

Support for OER

New textbook option provides cost-free material to students and adaptable content to professors



Matt Ruen
ruenm@gvsu.edu
Scholarly Communications
Outreach Coordinator for
the University Libraries

Matt supports the Libraries' open-access services, manages the institutional repository ScholarWorks@GVSU, and chairs the OER Initiative. He also provides information and instruction on copyright issues including fair use and how authors can retain their copyright.

**Average
textbook prices
have risen 73%
in the last
decade.**

Open Educational Resources (OER)—textbooks and other course materials designed to be free to use, share, and customize—are an increasingly important subject of discussion in higher education. Grand Valley State University Libraries, together with partners across campus, provide support and services for faculty interested in exploring, adopting, or creating their own OER.

Any college student can testify that textbooks are expensive—average textbook prices rose 73 percent in just the last decade according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and a recent survey done by the Student Public Interest Research Group indicates that undergraduates may spend more than \$3 billion per year in financial aid on course materials.

Many students choose to rent textbooks, borrow from friends, use old editions, or skip required materials entirely, even if their education suffers. Meanwhile, the commercial publishing model can limit the ability of instructors to customize textbooks for their courses or to combine material from multiple sources.

OER offer an alternative. Students benefit from textbooks and course materials, free from financial barriers. OER enable faculty to rely on every student having access from the first day of classes and also give instructors greater flexibility and control over their course materials. Because OER are designed to be shared and customized, most can be freely remixed, rewritten, or tailored to a specific course or an instructor's teaching style.

OER Support in University Libraries

University Libraries currently provides access to 10 open access textbooks written and shared by Grand Valley faculty members, through ScholarWorks@GVSU, the institutional repository.

These OER have reached a huge global audience: in 2014 and 2015 alone they were downloaded more than 100,000 times by readers in every state in the U.S. and from Iceland to India. The full reach and impact of these textbooks is even greater, as several of the most popular are shared on multiple platforms beyond ScholarWorks.

The faculty authors of the textbooks in ScholarWorks chose to create OER for a variety of reasons. One author in the repository wrote about a specialized subject not profitable enough for a commercial publisher, but now freely available online, it reaches users around the world. Some authors believed that it would be unethical for a teacher or company to profit from students learning fundamentals that have been well-understood for more than a century. Finally, other authors simply wanted to share their teaching materials and intellectual work as widely as possible, with as few barriers as possible, to reach as many learners as possible.

Not everyone wants to write their own textbook, so in 2015, University Libraries created a new guide to help faculty find existing OER to consider for their courses. This OER resource points to collections of high-quality resources, often written and



RIGHT: *Open Educational Resources can have a global impact.*

Authors wanted to share their teaching materials and intellectual work as widely as possible, with as few barriers as possible, to reach as many learners as possible.

peer-reviewed by faculty experts, and equal in quality to traditional textbooks.

For example, the OER published by OpenStax, an organization based at Rice University, are either commercially-published textbooks converted to free and open versions, or written by specially-commissioned faculty authors.

Additionally, some collections, like the Open Textbook Library, include public

reviews by instructors who have considered the texts for their own courses.

The OER Initiative at GVSU

The recently-formed OER Initiative is a collaboration among University Libraries, the Robert and Mary Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center, the Center for Scholarly and Creative Excellence, eLearning and Emerging Technologies, and

the university bookstore, the GVSU Laker Store. Grand Valley's culture of innovation, collaboration, and teaching excellence is reflected in the range of partners, all of whom were already interested in supporting OER when University Libraries reached out in early 2015.

The GVSU Laker Store is a great example of this attitude—most university bookstores are managed by companies like

Barnes & Noble or Follet, and are not too eager to support a free alternative to their merchandise. The GVSU-owned Laker Store shares the university's priorities and regularly helps faculty select affordable course materials, so supporting OER was a natural next step.

Each of these partners provides services and resources that support faculty who are interested in exploring, adopting, or creating OER for their courses. This support includes grant funding, professional development sessions, guidance on integrating OER into courses, assistance finding and sharing OER, and help connecting students with OER or identifying supplemental resources.

OER Use at GVSU

The open textbooks in ScholarWorks are used by many classes at Grand Valley, in addition to their global audience.

***In 2014 and 2015,
more than 1,200 Grand
Valley students saved
over \$100,000,
because their courses
used OER instead of
commercial textbooks.***

The Chemistry Department's decision, early this year, to adopt OER for two introductory courses will have an even larger impact. By adopting the OpenStax chemistry textbook in high-enrollment CHM 115 and CHM 116, the Chemistry Department may save Grand Valley students more than \$150,000 in the first year alone.

The OER Initiative partners, the Chemistry Department, and the authors

of OER in ScholarWorks are not the only people at Grand Valley interested in open and affordable educational resources.

The Statistics Department produced their own textbook, which is sold for slightly more than the cost of printing, with all proceeds going to a scholarship fund for students.

The GVSU Laker Store at Grand Valley works with many faculty each year to help them make course materials more affordable, whether by choosing older editions, finding OER alternatives, or negotiating with publishers for a lower rate.

Other faculty work with liaison librarians, building their reading lists exclusively from University Libraries' online journals and e-books, or providing students access to materials via course reserves.

Many faculty create and share video lectures and digital learning objects. These support flipped classrooms and online or hybrid courses, sometimes reaching large audiences—the Math Department's YouTube channel has around 1.5 million views, most from outside Grand Valley.

OER enable faculty at Grand Valley not only to provide affordable textbook options to their students, but also to share their work worldwide.

For a resource guide on OER visit
<http://libguides.gvsu.edu/oer>

For more of the services and
resources available at GVSU visit
www.gvsu.edu/library/sc/oersupport