Background: Open Educational Resources

Open educational resources (OER) are “teaching, learning, and research resources that are created with the intention of being freely available to users anywhere. They may include, but are not limited to, textbooks, readings, multi-media files, software, assessment tools, and even entire courses. Most are covered by open licenses that allow for using, re-mixing, and sharing.”[1] In 2016, the Library and the Teaching & Learning Centre (TLC) initiated and jointly administered the first year of OER Grants at SFU with funding from the VP Academic. After a successful pilot, funding was secured in 2017 from VP Academic, the Library and TLC to run the program for a second year.

This report summarizes the results of Year 3 of this program. It follows from the Year 1 and Year 2 reports that are available on the OER Grants website. The grants were again jointly administered by the Library and the TLC, with an adjudication committee populated by Library and TLC staff as well as a new Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) representative. The program awards faculty members up to $5,000 to assist with the redesign of a course to use OER as the primary course material, and to help with adoption and/or adaptation of open textbooks or other OER for that purpose. In addition to the funding, staff from the Library and the TLC work with recipients to assist with locating, evaluating and adapting high-quality open resources as an alternative to commercial course materials.

In 2018, the use of open textbooks and other OER that are free of cost and access barriers continued to be a priority issue for SFU students. In Fall 2018, several SFSS representatives had the opportunity to meet with the BC Government’s Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services and presented their Advocacy and Lobbying report which includes a recommendation for a “one-time funding increase to BCcampus in the amount of $5 million for the production and enhancement of open educational resources.” Follow the hashtag #TextbookbrokeBC to find direct evidence of the impact of commercial textbook pricing on students at SFU and across the province.

This past year, the success of open education-related professional development events and activities on campus also reflect growing interest from SFU instructors in using these kinds of flexible learning resources that can be easily customized and localized to better fit curricular needs and pedagogical goals. In Spring 2018, for example, a half-day workshop on Open Education: Transforming Teaching & Learning at SFU featured talks from several OER faculty grant recipients and student research assistants and was attended by over 45 participants from SFU as well as a number of other local post-secondary institutions.
2018 Granting Activity & Impact

Two calls for proposals were announced in June and October 2018. With minimal promotion, 10 proposals were received across these two rounds. A total of 9 projects were funded at a cost of $44,833. Projects were evaluated according to the following criteria:

- The extent to which they include curation and customization of open educational resources that will be freely and openly shared throughout and beyond SFU
- Their potential impact on student experience in the form of high-quality materials, maximum access (e.g., Creative Commons licenses), innovative and open pedagogy, and cost savings to students
- The inclusion of plans to re-use open educational resources in courses in subsequent semesters

Funded projects covered a variety of subject areas including Mathematics, Education, Interactive Arts & Technology, Psychology and more. To calculate the financial impact of these projects on SFU students, we added up the total number of students annually in all courses involved.

**2018 investment in grants program: $44,833**
- Number of funded courses: 15+
- Total enrollment in funded courses over one year: 2030
- Average textbook cost: $100

**Total student savings after one year: $203,000**

The Year 3 investment of $44,833 will result in $203,000 in estimated cost savings to SFU students during the year after implementation alone. As these courses are offered in subsequent years, these savings will continue. This is a powerful return on investment and directly affects affordability and accessibility of education for current and future SFU students.

Combined with Year 1 and 2 results saving students $230,000/year and $183,000/year respectively, SFU students will have saved more than $1.2 million over the past three years via this program.

This is likely an underestimate of student savings, as we know that several of this year’s projects have plans to expand use of these resources beyond a single course and across a number of courses within a larger program.

In addition to the direct financial impacts on SFU students, the OER Grants program has helped to identify and support faculty champions on campus interested in open educational resources and practices. It has also resulted in some realignments of Library and TLC staff roles and responsibilities to help build capacity within these campus units to support OER projects in future. And the program has served as a model for other BC post-secondary institutions that have launched similar OER grant initiatives in the past few years.
Year 3 results illustrate that there is still significant demand for this granting program at SFU as a means of addressing textbook affordability and accessibility issues for students and for providing instructors with maximum flexibility and control over easily customizable and high-quality open educational resources.