

Survey Overview

This survey ran on the UASU Perks platform from August 22 to 31, 2022. It reached 1247 points of contact. The survey had five questions:

- A 'choose all that apply' question about sources of stress, including options comparable to Angus Reid student data [reported in the Edmonton Journal](#) and in the [Financial Post](#).
 - UAlberta students were more likely than the Angus Reid student respondents (43% vs. 32%) to be afraid of taking debt to cover upcoming school expenses.
 - Stressors:
 - Mental health: 62% of respondents
 - Cost of textbooks: 54%
 - Cost of food: 50%
 - Level of skill with budgeting/finances: 47%
 - Taking on debt for school expenses: 43%
 - Physical health: 41%
 - Cost of clothing: 35%
 - Cost of rent: 33%
 - Accessibility issues: 10%
 - Note that, in our [2021 annual survey](#), 6% of respondents self-identified as disabled.
 - Returning students were far less likely than new students (48% versus 65%) to be stressed about the cost of textbooks.
- A five-point Likert scale question about the expected costs of books and school supplies, comparable to the Angus Reid surveys.
 - 58% of respondents who were also students last year believe that textbooks and school supplies will be more expensive this year. This is

substantially lower than the Angus Reid numbers. Possible factors include question format and last year's Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) program.

- A 'choose all that apply' question about students' choices in lieu of buying textbooks, a repeat of a question that the UASU asked in 2018 and 2020.
 - Results aligned with previous surveys, except that students are now much less likely to use a friend's copy or get a textbook from the library.
 - 58% didn't use a textbook at all for some/all of their classes rather than purchase one.
 - 58% downloaded textbooks for free online rather than purchase them.
 - 12% bought all required textbooks.
- A five-point scale question about the proportion of last year's classes that had zero or near-zero textbook costs.
 - 24% said more than 60% of their classes had zero or near-zero textbook costs.
- A text question intended to capture both general stress levels (or lack thereof) over grocery/rent prices, and related experiences.
 - 1/3 of responses used the word 'fine.' The vast majority of the rest expressed stress, very often about the cost of food.

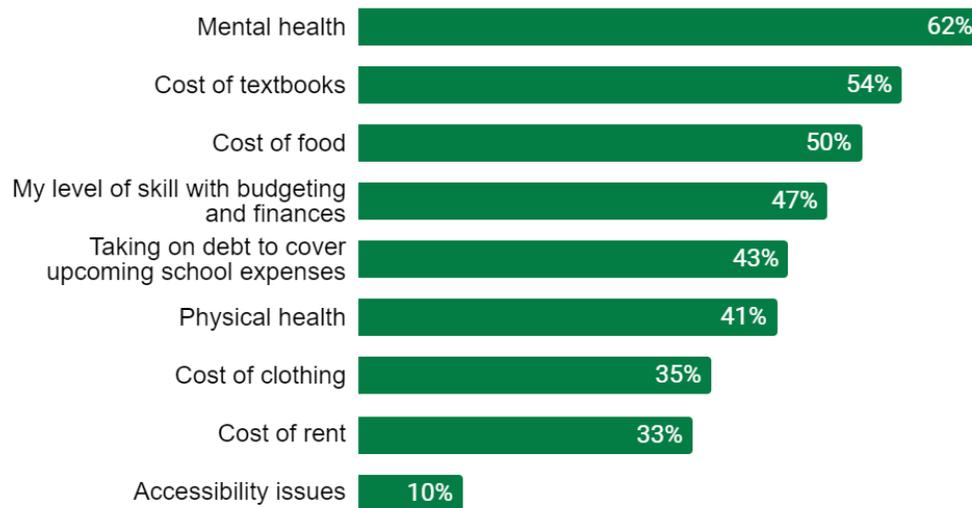
"Would you consider yourself stressed about any of the following lately? Choose all that apply."

Though the exact form of the Angus Reid question is unknown, it was [reported](#) as follows: "32 per cent of respondents afraid of taking debt to cover upcoming school expenses." UAlberta students were more likely (at 43%) to have this fear.

Almost 2/3 of respondents cited mental health as a primary source of stress. Half were also concerned about the cost of textbooks, the cost of food, and their level of skill with budgeting and finances.

Using the following questions, we filtered the 'cost of textbooks' line by whether respondents were university students last year. Those who were returning students (i.e. were here for last year's Zero Textbook Cost program) were significantly less likely than new students to be stressed about the cost of textbooks (47.7% versus 65.0%).

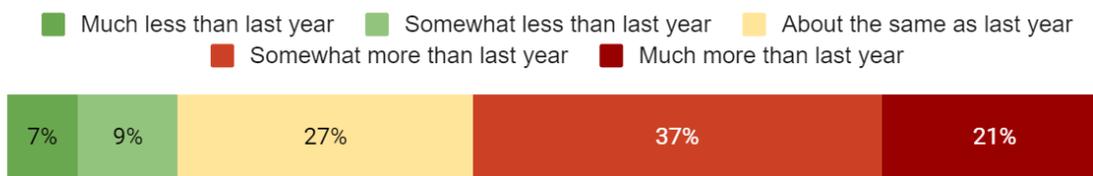
Primary Stressors



"Thinking about buying school supplies and books, what do you expect this year?"

Though the exact form of the Angus Reid question is unknown, it was [reported](#) as follows: "nearly 75 per cent of survey respondents said they're expecting to see higher prices for school supplies, including textbooks, this coming year." In the interests of fairness, we opted for a standard five-point Likert scale with a neutral option. Around 1/3 of respondents selected 'Wasn't a university student last year' and were filtered from this question.

Estimated likely cost of books and school supplies

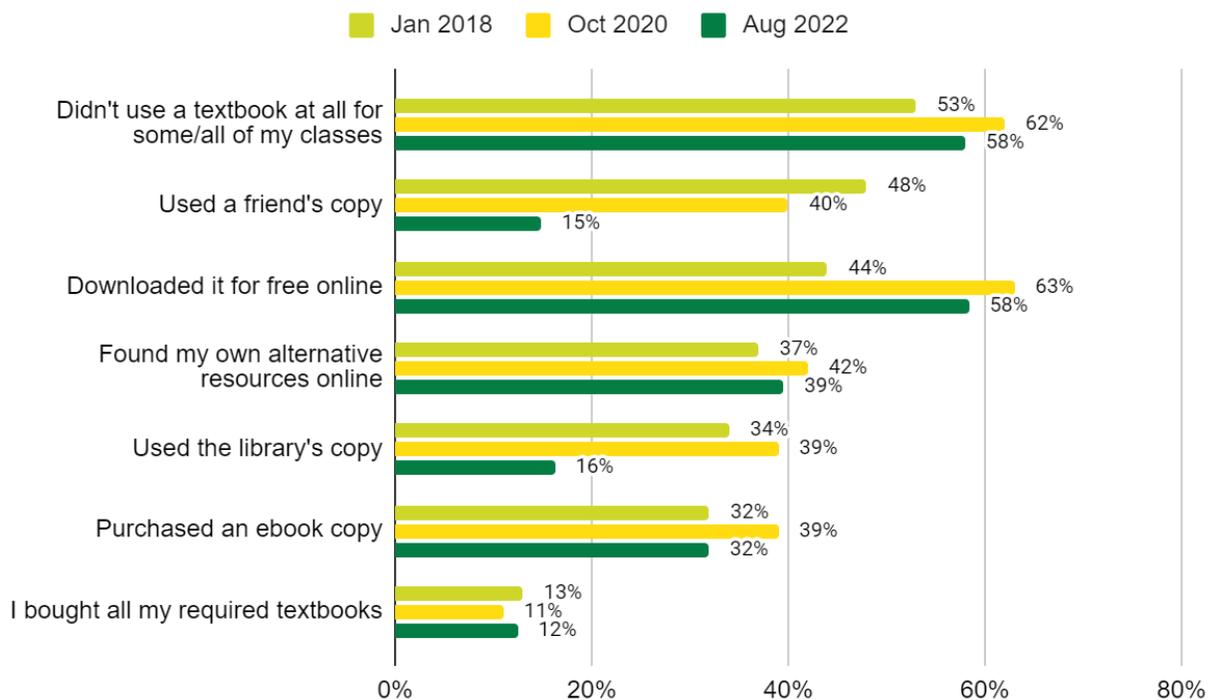


58% of respondents believe that textbooks and school supplies will be more expensive this year than last year. This is substantially lower than the Angus Reid numbers, which may indicate a question format difference. Comparability issues aside, we can conclude that most returning students believe textbooks and school supplies are becoming more expensive.

"Last year (2021/22), did you do any of the following INSTEAD of buying a physical textbook? Choose all that apply."

For context, the UASU asked a similar survey question (starting with 'have you ever...') as part of the Be Book Smart textbook-affordability initiative in [2018](#) and [2020](#). Around 1/3 of respondents selected 'Wasn't a university student last year' and were filtered from this question.

Since the phrasing of the question is not identical ('have you ever...' naturally includes multiple years'), results may not be perfectly comparable.



Results lined up very closely with previous years, with two exceptions: the strategies that involve physically going and interacting with people. This past year, students were far less likely to use a friend's copy or to use a textbook from the library.

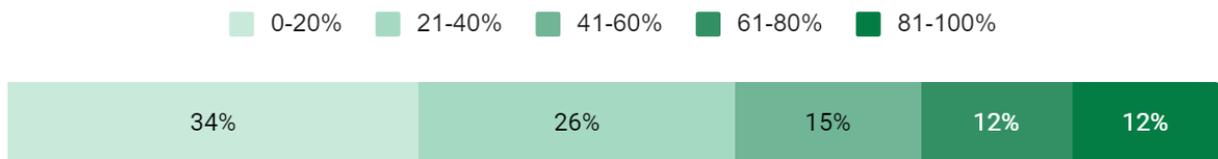
Over half of respondents opted not to use a textbook for some or all of their classes last year rather than buying the textbook. A similar number had downloaded their textbook for free online, which may or may not include use of OERs but certainly encompasses use of pirated copies.

"Last year (2021/22), roughly how many of your classes had zero or near-zero textbook cost?"

For context, in 2021/22 the University ran a pilot program that the UASU had requested since 2018: a Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) course indicator. Roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ of Fall 2021 courses (including year-long courses) and roughly $\frac{1}{2}$ of Winter 2022 courses (excluding year-long courses) were marked as ZTC. Participating courses saved students [at least \\$9 million](#).

Around $\frac{1}{3}$ of respondents selected 'Wasn't a university student last year' and were filtered from this question.

Around $\frac{1}{4}$ of respondents said that 60% or more of their classes or more had zero or near-zero textbook cost. This question will be a useful benchmark for tracking the uptake of ZTCs and comparable practices in the future.



"Between inflation and...everything else...the cost of living is a huge issue for students across Canada. Are groceries and rent getting you down, or are you doing fine right now?"

Roughly 32% of text responses used the word 'fine.' The vast majority of the rest expressed stress specific to groceries and/or rent.

- It's so bad man. Sometimes food feels like a luxury item with how expensive groceries are. Definitely feeling that pinch.
- It's really stressful! It's terrifying as a student with not much income watching the cost of living go up while education funding continues to get slashed every year.
- The cost of living is getting higher I'd say. Fruits and vegetables are skyrocketing in price and the rent keeps getting raised.
- Oh they are getting me very down. Definitely makes the whole staying alive thing seem not really worth it.
- Every day the chain links supporting my being come closer and closer to shattering under the cost of lentils.
- My rent (residence fees) has to be paid by student loans! The cost of living on campus is extremely high.

- I'm ok, but feeding a house of 5 on one salary while attending school full time is starting to tap me out.
- I can barely afford groceries, I've been cutting down on how many meals I eat in a day and how big they are so I don't need to go to the store often. Most of what I eat is ramen and cereal.
- I move on Friday and honestly I'm scared to be having these expenses.
- Living at home drastically reduces my cost of living; however, with two retired parents on fixed incomes and me only working part time, even I notice the costs of everything increasing (tuition, groceries, gas, utilities, etc.). I think it's hard on most people right now.
- I'm NOT doing fine; everything is too expensive. I find myself compromising what food I get when I go.
- Groceries are a huge stress for me and my family, as the prices have been raised too high for us to buy what we need.
- I am fortunate to live at home still, but I know my dad is struggling lots with it so I try to help out as much as I can.
- I just moved out and I'm living on my own. Expenses are WAY higher than I expected. I'll manage, but it's definitely on my mind.
- I'm doing ok, but having difficulty finding work that will accommodate my school schedule so it might become an issue soon.
- I'm getting really worried cause I have money saved but if I don't get a job it won't be enough. But I don't want to be relying on my parents after I moved out.
- While my rent has thankfully stayed about the same since I first moved into my apartment 5 years ago, it feels like every month grocery stores and their pricing continues to rise.
- They're kind of getting me down. I'm still waiting on my final cheque from my last job and my student loans have not yet come in.
- Rent has stayed the same, thankfully. Groceries are getting more expensive very quickly. My current wage is not able to acquire quantity/quality of groceries I used to get before inflation.
- I'm okay for now but it's only a matter of time until I'll be struggling like everyone else.
- Shopping has become less enjoyable overall. I'm worried about my financial stability as I enter university. I don't know if I'll be able to handle all the stress that comes with worrying about money.

- Well my car catalytic converter got stolen, I'm stressed with car stuff and groceries and rent and gas going up.
- As a mature student I am more adequately prepared for the cost of living. Though, it is still a challenge and it is necessary to utilize the financial supports available to me to be able to "afford" going to school. Without financial supports, I wouldn't be able to attend.
- Clothes are also getting very expensive.
- Getting me down HARD. Might be homeless by the start of this semester, but me and my family aren't sure how it's going to go yet.
- I'm piss poor, skint as a raccoon on Easter Sunday. I've worked five jobs 7 days a week this summer and still can't afford this.
- If you live with your parents, it's fine. But if you live alone or in res, then you're not fine.
- It's not lookin good for us chief.
- Rent is fine, however, groceries are not. Despite how busy my school schedule is I have to work 20 to 25 hours a week to be able to continue to afford groceries. I would love if I could devote those hours to school as that is more than a full day's worth of study time spent stuck at work.
- They're getting me down and wages are not increasing enough to combat inflation. I'm losing money yearly if we account for inflation and it's very disheartening.