

OER Advocacy Script:

OER stands for Open Educational Resources and refers to teaching, learning, or other research resources that are offered freely to users and that are either in the public domain or have been released under an open copyright license that allows for their free use and repurposing. Often created at educational institutions, OER can be freely and legally accessed from a variety of online databases, content libraries and other established sources. Their use in college courses can have a significant impact on a student's ability to successfully complete a course or degree program and offers faculty more teaching flexibility than traditional textbooks.

While Michigan is ahead of many other states in their support of open education, state supported efforts have largely focused on K-12 education, including funding and support for Michigan Virtual, and becoming one of 20 states part of the national #GoOpen initiative.

The adoption and use of quality OER also impacts students at colleges and universities across the state, as well as the work of the academic libraries on those campuses.

The use of OER is an extension of broader open access efforts to provide equitable access to resources through libraries. Academic libraries often offer course reserve services, where materials for courses requested by faculty are made available. For these services, libraries are tasked with seeking copyright permissions to make those materials available. The use of OER in college and university courses lessens this burden on academic libraries and faculty.

Of course, libraries are more than just repositories, and academic librarians go beyond by providing information literacy education, including digital literacy, and are experts in locating resources appropriate for different subject areas. They utilize this expertise and very often play a pivotal role in the creation of quality OER by working with their academic colleagues and often take leading roles in OER initiatives on college campuses.

More importantly, the availability of quality OER impacts the affordability and accessibility of higher education and the success of students, especially with the recent, sudden move to more comprehensive remote learning due to COVID-19.

Textbooks costs have more than doubled in the last fifteen years (cite SPARC), and surveys find that up to 2/3s of college students never buy the materials required for their courses. Expensive textbooks and required course materials can also extend time to graduation for students. A survey sponsored by Florida Virtual University in 2018 found that 42% of students took fewer courses and 22% dropped a course due to high textbook costs.

With exponentially rising tuition and textbook costs in colleges and universities, quality OER are one solution to make higher education more accessible for all students.

While cost is important, there are other benefits to the local creation of quality OER. OER provide more context and adaptability for local learning needs, a critical flexibility that traditional textbooks do not provide.

The Michigan library community supports open educational resources and state assistance that provides support for the implementation of programs which reduce the cost of required educational materials.

OER are important because they widen access to learning opportunities and help make obtaining a college degree more accessible for all.