Academic Materials, Supplies, and Open Education

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1. Definitions

1. Academic Materials: Any and all printed, digital, compiled, or computer generated educational materials, including books that a student is required or recommended for a course offered by the university.[1]
2. Academic Supplies: Any supplies, not including academic materials that are required or recommended for a course offered by the university (i.e. Art Supplies, Lab Materials, Calculators, etc.)
3. Open Education: Open Education encompasses resources, tools and practices that are free of legal, financial and technical barriers and can be fully used, shared and adapted in the digital environment.[2]
4. Open Research: Open Access is the free, immediate, online availability of research articles combined with the rights to use these articles fully in the digital environment.[3]
5. Open Date: Open Data is research data that is freely available on the internet. Permits any user to download, copy, analyze, re-process, pass to software or use for any other purpose; and is without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself.[4]

1. Facts

Academic Materials

a. The true cost of being a student is composed of many factors, such as tuition, fees, cost of living, foregone wages, and academic materials.
b. In 2024 the University of Alberta Students' Union found that students spend on average $323 on academic materials each year.[5] These academic materials are course-specific and critical to passing a course.
c. Many students avoid or drop classes based on textbook costs, leading to different educational experiences.[6]
d. 8% of students have been forced to choose between textbooks and food/monthly necessities.[7]
e. The rate of textbook cost increases has exceeded the rate of inflation over the last decade.[8]
f. Quality of education and cost of textbooks have no direct causal link.[9]
g. First-year students spend significantly more on textbooks, despite opting out of purchasing them as frequently as other students.10
h. Publishers often introduce new and more expensive editions of textbooks in rapid succession without necessarily undertaking substantial content revision, which adversely affects the used textbook market, leading students to incur higher costs in affording academic materials.[11]
i. Students can recover part of the cost of their textbooks by selling them as used books, and students can usually acquire a textbook for a lower cost by buying used textbooks. There are also many opportunities to acquire academic materials at a discounted cost or for free.
j. Online textbooks that expire or are single access cannot be sold to recover the cost or kept for reference after finishing the term.
k. Course instructors are the primary decision-makers in terms of setting academic materials for their courses.
l. The use of additional and online academic tools and platforms (such as learning management systems, online assignments and material aimed at enhancing self-evaluation by students), are increasingly being offered by publishers for a nominal cost and are becoming more widespread. Many students face technological barriers which inhibit access to such materials.12
m. The tools and platforms used to offer additional academic material to students often vary by publishers and are not standardized across courses and faculties, leading to additional expenses

for students.

n. Many students do not have sufficient internet access to support common models of online instruction. Students who live in rural or remote communities are at a disproportionate risk.13
o. The use of mandatory access codes in courses imposes a further financial burden on students already paying for instructional costs of post-secondary education.
p. The Book Importation Regulations approved by the Governor General in Council in July, 1999 allowed book importers to charge a premium of 10% on books imported from the United States and 15% on books from any other country.[14]
q. Students may access copyrighted material for scholarship subject to institutional standards of fair use.
r. In 2023 the University Facilities and Operations proposed an automatic textbook billing program, while this proposal did not go forward, the university still has interest in similar programs. The UASU estimates that this program would have cost students approximately $6.8 Million/year.[15]

Open Education

s. Open Educational Resources (OERs) are academic materials built based on the principles of open education. OERs can take a variety of forms and are not limited to purely being written textbooks.[16] OERs are openly licensed and typically able to be modified to suit the needs of the individual classes using them, being better able to directly adhere to course content.
t. Provincially or state run OER organizations exist in various jurisdictions in both Canada and the United States. BC Campus in British Columbia, Canada's longest running OER initiative, is estimated to have saved BC students an excess of $20 Million in eight years.[17] One OER publisher "OpenStax" has saved students $3 Billion since 2012[18] with 7 million students using their service and 70% of U.S. colleges and universities using OpenStax. From 2014-2017 the government of Alberta funded the Campus Alberta Open Educational Resources (ABOER) initiative. This initiative generated over $480,000 in savings in the fall of 2016 alone and was on track to create savings of $5.5 Million over 5 years.[19]
u. Due to their creative commons licensing OERs can be adapted much faster than traditionally published textbooks, leading to more effective course materials for individual courses. Similarly, OERs are better able to include diverse voices typically excluded from the textbook industry due to their open licensing.
v. A 2017 study showcased 96% of students felt OERs were equal to or of superior quality than traditionally published textbooks.[20]
w. Using and creating OERs provides the opportunity for students to co-create their academic materials, leading to a better understanding of course material, fostering skills in multimedia creation and digital literacy [21],and a variety of soft skills.
x. Student OER Specialist positions hired through the libraries provide useful employment opportunities for students and reduce barriers for professors for the creation of OERs.
y. An increased use of OERs can lead to large amounts of cost savings for university libraries as traditionally published textbook access for libraries is a significant cost.
z. Moving away from traditional textbooks towards OERs helps prevent the capital flight (the process of money leaving a local economy) that occurs due to the majority of textbook publishers and distributors being housed in the United States.
a. Due to the established presence of a strong provincial OER body, British Columbia has been able to create “ZTC”(Zero Textbook Costs) Programs. These are entire degrees, diplomas or certificates without any associated textbook costs.[22]
b. Open Access Research allows publicly funded knowledge to be publicly accessible, saving money for post secondary institutions and students, increasing the return on investment of publicly funded research and facilitates broader academic involvement.[23]
c. One part of Open Access Research is Open Data. Open data

a. Is freely available on the internet

b. Permits any user to download, copy, analyze, re-process, pass to software or use for any other purpose

c. Is without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself.[24]

d. Open data can accelerate the pace of research and discovery by allowing more people to analyze information. By providing open data various equity issues which prevent access to research and data are broken down, allowing more voices at the table to provide new, or traditionally marginalized, perspectives.

Academic Supplies

a. During their degree students may be required to purchase physical materials for classes, such as calculators, lab coats, lab kits, art kits, and other supplies.25
b. Often the only place students are able to purchase these materials is through the University Bookstore, where the staff are not always knowledgeable about the required materials.
c. The cost of these physical materials is a potential hurdle to students pursuing a post-secondary education.

2. Resolutions

Academic Materials

1. The Students' Union will advocate for academic materials to be as affordable and accessible as possible.
2. The Students' Union will advocate that academic materials should not impose costs outside of tuition. This includes:
   a. a. Online learning platforms;
   b. b. Interactive academic materials; and
   c. c. Paywalled online homework systems.
3. The Students' Union will advocate against students bearing the burden of extra costs that occur through importation, delivery or other tariffs, taxes, and fines associated with academic materials (regardless of any changes in PST, HST, or GST regulation).
4. The Students' Union will publicize and promote the various ways that students can save money on academic materials.
5. The Students' Union will raise awareness among educators and instructors of more affordable alternatives available to them.
6. The Students' union will advocate for a cap on the cost of all academic materials not covered by tuition.
7. The Students' Union will advocate for online courses to be delivered in a way which minimizes technological barriers, such as low-bandwidth online teaching practices.
8. The Students' Union shall advocate that materials required for online learning are affordable and respects students' privacy.
9. The Students' Union shall provide options/infrastructure to aid in the sale of secondhand textbooks.
10. The Students' Union shall advocate for the implementation of a campus wide Zero Textbook Cost signifier to be present during enrolment.
11. The Students' Union shall advocate for the costs of materials on the Undergraduate Cost Calculator to be updated to reflect the turn to Zero Textbook Cost classes. Ensuring students are properly informed about how much they can expect to spend on textbooks.
12. The Students' Union shall advocate for as many classes as possible to be offered in the Zero Textbook Cost program.
13. The Students' Union shall advocate against automatic textbook billing programs that would require students to pay more money on textbooks than they currently spend.
    a. a. Should the university implement an automatic textbook billing program the students' union shall run a campaign to remind and educate students on if they should opt-out.
14. The Students' Union will add information surrounding textbook affordability and textbook alternatives to the orientation package in order to educate incoming students of the additional costs they face.

Open Education

1. The UASU shall continue to raise awareness about open education and the benefits with University administration and instructors.
2. The UASU shall continue to raise awareness about open educational resources and the improved savings and quality of education with students.

3. The UASU shall advocate for the creation of professional development sessions for professors about the use and implementation of Open Educational Resources.
4. The UASU shall advocate for research done at the University of Alberta to be published as open access content, as well as the data to be publicly accessible.
5. The UASU shall advocate for the increased use of Open Educational Resources.
6. The UASU shall advocate for the presence of specific questions about the use of OERs in Universal Student Evaluations of Instructors.
7. The UASU shall advocate for the use of Open Education principles as an evaluation criteria for Faculty Evaluation Criteria.
8. The UASU shall advocate for the University of Alberta to hire undergraduate students to assist in the creation and maintenance of Open Educational Resources.
9. The UASU shall advocate for the expansion of the University of Alberta Open Educational Resource Grant to aid in the creation of OERs at the university.
10. The UASU shall advocate for the creation of a Student OER Co-Creation Grant to provide remuneration for students co-creating Open Educational Resources with their professors.
11. The UASU shall advocate for the creation of a provincial office of Open Education to facilitate intra provincial open education initiatives.
12. The UASU shall advocate for the subsidization of the creation of local open educational resources.

Academic Supplies

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3. The Students' Union will advocate for the University to separate books and supplies on the Undergraduate Cost Calculator, so that students know how much they can expect to spend on supplies in their program.
4. The Students' Union will advocate for University Bookstore staff to receive adequate training on academic supplies, to ensure that students receive the best advice when purchasing their supplies.

3. References

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