Textbook Information

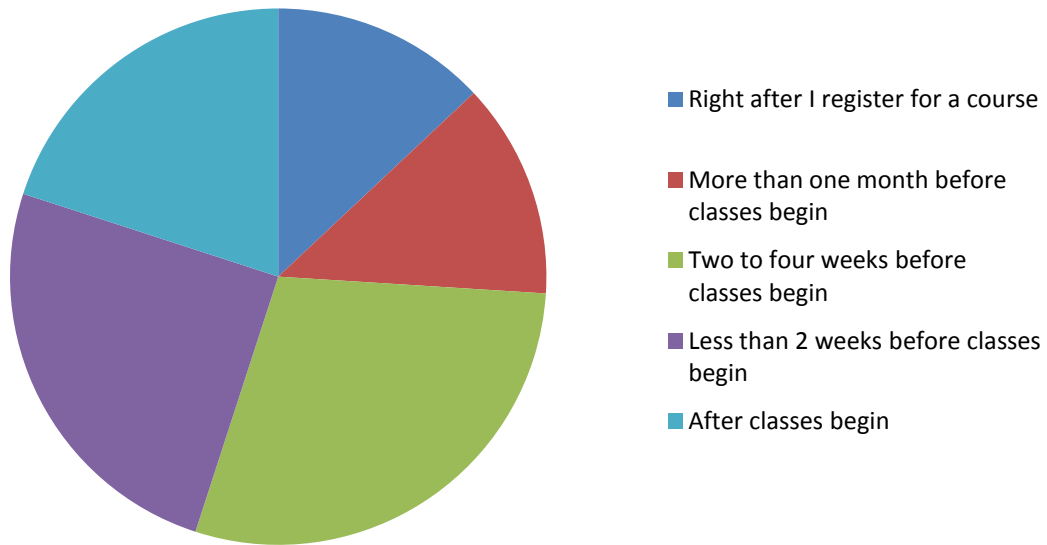
For many students, getting the best price on the textbooks they need depends on their ability to obtain information about the required course materials in a timely manner. Students responding to the survey were asked about availability of information regarding textbooks on their campuses, including ISBN numbers, which help students ensure that they are purchasing the correct book, especially when shopping around for a used or discounted book.



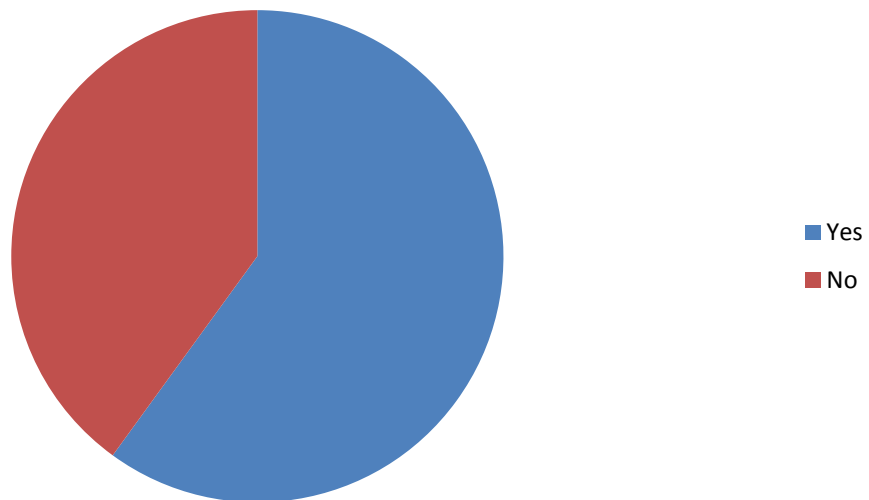


Students responding to the survey were asked whether textbook information is available in a timely manner, allowing them to buy books from sources other than the campus bookstore if they wish to do so. Students were also asked about their preferred timelines for obtaining textbooks, with the majority of those responding indicating a preference for buying/renting their books at least two weeks prior to the start of classes.

Survey Question: When do you prefer to buy/rent your books?

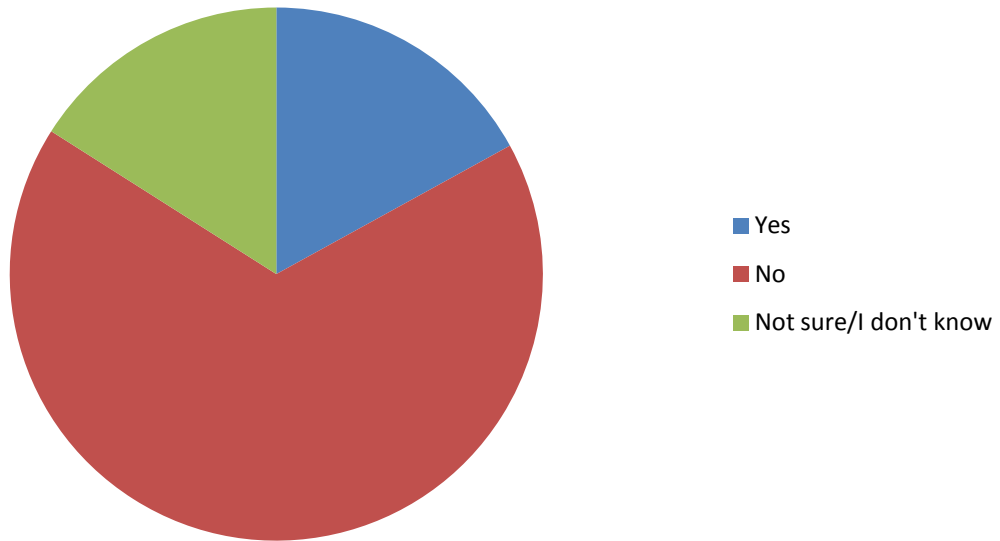


Survey Question: Do you believe that information about textbooks is available to you in a timely manner (allowing you to buy books from sources other than your campus bookstore if you wish to do so)?

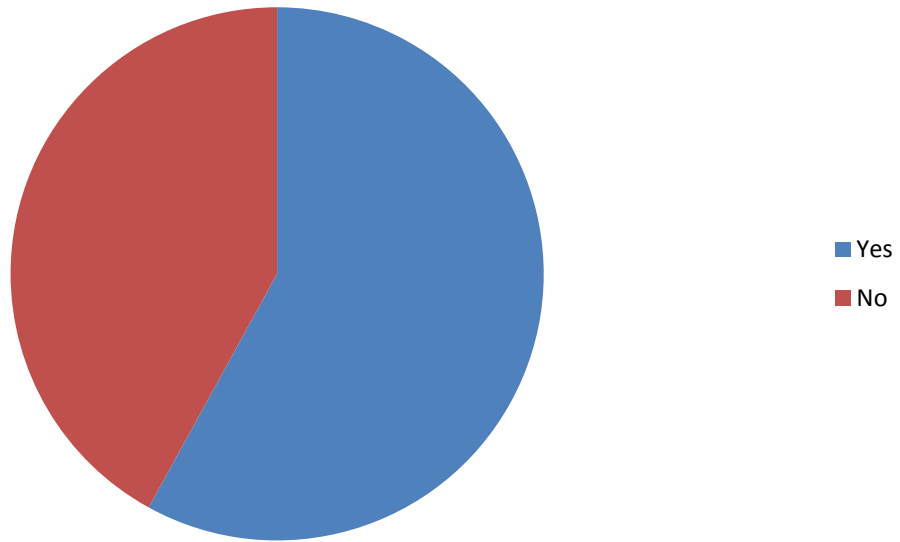


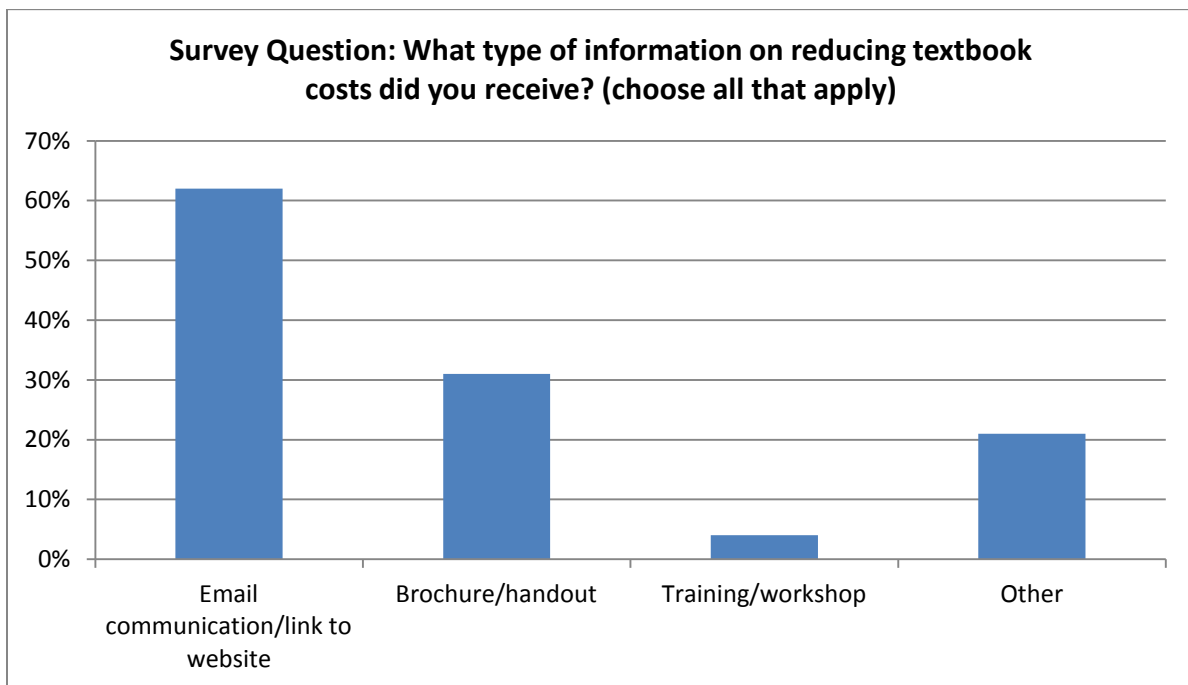
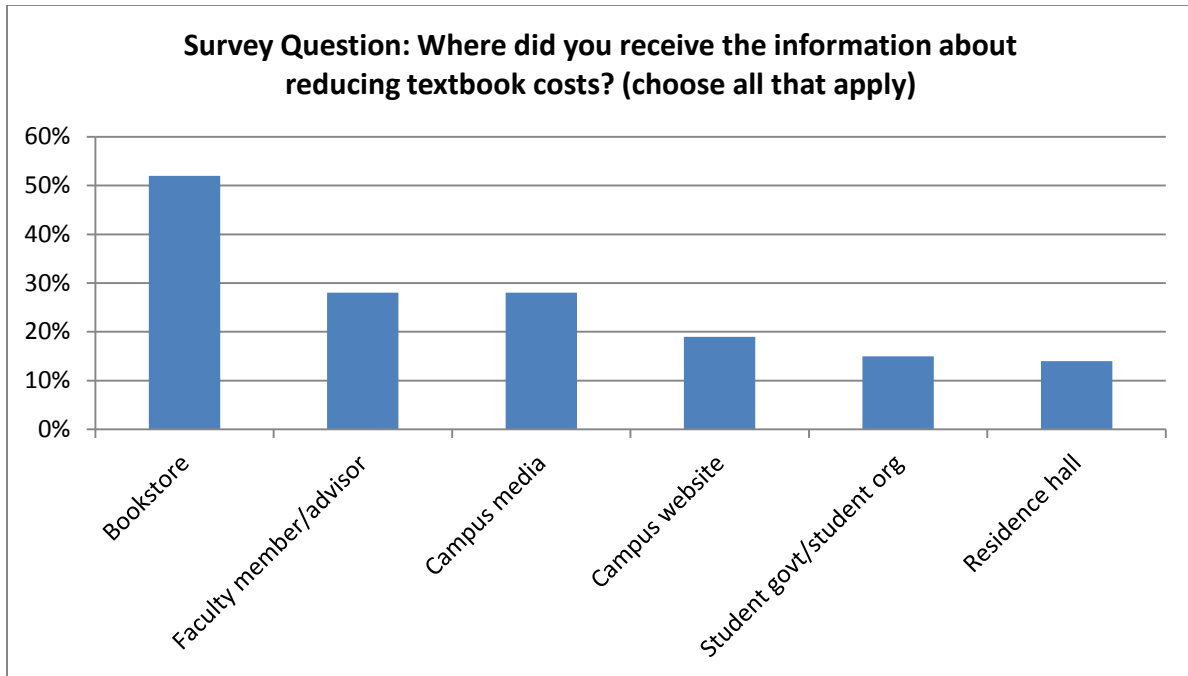
There has been discussion lately regarding provision of information to students about how to reduce textbook costs. Students responding to the survey were asked about whether they had received any information about reducing textbook costs from their campuses. Those who had were asked about the format of the information, where they received it and whether it was helpful. Just 17% of students indicated that they had received information about how reduce textbook costs from their campus, but 58% of those who received information said that it was helpful to them.

Survey Question: Have you received any information from your campus about how to reduce your textbook costs?



Survey Question: Was the information that you received on reducing textbook costs helpful to you?





VII. Demographics of Survey Respondents

Students responding to the survey were asked to respond to several demographic questions at the end of the survey, including which state university they were attending, year in school, credit load, area of study and estimated family income. The results of those questions are documented below.

University currently attended:

- Bemidji State University – 130 respondents (10%)
- Metropolitan State University – 210 respondents (17%)
- Minnesota State University, Mankato – 117 respondents (10%)
- Minnesota State University Moorhead – 386 respondents (31%)
- St. Cloud State University – 114 respondents (9%)
- Southwest Minnesota State University – 45 respondents (4%)
- Winona State University – 147 respondents (12%)
- 82 respondents (7%) to the survey did not indicate which university they were currently attending.

Year in School:

- First year – 225 respondents (18%)
- Second year – 190 respondents (15%)
- Third year – 279 respondents (23%)
- Fourth year – 224 respondents (18%)
- Fifth year or higher – 122 respondents (10%)
- Graduate student – 87 (7%)
- Non-degree seeking student – 7 (<1%)
- Other/No response – 97 (8%)

Credit load for current semester (Spring 2012):

- Less than 6 credits – 63 respondents (5%)
- 6 to 12 credits – 248 respondents (20%)
- 12 to 18 credits – 783 respondents (64%)
- 18+ credits – 55 respondents (4%)
- 82 respondents (7%) did not indicate their current credit load.

Area of study:

- Social Sciences – 270 respondents (23%)
- Science/Technology/Math – 249 respondents (22%)
- Business/Administration – 224 respondents (19%)
- Education – 166 respondents (14%)
- Arts – 98 respondents (9%)
- Humanities/Languages – 95 respondents (8%)
- Communications – 76 respondents (7%)
- Undeclared/Undecided – 39 respondents (3%)
- Other – 169 respondents (15%)

Estimated family income (including parents' income if dependent student):

- Less than \$20,000 per year – 297 respondents (24%)
- \$20,000 to \$40,000 per year – 238 respondents (19%)
- \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year – 225 respondents (18%)
- \$60,000 to \$80,000 per year – 202 respondents (17%)
- \$80,000 to \$100,000 per year – 95 respondents (8%)
- \$100,000 to \$120,000 per year – 64 respondents (5%)
- More than \$120,000 per year – 28 respondents (2%)
- 82 respondents (7%) did not indicate their estimated family income.

Conclusion

Students continue to be very concerned about the cost of textbooks and other course materials. This concern will likely only become more pressing as the cost of higher education continues to increase and student loan borrowing continues to rise. Students who participated in this survey care deeply about the issue of textbook costs, evidenced by hundreds of additional comments made on survey questions by respondents. The time to address this issue in Minnesota and across the country is now, and MSUSA hopes to be a part of discussions about the development of real solutions to this significant issue for students.

There are a number of possible solutions that can be a part of those discussions, including use of electronic textbooks, textbook rental and the use of free or low-cost alternatives to traditional textbooks. A committee is currently being developed within the Minnesota State Colleges & Universities system to look at issues related to textbooks, and students look forward to those discussions as a way for the MnSCU system to be creative and innovative in its approach to student learning and course materials. The textbook market is changing every year, and students hope to see ongoing discussions in the future about this issue as well as work to address current challenges.

This survey was developed in an effort to gather information about the cost and use of textbooks by students, with the hope that data would provide some guidance for change. It is the hope of MSUSA that this data can be used to inform decision makers and other stakeholders of the issues related to textbooks for students, as well as contribute to system, statewide and national conversations about how to resolve this growing concern. In an effort to do that, MSUSA's recommendations for further study are listed below.

Recommendations for Further Study:

- The potential for expanded use of free or low-cost alternatives to traditional textbooks (ex. Open Source Textbooks)
- How to communicate the impact of textbook prices to decision makers and encourage consideration of cost when textbooks are chosen
- Evaluation of possible pilot programs that significantly reduce textbook costs for students
- How to communicate possible role of e-textbooks in the classroom
- Review book bundling practices and how unnecessary related costs can be avoided, as well as evaluating connection of homework sites only to the purchase of new textbooks
- Evaluation of current model of individual campus bookstores and how cost savings could be achieved with systemwide approaches
- Whether changes could be made in textbook "buyback" processes at campus bookstores to provide better payoff for students
- How to ensure that textbook information is available as early as possible for students
- How financial aid could be made available for purchase of textbooks outside of campus bookstores
- Exploring the possibility of allowing all students (whether financial aid recipients or not) to charge textbooks at the campus bookstore to their campus account (enabling them to add it to their tuition payment plan)

Student Comments

Students were invited to add additional comments to their responses to many survey questions, and were also asked for any additional comments they had at the conclusion of the survey. Hundreds of students responding to the survey provided comments on a number of questions and topics, which not only provided additional feedback regarding the topic of textbooks, but also showed their level of concern about this issue. The following are selected comments from students who responded to the survey that illustrate some of the concerns addressed in this report:

- “The cost of certain textbooks has caused me not to take certain classes even though the material covered was of great interest to me and would have filled requirements...”
- “[Textbook cost] has had an impact on the courses I chose later in my college career. When the classes became more of a choice rather than required, I would sometimes choose a course over another because of the cost of the text.”
- “I cannot buy all my books at once, and some classes I end up not buying all the books I need because books are so expensive. I do not receive enough financial aid to cover textbook costs, so I pay for my books out-of-pocket.”
- “I try and locate and purchase the cheapest textbooks in good condition. At the end of the semester, I sell my textbooks on eBay or Amazon for the price I purchased them; this helps me recycle my money so I can afford textbooks for the upcoming semester.”
- “Most classes require purchasing a textbook, and sometimes more than one. When a student gets deeper into their major, books tend to be hard cover and cost a lot; hundreds of dollars. And once the semester is over, one tries to return the book and get some money back and you usually don’t even get half the price you paid for it.”
- “I always end up borrowing extra money for books. If I didn’t have loan eligibility it would be very difficult to afford books.”
- “Textbooks usually influence the amount of credits I take per semester because I add that into the amount I can afford [every semester].”
- “It would be much more cost effective to use other resources like Amazon, but I often don’t have the money to order them in advance. I rely on financial aid to pay for these things. That, coupled with the fact that overage doesn’t get sent out until later in the semester, means that I’m forced to pay the inflated prices at the campus bookstore.”
- “Sometimes I just can’t find that extra \$500 to buy books. Most times, I hope the teacher put a book in reserve or something. I had in the past made copies from other students who had bought their book already.”
- “This semester I chose not to buy two books because I couldn’t afford them. I ended up splitting the costs with a friend because you need books whether you can afford them or not.”
- “I have been in classes where I know of a few other people in the class. We will sometimes pool our money together and just buy 1 or 2 books for the group of us to use.”
- “I can only afford so many textbooks so I don’t buy them right away and only buy the ones that are absolutely necessary.”
- “Coming into my senior year, and the major I am in has one book that I am supposed to purchase-will cost me over \$250.”
- “It seems that most instructors are becoming more aware of how the cost of course materials impacts their students. I’ve noticed that some instructors have worked hard to limit these costs.”