Presley Parker worked her industrial scissors through thick, rigid foam to create shapes that would soon emulate a bathtub-sized teacup. The work has blistered her hands and drained her bank account.

Parker, a studio art major at the University of Texas, said the plush foam from Joann’s Fabrics was too expensive, so she settled for the cheaper, inferior option, an Amazon mattress topper. Even with the price cut, the project cost her $250.

Supplies for her required art sculptures cost $3500 each semester. Even though she plans a budget, Parker still pulls money out of savings year after year to achieve her vision.

“In order to make what you want to make, to make what you love and make a good piece, you have to spend a decent amount of money,” Parker said.

Parker said this is the price of being an art major. She puts hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars toward a single sculpture, with no funding from UT.

And while the costs are high, the alternative is giving up on her art career, she said.

“If you can’t spend a lot of money on your projects you won’t get scholarships and residencies and you can't be an artist,” Parker said.

Fine arts students spend their entire college careers creating intricate, labor-intensive art pieces. Students and professors do what they can with what is provided by the fine arts school, but with no scholarships or other forms of money from the university, students like Parker are often left to their own limited budgets.

“We do our best,” Jeff Williams, a studio art professor, said. “(Students) spend a little bit of time every class searching, trying to find free resources.”

Williams said that there are core classes required for art students where mandatory materials can cost over $100 and that every class, a student approaches him with issues financing their work.

“Every student definitely needs more money, more support,” Williams said.

Williams said the recent higher living costs in Austin make the problem worse. He said that any extra money art students might’ve hesitantly put toward their projects before is now used for daily life.

Studio art major Mac Benson said she and other art students have to spend a lot of their living expenses on supplies.

“There’s not very many times where you are not tied down by money,” Benson said.

Luna Davis, a fellow studio art major, said her latest piece cost her over a thousand dollars. Davis said she wished she had funding from UT because creating her pieces are consistently expensive.

Her current project involves laser-cutting wood, and to manage her costs, she used cheap wood that she described as “not pretty” and difficult to work with. Davis said she has to find a more affordable option for almost every project, which affects her final product.

Davis said she wants to try bronze molding, but the medium is too expensive, and UT does not provide the materials or teach classes with bronze.

“I’m appreciative of what we have, but it would be totally awesome if we could just learn different processes,” Davis said.

Parker tries to increase her art budget by selling prints on her Etsy shop. Even with this income along with help from her parents, Parker still struggles to fund her pieces. Parker said this made her recognize her privilege and the plight of the less privileged art students around her.

“They spend the same amount if not more on projects,” she said.

Parker also said that budget restraints can limit what students can create.

“You’re encouraged to experiment [with new materials] which is difficult money wise, it makes you scrappy, but it’s still really difficult,” said Benson. She noted that the materials recommended by professors are beyond most college students' budgets.

Benson said the inability to experiment with different materials limit what an artist can create in the future because they never had a chance to become skilled with it.

Williams discussed silicone molding, a skill he said is “something that most students want to learn while they're here… but to buy that stuff from a company could be in the hundreds of dollars.”

He, along with other professors, created a method similar to silicone molding that can be done for $10 instead of a few hundred, Williams continued.

This less expensive option creates an opportunity for students to work with something similar, but does not ensure a student artist will know the primary method for future pieces.

After four hours in the studio, Parker was still cutting foam. She tried to give her hands a break every now and then to ease the blistering. She now had a large pile of foam scraps overflowing in a makeshift cardboard box trash can behind her. Parker realized she had just enough foam to finish her teacup. She let out a relieved sigh. Her bank account was safe for now.

Benson sat beside Parker, plastering small, black stones to her 3-foot-tall handcrafted vase. Benson worried about her upcoming art show she was funding herself.

She said the show needed to go well to improve her portfolio. Benson said the quality of her pieces and shows “affects your opportunity for scholarships and residencies.” That in turn, Benson continued, “factors in how much you can do as an artist after college.”

Davis said she wished there would be art classes that teach young artists how to price their art. She said, “a lot of people are confused about that and undervalue themselves.”

Williams expressed his dismay that students don’t keep their sculptures or sell them for their worth. He said that when students don’t sell their pieces, the money put into the pieces doesn’t cycle back to them, perpetuating these student artists' financial problems.

Parker agreed the College of Fine Arts needs these education courses because “that leads to artists not earning what they’re worth when they’re out in the real world after college.”

The next week, Parker worked on final touches and left the art studio proud of her massive, bright purple, whimsical teacup. Her locker, stuffed full of fabric scraps and loose string, was an issue for a later date. The blisters were a mere memory, and the trek home from the art building didn’t seem too bad anymore. She said she was elated; her time and money became something she loved, which often isn’t the case with her finished pieces.

“I'm so happy the money I spent was worth it,” she said. “It’s finally exactly what I want it to be.”