



Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

INTERIM POLICY PAPER

Open Educational Resources

Fall 2017

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ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

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Suggested citation:

Lewarne, Victoria, Landon Tulk, and Danny Chang, *Interim Policy Paper: Open Educational Resources*. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2017.

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INTRODUCTION

The government of Ontario's approach to post-secondary education has shifted in recent years. The sector is entering a phase where all stakeholders, students, universities, and government, are working to ensure that financial access is not a barrier to education, while still upholding the high academic standards that accompany university education. Initiatives, such as the new OSAP, are being rolled out to ensure that both potential and current students from middle-low income families will be able to afford post-secondary education.¹ Most recently, the government announced funding for eCampusOntario to incentivize faculty to adapt and create Open Educational Resources (OERs) for students, which will be housed through eCampusOntario's online library.

eCampusOntario is a not-for-profit corporation that is funded by the government of Ontario.² They are mandated to:

- "Support the development and delivery of quality online learning experiences across all of Ontario;
- Lead in research, development and sharing of exemplary practices in online and other forms of technology-enabled learning;
- Support member institutions in fostering innovation, collaboration, and excellence on behalf of Ontario students and faculty; and,
- Contribute to the evolution of teaching and learning by responding to emerging tech and the development of state-of-the-art online courses and programs."³

In support of this mandate, eCampusOntario has been working with the government to utilize their recent funding to improve open access to education within Ontario.

OERs are broadly defined as educational resources that live online and are designed for anyone to openly share, revise and create material.⁴ The most recognized and relevant example of OERs are open textbooks. Often, these textbooks are designed in a way where instructors can remove chapters, replace older examples with newer or more course-relevant examples, or even integrate their own research into the readings.⁵ Open textbooks can save students hundreds of dollars, allowing professors to maximize their pedagogical tools rather than telling their students to purchase numerous textbooks for access to just one or two chapters.

In recent years, there has been a worldwide movement towards the adoption of OERs. In 2012, British Columbia became the first province in Canada to take the first steps towards this innovative approach to education, and their equivalent to eCampusOntario now hosts over 170 open textbooks for use by post-secondary institutions and students,⁶ and departments such as the University of British Columbia's physics department have converted their first year textbooks into OERs. Globally, Europe has been leading in this area for years, and Open Educational Resources have slowly become a vital part of adult education in the continent.⁷ Education is evolving and regardless of location, innovative ways to increase access to education and reduce the financial burden of attending post-secondary are necessary for institutions to succeed.

¹ Anne Bokma, "Student aid overhaul: The new OSAP," *The Toronto Star*, Sept 14, 2017, <https://www.thestar.com/life/insidersguide/2017/09/14/student-aid-overhaul--the-new-osap.html>

² eCampusOntario, "Committed to the Evolution of Teaching and Learning," eCampusOntario, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/about/>

³ Ibid

⁴ Suzanne Bowness, "The open educational resources movement is redefining the concept of online textbooks," *University Affairs*, April 4, 2017, <http://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/open-educational-resources-movement-redefining-concept-online-textbooks/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, "New research projects on Open Educational Resources in Germany," May 20, 2015, <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/content/new-research-projects-open-educational-resources-germany-0>

OERs have been identified as “something new.”⁸ As a concept, OERs have the opportunity to disrupt the monopoly that the publishing has over educational resources. By providing scholarship in an open manner, OERs will not only save students a significant amount of money, but will also save universities. For example, a subscription to the *Tetrahedron* chemistry journal costs universities approximately \$20,000 per year.⁹ While this is an extreme example, the average cost of an annual subscription to chemistry journals averages around \$3,792.¹⁰ For chemistry alone, the adoption of OERs would save institutions a significant amount of funds. Expanding this to other programs, OERs have an opportunity to significantly disrupt the monopoly that publishers have over the academic resource industry, saving both students and universities a significant amount of money.

The purpose of this interim paper is to capture students’ thoughts on OERs and to explore how students feel the government can continue to expand on their recent initiatives with eCampusOntario.

This interim paper will offer a series of recommendations that are representative of the principles and concerns of Ontario undergraduate students. These recommendations will be aimed at the Ontario government and other provincial stakeholders, with a respect for evidence-based policy maintained throughout. This paper will highlight and advocate for the following overarching goals: initiatives to increase awareness of OERs, ensuring there is adequate data collection and processing regarding the quality and user friendliness of OERs, the prioritization of OERs by the government, and the development of institutional infrastructure to ensure institutions face little-to-no barriers in implementing OERs on their campuses.

It is our hope that these evidence-based policy recommendations are seriously considered by the provincial government and that we can work together to improve the accessibility, affordability, quality and accountability of the university sector for students across Ontario.

⁸ John Naughton, “Academic publishing doesn’t add up,” *The Guardian*, April 22, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/apr/22/academic-publishing-monopoly-challenged>

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ *Ibid*

AWARENESS

FACULTY FOCUS

Principle: Educational resources utilized in courses at institutions should be determined by the course instructors.

Principle: The province should actively promote the use of OER to course instructors and administrators for the benefit of both students and faculty.

Concern: OERs available to course instructors in Ontario are often left underutilized due to a lack of awareness and/or misconceptions regarding efficacy and quality of OER.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with faculty stakeholders in Ontario, including but not limited to the Council of Ontario Universities and Ontario Council of University Faculty Associations, to incorporate accurate and up-to-date information on OERs for faculty orientation across institutions.

PROMOTION

Principle: Students should be aware of the availability of OERs in Ontario.

Concern: Many students and faculty, and administration across the province remain unaware of OERs and Ontario's Open Textbook Library.

Recommendation: The provincial government should, through collaboration with eCampusOntario, develop a more robust promotional strategy for greater OER awareness.

Recommendation: The provincial government should, through mediums such as the Ontario University Fair, promote the availability of OER to incoming post-secondary students.

DATA COLLECTION

QUALITY MEASUREMENT

Principle: All educational resources, regardless of format, should be high quality.

Concern: The perception that OERs are of a lower quality than traditional educational resources acts as a barrier to their adoption, development, and adaptation.

Recommendation: The provincial government should increase funding to eCampusOntario for faculty to faculty members to peer review existing OERs with a focus on quality assurance.

Recommendation: The provincial government should, through eCampusOntario, establish a quality assurance process to review OERs as they are developed.

USER EXPERIENCE

Principle: OERs should be implemented with the purpose of enhancing the teaching and learning experience at post-secondary institutions.

Concern: There is currently no centralized data regarding the impacts of OERs on the teaching and learning experience.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that institutions report data regarding both students and faculty members' experiences with OERs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should task eCampusOntario with the collection, analysis and publication of institutional user satisfaction data.

REPORTING & COLLECTION

Principle: Data regarding OERs, such as usage and user satisfaction, should be readily available and accessible to the public.

Principle: Institutions that promote and excel in OER usage should be recognized for their contributions to the enhancement of the teaching & learning experience.

Concern: There is currently no standardized reporting structure for institutions to measure the usage, successes, such as the financial impact, and failures of OERs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should, through the Strategic Mandate Agreements, mandate that universities must report back on usage, successes, and failures of OERs at their institutions.

Recommendation: The provincial government should designate eCampusOntario as the central collection facility for OER data processing and storage.

PRIORITIZATION

STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENTS

Principle: All costs associated with post-secondary education should be affordable.

Concern: The rising cost of educational materials, such as textbooks, create an increasingly larger financial barrier for students pursuing post-secondary education.

Recommendation: The creation and development of OERs should be included in Ontario's Strategic Mandate Agreements as a metric for effective pedagogy and faculty innovation, linking performance-based funding to increasing financial access to education.

FACULTY INCENTIVIZATION

Principle: Faculty members across Ontario should be recognized by their institutions for their work pertaining to the development of OERs.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions are not adequately incentivizing faculty to commit to the development of OERs at their institutions.

Concern: There are limited incentives provided by the government for faculty members to pursue OER development.

Recommendation: The province should work with the Council of Ontario Universities to develop a best practice system for incentivising OER development.

Recommendation: The province should work with eCampusOntario to develop incentives for faculty members to pursue OER development.

TARGETED FUNDING

Principle: Initial investments into OERs should be targeted towards subject areas that have high enrolment numbers.

Principle: Post-secondary education in Ontario should be made as affordable as possible for all students.

Concern: The Open Textbook Library, hosted by eCampusOntario, does not host a wide enough range of OERs for Ontario post-secondary institutions to utilize.

Concern: Students enrolled in the largest post-secondary classes are collectively purchasing a vast quantity of educational resources that could be developed into OERs.

Concern: Students often choose to not purchase textbooks as a way to save money during their studies.

Recommendation: The Ontario government should invest in the development of OERs that can apply to the largest entry-level classes in the province, similar to the implementation of British Columbia's 'Open Education Resource Project.'

STANDARDIZED INSTITUTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Principle: All post-secondary institutions should be equipped to support the development, adoption and review of OERs.

Concern: Many institutions across Ontario currently lack the infrastructure capacity to support faculty who are interested in developing, adopting and reviewing OERs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should make available the financial and infrastructural supports required for faculty members to develop, adopt, and review OERs.

OER COORDINATORS

Principle: Institutions should have dedicated e-learning personnel on-campus to support the facilitation and development of OERs.

Concern: Faculty members who have expressed a willingness to develop OERs lack the administrative support from their institution to begin the process of developing OERs.

Recommendation: MAESD should provide access to grant funding for institutions to fund “OER-specific coordinators” to work towards supporting OER development on university campuses.

FACULTY TOOLKITS

Principle: Every post-secondary institution should be able to effectively communicate to faculty how to develop and adopt OERs.

Concern: Due to infrastructural barriers at institutions across the province, faculty members do not have a clear path to developing OERs on campus.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Advanced Education & Skills Development should task eCampusOntario with the creation of an Ontario-specific toolkit that faculty members can use as an initial resource for the creation, adaptation, and development of OERs on their campuses.

Recommendation: MAESD should request that eCampusOntario host the institution specific toolkits that are already in existence for public use.

ACCESSIBILITY

Principle: OERs should meet accessibility requirements for all learners pursuing post-secondary education.

Concern: OERs adapted to meet accessibility requirements for learners are not centrally housed.

Recommendation: eCampusOntario's Open Textbook Library should collect and house OERs that have been adapted to meet accessibility needs at institutions.

POLICY STATEMENT

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Whereas: Educational resources utilized in courses at institutions should be determined by the course instructors.

Whereas: The province should actively promote the use of OER to course instructors and administrators for the benefit of both students and faculty.

Whereas: Students should be aware of the availability of OERs in Ontario.

Whereas: All educational resources, regardless of format, should be high quality.

Whereas: OERs should be implemented with the purpose of enhancing the teaching and learning experience at post-secondary institutions.

Whereas: Data regarding OERs, such as usage and user satisfaction, should be readily available and accessible to the public.

Whereas: Institutions that promote and excel in OER usage should be recognized for their contributions to the enhancement of the teaching & learning experience.

Whereas: All costs associated with post-secondary education should be affordable.

Whereas: Faculty members across Ontario should be recognized by their institutions for their work pertaining to the development of OERs.

Whereas: Initial investments into OERs should be targeted towards subject areas that have high enrolment numbers.

Whereas: Post-secondary education in Ontario should be made as affordable as possible for all students.

Whereas: All post-secondary institutions should be equipped to support the development, adoption and review of OERs.

Whereas: Institutions should have dedicated e-learning personnel on-campus to support the facilitation and development of OERs.

Whereas: Every post-secondary institution should be able to effectively communicate to faculty how to develop and adopt OERs.

Whereas: OERs should meet accessibility requirements for all learners pursuing post-secondary education.

Be it resolved that: The provincial government should work with faculty stakeholders in Ontario, including but not limited to the Council of Ontario Universities and Ontario Council of University Faculty Associations, to incorporate accurate and up-to-date information on OERs for faculty orientation across institutions.

Be it further resolved that: The provincial government should, through collaboration with eCampusOntario, develop a more robust promotional strategy for greater OER awareness.

BIFRT: The provincial government should, through mediums such as the Ontario University Fair, promote the availability of OER to incoming post-secondary students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should increase funding to eCampusOntario for faculty to faculty members to peer review existing OERs with a focus on quality assurance.

BIFRT: The provincial government should, through eCampusOntario, establish a quality assurance process to review OERs as they are developed.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that institutions report data regarding both students and faculty members' experiences with OERs.

BIFRT: The provincial government should task eCampusOntario with the collection, analysis and publication of institutional user satisfaction data.

BIFRT: The provincial government should, through the Strategic Mandate Agreements, mandate that universities must report back on usage, successes, and failures of OERs at their institutions.

BIFRT: The provincial government should designate eCampusOntario as the central collection facility for OER data processing and storage.

BIFRT: The creation and development of OERs should be included in Ontario's Strategic Mandate Agreements as a metric for effective pedagogy and faculty innovation, linking performance-based funding to increasing financial access to education.

BIFRT: The province should work with the Council of Ontario Universities to develop a best practice system for incentivising OER development.

BIFRT: The province should work with eCampusOntario to develop incentives for faculty members to pursue OER development.

BIFRT: The Ontario government should invest in the development of OERs that can apply to the largest entry-level classes in the province, similar to the implementation of British Columbia's 'Open Education Resource Project.'

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BIFRT: MAESD should request that eCampusOntario host the institution specific toolkits that are already in existence for public use.

BIFRT: eCampusOntario's Open Textbook Library should collect and house OERs that have been adapted to meet accessibility needs at institutions.