



# Open Education

## What is Open Education?

Open Education is the critical link between teaching, learning, and the collaborative culture of the Internet. SPARC supports policies and practices that advance the creation and use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) — academic materials that everyone can use, adapt, and share freely.

## What are Open Educational Resources?

Open Educational Resources (OERs) are teaching, learning, and research resources released under an open license that permits their free use and repurposing by others. OERs can be textbooks, full courses, lesson plans, videos, tests, software, or any other tool, material, or technique that supports access to knowledge.

## Why are Open Educational Resources important?

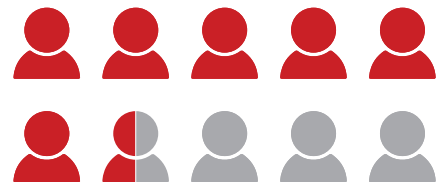
Technology creates an unprecedented opportunity to expand access to knowledge. Yet, our systems for communicating knowledge still have many of the same cost barriers and use limitations present in the pre-Internet, print-based world. This is especially true for educational resources. *The cost of college textbooks has risen rapidly, forcing many students to forgo required materials due to the expense.* Digital alternatives have offered little financial relief, and are typically sold on a subscription basis with heavy restrictions on access. Moreover, traditional publishing systems too often discourage, rather than enable, the adaptation or improvement of content for the classroom.

Educational materials are both an important output of the scholarly research process and, in turn, an essential part of educating tomorrow's scholars. SPARC believes that OERs are the ideal model to leverage the digital environment to unlock the full potential for education.

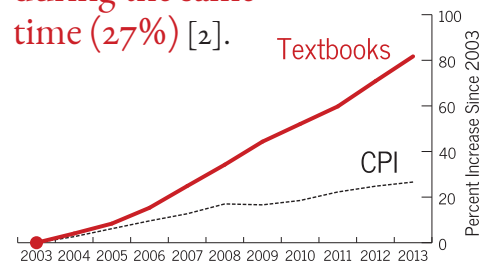
## Case studies: What does the data show?

Studies conducted at Virginia State University and Houston Community College found that students who used open textbooks tended to have *higher grades* and *lower withdrawal rates* than their peers who used traditional textbooks [3][4].

65% of students report not purchasing a textbook because of its high price [1].



College textbook prices rose 82% between 2003 and 2013, approximately *triple the rate of inflation* in overall consumer prices (CPI) during the same time (27%) [2].



## How Are Open Educational Resources Created?

**OER publishing efforts** mirror the traditional publishing process, including author compensation and peer review, and release the output under an open license.

**OpenCourseWare (OCW)** are OERs created by educators and presented in course format, often including both course planning materials and instructional materials.

**Publicly-funded initiatives** support the development of OER and ensure that taxpayer-funded educational resources are openly licensed.

**Individual authors** who receive support from their institution or write on their own time can share their work freely through OER repositories.

## How Are Open Educational Resources Used?

**Students** can access OERs online for zero cost, download and keep a digital copy, and print or purchase a low-cost hardcopy.

**Educators** can curate, tailor, and share OERs to perfectly suit their curriculum, and share their innovations freely.

**Authors** can disseminate their work to a worldwide audience while still receiving attribution.

**Institutions** can leverage OERs to reduce student out-of-pocket costs.

**Entrepreneurs** can build businesses around OER by offering value-added products.

---

## How Can You Support Open Education?

SPARC supports the creation and adoption of OERs to be used in teaching, along with collaborative new approaches to learning, where knowledge is created and shaped openly, and promotes practices and policies that advance this vision. You can help support OERs by:

**Increasing OER awareness and adoption.** Students, professors, librarians, and administrators can help raise awareness, increase discoverability, and advocate adoption of OERs whenever appropriate.

**Supporting OER development.** Institutions, foundations, authors, and researchers can support or participate in frameworks for creating, vetting, and evaluating the efficacy of OERs.

**Advocating effective policies.** Policymakers can fund programs that support OER creation and adoption, ensure that publicly-funded educational resources are openly licensed, and remove policy barriers that hinder OER.

---

[1] U.S. PIRG Education Fund and the Student PIRGs. 2014. Fixing the Broken Textbook Market. <http://www.studentpirgs.org/reports/sp/fixing-broken-textbook-market>

[2] Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2014. Consumer Price Index Databases. <http://www.bls.gov/cpi/data.htm>

[3] Hilton III, J., & Laman, C. 2012. One college's use of an open psychology textbook. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 27(3), 265-272.

[4] Feldstein, A., Martin, M., Hudson, A., Warren, K., Hilton III, J., & Wiley, D. 2012. Open Textbooks and Increased Student Access and Outcomes. *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning*.