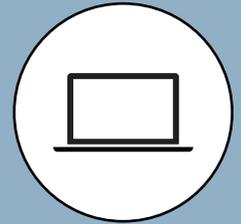


Investing in Open Educational Resources



In 2017 the Government of Ontario announced funding for eCampusOntario to incentivize faculty to adapt and create Open Educational Resources (OERs), which will be housed through eCampusOntario's online library. OERs are defined as educational resources that are housed online, and are created as a resource that anybody can openly share, create, or revise.¹ As a tool, OERs have the opportunity to ensure that financial access is not a barrier to post-secondary education, while still upholding the high academic standards that accompany a university education.

While a relatively new concept to Ontario, there has been a recent worldwide movement towards the adoption and development of OERs. In 2012, British Columbia became the first Canadian province to take steps towards this innovative approach to education, whereas Europe as a continent has been leading in this area for years. In Europe alone, OERs have slowly become a vital part of adult education in the continent.²

However, the infrastructure that is necessary to support digital education practices, such as OERs, is noticeably absent in discussions about open education.³ As such, it is necessary to invest in infrastructure to support both the individuals and institutions that are taking the lead on promoting, creating, adopting and revising OERs.⁵ OERs will only succeed in Ontario if faculty are equipped to engage in this innovative idea. In order to do so, they will require appropriate infrastructural supports.

Additionally, financial supports are necessary for faculty members to develop, adopt and review OERs. At present, these supports are commonly left up to each institution. For example, Simon Fraser University has created the Open Educational Resources Grant, which provides funding and support to faculty members who choose to integrate OERs into their courses.⁶ Due to the commitment that the government has made in creating a more affordable post-secondary education sector in Ontario, this funding support should not be left to Ontario's universities.

RECOMMENDATION: The provincial government should make available the financial and infrastructural supports required for faculty members to develop, adopt, and review OERs.

"Since 2012, Open Textbooks have saved students in British Columbia between **\$4,865,291 - \$5,323,455.**"⁴

¹Victoria Lewarne, Landon Tulk, and Danny Chang, *Interim Policy Paper: Open Educational Resources*, (Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2017), 1.

²Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, "New research projects on Open Educational Resources in Germany," May 20, 2015, <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/content/new-research-projects-open-educational-resources-germany-o>

³Kelly Terrell, "OER Infrastructure," Seminar, OER17: The Politics of Open from Resource for London, London, UK, April 5, 2017.

⁴"Open Textbook Stats," BCcampus, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://open.bccampus.ca/open-textbook-stats/>

⁵"Open Educational Resources," Hewlett Foundation, accessed November 6, 2017, <https://www.hewlett.org/strategy/open-educational-resources/>.

⁶"Open Educational Resources Grants," Simon Fraser University, accessed November 6, 2017, <https://www.sfu.ca/oergrants.html>



RECOMMENDATION: The Ontario government should invest in the development of OERs that can apply to the largest entry-level classes in the province, similar to the implementation of British Columbia's 'Open Education Resource Project.'

As Ontario looks to expand OERs, the government should tailor their initial investments in a manner similar to the roll out of British Columbia's 'Open Education Resource Project.' BCcampus targeted initial investments towards educational materials for the 40 most popular courses in the province. Since then, the program has evolved. Approximately 50,842 students are currently using open textbooks in British Columbia, and the program has saved students approximately \$4,865,291 - \$5,323,455.⁸

As a result of the success in British Columbia, OUSA recommends that the Ontario government follow a similar model. By directing initial investments into the development of OERs that apply to the largest entry-level classes, Ontario has an opportunity to positively impact a brand new generation of students. Additionally, by investing in areas where the most significant impact and financial savings for students can be realized, the province would improve upon its efforts to make education more affordable for Ontario's students.

"I discovered over six years ago that I could make my courses more accessible to students if I used OER materials and removed the onus of purchasing an expensive textbook. ... As an OER early adopter, I got the chance to review College Physics while it was still in production. It was the best physics textbook I'd seen, and better than some \$300 books, in my opinion. Since adopting College Physics, my class enrolments have increased and my students' scores on the national physics benchmark exam have improved by 30 percent."⁷

**- Professor Erik Christensen,
South Florida State College**

"IF STUDENTS CAN'T AFFORD THE REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS, WHO ARE WE SAYING HIGHER EDUCATION IS RESERVED FOR?"⁹

**- Professor Jhangiani,
Kwantlen University**

⁷"Impact of OER," The University of Arizona, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://www.oer.arizona.edu/content/impact-oer>.

⁸"Open Textbook Stats," BCcampus, accessed November 6, 2017, <https://open.bccampus.ca/open-textbook-stats/>

⁹Isaac Fairbairn, "#TextbookbrokeBC campaign finds students spend over \$400,000 on textbooks," *The Ubyyssey*, October 16, 2017, <https://www.ubyssey.ca/news/textbook-broke-bc-success-2017>.