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OER & Textbook Affordability Initiatives: an Introduction

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OER & Textbook Affordability Initiatives: an Introduction

Note: this document was originally assembled as background and reference materials for a University Academic Senate Task Force on Open Educational Resources and Affordable Course Materials, at Grand Valley State University (Allendale, Michigan). It was compiled by Janelle Yahne, Jackie Rander, and Matt Ruen (University Libraries), and was originally intended to be illustrative, rather than exhaustive. The document focuses most on the Michigan context.

This version of the document is made available for edits, additions, and comments from anyone involved with OER. (To the extent that any of the original annotations are copyrightable, they are released with a [CC Attribution - Noncommercial](#) license.)

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1. Models of OER and Textbook Affordability Initiatives

Note: this list features examples of OER and affordability programs which demonstrate a range of different approaches, goals, and scales. It is not exhaustive.

General Resources

- [Connect OER](#)
 - a directory of OER programming at SPARC member institutions across North America.
- [ARL SPEC Kit 351: Affordable Course Content and Open Educational Resources \(2016\)](#)
 - Collection of resources and case studies of initiatives at Association of Research Libraries member institutions. Includes several listed below.
- [The Evolution of Affordable Content Efforts in the Higher Education Environment: Programs, Case Studies, and Examples](#)
 - A peer-reviewed volume of case studies, best practices, and descriptions of affordable content initiatives across higher education institutions.
- [Lumen Learning's Open Champion Playbook](#)
 - A collection of strategies and ideas for OER (and affordability) initiatives.

Model Programs

California State University

- California State University program focused on a wide range of affordability options, including lower cost materials, OER, library resources, and consortial deals
- [CSU Affordable Learning Solutions](#)
- Features [showcase of faculty AL\\$ champions](#).
- Shared [program strategy](#).

Dartmouth College

- [Grant program](#) provides funding for expenses associated with OER creation (up to \$2,000) or OER adoption/adaptation (up to \$1,000). Does not include faculty salary or stipend.
- Openly licensed presentations and program documentation developed by Katie Harding via SPARC Open Education Leadership Program: <https://osf.io/pbd6a/>

Ferris State University

- [Free the Textbook Faculty Learning Community](#): semester of professional development, participants wrote reviews of OER and presented posters to colleagues. [Learning Community Reviews](#) were



shared online. Participants earned additional professional development funding for completing the learning community tasks, through [Ferris State's professional development incentives program](#).

- Several groups of participants subsequently developed or adopted OER for their courses.

Kansas State University

- [Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative](#) provides faculty with up to \$5,000 for redesigning a course to use OER or library-licensed materials.
- Initial funding from library. Second round support from President's Office. Ongoing work with university Foundation/Development office to locate underwriting.
- Current funding through student fees (\$10 per student).
- A significant proportion of the student fee is directed to the department to reward department and administration buy-in and support.
- Further reading:
 - [Cultivating Textbook Alternatives From the Ground Up: One Public University's Sustainable Model for Open and Alternative Educational Resource Proliferation](#) (2017, *International Review of Research in Open & Distributed Learning*)
 - [University students and faculty have positive perceptions of open/ alternative resources and their utilization in a textbook replacement initiative](#) (2016, *Research in Learning Technology*)

Maricopa Community Colleges

- [Maricopa Millions program](#) provided overload time to support faculty transforming high-enrollment courses to use OER. Overload time compensated participants for time invested in developing and piloting materials.
- [Maricopa Millions 2.Open](#) refocuses support on remixing, expanding, adapting existing OER
- Further reading: [Leading the Maricopa Millions OER Project](#) (2016, *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*)

Minnesota State Colleges & Universities - Central Lakes College

- OER Learning Circles. Participants are paid a stipend for their work, depending on pathway: OER textbook review, \$200– \$500; course redesign and authoring pathways, \$1500.
 - [Chapter: Evolving supports for faculty to embrace adopt and author OERs](#)

Oregon State University

- In 2017-2018, Oregon State University Library received Foundation (donor) money from the [Women's Giving Circle Grants to support OER initiatives](#). Grants awarded to professors of high-enrollment courses who replace high-cost textbooks with high-quality, low- or no-cost alternatives.



- Further reading: [Donor funded Open Educational Resources: making the case](#) (2015, *The Bottom Line*)

OhioLink

- [Affordable Learning Ohio](#) incorporates multiple approaches to lowering textbook cost, including OER, ambassadors at each participating institution, and discounts on inclusive access programs.

Pennsylvania State University

- [Task force created in 2015](#) by Provost to develop approaches for systematically implementing OER to support Penn State teaching and learning, and to contribute to the President’s agenda for student access and affordability.
- [Penn State Berks Textbook Affordability Dashboard](#) provides visualization of actual textbook costs as well as estimated savings through OER and similar materials. [Dashboard was developed by Corey Wetherington](#) through the 2018-2019 SPARC Open Education Leadership Program.
- Further reading:
 - [Grant recipients, courses targeted, and grant requirements.](#)
 - [Penn State task force report \(PDF\).](#)
 - [Book chapter discussing the OER task force process and report at Penn State.](#)

Portland State University

- In the [PDXOpen initiative](#), the library works with faculty authors to publish high-quality open access textbooks designed specifically for their courses. Support includes a \$2,500 stipend and assistance arranging peer review. Faculty often use the stipend to hire graduate students from PSU’s publishing program to enable the students to gain publishing experience.
- Further reading: [2017 presentation on initiative.](#)

Rutgers University

- [Rutgers' Open and Affordable Textbooks Program](#) is an incentive program that awards research funds to Rutgers faculty who make their courses more affordable for their students.
- [Award recipients also receive an official award letter](#) from the University Libraries as well as the OAT logo and language to add to their syllabus.

The State University of New York (SUNY)

- SUNY OER Services provides mentoring, technical support, and access to a broad catalog of [SUNY Open Textbooks](#) to help incorporate OER into the classroom, lower costs, and empower faculty.



- Incentives include \$3,000 for authors, and an additional \$1000 to authors using student assessment in the creation/editing process. \$1,000 for peer reviewers in first round, \$300 second round.
- Supported in part by funding allocated by [the governor of New York for statewide OER initiatives](#).

Temple University

- [Textbook Affordability Project](#) provides awards of \$500 to \$1500 for faculty implementing OER or library-provided resources, and for OER creators.
- [North Broad Press](#) is a new imprint of Temple University Press in collaboration with the Temple University Libraries, publishing OER produced by Temple faculty. In addition to the Press' editorial and peer review support, participating authors in the inaugural round received a \$5,000 stipend.

Texas A&M

- Student government and university library partnership where two annual [awards recognize faculty OER achievements](#). One is awarded to the Open Educators that show “exemplary use of open access materials in their own classroom” and the other is awarded to the Open Education Champions that are “compelling and significant positive impact related to OER”
 - Since awards are student-nominated and distributed by the student government, they have high value as evidence for tenure/promotion processes.
- Further reading: [report on developing the awards program](#).

Texas Woman's University

- Departmental Award for Textbook Savings recognizes departments with high impact on student savings and on high participation in transitioning courses to zero- or low-cost materials.
- Highest projected student savings from course transformations: \$5,000, unrestricted.
- Highest percentage of faculty participation in course transformations: \$5,000, only for travel.
- [Collaboration between library, technology centers, and faculty excellence center](#).

Tidewater Community College

- TCC's trailblazing Z-Degrees, now called [Textbook-Free Degrees](#), allow students to complete associate degrees (and take other courses) for which the textbooks and course materials are free (to students).
- [The Tidewater Z-Degree and the INTRO Model for Sustaining OER Adoption](#) (2016, *education policy analysis archives*)

University of Alberta

- [Library-hosted, maintained publishing infrastructure](#) using Pressbooks to support OER publishing by institutional partners across the province. University of Alberta covers all costs, but partners make



specific commitments in order to facilitate successful OER creation at partner institutions. Initial call for partners recruited 5 provincial institutions.

- Further reading: [Planning document for collaborative service model](#).

University of Arkansas

- Uses a monetary incentive from University Libraries and Global Campus to encourage OER engagement. [UA grant program provides tiers of funding](#) (adoption, adaptation, creation), with increasing funds for increasing original work by recipient. Additionally, funds are disbursed in stages as each portion of outlined process is completed, encouraging consistent progress.
- Course redesign workshops draw on same funding for projects converting a course to use open/affordable materials, but supports solutions other than textbook-like content.

University at Buffalo (SUNY)

- [Newly-launched \(Fall 2019\) OER Studio](#) will combine regular OER programming, a fellowship program for faculty developing OER courses, and dedicated librarian support.
- Developed by Christopher Hollister through 2018-2019 SPARC Open Education Leadership Program, and [Hollister's final capstone report](#) provides a framework and description of the studio model. Initial funding for the Studio (\$50,000) was provided by SUNY OER Services.
- The Studio will collaborate closely with the university's [Open Education Research Lab](#), based in the Graduate School of Education, to carry out OER and Open Education research projects.

University of British Columbia

- Successful adaptation and reformatting of a Physics 100 textbook and creation of a “question database and test bank”. Two faculty, one IT, and four paid graduate physics interns developed it over a summer. The University gave a grant of \$CAD 20,000 to pay the physics interns.
- [OER can be considered for tenure and promotion](#) for some faculty.
- [OER Rapid Innovation Grants](#) fund activities increasing engagement with OER, including development sprints, assessment of OER use/impact, and promotional events.
- Further reading: [The Adoption of an Open Textbook in a Large Physics Course: An Analysis of Cost, Outcomes, Use, and Perceptions](#) (2017, *International Review of Research in Open & Distributed Learning*)

University of California – Los Angeles

- [Affordable Course Materials Initiative](#) combines a stipend with individual support from a designated librarian partner. Stipend can be allocated to buying particular materials for the library collection.
- [Leveraging Licensing to Increase Access](#) (2018, *Journal of Copyright in Education and Librarianship*)



University of Houston

- [Alternative Textbook Incentive Program](#) provides awards, \$500 - \$2500, for faculty who implement OER or other free and library-provided resources in a course, replacing a commercial textbook. Funding provided by UH Libraries and Provost, and can be used for any purpose.
- As part of the the 2018-19 SPARC Open Education Leadership Program, Ariana E. Santiago developed and shared [resources to support faculty participation in ATIP](#), including an OER adoption workflow, environmental scan template, and model for evaluating existing OER options.

University of Minnesota

- [Partnership for Affordable Content](#) grants- small incentive grants for faculty plus support from Libraries staff to transition to alternative affordable content options.
- University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing - [Open Textbooks](#) - locally produced and published textbooks and re-published versions of heavily used open textbooks - with some licensed content/images updated/replaced.
- [UofM Libraries/Bookstores Project](#) provides multi-user ebooks for required course content where possible.

University of Oklahoma

- [Alternative Textbook Grants](#) support faculty members in the adoption, modification, or creation of openly licensed course content. All University of Oklahoma-Norman full-time faculty and teaching staff are eligible to apply for awards of up to \$2,500+ in funding and support.
- Some OU colleges, including the college of business, contribute matching or additional funds.

University of Saskatchewan

- Funding is available to support the use, adaptation and creation of open textbooks. Program information includes link to an extensive [application form which discusses criteria and expectations](#).

University System of Georgia / Affordable Learning Georgia

- [Affordable Learning Georgia](#) is an initiative from the University System of Georgia.
- Program includes designated coordinators and champions at each participating institution, focusing on support and advocacy respectively.
- [Textbook Transformation Grants](#) - includes mini-grants and large multi-recipient grants for creating materials and redesigning courses to use OER and low-cost materials. Grants can cover course release, overload pay, and project expenses, though specific details are determined by each participating institution.
 - [2018 RFP](#) (pdf) has extensive criteria and process information.
- USG provides extensive [statistics, reports, and peer-reviewed scholarship](#) on ALG's impact.



Virginia Tech

- A [competitive Open Education Initiative](#) awarding up to \$3,000 to faculty who submit successful proposals outlining efforts to adopt a new curricular resource strategy.
- Further reading: 2017 presentation [Creating an Open Textbook: Purpose, process & progress](#).

2. Relevant Organizations

Organizational Partnership Initiatives

OpenStax

- [OpenStax Institutional Partnership Program](#)
 - Competitive, fully-funded program focused on aggressively boosting OER adoption.
 - Planning support, consultations, campus visits, community of practice, and outreach materials.
- OpenStax also shares some data from surveys on OER programs, not limited to partner institutions:
 - [OER Grant Models](#) - criteria, funding, and more.
 - [OER Class Schedule Survey](#) - how OER and affordable textbook information appears in course catalogs and registration systems.

Open Textbook Network

- [Open Textbook Network Institutional Membership](#)
- Initial year of membership includes campus visit, workshops, and covered travel for campus representative to attend annual OTN training institute.
- Campus visit workshops typically ask faculty to produce a detailed review of an OER from the Open Textbook Library. Roughly 40% of those reviews lead to OER adoption.
- Community of practice, resource sharing, discounts on OER-related services and technologies.

Rebus Foundation & Rebus Community

- [Textbook Success Program](#)
- Professional development program for OER development teams with institutional funding. Includes 12-week course and monthly check-ins, and participating teams form a cohort for shared support, accountability, and collaboration. Rebus Community also provides publishing and hosting platform for resulting project(s). \$2500 - \$3500 per team.



SPARC Open Education Leadership Program

- Year-long [intensive professional development program](#). Participants build skills, collaborate with a mentor and a cohort of other program Fellows, and develop a capstone resource for their institution and the broader OER community.
- Community resources include presentations, initiative planning documents, educational guides, and more. Resources can be found by viewing Fellow profiles from the [2017-2018](#) & [2018-2019](#) cohorts.

Nonprofit & Higher Education Organizations

- [Achieving the Dream](#)
- [Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources](#)
- [Creative Commons](#)
- [Library Publishing Coalition](#)
- [MERLOT](#)
- [Michigan Community Colleges Association/Michigan Colleges Online](#)
- [MACUL - Michigan Association of Computer Users in Learning](#)
- [OpenStax](#)
- [Open Textbook Network](#)
- [The Rebus Community](#)
- [SPARC](#)

Service Providers & Commercial Initiatives

- [Lumen Learning](#)
- [Top Hat](#)
- [PanOpen](#)
- [Cengage OpenNow](#) & [Cengage Unlimited](#)

See also: Inclusive Access (or Mandatory Purchase) Programs

3. Conferences & Professional Development

These events frequently include sessions or tracks on OER, and some are entirely dedicated to OER. Many professional and disciplinary conferences also discuss OER and textbook affordability.

- [OpenEd Conference](#)
- [OE Global Conference](#)
- [OpenCon](#)
- [MI OER Summit](#)
- [Textbook Affordability Conference](#)



- [Digital Pedagogy Lab](#)
- [Digital Humanities Summer Institute](#)
- [Digital Media and Composition \(DMAC\)](#)
- [Online Learning Consortium](#) – multiple annual events
- [Lilly Conferences](#) on Teaching & Learning, including [Lilly-Michigan](#)
- [The Instructional Technology Council's eLearning Conference](#)
- [Educational Technology Organization of Michigan](#) - multiple events
- [EDUCAUSE Annual Conference](#) and [EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative annual meeting](#)
- [Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education](#) - multiple annual events
- [Association of American Colleges & Universities](#) - multiple events
- [Library Publishing Forum](#)
- [Force11 Scholarly Communications Institute](#)
- [International Society for Technology in Education Conference & Expo](#)
- [The POD Network Annual Conference](#)
- [The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning](#)

4. Government Policies on OER and Affordability

SPARC is [tracking state-level policies on OER](#), a growing trend. Many involve grant funding or mandatory OER marking in online course catalogs. Some establish or expand state-wide educational consortia to work on OER. In Michigan, the [2018 educational appropriations act](#) directed Michigan Virtual University to support OER creation, but this appears primarily focused on K-12 OER.

SPARC also has excellent background information on the new federal-level [Open Textbook Grant pilot program](#), which is aimed at large consortial efforts in collaboration with workforce partners. There are significant critiques of the way this pilot has been implemented, but the program's existence is a major victory. It is quite possible that an improved version of the 2018 grant will be part of the next federal appropriations bill.

5. Issues Related to OER & Affordability

Inclusive Access (or Mandatory Purchase) Programs

Many commercial publishers are beginning to offer what they call “inclusive access” programs, and what critics have described as “mandatory purchase” programs. The basic idea is that the publisher works directly with the university and/or bookstore to integrate with an existing student fee system. Students in a course using an “inclusive access” resource pay the fee along with tuition and other student fees. This approach can be easier to handle via student loans, and which guarantees that every registered student has online access from the beginning of a course to the end. Currently, these



programs are significantly less expensive than traditional textbook purchasing, because publishers are able to guarantee that every student pays for online access.

Critiques of this model center on the loss of agency for students, challenging opt-out processes, the temporary nature of the course materials, and the possibility of higher prices once a course or institution is an established customer. After all, traditional print textbooks used to be a lot more affordable, too.

- [Inside Higher Ed overview of Inclusive Access](#) - includes critiques (November 2017)
- [Inclusive Access: Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why?](#) chapter exploring case studies and challenges with inclusive access programs, including best practices. (2018)
- The Digital Reader news blog published [a 2017 critique of inclusive access](#) programs, which linked to [a 2012 critique of the same idea in the same publication](#).

Sustainability

[The CARE Framework](#) describes 4 principles of good stewardship by OER programs (contribute, attribute, release, empower) for a sustainable open education ecosystem.

Open Pedagogy

[The Open Pedagogy Notebook](#) – a community and collection of resources for educators exploring what can be done with OER and open approaches to teaching.

Textbook Costs & OER Savings

How much does one OER adoption really save?

A lot of discussions about OER use a rough metric of \$100 saved per student in a course that adopts OER, an estimate popularized by OpenStax. Calculating a useful universal metric is a messy and imprecise task, since many students report not buying a required text, many share with a friend, others buy used or rent from a variety of services.

Readings:

- [Is the average cost of a textbook \\$100?](#) An Open Oregon blog post which digs into the question.
- OpenStax [recently downgraded their estimate of savings per student per OER to \\$80](#).
 - Some OER advocates note that the data behind this downgrade may actually reflect greater OER adoption, not lower textbook costs.



- [Current survey data from the National Association of College Stores](#) estimates students spent an average of \$415 on required course materials in 2018-2019 (plus \$527 on technology and supplies).
- [The College Board](#) recommends undergraduates budget \$1200 a year for “books and supplies”.
 - The difference between this and the NACS data likely reflects different survey scopes as well as different data sources.

6. Additional Selected Readings

OER on OER (and Affordable Content)

- [An Open Education Reader](#) – history, context, and issues related to open education.
- [Open: The Philosophy and Practices that are Revolutionizing Education and Science](#). (2017)
- [OER Student Toolkit](#) for advocacy campaigns
- [The Rebus Guide to Publishing Open Textbooks \(So Far\)](#)
- [Authoring Open Textbooks](#)
- [Working Group Guide](#) from BC Campus Open Education

Community Resources

- [Methodology for OER Environmental Scan](#) and textbook listening tour
- [Developing a Needs Assessment for an Open Education Initiative](#) and [supporting resources](#).
- [Advocacy and Information Campaign](#) including event activities, a *getting started* resource, and a faculty learning community.
- [University of Tennessee - Knoxville research guide comparing models of educational materials](#): traditional textbooks, library subscription content, inclusive access, and OER.
- [20 OER-focused Listservs](#).

Press

- Chronicle of Higher Education
 - [Use of Free Textbooks Is Rising, but Barriers Remain](#) (12/2017)
 - [As Libraries Go Digital, Costs Remain Tangible](#) (8/2017)
 - [Can a Health-Insurance Model Bring ‘Equitable Access’ to the Textbook Market?](#) (6/2019)
 -
- Inside Higher Ed
 - [Calculating \(and Acknowledging\) the Costs of OER](#) (7/2018)
 - [Textbook Alternatives Take Hold at Community Colleges](#) (5/2018)
 - [OER and Affordable-Textbook Labeling Gains Ground](#) (12/2017)



- [OER Issues: Apples, Orchards and Infrastructure](#) (11/2015)

Blogs & Commentary

- [Three author takeaways from the ‘equitable access’ course distribution model](#) (Textbook & Academic Authors Association)
- [For-profit, faux-pen, and critical conversations about the future of learning materials](#)

Reports

- [Babson Survey Research Group](#) OER Reports
 - Studies exploring OER awareness and adoption, and perceived barriers.
 - [Opening the Textbook - 2017](#) (pdf)
 - [What We Teach: K-12 School District Curriculum Adoption Process, 2017](#) (pdf)
 - [Opening the Textbook: Open Education Resources in U.S. Higher Education, 2015-16](#) (pdf)
- Student PIRGs - “Make Textbooks Affordable” campaign
 - [ACCESS DENIED: The New Face of the Textbook Monopoly](#) (2016) - specific attention to the impact of access codes & short-term access options.
 - [Covering the Cost: Why we can no longer afford to ignore textbook prices](#) (pdf, 2016) - estimates impact of textbook costs on student aid as \$3.15 billion per year.
 - [Open Textbooks: The Billion-Dollar Solution](#) (pdf, 2015) - policy recommendations.
 - [Fixing the broken textbook market: how students respond to high costs and demand alternatives](#) (pdf, 2014) - large survey of undergraduates on textbook use behaviors.
- [A 2018 survey from Cengage](#) discusses the impact of textbook costs and related stress on students.

Selected Scholarly Literature

- [A Critical take on OER practices: interrogating commercialization, colonialism, and content](#) (2015, in *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*)
 - Important critical discussion of OER advocacy.
- [Eight Patterns of Open Textbook Adoption in British Columbia](#) (2018, *International Review of Research in Open & Distributed Learning*)
 - Identifies and explores social patterns through which OER are adopted.
- [The Impact of Open Educational Resources on Various Student Success Metrics](#) (2018, *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*)
 - Large-scale study indicating significant improvements in grades and drop/fail/withdraw rates for students in courses using OER, especially underserved and at-risk groups.
- [Learning challenges in higher education: an analysis of contradictions within Open Educational Practice](#) (2017, *Higher Education*)



- Challenges and tensions experienced by educators as they considered adopting OER.
- [Student Voice in Textbook Evaluation: Comparing Open and Restricted Textbooks](#) (2017, *International Review of Research in Open & Distributed Learning*)
 - Case study: enlisting students to evaluate textbook quality.
- [Sustainability of Open Education through Collaboration](#) (2018, *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*)
 - Analyzes business models of four Open Education/OER organizations in the context of financial sustainability.

