

# Open Educational Resources

Discussion Paper  
March 2019

# CAUT Discussion Paper: Open Educational Resources

CAUT Librarians' and Archivists' Committee  
March 2019

This paper is to promote discussion within the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and does not necessarily reflect the views of CAUT.

This document provides an overview of the main issues related to the use and creation of Open Educational Resources (OER) by CAUT members. It also provides suggestions for implementation, a bibliography for further reading, and a resource list to help instructors locate existing OER.

## Definitions

OER are any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open licence. The nature of these open materials means that anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt and re-share them (UNESCO)<sup>1</sup>. OER can include but are not limited to textbooks, syllabi, lecture notes, readings, assignments, and tests.

*Open licences* are often the infrastructural element of OER, and allow the resources to be re-distributed and re-used without fees or the need to seek permission from the rights-holder.

## Academic Freedom

A fundamental component of academic freedom is the right of educators to decide what materials to include in their teaching. This freedom should not be constrained by publishers' pricing and editorial priorities. OER enhance academic freedom by extending pedagogical options beyond traditional, commercially published materials.

The concept of public education is at odds with the commercial interests of publishers that charge high prices for materials to support learning. OER assist educators in pushing back against profit-driven infrastructure in public educational settings.

Professionally, educators empower themselves and their students by using, modifying, or creating open content that is specifically suited to the goals of the curriculum. Further, OER need not include chapters or sections that are not relevant to educational goals, as is often the case with traditional textbooks.

## Student Access to Course Materials

OER make it possible for students to access quality pedagogical materials without financial hardship. This is facilitated when academic staff either use or create content made available with an open licence.

The cost of textbooks has increased by 129% in the past fifteen years,<sup>2</sup> forcing students to choose between buying textbooks and paying for other costs related to their studies. Although this is only one reason for choosing OER, it is critical for many students<sup>3</sup> and Student Unions across the country are launching campaigns focused on the increased use of OER in Canadian classrooms.

OER extend the classroom learning environment and contribute to the good of society as a whole, even if they were originally intended for a specific classroom use. Because "education is fundamentally about sharing knowledge and ideas," OER directly contribute to "equitable education opportunities" for students around the world, especially those struggling with the financial costs of education (Green & Vollmer, 2016 p. 2).

## Copyright and Open Licensing

Teaching materials that are not subject to copyright restrictions (e.g., are in the public domain) or are made available via an open licence can be said to be OER by default. Creative Commons (CC) licences are the most commonly used open licences associated with OER. The only CC licences that are not OER-compatible are those with a No Derivatives (ND) element. There are many tools that identify and provide access to openly licensed OER created for use in higher education classrooms. See Appendix for a select list of these tools.

Most faculty, librarians, and archivists at Canadian universities hold the copyright in teaching and research materials they produce under the terms of their employment contract and, therefore, are able to assign OER-compatible open licences to these materials.

1. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-knowledge-societies/oer>

2. See Jhangiani, Dastur, Le Grand, & Penner (2018) for statistics related to the use and impact of OER.

3. See Vitez (2018) for a detailed analysis of the economics of textbooks in the post-secondary sector.

## Suggestions for Implementation

### Academic staff

Academic staff, especially those with tenure and rank, can facilitate the use of OER by:

- selecting and using course materials that have been assigned an OER-compatible licence (see Appendix for a list of possible sources);
- adapting existing OER for their students' needs, including translations of materials;
- creating new OER or assigning a compatible open licence to existing materials for which they hold the rights;
- encouraging colleagues to create and use OER in their classrooms before considering a high-priced, commercially-produced textbook;
- undertaking and encouraging research on OER where appropriate; and/or
- contributing content to OER repositories where possible.

### Academic staff associations

Academic staff associations can support the development of OER by ensuring collective agreements recognize these works as contributions for the purposes of contract renewal, tenure, and promotion. Furthermore, associations can bargain for technology support, financial incentives, and intellectual property language that promotes awareness and encouragement of OER for the purpose of teaching and research.

### Academic institutions

Academic institutions can support the development and use of OER by:

- providing training opportunities for academic staff to learn how to create and license OER, as well as modify and reuse OER (UNESCO, 2012);
- “promoting quality assurance and peer review of OER” (UNESCO, 2012 para 6);
- recognizing for purposes of renewal, tenure, and promotion the value of OER created by academic staff and research devoted to the subject of OER;

- making funds available or promoting provincial and other funding opportunities that support the development of OER;
- providing technology and support staff to assist in the creation of OER;
- providing an infrastructure for storing and accessing OER;
- ensuring that all students have access to the internet on campus to facilitate access to OER;
- encouraging OER in underserved areas;<sup>4</sup>
- compensating contract academic staff for the creation of OER;
- dedicating a position, such as a Teaching Fellow or other distinguished position, responsible for researching, coordinating, or promoting OER.<sup>5</sup>

## Questions to Consider

1. Do you know who is creating OER on your campus? Are they professors, teaching support staff, developers, or other staff? Are they available to support you?
2. Are you aware of any grant-funded OER projects on your campus?
3. Have you ever considered creating or adapting your course materials to be OER-compatible?
4. Are certain departments using and creating OER more than others? If so, how have they created a culture of OER use and creation?
5. Is OER use and creation promoted on your campus? Are there lectures featuring those who create OER for innovative teaching applications? Are there other ways to promote the use and creation of OER?

4. See Ontario Council of University Libraries (2017) for a discussion of underserved areas.

5. See Jhangiani (2018) for a description of a similar position at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

## Bibliography

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- Vitez, K. (2018). Open 101: An Action Plan for Affordable Textbooks. Washington, DC: Student Public Research Interest Group. Retrieved from: <https://studentpirgs.org/sites/student/files/reports/Open%20101%20-%20An%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Affordable%20Textbooks.pdf>

## Appendix: OER Repository List (North American content)

BC Textbooks

<https://open.bccampus.ca/find-open-textbooks/>

e-Campus Ontario Open Textbook Library

<https://openlibrary.ecampusontario.ca/>

Open Textbook Network Open Textbook Library

<https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/>

Directory of Open Access Books

<https://www.doabooks.org/>

Guide sur les REL de l'UQÀM

[http://guides.bibliotheques.uqam.ca/themes/179-Ressources-educatives-libres-\(REL\)?tab=1076](http://guides.bibliotheques.uqam.ca/themes/179-Ressources-educatives-libres-(REL)?tab=1076)

Manitoba Open Textbook Initiative

<https://openedmb.ca/find-open-textbooks/>

OASIS: Openly Available Sources Integrated Search

<https://oasis.geneseo.edu/>

OpenStax

<https://openstax.org/>

Merlot

<https://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm>