

# Accelerating the Adoption of OER in the Era of COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic creates greater urgency for high quality, customizable, no- and low- cost instructional materials designed with remote instruction in mind. Open Educational Resources (OER) meet these needs while also *increasing* the revenues of the institutions that adopt them. Driving OER Sustainability for Student Success (DOERS<sup>3</sup>) is a collective of 22 higher education systems and state/province-wide OER initiatives in the U.S. and Canada. We represent approximately 5.8 million students across more than 600 colleges and universities. The DOERS<sup>3</sup> Steering Committee urges *higher education institutions to accelerate their adoption of high-quality OER this summer and fall.*

## OER has four advantages over traditional textbooks in the COVID-19 learning environment

- **Remote-instruction friendly.** Almost all OER is born digital, available for free online or in print at low cost. Much OER comes pre-loaded in a format that is compatible with the most commonly used learning management systems.<sup>1</sup>
- **Adaptable.** In contrast to traditional textbooks, which are locked by copyright, OER can be customized by instructors as they adapt their courses to remote instruction.
- **Accessible forever.** Given the economic impact and potentially long duration of COVID-19, students are more likely than ever to take extended periods to complete their degree paths. Being able to reference materials from prerequisite courses months or years later will help them persist. Unlike commercial ebook access codes that expire at the end of the semester, students can retain OER permanently.
- **A good investment.** These are times of tight budgets for both students and institutions. OER adoption is one of the few interventions that *both saves students money and generates additional revenues for institutions.* OER has saved higher education students nearly a billion dollars in textbook costs in the US and Canada.<sup>2</sup> New research shows that there is also *a positive financial return on investment (ROI) for institutions that adopt OER,* as students who save money on texts take additional credits.<sup>3</sup>

### OER is:

- Remote-instruction friendly
- Adaptable
- Accessible forever
- A good investment

<sup>1</sup> For example, the entire [OpenStax.org](https://openstax.org) catalog of OER is [available in course shells for Canvas](#), a common higher education learning management system.

<sup>2</sup> OER has been estimated to have saved \$921 million for higher education students in the US and Canada as of 2018. Source: Nicole Allen "[\\$1 Billion in Savings through Open Educational Resources](#)," October 12, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Achieving the Dream's report "[OER at Scale: The Academic and Economic Outcomes of Achieving the Dream's OER Degree Initiative](#)," page 40.

## DOERS<sup>3</sup> urges senior leaders to take these three actions as soon as possible

- **Position OER as the “first option.”** DOERS<sup>3</sup> supports OER adoption initiatives, albeit *without* mandates. OER does not exist in equal quality for all courses. Moreover, the choice of instructional materials is and should be the purview of instructors. We recommend an institutional strategy in which OER *is positioned as the first option for consideration when selecting instructional materials*. If high quality OER exist that meet the needs of students as well as or better than proprietary textbooks, institutions should support instructors in adopting those OER. We recommend senior leaders write and widely share a statement that positions their institution as committed to considering OER as the first option for instructional materials and explains how increased OER adoption fits into their overall COVID-19 response strategy.
- **Develop OER strategic plans.** We recommend senior leaders *work with deans and department chairs to develop OER strategic adoption plans*. Leaders can also accelerate institution-wide efforts by facilitating the sharing of resources and best practices across the institution. In addition, we recommend *focusing on introductory courses for OER adoptions*. A large number of high-quality, up-to-date, peer-reviewed openly licensed materials exist for many introductory courses. Instructors who adopt existing OER will be able to change their courses faster and with less effort. Because introductory courses also tend to have high enrollments, *every dollar spent to convert them to OER will have a higher impact on student savings and institutional revenues*.
- **Provide financial support.** We recognize that institutional budgets will be decimated by the recession engendered by COVID-19. So will the financial lives of students and families. As mentioned above, OER remains a mission-critical investment, one that keeps student affordability and institutional financial well-being front and center. In DOERS<sup>3</sup> systems, we have found that certain targeted, relatively inexpensive interventions have increased both the likelihood and speed of OER adoption: support from librarians to find OER, stipends and/or release time for instructors to change courses to OER, and help for instructors with instructional design and instructional technology. A targeted, efficiently-executed surge of resources to support OER adoptions, especially if focused on large, introductory courses, is highly likely to produce much more in returns than it costs. Investing in OER adoption will help both students and institutions better weather the COVID-19 storm.

### Senior leaders should:

- Position OER as the “first option”
- Develop OER strategic plans
- Provide financial support

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