	Policy No.	Approval Authority
	IB-07	Board of Directors
	Policy Name	**Approval Date**
	Open Educational Resources (OER)	
	Responsible	**Scheduled Review**
	Advocacy Committee	*2 years*

Summary

While some post-secondary students have access to financial assistance from their families, students from lower income percentiles cannot always rely on familial support. This creates disparities in post-secondary affordability and academic performance. The high costs of textbooks and courseware is a prime example of this phenomenon. Lower income students may have to make a difficult choice between paying for their textbooks or paying for basic necessities.

Studies from the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics have shown that the price of post-secondary textbooks has increased by 1041% since 1977.[1] Data from the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada shows that the average textbook cost for Canadian students is $1200 to $1400 per year.[2] These costs put students with less financial resources at a disadvantage, and may lead to these students forgoing the purchase of required course materials altogether.

The expansion of open educational resources (OERs) in BC is one way to address the financial barriers that many students face. The use of OERs also increases learning outcomes and provides greater flexibility to faculty and students. Several studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between the use of OERs and a variety of academic indicators, such as improved grades, decreased withdrawal and drop rates, and increased course loads per semester. A 2023 report indicated that with open textbooks BC students had saved $35 million since 2012.[3] Furthermore, the savings created by the use of OERs allows students to manage the cost of an increased course load in the following semester, which contributes to improved graduation times.[4] Part-time students also benefit from the use of OERs, with one study finding a 53.12% increase in average grades and a 29.54% decrease in failing and withdrawal grades.[5]

Certain demographics of students are more likely to be impacted by the high-cost traditional textbooks. A 2017 study of OER implementation in BC found that students with loans and/or who worked more while in school were more likely to benefit from OERs.[6] In fact, in 2024, 25 % of students reported

[1] Melanie Hanson, "Average Cost of College Textbooks," *Education Data Initiative*, October 12, 2024, https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college-textbooks.

[2] Ibid

[3] BCcampus OpenEd Resources, "Open Textbook Stats," last updated 2024, https://open.bccampus.ca/advocate-for-open-education/open-textbook-stats/.

[4] Loleen Berdahl and Susan Bens, "Why You Should Start Using Open Educational Resources in Your Teaching," *University Affairs*, June 2023, https://universityaffairs.ca/career-advice/be-open-to-using-open-educational-resources-in-your-teaching/.

[5] Nicholas Colvard, C. Edward Watson and Hyojin Park, "The Impact of Open Educational Resources on Various Student Success Metrics," *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 30, no. 2 (2018): 262-276, https://uark.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=43756953

[6] Rajiv Jhangiani and Surita Jhangiani, "Investigating the Perceptions, Use, and Impact of Open Textbooks: A survey of Post-Secondary Students in British Columbia," *International Review of Research in Open Distribution Learning*, 18, no. 4 (June 2017) . http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/3012/4214

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they worked more to be able to afford textbooks.[7] The study also found that students who identified as being part of a visible minority were more likely to decide not to purchase course materials due to prohibitive costs.[8]

OERs have been critiqued as being of lower quality compared to traditional textbooks. However, various studies have demonstrated that this is not the case. Jhangiani, R. and Jhangiani, S. found that 96% of students felt that the OERs used in their classes were of equal or superior quality to traditional textbooks.[9] In a different study, 90% of faculty who used an OER also reported their quality to be equal or superior,[10] It is clear that investing in OERs is an excellent way to improve the accessibility and affordability of post-secondary education in BC.

Definitions

In this policy:

"Open Educational Resources (OER)" means: "Teaching, learning, and research materials that are either (a) in the public domain or (b) licensed in a manner that provides everyone with free and perpetual permission to engage in the 5R activities.
This includes:

- Retain – make, own, and control a copy of the resource
- Reuse – use your original, revised, or remixed copy of the resource publicly
- Revise – edit, adapt, and modify your copy of the resource
- Remix – combine your original or revised copy of the resource with other existing material to create something new
- Redistribute – share copies of your original, revised, or remixed copy of the resource with others."[11]

Rationale

The Alliance of BC Students has adopted these policy principles because:

- The average annual cost of textbooks in Canada is between $800 and $1000;

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[7] Loleen Berdahl and Susan Bens, "Why You Should Start Using Open Educational Resources in Your Teaching," *University Affairs*, June 2023, https://universityaffairs.ca/career-advice/be-open-to-using-open-educational-resources-in-your-teaching/.
[8] Jhangiani and Jhangiani.
[9] Jhangiani and Jhangiani.
[10] Hilton III, et al., "Maintaining Momentum Toward Graduation: OER and the Course Throughput Rate,"
[11] "Open Education," *Creative Commons*, accessed July 15, 2020, https://creativecommons.org/about/program-areas/education-oer/

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- Low- and middle-income students are more likely to suffer unjust academic consequences due to prohibitive traditional learning material costs;
- Students who cannot afford the cost of traditional learning materials often decide not to purchase them, leaving them without necessary learning tools and resulting in lower academic outcomes;
- Students should never be forced to decide between purchasing required learning materials and meeting their basic needs;
- OERs are associated with improved academic outcomes in the form of higher average grades, fewer failing grades, lower rates of withdrawing from or dropping courses, and increased course loads leading to improved graduation rates;
- Students facing more financial hardship are more likely to see significant benefit from the implementation of OERs; and
- OERs are of equal or higher quality to traditional learning materials.

Policy Principles

1. The Alliance of BC Students supports the provincial government increasing investment in open educational resources.
2. The Alliance of BC Students supports increasing funding for *BCCampus* to continue the development, promotion and distribution of open educational resources.
3. The Alliance of BC Students supports the development of open educational resources that are rooted in decolonizing practice and principles of justice, equity, and inclusion. This includes ensuring that open education resources are accessible to students with disabilities, including visual impairments, hearing impairments, and learning disabilities.
4. The Alliance of BC Students supports the collection of data by the provincial government on textbooks and required learning material costs for post-secondary programs in order to help address the lack of Canadian-specific data in this area.
5. The Alliance of BC Students supports the collection of data by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training to monitor the implementation, and financial and academic impacts of open educational resources for post-secondary programs in B.C.