



Free for Students



Flexible for Faculty



OPEN
Textbooks

Backgrounder on Open Textbooks

What are open textbooks?

Open textbooks are an aspect of open education, a growing movement around the world to make education more accessible and engaging. The principles of that movement have been defined as follows:

[Open education] is built on the belief that everyone should have the freedom to use, customize, improve and redistribute educational resources without constraint.

Cape Town Declaration on Open Education
(capetowndeclaration.org/read-the-declaration)

In practice, the open education movement creates, distributes, and uses a wide range of resources.

Open Education encompasses resources, tools and practices that are free of legal, financial and technical barriers and can be fully used, shared and adapted in the digital environment.

Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resource Coalition
(sparcopen.org/open-education/)

These resources include videos, lesson plans, software, games, simulations, wikis, blogs, adaptive tests, and textbooks!

Therefore, open textbooks can be understood as course materials created, published, distributed, and adapted without restriction to provide users the greatest possible benefits.

How do open textbooks work in practice?

There are many platforms for the development and publication of open textbooks, but a good place to start is the BCcampus Open Textbook Project (open.bccampus.ca).

A key feature of the processes of open textbooks is that faculty are empowered at every stage.

- **Creation:** This begins with creation. A faculty member(s) prepares the content. BCcampus provides a number of resources online such as an authoring guide to support this process.



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- **Publication:** The prepared textbook is then published “openly”. That means it is published under a copyright license with few restrictions on its use (see creativecommons.org).

Publishing through BCcampus means an open textbook is available in an online database (open.bccampus.ca/find-open-textbooks/). There is a constantly growing inventory of open textbooks available. Many courses will have something appropriate available now, or may in the next semester or year.

- **Adoption:** Faculty members can search the database, and choose to adopt an open textbook that suits their curriculum. Because of the open license, they may also remix or revise the content to suit the specifics of their course. A faculty member then assigns the textbook to their students, who can access it without charge.
- **Review, Adaptation, and Supplementation:** The open textbook process doesn't stop at adoptions. Beyond the customization possible by end users, the content of open textbooks can be continuously updated and improved.

For example, open textbooks can be peer-reviewed. BCcampus will offer honoraria for qualified reviews, and these are then published with the textbook (open.bccampus.ca/call-for-proposals/call-for-reviewers).

Open textbooks can also be formally adapted or supplemented. BCcampus supports these projects too (open.bccampus.ca/projects-in-progress/). There is an increasing amount of ancillary resources like test banks, videos, presentation slides, etc. that go with open textbooks and can make adoption easier.

What are the benefits of open textbooks?

Open textbooks are, by design, intended to provide the greatest possible educational benefits for users – both students and faculty.

- **Cost-savings:** The obvious advantage for students is cost savings, since open textbooks are free.

Textbook costs have increased 88% in the last decade – more than four times faster than inflation – and are an increasing proportion of education costs. (Bureau of Labor Statistics – bls.gov/opub/ted/2016/college-tuition-and-fees-increase-63-percent-since-january-2006.htm)

This has serious implications on students' financial situation, but also on their learning. Recent studies show that rising textbook costs undermine students' engagement in the classroom. Students often choose not to buy a required textbook, to take fewer courses, avoid a course, drop a course, or withdraw from a course due to



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textbook costs.

- 2016 Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey. Florida Virtual Campus, 2016. (<https://oerknowledgecloud.org/sites/oerknowledgecloud.org/files/2016%20Student%20Textbook%20Survey.pdf>)
- Data on Textbook Costs. Higher Education Strategy Associates, 2015. (<http://higherstrategy.com/data-on-textbook-costs/>)
- Student Budget Consultation Report 2017/18. Thompson Rivers University Students' Union, 2016. <http://trusu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/1A-SC-I-BC-2017-Report.pdf>
- **Easy Access and Multiple Formats:** The moment an instructor lists an open textbook as a course material, a student can access it online. The student can read it online or download multiple file types to suit them. For a small fee, they can have a copy printed and delivered to their home address. That means there is no delay and no barriers to engaging in the course material.
- **Retention:** Because open textbooks are free, students don't need to try to resell them to the Bookstore or on Kijiji. They can keep their copy throughout their studies - building a library for reference and lifelong learning.
- **Portability:** Because they are available in many digital formats, students can take many of their open textbooks with them wherever they go - without a 50lb backpack.
- **Customization:** Open copyright licenses provide users with permission for what David Wiley calls the 5Rs - to retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute. Faculty are empowered to use the content in ways that best suit a course with minimal restriction. A study last year right here in BC found that 59% of faculty found open textbooks of comparable or better quality than traditional textbooks, and those faculty who had actually used an open textbook rated them even more favourably.
 - Jhangiani, R. S., Pitt, R., Hendricks, C., Key, J., & Lalonde, C. (2016). Exploring faculty use of open educational resources at British Columbia post-secondary institutions. BCampus Research Report. Victoria, BC: BCampus. (bccampus.ca/files/2016/01/BCFacultyUseOfOER_final.pdf)

In concert, these features of open textbooks contribute to a universal benefit of improved learning.



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How to get started using open textbooks

Hopefully this has created some interest in using open textbooks and other open educational resources in your teaching. If you want to get started, there are a number of great resources available right now at TRU.

First and foremost is the TRU Library, and specifically Brenda Smith, who serves as the Open Education Librarian.

- Brenda Smith, Open Education Librarian
brsmith@tru.ca
250.828.5098

Brenda has curated a fantastic set of Library Guides on open educational resources including open textbooks, and can be contacted for further assistance in locating appropriate open textbooks and incorporating them in your teaching (libguides.tru.ca/c.php?g=246499&p=1642306).

There is also a larger community of open education champions at TRU, some of whom have prepared a workshop on open textbooks that they have generously agreed to provide upon request. If a department or another group is interested in learning more about how to adopt open textbooks, you can contact them through Brenda.