

Accessible, Adaptable, Affordable: How OER and Low-Cost Materials can Future-Proof Your Courses

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Context: Textbook Costs at Gettysburg College

Main findings of the 2019 campus-wide student textbook survey

1. Almost 2/3 of respondents spent more than \$200 on books in Fall 2019
2. Students report that financial aid is not helping
3. Students reduce textbook costs in a variety of ways
4. Book costs may affect some groups more than others (notably, Pell Grant recipients and first-generation students)
5. Students say **\$50** is a reasonable price for ALL books and materials for a single course

Additional Resources:

- Wertzberger, Janelle, Sarah Appedu, and Mary Elmquist. "I spent my whole summer's wages...on books alone': Gettysburg College Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey." Presented at the Friday Forum, February 28, 2020.
<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/130/>
- 2019 Gettysburg College Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey Executive Summary
<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/134/>

Context: Teaching Online

- Affordability was an important issue before March; the pivot to online learning exacerbated it. Our most vulnerable students are likely more vulnerable now.
- Some coping strategies that students used pre-COVID no longer work in an online context (ex: utilizing print reserves, sharing books).
- Publishers are unlikely to lift paywalls again in the future.
- Assigning open and zero-cost materials from the outset eliminates access problems that many students have.

Open Educational Resources (OER)

- Open Educational Resources are teaching and learning materials that are free of cost and of copyright restrictions. They can most often be accessed online but are often also available in low-cost print form.
- OER can take the form of all kinds of course materials, including (but not limited to) textbooks, lesson plans, slide decks, virtual labs, and homework software.
- Open textbooks can have many benefits for both students and teachers. They are:
 - Affordable – students don't have to worry about how they'll pay for their books, and faculty can know that all students will be able to afford a copy
 - Adaptable – faculty can easily rearrange a book to suit the organization of their courses. Faculty (and students!) can edit content to be more representative of the students in the class or simply be more up to date.
 - Accessible – as long as they have online access, students will be able to get to their books, before, during, and after the semester. Not all OER are created with digital accessibility standards in mind, but adaptability means they can be updated to meet these needs.
- There are lots of places online to go looking for OER, but your most valuable resource may be your friendly librarian! Let your library liaison or one of us know what you're looking for, and you can focus on evaluating and course design, instead of searching.

Additional Resources

- [Musselman Library Open Education Guide](#).
- [Revising and Remixing OER](#). Presentation by Mary Elmquist and Janelle Wertzberger, June 4, 2020.
- [Improving the Accessibility of OER: A reflective guide](#). Blog post by Katy Anastasi for Open Oregon, June 11, 2020.

Searching for OER

- [Open Textbook Library](#) – Best option for complete textbooks
- [OER Commons](#) – Wide range of materials at a variety of education levels; good for ancillaries and other supporting materials
- [OASIS](#) – Similar to OER Commons; wide range of material types, with a focus on materials for higher education
- [LibreTexts](#) – Our recommended platform if you want to edit OER, with its own sizable library of open textbooks

Zero-cost and Low-cost Materials

- Library course reserves can help students access your texts under some conditions (we must comply with copyright law). Submit requests as soon as possible using [online forms](#).
- Assign library-licensed materials like journal articles and ebooks from our subscription collections. Ask your [liaison librarian](#) about multi-user ebook licenses.
- Other strategies:
 - Let students use older or different editions
 - Eliminate costs for some of your assigned texts
 - Seek open or zero-cost alternatives to currently assigned texts
 - Remember that Gettysburg students say \$50 per course or less is a reasonable cost

Faculty Experiences

Dr. Sarah Principato – Environmental Studies – OER

- Used an open textbook in fall 2019 for ES 223 – Earth System Science
- Remixed the OER in LibreTexts to customize it for next time, so that the book arrangement mirrors her course design

Dr. Alecea Standlee – Sociology – OER + low cost

- Used an open textbook in fall 2019 and spring 2020 for SOC 103 – Introduction to Sociology
- Also assigned trade paperbacks with low price points (~\$10)

Dr. Mercedes Valmisa Oviedo – Philosophy – zero-cost

- Assigns zero-cost materials for all her philosophy courses
- Selects library-licensed articles and ebooks in order to create a global, multicultural focus on course content
- Utilizes course reserves to share book chapters with students via Moodle
- Says she has never had to compromise her academic standards or vision for course content while eliminating costs and preserving flexibility