RESULTS OF THE 2022 NORTHWESTERN SURVEY ON DIGITAL COURSE MATERIALS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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THE SURVEY

The survey was distributed by Northwestern University in February-March 2022 and closed after receiving responses from 81 people representing 65 unique institutions with which they were affiliated and 8 unnamed institutions.

The survey is part of a benchmarking effort to understand what colleges and universities are doing to address the issues around the costs of course materials. For many years, the prices of texts and courseware (homework systems) has been a concern for students, faculty, and staff. As part of an analysis of digital course materials and course costs, Northwestern University examined the campus context, benchmarked its findings against other schools, and analyzed products available in the current marketplace. All of these elements became part of a university-wide set of recommendations and five-year plan for the University.

The breakdown of categories of institutions represented by the respondents is as follows:

|	
Community colleges	12
Four-year colleges	5
Private universities	16
Public universities	31
Uncategorized	8

Table 1: Categories of institutions represented by respondents.

CURRENT CONCERNS

To get a sense of the level of urgency being felt around the issue of course costs, the survey asked a series of questions about campus activities. For most of the respondents, addressing course costs is either a medium or high priority at their institution. They reported that most of their schools already have an initiative focused on affordable course content; for those that don't currently have an initiative, there are plans to get one under way.
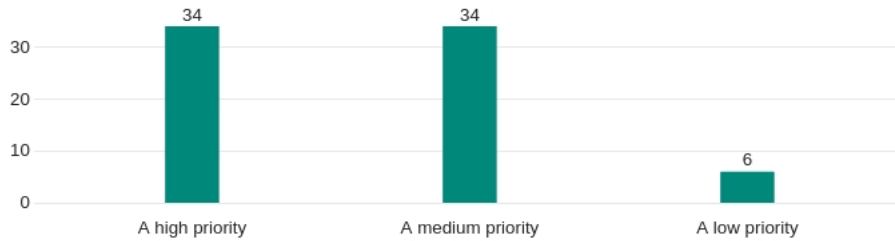
Figure 1: Priority level of addressing course costs.
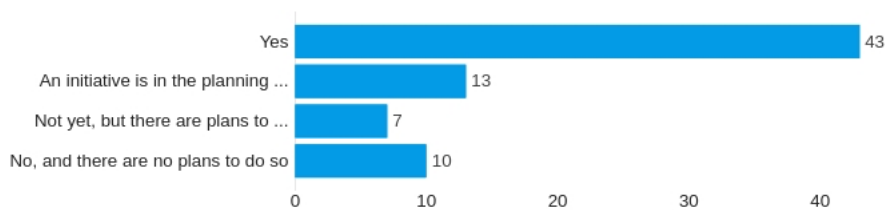
Figure 2: Affordable course material initiatives.

According to the survey results, the interest in affordable course materials comes primarily from students, faculty, the library, and university or college administrations; in some cases, pressure is being felt from the state.
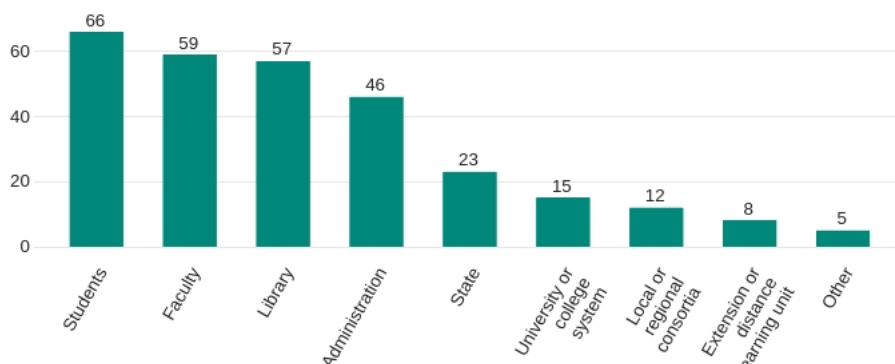
Figure 3: Interest in affordable course material sources.

Only about a third (32%) of respondents report that their institutions have a program that provides students in need with no cost course materials.

Q10 - Does your institution have a program that provides students in need with no cost course materials?

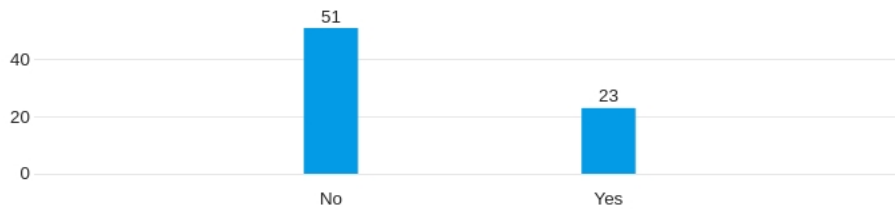**Figure 4:** Programs to provide students in need with no cost course materials.

PUBLISHING COURSE MATERIALS

More than half of the respondents from the schools and colleges state that greater than 50% of their courses have course materials and costs published by the time of student registration, a requirement of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. Twenty-nine percent estimate that 75-100% of courses have this information published by the time of student registration. For those schools with high publication rates, respondents credit their success to directives from the institution to instructors, institutional culture, and review and reminders for courses lacking course information.

Q12 - For what proportion of courses does your institution have course materials plus their costs published by the time of student registration?

Q12 - For what proportion of courses does your institution have course materials plus their costs published by the time of student registration?

Field	Choice Count
0%	14
1-25%	4
25-50%	11
50-75%	14
75-100%	17

Figure 5a and 5b: Proportion of courses with course materials published on time.

Q13 - What factors contribute to this high proportion of courses with course materials published by the time of student registration?
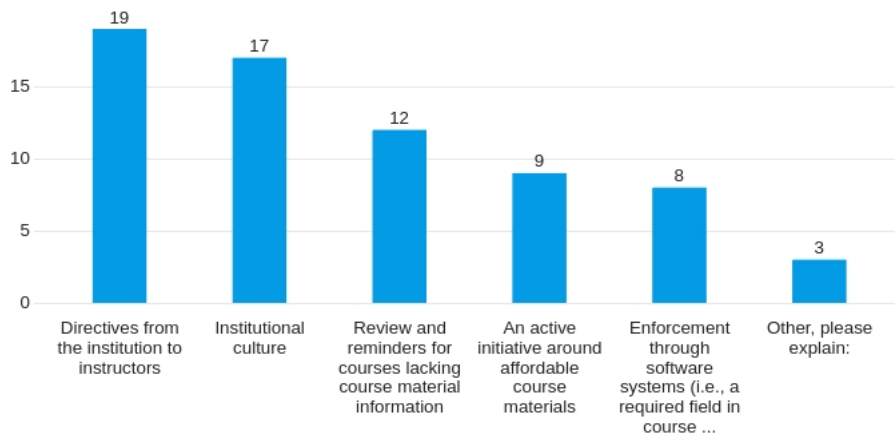
Figure 6: Factors contributing to high proportion of courses with materials published on time.

THE FUTURE

In addition to questions about the current state at their institutions, the survey also asked about plans for the future. The respondents anticipate their schools concentrating on these strategies to reduce course material costs:

- Increase the amount of OER in use (26%)
- Increase the amount of digital materials available (21%)
- Create a committee focusing on course material affordability (15%)
- Create incentives for instructors to reduce course material costs (15%)

- Explore inclusive access programs (10%)
- Join a consortium with a program to reduce course material costs (7%)

Q28 - Over the next several years, do you anticipate your institution adopting any of these strategies to reduce course material costs? (please select all that apply)

Field	Choice Count
Increase the amount of Open Educational Resources in use	34
Increase the amount of digital materials available	27
Create a committee focusing on course material affordability	20
Create incentives for instructors to reduce course material costs	19
Explore inclusive access programs	13
Join a consortium with a program to reduce course material costs	9
Reduce the use of courseware / homework systems	5
Move course materials sales to an online store	3

Figure 7: Plans to address course material costs.

MARKETPLACE

Among the 65 unique institutions, there are more than 100 agreements with vendors to supply course materials to students. The products mentioned most often are Pearson, McGraw-Hill, Follett Access, and VitalSource. Most respondents had somewhat muted reactions to the software they are using.

For each product, we asked if the respondent would recommend another institution use the product.

Product	Recommend		
	Yes	Maybe	No
Unizin	7	0	0
Akademos	3	0	0
Lumen	1	0	0

Follett Access	1	5	1
B&N First Day / B&N College	1	3	1
Wiley	1	1	0
Pearson / Pearson Inclusive Access	0	6	1
McGraw-Hill / McGraw-Hill Inclusive Access	0	5	0
Macmillan Learning	0	3	0
VitalSource / VitalSource Equitable Access	0	2	1
Redshelf / Redshelf Inclusive Access	0	1	0
Cengage	0	1	0
Willo Labs	0	1	0

Table 2: Recommendations regarding products available in the marketplace.

Respondents stated that they measure the success of these arrangements with vendors or consortia in a number of different ways. The most popular measurements are:

- Number of students involved
- Number of classes involved
- Amount of money saved
- Number of classes with access to materials on the first day of class

It was remarkable how many responses indicated that the institutions are not measuring their arrangements as a way of understanding whether they should continue in the contract with the vendor.

Overall, the survey results give us a glimpse of the higher education context regarding course materials at the current time.

2022 Course Materials

Start of Block: Block 1

Q1 Thank you for taking part in this survey. The information that will be collected is intended to help Northwestern University understand the current landscape regarding course material costs in higher education. Since we are seeking multiple perspectives, it is fine if more than one person at an institution takes the survey.

We value your feedback. Once the data are gathered, we will be happy to share the survey results. You will be able to obtain a copy of aggregate, anonymized results by including your email address at the end of this survey.

Thank you again for participating in this very important initiative!

- -

Q2 First name

_____

- -

Q3 Last name

_____

- -

Q4 What is the name of your institution?

_____

Q5 What is your role at your institution?

_____

Q6 What kind of institution is it?

○ Community college (1)

○ Four year college (2)

○ Public university (3)

○ Private university (4)

Q7 At your institution, addressing course costs is:

○ A high priority (1)

○ A medium priority (2)

○ A low priority (3)

Q8 Has your institution implemented an initiative focused on affordable course content?

○ Yes (1)

○ An initiative is in the planning stages (2)

○ Not yet, but there are plans to focus on this soon (3)

○ No, and there are no plans to do so (4)

Q9 Where is the interest in affordable course materials being expressed? (Please select all that apply)

☐ Students (1)

☐ Faculty (2)

☐ Administration (3)

☐ Library (4)

☐ University or college system (5)

☐ State (6)

☐ Extension or distance learning unit (7)

☐ Local or regional consortia (8)

☐ Other (9)

Q10 Does your institution have a program that provides students in need with no cost course materials?

○ No (1)

○ Yes (2)

Q11 Please share a URL or documentation about the program:

_____

Q12 For what proportion of courses does your institution have course materials plus their costs published by the time of student registration?

○ 0% (1)

○ 1-25% (2)

○ 25-50% (3)

○ 50-75% (4)

○ 75-100% (5)

Q13 What factors contribute to this high proportion of courses with course materials published by the time of student registration?

☐ Institutional culture (1)

☐ Directives from the institution to instructors (2)

☐ An active initiative around affordable course materials (3)

☐ Enforcement through software systems (i.e., a required field in course description in the registration software) (4)

☐ Review and reminders for courses lacking course material information (5)

☐ Other, please explain: (6) _____

Page Break

Page Break

Q14 Please indicate which programs or vendors your institution works with on an institution-wide basis: (select all that apply). The next 13 questions will be repeated for each of the programs you select below.

☐ Akademos (1)

☐ Barnes & Noble First Day / Barnes & Noble College (2)

☐ Equitable Access (3)

☐ Follett Access (4)

☐ Macmillan Learning (5)

☐ McGraw-Hill / McGraw-Hill Inclusive Access (6)

☐ Pearson / Pearson Inclusive Access (7)

☐ Perlego (8)

☐ Redshelf / Redshelf Inclusive Access (9)

☐ Texidium (10)

☐ Unizin (11)

☐ VitalSource / VitalSource Equitable Access / VitalSource Explore (12)

☐ Wiley (13)

☐ Willo Labs (14)

☐ Other, please name: (15) _____

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 2

Q15 Would you recommend another institution use ${lm://Field/1}?

○ No (1)

○ Maybe (2)

○ Yes (3)

- -

Q16 What is your institution planning with regard to the agreement with ${lm://Field/1}?

○ We will continue the agreement (1)

○ We will discontinue the agreement (2)

- -

Q17 Is your institution using the following offerings of ${lm://Field/1}:

☐ Digital texts (1)

☐ Physical texts (2)

☐ Homework systems / courseware (3)

- -

Q18 What cost savings is the institution seeing as a result of using ${lm://Field/1}?

_____

Q19 Who is responsible for paying for course materials when using ${lm://Field/1}?

○ Students pay at the point of sale (1)

○ Students are billed in a university tuition and fees system (2)

○ Institution pays for contract with vendor, but students pay for materials (3)

○ Institution pays for all materials (4)

Q20 What are the institution's costs associated with this arrangement? In money? In staff time?

_____

Q21 Where does responsibility fall for managing the course materials process (this might include working with the vendor, student refunds, etc.) associated with ${lm://Field/1}?

○ Institution's bookstore (1)

○ Financial aid (2)

○ Information technology (3)

○ Student Affairs (4)

○ Office of the Registrar (5)

○ Other, please specify: (6) _____

- -

Q22 How do students and instructors learn about ${lm://Field/1}?

○ Communication from group managing the course materials process (1)

○ Communication from the university (Provost's Office, College, Registrar, Dean, Chair, etc.) (2)

○ Communication from the vendor (3)

○ Communication from the university bookstore (4)

○ Communication from initiative focused on lowering course material costs (5)

○ Other, please specify (6) _____

- -

Q23 Do you have any concerns about the accessibility (i.e., access for students with accommodations) of the products supplied by ${lm://Field/1}?

○ No (1)

○ Yes (2)

- -

Q24 Are the programs supplied by ${lm://Field/1} integrated into your learning management system?

○ No (1)

○ Yes (2)

- -

Q25 With regards to the products offered by ${lm://Field/1}, do the students:

☐ Opt in (1)

☐ Opt out (2)

☐ Use for some courses, but not all (3)

☐ Use for all courses (4)

- -

Q26 With regards to the analytics on the usage of ${lm://Field/1}, do you:

○ Not have access (1)

○ Have access, but we don't use them (2)

○ Have access, and we use the analytics (3)

- -

Q27 How do you measure the value of the products offered by ${lm://Field/1}?

☐ Number of students involved (1)

☐ Number of classes involved (2)

☐ Number of classes that have access to materials on the first day of class (3)

☐ Amount of money saved (4)

☐ Number of volumes in use / available (5)

☐ Number of courseware uses (6)

☐ Number of DFWs (D or F grades, Withdrawals) (7)

☐ Number of course completions (8)

☐ Other, please specify: (9) _____

Q28 Over the next several years, do you anticipate your institution adopting any of these strategies to reduce course material costs? (please select all that apply)

☐ Create a committee focusing on course material affordability (1)

☐ Explore inclusive access programs (2)

☐ Increase the amount of Open Educational Resources in use (3)

☐ Move course materials sales to an online store (4)

☐ Create incentives for instructors to reduce course material costs (5)

☐ Join a consortium with a program to reduce course material costs (6)

☐ Increase the amount of digital materials available (7)

☐ Reduce the use of courseware / homework systems (8)

☐ None of the above (9)

Q29 What else do you plan to do to support course affordability?

_____

Q30 Is there anything else we should know about your institution with regards to course material affordability?

_____

Q31 If you would like a copy of this survey's results, please enter your email here.

_____