

UPEI Textbook Working Group

Interim Report - 2014

Members

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Mandate and Outcomes

The cost of textbooks is a significant component of every student's financial commitment to getting a university education and in times of fiscal challenges, it is a significant factor in determining the total costs of a degree. An increasingly common response to this is to provide freely available materials for students, or Open Textbooks. The Open Textbook term typically refers to a single text, or collection of material, that is made available online under an open copyright license (e.g. public domain, or Creative Commons Attribution) to be freely used by teachers, students, and the general public.

In late 2012, UPEI and UPEI SU Presidents (Alaa Abd-El-Aziz and Anastasia Smallwood) met and highlighted the impact of costly textbooks on the overall debt load of students. The Textbook Working Group was created to respond to this challenge and is tasked with:

1. reviewing current textbook costs and approaches to the provision of textbooks on campus;
2. reviewing current best practices and innovations in the use of open educational resources in the larger North American university community;
3. identifying options and innovative ways to provide textbooks or print and online equivalents, including the initiation of pilot projects;
4. developing decision making guidelines to assist faculty when selecting a text;
5. making recommendations to help minimize textbook costs to students while ensuring a high quality learning context.

Activities and Outcomes

The WG has undertaken a number of activities in their first year of discussions (the WG meets monthly) in response to the Mandate and Goals: this is an update on progress.

- Review of Current 1st-Year Courses
 - Discussions highlighted that the "biggest bang for our buck" would be achieved with a focus on 1st-year courses, providing both an opportunity to investigate a variety of options for open texts, and to have the greatest impact on students' expenses. The goal is to work towards the use of free and open textbooks for all

- 1st year courses, while responding to faculty interests at higher level courses.
- The WG developed a profile of 1st year courses, with average textbook costs for a sample representing “typical” timetables for students with a major in: Psychology, Chemistry, Biology, Business, Nursing, English, Sociology, Economics, Mathematics, Engineering, Education, AVC.
- The WG has also benefited from the efforts undertaken by the SU to survey students to determine average costs of textbooks. The most recent such efforts highlighted an average cost of \$700 over 2 terms for Arts students and \$900 for science students.
- Faculty Feedback
 - The WG is developing a survey for faculty to determine current practices, interest in other approaches and more details on the use of textbooks and additional materials in classroom and online courses. The WG hopes to distribute the survey in 2014.
- Resources
 - The WG has created a website (<http://textbooks.vre3.upei.ca/>) with resources for faculty to help make textbook decisions that consider costs as well as quality. This will be backed up with service from the WG and the Library to work with faculty to identify suitable open resources for specific courses.
 - This will include a review of best practices, including: links and descriptions of best practice approaches and a library of documents reflecting projects and practices from other institutions. These best practices will be summarized in a document that will be distributed to all Faculty each year at a time consistent with the communications from the Bookstore for textbook orders.
- Communication
 - The WG distributed an initial communication to Faculty in April of 2013 which highlighted the high cost of textbooks and the resources available from the WG and the Library. It also resulted in a substantial interest from a number of individuals who are working with the WG to implement open textbooks. This will be followed up with additional communications in 2014.
 - The WG gave a presentation to faculty on January 7/14 (facilitated by the Faculty Development Office) which was well attended and generated a great deal of interest in open textbook options.

Current Pilots

A hallmark of the outcomes of efforts over the last 12 months has been a focus on diversity: a variety of approaches to the delivery of textbook alternatives in a cost-effective and pedagogically sound approach. In the 1st academic term of the 2013-14 year, there were 6, with additional conversation started around a dozen or so courses. Some of the key outcomes include: adoption of existing best-practice open textbooks; creation of new open textbooks from existing material; options to print free textbooks via the Library’s Print-on-Demand book printer.

- Adoption of “Exploring Business” for Business 101, a comprehensive introductory business text, which was available for free as a download (complete PDF or chapter by chapter PDFs) and/or as a \$35 print version (printed on the Library’s Espresso Book Machine). <<http://textbooks.vre3.upei.ca/busi101>>
- Development of a freely available textbook for 1st-year Chemistry, based on a combination of a previously published textbook (made available under a “Creative Commons” type license) and now being edited and enhanced by the Chemistry Department, as well as resources from the OpenStax initiative. This effort will not be available until the Fall of 2014 or 2015.
- Creation of a new textbook (written by Dr. Joe Veladium) for Religious Studies 103 (Love, Sex and Marriage) in collaboration with a regional publisher, and made available to students in an online version for less than if done via a traditional publisher. While not meeting the definition of Open Textbook from our introduction, this pilot does speak to the issue of texts authored by UPEI faculty and the various issues involved in this approach.
- Adoption of the OpenStax Biology textbook as an alternative to the official printed course textbook. There is an interest in adopting the text as the preferred option in future. <<http://textbooks.vre3.upei.ca/islandora/object/textbook%3A25>>
- Adoption of a freely available textbook (published by the Nature Group via their Scitable site) for Biology 231 (Introduction to Genetics - 2nd Term), and available as an online resource. <<http://www.nature.com/scitable/group-join/upei-bio223-110914373/24728>>
- Creation of an open textbook by Dr. Jason Pearson for Chemistry 331 (Quantum Mechanics and Spectroscopy) using the Wolfram Computable Document Format, which provides rich and interactive visualizations for concepts in the course.

The WG estimates a cost-savings to students in the past 2 semesters of over \$25,000.

Future Pilots

The following efforts are underway or just starting and will produce concrete outcomes in the 2014-15 academic year, or 2015-16.

- Adoption of the OpenStax Sociology textbook for a W section of 1st year Sociology, and possibly others.
- Potential adoption of the OpenStax Psychology textbook for 1st year Psychology.
- Creation of a commercial textbook for Psychology 201 (Developmental Psychology) where use on campus would be free.
- Adoption of open source case studies for Business 416 (Integrated Cases in Marketing).

How To Get Started

The WG recognizes that the discussion around open textbooks involves a number of people in various parts of the institutions, including E-Learning Office, the Library, Bookstore, this

committee, champions in individual departments. We also recognize that to make the adoption of open textbooks seamless and effective there should be one initial point of contact, the E-Learning Office: elearning@upei.ca.

Recommendations

During the 1st year of effort the TWG has considered a number of best-practice approaches which lead to some specific recommendations for ongoing efforts in this area.

We have adopted the use of the term Open Educational Resources (OER) to mean: a reusable, freely distributable element of content (e.g. a textbook) that is available at no or low cost. The ideal form of OER would be adaptable (ie. can be edited and remixed) and would provide a complete learning resource for a specific course. This definition also recognizes the importance of original, unedited texts in forming the basis of OER for specific courses.

1. Make the Working Group a standing Committee or WG of APCC, ideally linked with the E-Learning Committee, and with a mandate to carry out the recommendations and report back to APCC annually.
2. Increase the use of OER at the University of PEI while ensuring flexibility for individual instructors.
3. Develop guidelines for building OER according to best-practice standards.
4. Develop an online framework for creating OER that is centrally supported by the Office of the VP Academic and APCC and that follows a universal design approach to ensure accessibility to all students.
5. Create supports (including grants) for the creation of OER and the adoption of OER, with an emphasis initially on 1st-year courses. This should be facilitated by the SCENT Committee and the Faculty Development Office.
6. Focus on the adoption of open textbooks in 1st Year Courses for the next 12 months, as this would positively impact the largest number of students.
7. Where OER are created locally encourage the use of a CC Attribution Share-Alike license to make the resources freely available to other educational institutions.
8. Make the existing E-Learning Office (e.g. the E-Learning Instructional Designers) resources permanent and add additional resources as demand allows.
9. Ensure the effective use of the Bookstore's distribution channels and upcoming online "Bookstore" system to deliver both traditional and OER.

10. Complete the survey of faculty (described in Activities and Outcomes) and present the results in the next report to APCC.

11. Promote the efforts of the WG in local, national and international media using traditional as well as social communication channels.