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Community Over Commercialization

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Community Over Commercialization

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By Mandy Shannon and Simon Robins

At the University of Dayton, we believe in the power of community. Community is a word that carries weight at the University of Dayton. It's more than a word; it's a way of advancing the common good. That celebration and recognition of the power of community is echoed in the 2023 International Open Access week, the theme of which is Community over Commercialization. Each year since 2008, an annual celebration of the open access movement strives to connect users to free, immediate online access to information.

While much of this conversation about open access is centered upon scholarly research and publishing, open educational resources (OERs) are a particular type of open access information with the power to advance the common good for our community of students through a reduction in costs associated with classroom learning. OER can range from textbooks to articles, assessments to study guides, provided that these teaching, learning and research resources are available at no cost. Expanding access to resources for the

common good has been at the core of the OER movement since 2002, when the term was coined at a UNESCO forum with a goal to “develop together a university educational resource available for the whole of humanity.”

Textbook Costs as a Barrier to Success

The increased cost of textbooks and course materials over the past several decades is well-documented, yet the reality is still shocking. The Education Data Initiative notes that:

- Between 1977 and 2015, the cost of textbooks increased **1,041%**.
- The increase in the cost of textbooks **outpaced currency inflation by 238%** from 1977 to 2015.
- From 2002 to 2012, textbook inflation **outpaced consumer price growth by 192.9%**.

While the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports a slight downward trend in textbook prices since 2018 and over the past year, costs remain substantially higher than a decade ago. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that the average annual cost of textbooks for students at private, nonprofit universities is over \$1,100.

Students report concern that not purchasing course materials will affect their success in the course, yet in 2020, 65% of students reported that cost prevented them from buying a textbook, and over 20% didn't purchase access codes for electronic material due to costs. This disproportionately affects students who experience other economic challenges, particularly food insecurity.

Using OERs to Remove Barriers

While OERs don't solve all of these problems, they provide a proven way to effect positive change. Studies have shown that OERs can not only reduce barriers to access, but improve course grades and decrease failure and withdrawal rates. These effects are amplified for students who have been historically underserved. Some results suggest a role for OERs in improving progress toward graduation, particularly for Pell-eligible students.

Additionally, the born-digital nature of most OERs allows them to be designed with the principles of universal design for learning (UDL) to extend inclusive pedagogy approaches.

Community-Minded Course Materials

OhioLINK has implemented a series of initiatives aimed at lowering the cost of college by promoting the adoption of open and affordable textbooks and course materials and helping locate shareable library materials and OERs. Collectively, these are grouped as Affordable Learning Ohio.

We encourage all who hold the power of designing course curriculum and selecting required materials to consider inviting more into the community of knowledge by exploring OERs and other materials that reduce barriers. The resources listed below can begin that exploration, but all who are interested are encouraged to consult with their [liaison librarian](#) about other opportunities, including development of new open materials.

Open Content

[Open Textbook Library](#): This collection of open textbooks has been funded, published and licensed to be freely used, adapted and distributed. These books have been reviewed by faculty from colleges and universities and can be downloaded at no cost or printed at low cost. All textbooks are either used at multiple higher education institutions or affiliated with an institution, scholarly society or professional organization.

[OhioLINK Open Course Content Library](#): This repository of OERs highlights content created or curated by Ohio faculty.

[Ohio OpenEd Collaborative](#): This initiative grew out of a grant awarded by the Ohio Department of Higher Education to support the development of OERs and other course materials for high-enrollment classes. Content is available in arts and humanities, social and behavioral sciences, and STEM disciplines.

[OER Databases](#): These databases link to various collections of open materials across a spectrum of disciplines.

Library Subscription Content

While library subscription content isn't open access, it can provide resources to enrolled students at no additional cost. Nearly 50 databases of [e-book collections](#) are available for use in courses. If you are interested in using library-licensed materials for your course, talk with your liaison librarian about available resources and best practices for making the content available to students through permalinks, DOIs or citations.

For further reading, the [Adopting Open Educational Resources in the Classroom](#) guide provides a variety of copyrighted and openly licensed materials to support different aspects of integrating open materials into courses.

Creating OER Content

For those interested in authoring OER content, the UD Libraries can support the process in several ways. The library can store and make available content at no cost to the publishing authors in [eCommons](#). Several UD faculty members have created OERs for their courses, including [Don Chase](#) in the School of Engineering and [Messay Kebede](#) in philosophy. Contact [Maureen Schlangen](#) if you have questions on the process. Liaison librarians can

help authors identify grants to develop new OER textbooks. A key example from past years includes a [2023 grant program from the U.S. Department of Education](#). For faculty interested in incorporating OER content into their existing courses, grants are available through UD's participation in OhioLINK (the next cycle will be in spring 2024; [read more about the program](#)).

— *Mandy Shannon is an associate professor and director of teaching, research and engagement in the University Libraries; Simon Robins is an assistant professor and coordinator of electronic resources and discovery.*

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[Open Access Support](#)