

# Tech Snacks: OERs and Open Textbooks

In last week's session, OTLE discussed some common barriers students face when purchasing course materials. The increasingly high cost of publisher textbooks is an obvious and large barrier. Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Open Textbooks can help bring down the cost of new textbooks while still providing students with robust academic materials.

## Typical student costs

We surveyed the cost of textbooks for two real freshman students from the Fall of 2021 and simulated what their textbooks cost them.

<i>Courses taken</i>	<i>Credits</i>	<i>Total cost (textbooks)</i>
<b>BIOB 160, CJUS 125, CJUS 230, WRIT 101L, PSYX 100</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>\$515.09</b>
<b>CJUS 121, BIOB 101, SOCI 101, COMX 115, WRIT 101</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>\$495.10</b>

## Why should we care?

**Students delay buying books.** It is becoming more common for students to delay buying textbooks until their financial aid checks arrive, which can be several weeks into the semester. They often wait for refund checks to try and buy their textbooks for less money than the price at the bookstore.

**They don't buy the book at all.** If students feel they won't find use in a textbook (for many reasons) they often choose not to buy at least one required textbook because of the cost.

**They buy old editions.** In some cases, old editions may not pose a big problem. But if end-of-chapter questions can change between editions, and if your course includes online publisher materials (LTI or access codes), students won't have access.

**They share books with peers.** A growing trend on our campus and across the country is the phenomenon of shared books. Students pitch in together for a book and then schedule their studying around each other. Websites that provide e-texts online are often cheaper and allow students to share login credentials.

## What are OERs and Open Textbooks?

Open Educational Resources (OERs) are teaching and learning materials that are freely available and openly accessible within online digital media collections. Examples are diverse and can include learning activities, games, simulations, digital media, modules, full courses, pedagogical materials, etc. Open Textbooks are comprehensive, freely available textbooks. OERS and Open Textbooks are licensed to allow you to copy, use, modify, and adapt any of these resources with little or no restriction in your own classrooms. Some of the major repository sites include:

[OER Commons](#) is a public digital library of open educational resources. Explore, create, and collaborate with educators around the world to improve curriculum.

[OpenStax CNX](#) (formerly Connexions) includes lectures, assignments, and written educational materials. Content can be created in the Connexions interface and housed within the Connections servers. Users can create collections of existing content and create their own content pages to share. Hosted by Rice University.

[MERLOT.org](#) holds curated online learning and support materials and content creation tools, led by an international community of educators, learners and researchers.

[MIT OpenCourseWare](#) (OCW) is a web-based publication of virtually all MIT course content. OCW is open and available to the world and is a permanent MIT activity.

[The Science Education Resource Center](#) is a grant-funded office at Carleton College, founded to improve education in the Earth sciences and beyond. They are a team of 19 educators, researchers and technical specialists who have worked with over 100 award winning education projects across the STEM disciplines and allied fields. Engaging participants from more than 1,000 institutions of higher education, as well as K-12 curriculum developers and teachers, they have created one of the world's largest collections of pedagogic resources.

[Open Learning Initiative \(OLI\)](#) is a collection of evidence-based tools and approaches to learning that are proven to boost student success and enable teaching effectiveness.

[Saylor Academy](#) is a nonprofit initiative working since 2008 to offer free and open online courses to all who want to learn. We offer nearly 100 full-length courses at the college and professional levels, each of which is available right now — at your pace, on your schedule, and free of cost.

## OER LibGuides from other MUS institutions

A number of MUS institutions have helpful LibGuides linking to OER repositories.

- University of Montana [OER Libguide](#)
- Montana State University [OER Libguide](#) (the “by discipline section” is particularly helpful)
- Montana State University-Billings [OER Libguide](#)

## “Indian Education for All” OERs

Montana’s Office of Public Instruction also has a number of great OERs that have been collected as part of Montana’s “Indian Education for All” program. Lesson plans and other instructional materials can be found at [Indian Education Classroom Resources](#).

## MUS TRAILS grants

The past four years, TRAILS and the Montana University System (MUS) have used grant awards to support MUS faculty in using Open Educational Resources (OER). Instructors at MUS institutions have typically been provided opportunities for the following:

**Adoption Grants** – These support faculty in adopting an existing open textbook or open course content. Adopt grants have been \$500 per faculty member. If faculty are working as part of a team, grants are capped at \$2,500.

**Maintenance Grants** – These support faculty in updating an existing OER that requires minor editing for currency or relevance, without major changes to the content or structure (\$750 per person, capped at \$3,750 per course).