

Open Educational Resources at Seneca

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by **Jennifer Peters, Chair of the OER Committee**

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In the past year, there has been a boom in Open Educational Resources (OERs) in Ontario. There has been funding, educational events, community building, and a lot of excitement in general at both colleges and universities.

But what are OERs?

UNESCO defines OERs as: "...any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. The nature of these open materials means that anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt and re-share them. OERs range from textbooks to curricula, syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, tests, projects, audio, video and animation."

Examples of subjects with open textbooks include: [Psychology](#), [Business](#), [ESL](#), [Microbiology](#). Examples of open learning resources, such as activities and handouts, include: [Writing Your Essay](#), [The Accounting Cycle - Problems](#), [Mathematics \(homework exercises\)](#).

OERs have been used in post-secondary education for decades as they allow faculty flexibility in their course materials. Faculty may be frustrated with a traditional textbook's inability to meet their course learning outcomes completely, or would like to use multi-modal components with their students. Many OERs are high-quality, having been developed by college and university professors, and include text-based content, videos, audio, case studies, question pools, homework problems, and more. The content is then shared online, usually under a Creative Commons license, and can be reused and modified under certain conditions (such as for non-commercial use).

OERs have been receiving a lot of attention in Ontario recently. In June 2017, the government of Ontario announced an **investment of \$1 million in open textbook development**. Partnering with eCampus Ontario, the development would focus on high-enrolment first-year courses, and content for Indigenous studies, trades and technical skills, and for new Canadians, as well as French language content.

The trend towards making course materials more affordable and accessible for students is evolving for good reason. Two North American OER advocates, Rajiv Jhangiani and Robin DeRosa, cite some startling statistics about rising costs in their presentation, "[Open Education: Serving Social Justice & Transforming Pedagogy](#)":

- Ontario students now work 173% more than in 1975 to pay for post-secondary education.
- When debt reaches \$10,000, program completion rates drop from 59% to 8%.
- The cost of textbooks has risen by 1041% since 1977, adjusting for inflation.

While affordability is important, evidence has also found OERs can benefit a student academically. In the same presentation, Jhangiani and DeRosa cite 13 peer-reviewed studies with almost 120,000 students that found using OERs in class leads to the same or better result 95% of the time.

In spring 2017, Vice-President Academic Laurel Schollen asked for an OER Committee to be struck to promote awareness and develop recommendations for the integration and sustainability of OERs across the Seneca curriculum. Exploration into OERs is part of the planning process for Seneca's Digital Learning Strategy (DLS). The purpose of the DLS will be to build capacity and support for technology-enabled/enhanced learning and to increase flexible learning opportunities at Seneca. Open education in its many forms, such as open textbooks, open educational resources, open access, open research, and open data, is one of the considerations in the DLS.

To introduce Seneca faculty to OERs, the Committee has released a draft "[Faculty Guide to Open Educational Resources and Other Alternatives for Textbooks](#)": [Open Educational Resources](#).

In the guide you will learn:

- how to find and adapt an existing OER
- who can support you when adopting an OER
- how to ensure accessibility

The guide also includes a list of resources developed by Seneca faculty: [Seneca OER Examples](#). If you have developed an open resource and would like it added to the list, please email Jennifer.Peters@senecacollege.ca.

Currently, there are two projects underway at Seneca where faculty are adapting existing open textbooks, editing them to align with our programs and "Canadian-izing" them to include Canadian scenarios and standards. Treena Burns, from the School of Accounting

and Financial Services, is adapting an introductory accounting textbook, and Tom Bartsiokas, from the School of English & Liberal Studies, is adapting a business communications text. Look for the release of these resources in 2018.

If you are interested in using an OER in your course, speak to your Chair to discuss fit, both with your course and the overall program. Successful OER adoption involves consideration for suitability, thoughtful evaluation of available open resources, as well as consultation with faculty teams regarding implementation.

If you would like to learn more about OERs, attend a [workshop](#) through Teaching & Learning Centre, or email teaching@senecacollege.ca to book a one-on-one consultation.

View the [December 2017 issue of the Academic Newsletter](#).

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