Textbook equity at CQU – How can I get involved?

THE NEED FOR TEXTBOOK EQUITY

The financial burden of purchasing prescribed textbooks continues to be a significant barrier to equitable participation in higher education (Lambert & Fadel, 2022). In 2023, 47% of active higher education units at CQU required prescribed textbook, potentially costing the student body upwards of $10.3 million. This cost disproportionately affects students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, regional and remote areas, and other equity cohorts, potentially contributing to unequal learning experiences and outcomes.

In alignment with CQU's Curriculum Refresh objectives, CQU Library's focus on Textbook Equity supports a shift away from reliance on commercial textbooks towards more dynamic, inclusive, and cost-effective teaching resources. By leveraging a mix of existing Library resources and open access content into eReading Lists, educators can create flexible, student-centered learning environments that promote equity, engagement, and academic success.

BENEFITS TO ACADEMIC STAFF

Creating and using OER doesn't just benefit students. Academics can potentially gain through:

- **Greater visibility and impact** through sharing their work openly with a global audience,
- **Opportunities for collaboration** across disciplines and institutions via shared resources,
- **Flexibility in teaching** by adapting and remixing materials to suit diverse learning needs,
- **Contribution to lifelong learning** by making knowledge accessible beyond formal education,
- **Professional growth** through developing skills in digital literacy, open licensing, and instructional design,
- **Customisation of curriculum** to better align with course objectives and local contexts, and
- **Preservation and reuse of teaching materials** that can be built upon by others.

DO I NEED A PRESCRIBED TEXTBOOK?

This is the first question to ask when moving towards Textbook Equity. The label "prescribed" traditionally means "needs to be purchased" by students. Consider the following:

- Is enough of the textbook material used in class to justify the label "prescribed"?
- Is a commercial prescribed textbook the best option for your students in terms of content, context and accessibility?
- Could the course content be adequately or better covered by an alternative resource at no cost to students? Or another resource within the library's holdings that has more favourable licensing (unlimited users). Or perhaps by a curated list of resources with favourable licensing (multiple or unlimited users) conditions?

HOW CAN I USE AN eREADING LIST TO HELP WITH TEXTBOOK EQUITY?

eReading lists integrate with Moodle and provide a single, consistent and easy point of access for students to engage with unit readings and resources. A wide range of resources can be included in a list, complementing or in many cases replacing the prescribed textbook.

Content in an eReading list may include:
- Links to electronic resources held in Library collections (ebooks, journal articles, videos)
- Freely available material on the web (websites, online documents and reports, videos)
- Digitised readings created from print sources

eReading lists must be used to provide access to readings and resources in Moodle. The following resources will help you to get started:
- The eReading Lists in Moodle course in EMPower.
- Instructional material in the Using eReading Lists page.
- For help on developing an eReading List, please contact the Library via my-librarian@cqu.edu.au

When creating an eReading list, we advise careful consideration when applying tags such as "Recommended" or "Supplementary Textbook" to books in your list. These can make it unclear to students whether a book needs to be purchased or not. If you do choose to use these tags, consider adding a note to the resource to clarify.

USING OPEN TEXTBOOKS AND OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Open Educational Resources (OER) are any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open licence. OER range from books to curricula, syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, tests, projects, audio, video and animation. A specific and growing category of OER is Open Textbooks. These online textbooks, written by academics, can be easily integrated into eReading Lists and may include additional resources and features. Key open textbook collections and databases include:

- CQU Library's Open Education Resources Collection: This is a new and growing collection
- of high-quality open textbooks curated by CQU Librarians and arranged by study area. Watch
- this space for the addition of new sub collections.
- CAUL OER Collective Catalogue: A collection of high quality Australian and New
- Zealand open textbooks facilitated by the Council of Australasian University Librarians.
- Pressbooks Directory: A global collection of over 8,000 open books published via the
- pressbooks platform.
- OER Commons: A public digital library of open educational resources which can be filtered by
- subject and education level.
- OpenStax: Peer-reviewed titles by OpenStax, part of Rice University. Some titles include additional resources for academics and students. Content can be highlighted and notated.
- Open Textbook Library: Titles from a wide range of publishers, including key open textbook publishers.
- MERLOT: MERLOT is the Multimedia Educational Resources for Learning and Online Teaching database and provides access not only to open textbooks but also to a host of other learning resources, including lesson plans, tests, activities, articles and many more.

Please reach out to our Library team if you would like to talk about how you can find and use OER in your unit. We can also discuss ways in which your discipline might achieve greater textbook equity. For more information on how to find Open Access resources, see the Library's Open Access and Creative Commons page.