Open Education Initiatives in Canada

What Are Open Educational Resources (OER)?

OER are teaching and learning materials made available for others to use **for no cost**, and with an **open license** that allows others to freely **reuse, revise, and redistribute** those materials.

Canada Has Long Been a Leader in OER

- **1938**. The International Council for Open and Distance Education is founded in Victoria, British Columbia.
- **1987**. SMART Board interactive whiteboards are pioneered in Calgary, Alberta.
- **1988**. The Commonwealth of Learning, the only agency solely devoted to distance education and open learning (now with 53 member nations) is founded in Vancouver, British Columbia.
- **1994**. The world's first online MBA program is offered at Athabasca University in Alberta.
- **1995**. WebCT is developed at the University of British Columbia.
- **1997**. VirtualU is developed at BC's Simon Fraser University.
- **1999**. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* is founded at Athabasca University.
- **1999**. Desire2Learn is founded in Waterloo, Ontario.
- **2008**. The world's first MOOC is offered by George Siemens and Stephen Downes at the University of Manitoba.
- **2019:** Many leading thinkers on open education are Canucks: Terry Anderson, Tony Bates, Alex Couros, Stephen Downes, and George Siemens.

Impetus for OER

A Canadian study showed that **54%** of post-secondary students were not buying at least one required textbook, and **17%** were dropping out of courses, due to high textbook costs.

Are OER Any Good?

They are developed by faculty experts and are peer reviewed. Studies have shown that **93% of students** using OER achieve outcomes as good or better than with traditional textbooks.

Recent OER Initiatives in Canada

- **2012**. British Columbia becomes the first Canadian province to fund the creation of OERs. Seven years later, the BC Open Textbook Collection features 270 titles adopted by 400+ faculty across 42 BC institutions in 1600+ courses.
- **2014**. British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan sign an MOU to foster collaboration in developing OER.
- **2015.** Ontario establishes eCampusOntario which launches an Open Textbook Library in 2017.
- **2015**. Canada's research funding agencies announce that agency-funded publications must be made freely accessible within 12 months of publication.
- **2017**. Kwantlen Polytechnic University establishes Canada's first "Zed Cred" (zero cost for textbooks) program. KPU now offers 200+ courses that use only open textbooks.
- **2018**. 60% of Canadian universities now offer courses that use open textbooks (90% in British Columbia).

Benefits of OER

- **Financial**: to date, OER initiatives have saved students over $10 million in textbook costs in British Columbia alone.

- **Pedagogical**: Open textbooks can be freely **adapted** for new contexts: for example, the 2015 *Introduction to Sociology* (created by OpenStax) was adapted by BCcampus into a 2016 Canadian edition that integrated additional Canadian content.

Challenges Facing OER

- **Skepticism**: "How can a free book be as good as a $150 book?"

- **Self-interest**: Some instructors are reluctant to "give away" their intellectual property

- **Departmental**: In many programs, textbooks are selected by committees rather than individual instructors.

- **Institutional**: Insufficient leadership and support from senior administration.

Incentives and Strategies

- **Encourage** your institution to include the development of OER in criteria for promotion and tenure. UBC did so in 2018.

- **Pay faculty** to review new OER. BCcampus, eCampusOntario, and Campus Manitoba pay $250 per review.

- **Institute Communities of Open Education Practitioners** to promote awareness and sharing (as BCcampus has done).

- **Coordinate Collaborative Sprints**: onsite meetings lasting several days where a group of faculty members work intensively on creating an Open Education resource.

- **Establish Zed Cred programs** (programs based entirely on open textbooks) to foster collaboration among disciplines.

US edition

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Adapted Canadian edition

European colonizers often viewed the people in the lands they colonized as uncultured savages who were in need of European governance, dress, religion, and other cultural practices. On the West Coast of Canada, the Aboriginal potlatch (gift-giving) ceremony was made illegal in 1885 because it was thought to prevent Aboriginal peoples from acquiring the proper industriousness and respect for material goods required by civilization. A more modern example of cultural imperialism may include the work of international aid agencies who introduce agricultural

The Canadian adaptation also added significant content pertaining to feminist theory, as well as a new chapter on Aboriginal perspectives.

OER can also be freely remixed: sections of various OER can be assembled into a new resource.

Centre for Teaching Excellence
UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

More Info

bit.ly/CTE-OER