

Open Educational Resources (OERs) at McGill.

Issue.

According to a recent report, the amount students in Canada and the USA can expect to spend on 'books and supplies' in an average year ranges between \$1000-1500¹. On top of already paying for rent, tuition, and food, the textbook costs which have undergone inflation of 812% since 1975 have only added to student debt². A recent McGill report incorporated the result of a survey conducted using 130+ students in a variety of faculties to look into textbook costs³. The survey found that 72% of the students opted out of buying course material because of its cost leaving them relying on borrowing books from peers or resorting to illegal methods of obtaining the books (i.e. torrents). Education should be accessible for all those who desire it and no GPA should be jeopardized because students feel they cannot afford the cost of course materials. Governments and educational institutes globally are investing increasingly in OERs. British Columbia's Open Textbook Project alone has successfully saved students an estimated 3.6-4.2 million dollars across 32 different participating institutions since 2012⁴. As a world-class educational institute, McGill should invest more resources into developing and implementing these pedagogical tools to improve and facilitate accessible education.

Options.

Workshops for faculty. One of the major issues that comes along with professors adopting OERs is their lack of knowledge about them or how to find them as well as the common misconception and worry about publishing in open journals is that people will steal and misuse their work. Creative Commons (CC) licensing protects them from this. Unlike public domain, CC protects work by allowing the author to limit how it can be used while also allowing it to be used by anyone. Through McGill (Libraries and Teaching and Learning Services) we can establish monthly or bi-annual workshops for interested professors to learn how to find relevant OERs as well as how to publish their work in open journals.

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/financial-consumer-agency/services/budget-student-life.html>

² <http://www.businessinsider.com/college-textbook-inflation-2012-12>

³ http://ssmu.mcgill.ca/ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/OER_Final_Report_April_28_2017.pdf

⁴ <https://bccampus.ca/2016/10/18/the-bc-open-textbook-project-celebrates-four-years-of-success/>

Liason for faculty. This option could be paired with the option for workshops. For those professors who are interested in adopting OERs but are too busy to learn how to or simply do not have the time to spend muddling through the internet to find the appropriate resources for their syllabi, having a team of dedicated (paid?) students and library staff to help them find OERs would encourage its use.

Changing policies. To tackle the issue of professor hesitancy with OERs, we could provide some incentive by amending tenure and promotion policies at McGill. It would be amended so that the committees who evaluate professor qualifications for promotion or tenure would need to consider their involvement in OERs (i.e. Do they use an open textbook in their class(es)? Have they made a point of publishing in open journals?).

Pilot project. This is my recommended option. By presenting at faculty meetings, we can try and recruit one or two interested professors of first-year or popular second-year classes. Along with acting as advocates for OERs on campus amongst their students and colleagues, these professors would work with a small team (made up of Teaching and Learning Services, the Libraries, and other interested student volunteers) to undertake a project in adopting relevant OERs to go with their course syllabi for the upcoming Fall semester. We could also recruit an OER professional who has experienced the OER adoption process at other universities to guide us through the process. As we work through the pilot project, we will document the process to evaluate, edit, and adapt for further implementation with other professors.

Background.

The term Open Educational Resources (OER) was first introduced at a conference hosted by UNESCO in 2000 and was used in promoting free access to educational resources on a global scale. Examples of OERs include full courses, lectures, homework assignments, and pedagogical materials. OERs are “any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. The nature of these open materials means that anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt and re-share them”⁵. In the United States, resources from thousands of courses have been made available by university-based projects (most famously, MIT OpenCourseWare⁶ and Rice University’s Connexions project⁷).

⁵ [UNESCO](#)

⁶ <http://ocw.mit.edu/>

⁷ <http://cnx.rice.edu/>