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U of L faculty members help students save money on textbooks

University of Lethbridge faculty members saved students more than \$250,000 in textbook costs last academic year by adopting Open Educational Resources (OERs).

OERs are freely accessible and openly licensed educational materials in text, media or other digital forms that are used in teaching, learning, assessment and research. OERs represent quite a savings for students, who may spend up to \$1,500 on textbooks during one academic year.



Dr. Sean Fitzpatrick, a mathematics professor, has created OERs for seven courses being taught in the department. He customized open-source textbooks in a way that makes them fit closely with the course curriculum. Students can download the OER for free or print it at a low cost.

“I greatly appreciate the freedom for an instructor to create something that custom fits the course in question,” says Fitzpatrick.

In the Department of Physics & Astronomy, Drs. Dan Furgason and Ken Vos, after a trial semester of using the Astronomy textbook on Openstax, convinced the department to move to OER textbooks for all introductory courses.

“As you craft lectures to emphasize what you believe is important, there are times when a traditional textbook gets in the way,” says Furgason.





Dr. Ying Zheng, an instructor in the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry, is passionate about her work and recommends OER to novices.

“If you think that Open Education is the right approach for your students, then do it!” she says. “Through my own experience, I know that, with the assistance from OER champions, access to openly licensed resources in your discipline, and funding opportunities for adoption, any OER project can become reality.”

Art History professors have also adopted open source educational resources in their two largest classes and they’ve saved students more than \$45,000 in textbook costs.

The U of L supports OER and currently funds projects involving students. Keith Aiken was hired to assist Zheng in creating a unique course package.

“I get to add some bragging rights to my CV when I enter the job world; not many people can say they helped develop materials for a university course,” he says. “It also gives me a great way to involve my future students in a cross-curricular way by creating our own textbooks, allowing for deeper learning through a different form of engagement. It also allows us to be more up-to-date with content.”



The OER initiative came about after faculty, instructors, the Library, the Bookstore, the Students’ Union and The Teaching Centre joined forces to form the Campus Open Education Working Group. The group has done presentations, conducted workshops and helped secure funding for open access learning resources.

Students have responded favourably in surveys, commenting that they don’t have to spend money on a textbook that might not be useful, don’t have to carry a heavy book around and can save money.

This news release can be found online at [OERs](#).

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