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Finding Zero-Cost Textbooks and Course Materials

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Finding Zero-Cost Textbooks and Course Materials

Abstract

Research shows that students who don't have access to assigned course materials are more likely to struggle academically. We know that high book costs mean that many students never obtain their textbooks, while others have limited access due to using shared copies. Local data reveal that negative impacts of high book costs are more pronounced for Gettysburg College first-generation students, international students, and Pell Grant recipients.

Eliminating or reducing the cost of course materials can help to counteract these negative effects and inequities. This session will provide a brief overview of how to find two types of zero-cost materials: Open Educational Resources (OER) and library-licensed materials. We'll also share information about the JCCTL OER/Zero-Cost Course Conversation Grant, which provides support for adopting zero-cost materials or remixing OER.

Librarians are able to provide support for identifying titles that will work for your continuing and newly-developed courses. Librarians and Instructional Technologists can provide support for remixing.

JCCTL will provide lunch – join us, and learn more!

Keywords

textbook affordability, OER, library licensed materials, OER grant

Disciplines

Scholarly Communication

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Finding Zero-Cost Textbooks and Course Materials

Janelle Wertzberger & Mary Elmquist
Musselman Library
August 30, 2024

Welcome and introductions
Thank JCCTL and Junjie for sponsoring

Outline

Do zero-cost materials make a difference?



Strategies to reduce costs

Openly-licensed materials

Library-licensed materials



How to get help - JCCTL grant and campus partners

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—

Do zero-cost and low-cost materials really make a difference?

(yes)

GC Textbook and Course Materials Survey

2019

- 2/3 of students spent \$200+
- Students use many strategies to reduce costs

2022

- About 1/2 of students spent \$200+
- Compared to 2019, *all* students employ more strategies to save money and also feel more negative effects from cost

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We conducted a Textbook and Course Materials Survey in Fall 2019 and again in Fall 2022. We based our initial survey on one used by Florida Virtual Campus for the entire state of Florida and made some modifications. I want to briefly share the key findings from those surveys:

In 2019:

- About 2/3 of respondents spent more than \$200 on books. The most common answer was actually \$300, and first year students spend more than any other class.
- They use a lot of strategies to try to reduce costs, including renting books, getting used books, sharing books with a classmate, or just not acquiring the assigned materials.

In 2020:

- We were pleased to see that the amount spent on books came down a little, with only about half of respondents saying they spent more than \$200.
- Students from all groups used even more strategies to reduce costs, including using library resources.

Key findings in both 2019 and 2022



Certain student groups are disproportionately affected by book costs

First gen - Pell - International



Students say financial aid does not help enough



\$50 is a reasonable cost per class

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Some findings were consistent across both survey years.

- The most important is that students from certain groups are disproportionately affected by book costs. First-generation students, Pell Grant recipients, and international students reported higher rates of sharing books and only purchasing some assigned books as compared to the entire response group. Most notably, those subgroups said they “struggled academically because they could not access books” at a much higher rate than the entire response group. This is something to keep an eye on as our student body demographics continue to shift
- In both years, students complained that financial aid does not extend to helping with book costs, and that they pay for these out of pocket (or with help from families)
- In both years, we asked students how much was reasonable to pay for all materials in a single class - \$50 was the most common and median response. I think it’s important to stress that not all students expect all books to be free of cost! But note that \$50 is the “per course” target, not the “per book” target. Also, this response is why the library uses the \$40-50 threshold when we talk about “low-cost” courses.

Finally, if you'd like to know more about these surveys, we have both long reports and executive summaries available in The Cupola.



What can instructors do?

Assign openly-licensed and/or library-licensed materials

We'll now turn our attention to avenues faculty can take to reduce materials cost for students. Making your course zero-cost is an equity move – by ensuring that all students have full and equal access to learning materials from day 1 gives them improved chances of academic success. It also enormously reduces the financial and mental strain often experienced by our most vulnerable students at the start of each term. It is kind to students, and also kind to yourself... because you won't encounter a classroom with some students who don't have your texts.

We're start with openly-licensed materials.

OER

Open Educational Resources

- Can be full textbooks, or something smaller
- OER are already widely used on our campus

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Calculus
Volume 1

**In 2023-24:
140 sections
of 49 courses
used OER.
Students
saved about
\$414,000!**

We often use the acronym “OER,” which means Open Educational Resources. OER are materials that carry an open license, meaning they are completely free to access online and are often free of other copyright restrictions (more on this in a minute). OER can be full textbooks, or smaller resources like assignments, lab manuals, quizzes, etc.

Some OER are produced by large philanthropic organizations like OpenStax, which others are written by professors like yourselves. Authors create them to support their own courses and students, and share them to contribute to the larger commons.

We have lots of Gettysburg faculty who use OER in their classes! If you want to know more about your department use of OER, get in touch – we track this and can share data.

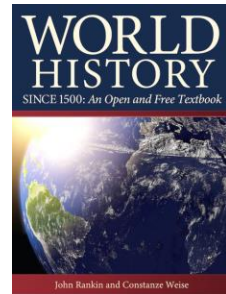
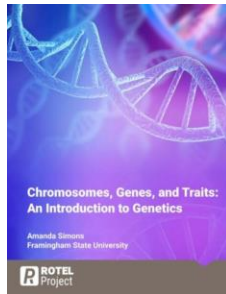
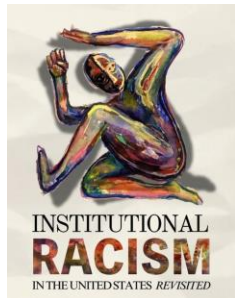
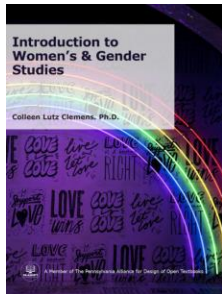
Here’s some impressive data: in the 2023-24 academic year, 140 sections of 49 courses used OER. Together, these saved students about \$414,000!

Now we’ll switch gears and talk about how to find OER. If you want to explore what

OER are available in your discipline and subject areas, there are a few places we always begin:

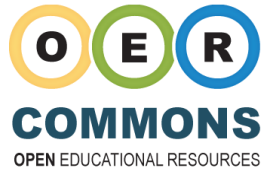


Open Textbook Library



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The OTL is curated by the Open Education Network at the University of Minnesota. It like a library catalog of open textbooks. It only includes full textbooks, so it doesn't have everything... but it's usually the place we begin to search. I included book jackets for a few titles here so you can get a sense of the scope of coverage.

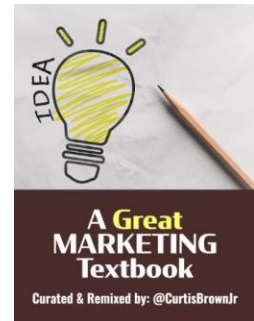
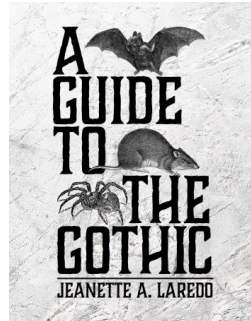


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The OER Commons has a broader scope and includes those smaller things I mentioned earlier, like assignments and lab manuals. It also includes material for grade level K-graduate. It has great filters that let you limit to material that is appropriate for undergraduates. It is a much bigger database but often surfaces promising materials that aren't in the OTL.

PB PRESSBOOKS DIRECTORY



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Finally, the Pressbooks Directory is a searchable catalog of open access books published by organizations that use the Pressbooks publishing platform. It currently has more than 7000 titles listed. These titles are sometimes narrower than typical “capital T textbooks” and can more closely resemble academic monographs. They have a real mix of exciting resources, some of which include interactive exercises and other goodies.

There are other places to look, too, but at the risk of sounding immodest, I want to remind you all that librarians are really good at searching for information. If you want to know what OER are out there that might support your class, outsource that first search to us. We’ll find things that meet your parameters and you can reserve your time to evaluating whether the OER support your learning goals.

Open works carry open licenses

Open =
Free + Permissions

Permissions =
copy, share, edit, mix,
keep, use



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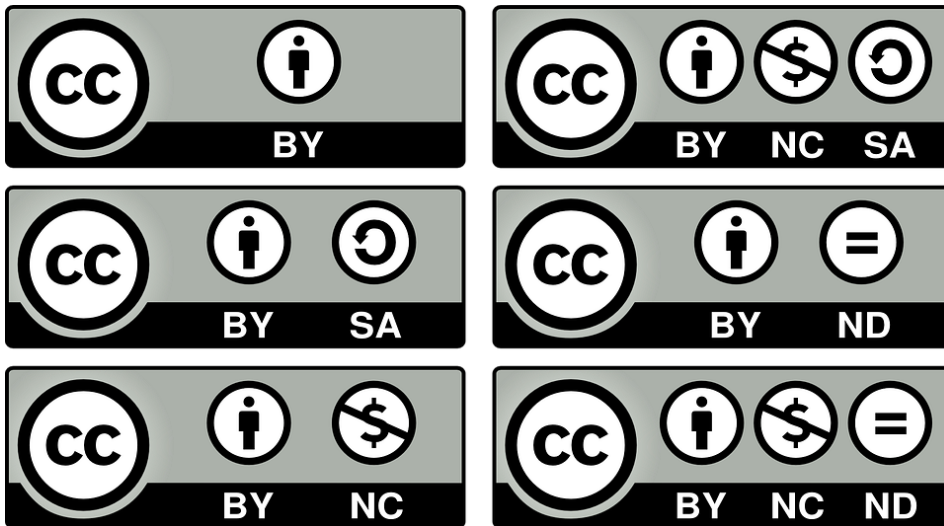
I also want to talk briefly about licenses, which sounds dull but I promise you: the most exciting thing about using open works is the power of the open license.

This is the logo for “open access,” an unlocked lock. When you see this, it doesn’t mean that you can ignore copyright – creators can still assert copyright over their work! But it means that the creator has made the work freely available for others, and that they are authorizing some uses up front. You don’t have to explicitly ask permission for things that a license authorizes.

The shortcut way I explain this is: Open = Free + Permissions

Permissions can include some or all of these things: copy, share, edit, mix, keep, use

The most common open license we see in OER is a Creative Commons license...



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... which looks like one of these. Do these images look familiar?

The “CC” means “Creative Commons,” and the other bits relate to the permissions. Note that there are 6 different licenses here. Creators can choose which one they want to use. Some are more open, while others are more restrictive. Creators have flexibility, which is good! But it also means that downstream users need to be aware of what these mean so they don’t violate the creator’s rights.

creative commons

Licenses

Icons **Terms of the Licenses**

Public Domain Dedication (CC0)
This is considered a dedication to the public domain, and thus the creator(s) associated with this item have waived all their rights to the work worldwide under copyright law.

Attribution (BY)
Others can copy, distribute, display, perform and remix the work if they credit/cite the creator/author.

Derivative Works (ND)
Others can only copy, distribute, display or perform *verbatim* copies of the work. (No modifications allowed.)

Share Alike (SA)
Others can distribute the work only under a license identical to the one attached to the original work.

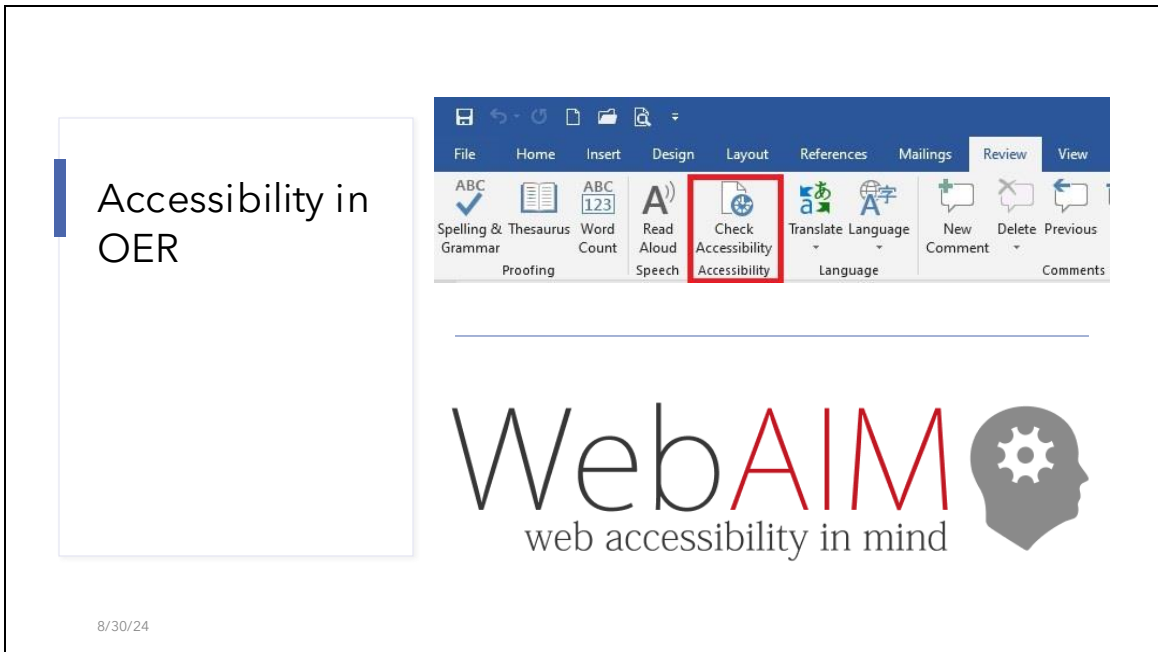
Non-Commercial (NC)
Others can copy, distribute, display, perform or remix the work but only for non-commercial purposes.

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This work is a CC0 Public Domain Dedication work.

Here's another way to look at CC licenses, and it also annotates the permissions.

The one that is most important to be aware of is "ND," which means "no derivatives." This means that if you use something with an ND license, you can't modify it. You can use it in its' entirety, but you can't edit.

If you find yourself wanting to remix an OER for your course, using bits and pieces from other people's work and recombining them to make the perfect work for your class, get in touch. We can provide more information and support for how these licenses interact and how to handle situations when it seems like the licenses aren't playing nicely together. There is usually a way!



Another thing I want to mention briefly is that it's just as important for OER to be accessible for users who require accommodations as it is for commercial materials to be accessible. With commercial materials, you assume (or hope) that someone at the publisher is tending to these concerns. With OER, the authors are more involved.

And I'll be honest: not all OER that you'll find online meet current accessibility standards. ☹️

But if YOU are creating or adapting open materials, you should have accessibility in mind. It's much easier to use accessibility best practices from the beginning than to retroactively bring something up to the mark.

If you're working in Microsoft Word, use the built-in Accessibility Checker. It will let you know if there are problem areas. If you're building something online, consult the WebAIM website for lots of helpful resources.

And the best resource of all is Kelli Murphy in Educational Technology.



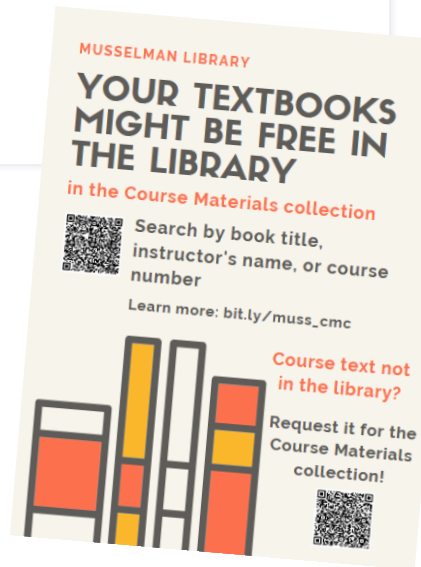
Library-licensed materials

Let's switch gears and talk about the other big way you can get your course cost down to zero: using library-licensed materials. This strategy complements OER adoption and often works in cases where OER do not. Maybe you teach an upper level humanities course and you typically assign a handful of academic monographs. These are unlikely to be open, but they are very likely to be in our library collection. In fact, you may already assign journal articles or streaming films that are in the library collection. It's a short hop to assigning books or ebooks in the library collection.

Course Materials Collection

The screenshot shows the Musselman Library search interface. At the top, there are navigation links: 'Start Over', 'A-Z Databases', 'Find a Journal', 'Research Guides', and a menu icon. Below this is a search bar with the text 'SEARCH CRITERIA'. Underneath the search bar, there are search criteria options: 'Everything', 'Library Catalog (MUSCAT)', 'Course Materials & Reserves' (which is selected and highlighted with a red box), 'Online Resources', 'Special Collections', and 'Search other Libraries'. Below the search criteria, there are search filters for 'Any field' and 'AND' with dropdown menus and input fields for search terms. On the right side, there are filters for 'Material Type' (All items), 'Language' (Any language), and 'Publication Start Date' (Day, Month, Start Year).

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In order to support textbook affordability on campus, the library maintains something we call the Course Materials Collection (in the olden days, it was called “reserves” – but CMC is more legible to students). This collection is for required course materials only, and it includes both digital and print materials. It’s searchable in MUSCAT Plus.

For this collection, we prefer that titles be digital and that they have multi-user licenses. However, we may acquire print copies if:

- There is no library ebook license available (not all books have library ebook licenses)
- There is only a single-user library ebook license
- Cost is prohibitive
- Print is preferred

To request that your assigned course materials be considered for the CMC, complete the online form (each semester). You don’t have to know if the library already owns the books in question – just complete the form and we’ll do the legwork.

Also know that students are permitted to use this form – you will see flyers like this around campus directed at students.

Finally, a caveat: **we are unable to purchase textbook codes!** The library collection is a shared collection. There is no mechanism for us to purchase access codes, which are designed for individual, one-time use.

Ebooks - chicken or egg?

Does the library already have my books?

- Search MUSCAT Plus, or
- Complete the Course Materials Request & Reserves Form so we can investigate options

What ebooks might I assign?

- Search MUSCAT Plus
- Assign something that's already in our collection

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There are a couple of approaches you to take if you're interested in using library-licensed ebooks:

1. If you already teach certain titles and want to know if we have them or could get them with multi-user ebook licenses, complete the form so we can investigate
2. If multi-user ebook licenses are not available, or you want to choose from titles that we already own, search MUSCAT Plus

It's pretty straightforward to limit a search to library ebooks, and we can help you out with any questions.

OER +
library-
licensed =
even more
student
savings!

2023-24 OER or zero-cost materials (like
library-licensed)

122 courses

234 sections

4,362 students enrolled

\$566,000+ savings!

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JCCTL OER / Zero-Cost Course Conversion Grant

Rolling deadline

Two tiers of support

- Adoption
- Remix

Consultation with campus partners is important/helpful/required

- Janelle Wertzberger and/or Mary Elmquist (library)
- AND Kelli Murphy (educational technology)

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Takeaways



If you want to step outside the constraints of the commercial textbook ecosystem and have full control over your course materials, OER are for you!



If openly-licensed materials don't work for your discipline or class, library-licensed materials might offer student savings.



These cost-saving strategies can be used in combination.



JCCTL grant support may incentivize!

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To review or share

These slides (with notes) are available at:

<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/176>



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