

Pep talk

noun

INFORMAL

noun: pep talk; plural noun: pep talks

1.a talk intended to encourage, make someone feel more courageous or enthusiastic.

The national conversation around equitable participation in dual enrollment continues to grow as research studies continue to show that these [programs improve rates of college access and completion](#), particularly for low income students, students of color, first-generation college students, and other populations traditionally underrepresented in higher education. Despite recent work to increase equity in dual and concurrent enrollment, [national reporting](#) shows there is still much work to be done [to close participation gaps for those underrepresented in postsecondary education](#).

Welcome to our first Program Equity Practices resource, or PEP Talk. Practitioners across the nation are eager to improve equitable access to and participation in their programs. NACEP is here to help with this resource series to inspire and equip you to build your equity-focused approach. Each PEP Talk is designed with the practitioner in mind and includes a summary of the topic, examples from the field, links to resources, and actionable steps to get started.

In this NACEP PEP Talk, we explore textbook cost as a barrier to participation and program equity inhibitor. Open Educational Resources (OER) offer a powerful possible solution to address cost, expand access, and improve inclusiveness in course textbooks. This PEP Talk features one institution's work to integrate Open Educational Resources (OER) into their dual enrollment program including the strategies utilized, steps in the process, essential resources, and lessons learned.

OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCES: A DUAL ENROLLMENT EQUITY STRATEGY

For many students just starting their journey in higher education, the first trip to their institution’s bookstore is a jarring, eye opening experience. College textbook costs can be substantial, presenting a barrier for students in their pursuit of a degree or credential. Many dual and concurrent enrollment students first encounter textbook “sticker shock” years before they head to college. Programs that allow high school students early access to college courses such as dual and concurrent enrollment can face significant issues in their work to promote equitable access and participation due to cost barriers. In these funding and cost conversations, textbook costs are often an important but overlooked consideration.

TERMINOLOGY USED IN THIS RESOURCE:

*There is a rich history behind the diverse terminology used to describe the act of a high school student taking a college course through a formal partnership between a secondary and postsecondary institution. Terms can vary by state, institution, and district. For the purposes of this resource we use **dual enrollment** as an umbrella term to encompass the many types of programs offering high school students early access to transcribed college credit. We use the term **concurrent enrollment** to describe the programs in which the courses are taught by college-approved high school teachers in a secondary environment. We use the term **Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)** which is generally a Minnesota-specific term, to describe programs where high school students take their courses on a college campus or through the campus online.*

States’ policies are largely silent on (or leave to local discretion) which party purchases dual enrollment textbooks – the district or high school, the postsecondary institution, the student’s family, or some combination thereof. The responsibility for textbooks for dual enrollment programs generally varies by program format.

- **School districts** offering concurrent enrollment often must supply the course text for students. When this is the case, the cost of college textbooks can be an important consideration before a district or high school enters into a partnership with a college to offer courses.
- When **postsecondary institutions** provide course textbooks for PSEO students attending on campus, they often face similar cost and budget considerations.
- When **the state** covers the cost of course materials, growing enrollments can lead to unexpected increases in cost. In an effort to control costs, states may cap participation, change eligibility requirements, or decrease reimbursement rates impacting student participation across the state.
- When **students and their families** are the ones picking up the tab for their dual enrollment textbooks, these costs can be a significant barrier to participation, particularly for low-income students.

Regardless of who pays, textbook cost can inhibit program establishment, growth, and development as well as student participation. This can impede work to increase equitable access and the engagement of students underrepresented in higher education.

As part of broader efforts to increase equitable access to and participation in dual and concurrent enrollment, states and institutions should explore ways to address the challenges posed by textbook cost. One potential solution is the use of open educational resources (OER). Open Educational Resources are openly licensed teaching, learning, and research resources available for use by anyone with few or no restrictions. Available to users at little or no cost, OER have been touted as an

equity-focused solution to textbook costs in higher education. This makes OER a natural fit for dual and concurrent enrollment as well. As the national voice for the field, NACEP hopes this PEP Talk will serve as a call to action for the dual and concurrent enrollment community and spur work on this important issue.

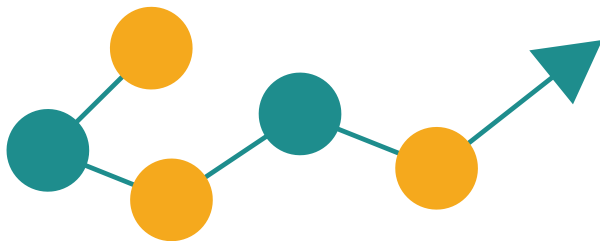
WHAT ARE OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES?

Open educational resources, or OER, are openly licensed educational resources that users are permitted to access, re-use and redistribute. Disseminated electronically at no cost or printed from online at relatively low cost, OER may be textbooks or supplemental instructional materials, including but not limited to PowerPoints, study guides, problem sets, workbooks, homework assignments, quizzes, and exams.

PEP TALK CASE STUDY

Connecting the Dots: OER and Dual Enrollment

Tanya Grosz began working on an open textbook initiative at the [University of Northwestern - St. Paul](#) in Minnesota in 2015 as part of the instructional design team that served all online, dual enrollment, undergraduate, and graduate courses and programs. Initially, she didn't give much thought to the synergy between OER and dual enrollment but as her experiences with OER increased the connections started to become more clear.



She saw an abundance of open textbooks available for lower-level, general education courses most commonly enrolled in by dual

enrollment students. She was also well aware that textbook cost was a significant barrier for many students and a significant cost in their Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program. Grosz felt that OER were uniquely positioned to help programs address participation barriers that increased equity gaps and dual enrollment looked like a great place to start.

There is no common, national approach for how dual and concurrent enrollment programs handle the cost of providing textbooks for students. Practices can vary state to state, district to district, and often vary by program format. Minnesota is one among a handful of states that has policy explicitly addressing textbook costs for dual enrollment students participating in [PSEO](#) programs. Participating students pay no tuition or fees and don't pay for course texts as long as they are returned at the end of the term. The state's Department of Education reimburses colleges and universities for textbook costs associated with PSEO students.



This approach removes a significant cost barrier for students but it can create additional processes and logistical complexities for students and institutions. For example, the PSEO-providing institution must absorb the up-front costs of textbooks and course materials, determine how much inventory to buy for courses not yet enrolled based upon historical enrollment data, mail thousands of textbooks and other course materials out to students, get those textbooks and materials back in good condition in time for the next semester, and wait for the reimbursement from the state. When a course is revised because

a textbook edition is updated, institutions must manage leftover textbooks in addition to ordering new texts. This creates the illusion of simplicity in ensuring students have timely access to free course texts while the reality is can be more complicated. Grosz notes that while well intentioned and clearly student focused, the process can create complexities for the institution and the students:

“For Northwestern’s PSEO program, our largest budgetary line item was for course materials. Further, the staff time to manage the whole operation of providing course materials was immense. Then there were the other factors: the ongoing communication with the Campus Store regarding inventory, parents confused as to why they were being charged for lost or damaged textbooks, and students who didn’t receive their course materials on time. These were reason enough to fully embrace open textbooks for dual enrollment.”



For Grosz, OER offered a cost effective and more streamlined approach to getting students the texts they needed for their PSEO courses. Beyond the cost of the textbooks and the indirect costs of staff time to coordinate, the ability to give students instant access to course materials was a huge benefit.

In addition to cutting the cost and logistical burden for the college, there were other benefits for students in the move to OER. Providing students immediate access to their course materials helped remove some of the stress and ease the transition to PSEO courses. Grosz noted that OER also helped Northwestern serve students while managing the varying enrollment dates in their partner districts:

“Because of various institutional enrollment policies, students might enroll two weeks into a course or right before a course began, so not having to wait for a book to be mailed to them helps them begin their coursework immediately. This was just one more way to help improve the way we were supporting student success.”

Moving to OER can help reduce an array of barriers to equitable access and participation in dual enrollment. Leveraging OER has the potential to simplify budget and access conversations for school districts, postsecondary institutions, as well as students and families. With the potential benefits clear, the work transitioned from exploration of OER to implementation.



Building the Open Textbook Initiative

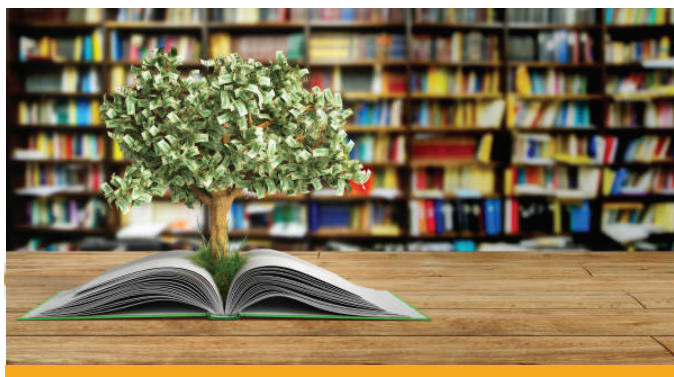
Tuition is only one part of the cost of college. Grosz said that Northwestern had already started to look at how to better help students understand and plan for the non-tuition parts of their higher education costs:

“At the time we started our open textbook initiative, Northwestern was considering rolling course material costs into the cost of tuition, but the provost wisely saw open textbooks as one way to keep course material costs down for students in a different way.”



The administration’s decision to embrace OER at Northwestern led to targeted action. Institutional leadership approved a three-pronged strategy for growing an open textbook initiative at the campus:

- 1) educate university constituents on the realities of student debt and the current financial landscape for students;
- 2) partner with library staff to ensure full utilization of already-purchased library materials for courses; and
- 3) encourage the review and adoption of open textbooks



OER VS OPEN TEXTBOOK:

Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching, learning, or research materials that are in the public domain or released with an intellectual property license that allows for free use, adaptation, and distribution (definition from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation). Open textbooks are one type of OER. Open textbooks are free and include permissions to copy, mix, share, keep, edit and use dependent upon the Creative Commons license it has been given.

With the support and leadership of Northwestern's administration and assistance from the [Open Education Network](#), the institution was able to incentivize faculty reviews of textbooks in the [Open Textbook Library](#), a referatory of over 1000 openly licensed textbooks. Grosz worked to add an additional important layer of support for faculty by ensuring that instructional designers within the institution would be available to support faculty who chose to adopt or adapt an open textbook. This strategy freed faculty to focus on content and not technology. The Open Textbook Library also had more text options for the types of

introductory courses available to dual enrollment students, offering a variety of adoptable text options. Additionally, the institution's undergraduate faculty also had a familiarity with the PSEO program which helped to build buy-in and consensus for adopting open textbooks. All this work helped to increase faculty comfort with OER and created the right conditions for a successful transition away from traditional textbooks.

Despite these activities and the support of leadership, there was an additional vital element that the program needed to attend to, one all too familiar to educators working in the COVID-19 landscape, a very real digital divide. Fortunately, Grosz found that OER proved versatile and cost effective in helping support students lacking technology or reliable internet access:

“Even pre-COVID, we realized that we needed a print-on-demand option available for students. We were relieved to find out that most open textbooks could be printed at a fraction of the cost of traditional textbooks.”

Gaining Traction

Support for OER began to grow and when Grosz's team created a [two-minute video](#) of Northwestern students talking about how textbook costs negatively impacted them, campus conversations erupted around open textbooks. While some faculty were resistant to the idea, more were willing to explore open textbooks.

There were also a lot of early wins that helped spur the movement towards OER. Grosz found the library was immediately wonderfully supportive, realizing that students would be better served through the initiative's emphasis on library



materials and well-chosen open textbooks. The administration was supportive because of the clear up-front savings on inventory, shipping costs, and staff time managing the process. They also valued the positive press that was generated when the program started promoting the open

textbook initiative. Faculty who chose to adopt an open textbook liked the immediate, free access to course materials for students and many appreciated that they could modify the open textbook if they wished to do so. The open textbook initiative continued to gather steam and Northwestern developed the first zero-textbook cost degree “[Z degree](#)” in the state of Minnesota.

When a professor and fellow dean adopted an [OpenStax](#) Chemistry text for one of his dual enrollment courses Northwestern started to see cascading impacts that benefited the college and the students. First there was the immediate, up-front savings of \$20,000 on textbooks. Jettisoning the cost of the text used for multiple campus sections of the Chemistry course

was a big, early win for the institution’s transition to OER. There was also the significant time savings for staff tasked with ordering and distributing the textbooks. Positive student feedback and buzz from faculty early adopters helped to continue the momentum.

Grosz feels that this work has made a huge impact on improving the student experience while saving the institution and the state time and money:

“After years of my dual enrollment team hearing parent and student complaints about late textbook fees and course materials not received on time, every course that replaced a traditional textbook with an open one became a very welcome shift in practice.”

Benefits Beyond Affordability

All elements of Northwestern’s three prong strategy played a critical role in helping advance the adoption of OER at the university. As the work to educate the campus community about the realities of student debt and the current financial landscape for students grew, the value of OER as a cost-saving measure became evident. The support of instructional design and library staff played a critical role in adopting OER as well. As faculty started to gain comfort with OER and integrate open textbooks into their courses, faculty buy-in increased. Grosz saw other benefits start to emerge as more faculty engaged with open textbooks:

“A colleague adapted the OpenStax textbook with the assistance of the instructional design team, and he paved the way for other faculty adopters/adapters. It was gratifying to see faculty who adopted an open text in a course start to share with peers that they liked it, and their students liked it, leading to more open textbook adoptions for undergraduate courses.”

ADOPTING VS ADAPTING AN OER:

***Adopting** simply means that faculty are using the OER in its original form without modification. **Adapt** refers to the ability to customize an OER. Faculty interested in using an OER do not have to modify or adapt it. Some may find that the OER fits their and their students’ needs without modifying it. When that is the case, faculty can simply download the text and make it available for their students. Others, however, may decide that they want to change the OER in some way, and the Creative Commons licensing allows for that. Perhaps they want to augment a chapter, add different illustrations, contextualize the book for their particular student audience, or even invite their students to be co-creators in improving the OER in ways that better meet their students’ needs. Interested in learning more about modifying an open textbook? Check out [Modifying an Open Textbook: What You Need to Know](#).*

Open textbooks were empowering equity in multiple ways that extended well beyond affordability. Students simply downloaded the open textbook once and it was theirs immediately, free and forever, to use digitally or to print. Additionally, there were rich pedagogical opportunities afforded to faculty through OER. For example, open licensing allows faculty to make their curriculum more inclusive by allowing them to update images, include marginalized voices or emerging social themes, and provide case studies that speak to their diverse learners. OER also offer a tremendous opportunity to better align different sections of a course around common content. This functionality works as well for multi-section courses on campus as it does for concurrent enrollment courses

taught in the high school or across multiple high schools or districts. Grosz found that this level of functionality and modification was available only through OER:

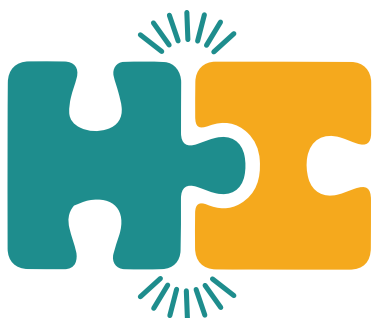
“I’ve been working in open education full time for a couple of years, I see more clearly that the benefits of OER extend beyond affordability; OER empowers faculty to make their curriculum more accessible and inclusive.”



Perfect Partners: OER and Dual Enrollment

The synergy between OER and dual enrollment is evident. For Grosz and Northwestern, blending these two initiatives solved a lot of common problems for students and removed important barriers to equity:

“Looking back, I realize that I sort of stumbled onto this synergy between OER and dual enrollment courses. The availability of textbooks for dual enrollment courses, the complexity of determining needed inventory and mailing course materials, the wait times for reimbursement from the state, and the need for high school students to have their materials immediately...all made for a perfect fit between PSEO and OER.”



Northwestern cites many factors that led to their successful utilization of OER. The administrative decision to support the growth of an open textbook initiative greenlighted the work and helped integrate it into the fabric of the university. For the nuts and bolts of how to do the work, the [Open Education Network](#) was there to help run workshops and train staff to run future workshops. Then there was the help from the library and the instructional design team, critical to support faculty buy-in and adoption. Student voices helped make the case that the work was important and the [student video](#) helped generate talking points to keep the buzz going. Early faculty adopters helped motivate their peers as they shared candidly about the benefits and challenges of adopting and adapting open textbooks. The open textbook initiative and [Z-degree](#) helped bring attention to what the program was doing to support and empower students, generating further positive attention. All these elements

helped create the culture and infrastructure to support and sustain growth.

Equally important, says Grosz, was celebrating the work and the milestones along the way:

“We stopped to celebrate when we reached 50 open textbook adoptions, giving faculty adopters the credit and kudos they deserved. Most importantly, every open textbook that was adopted meant that there were no textbook costs for that course, and every student who signed up for that course would have instant access to free and forever course materials.”



The national conversation around equitable participation in dual enrollment continues to grow as research studies continue to show that these programs [improve rates of college access and completion](#), particularly for low income students, students of color, first generation college students, and other populations underrepresented in higher education. Although not universal, many states have programs that offer dual enrollment at no cost or reduced cost for students, removing a one important barrier to participation. Despite significant work to increase equity in dual enrollment, [national reporting](#) shows there is still much work to be done to [close participation gaps for those underrepresented in postsecondary education](#). Incorporating OER offers an additional option to decrease student’s costs to participate.

With the power of open licensing, faculty and those who support faculty can be truly empowered to provide access to students in more inclusive ways than ever before. Fervent calls for social justice across the nation and rising costs of higher education inspired Grosz to consider the power of these programs to close equity gaps in higher education:

“I’ve been in open education full time for a couple of years and now I’m more cognizant of the ways in which dual enrollment can serve as a bridge for underserved students to higher education, and I realize that adoption of OER is one way of making dual enrollment courses more accessible and inclusive.”



To take a more fully transformative approach, she suggests the application of [Lambert’s framework for social justice](#) to the post secondary curriculum and [Peralta’s Online Equity Rubric](#) to the course design process as places to start. OER enables culturally responsive teaching by allowing instructors to customize and contextualize learning in a way that can reflect underrepresented students’ cultures. Through the practice of open pedagogy, faculty are able to invite students into the process of teaching and learning by allowing them to be partners in knowledge creation. Just as dual and concurrent enrollment provide increased access to college, OER opens the doors to a more inclusive and equitable future of learning.

GETTING STARTED

Are you eager to explore how OER can help improve equity in your program? We've included some thoughts, resources, and advice to help support and guide your journey to OER.

Essential Resources

- [The OER Starter Kit](#) by Abbey Elder provides instructors with an introduction to the use and creation of OER.
- [Open 101: An Action Plan for Affordable Textbooks](#) by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (US PIRG) provides data regarding textbook prices and offers recommendations that could save students billions of dollars through the adoption of OER.
- The [Open Textbook Library](#) repository of over 1000 openly licensed books.
- [OER Commons](#) is a public digital library of open educational resources.
- The [OER Field Guide for Sustainability Planning](#) out of the State University of New York (SUNY) and the RPK Group provides information to help institutions of higher education implement sustainable OER programs on their campuses
- Consider using [Peralta's Online Equity Rubric](#) as you review the course in which an OER is utilized to ensure you are addressing fundamental equity considerations.

Important Partners

While the obvious and essential institutional partners are the administration, librarians, and faculty, it is important to highlight some of the less obvious partners that can help you grow your open education initiative:

- Instructional designers and technologists can free faculty up to be experts in their field while the designer/technologist helps with design and technology considerations for the OER being adopted or adapted.
- Students can be powerful advocates and allies for the implementation of OER. The [OER Student Toolkit](#) by BC Campus can be a very helpful resource for ways in which to reach students.
- Centers for Teaching and Learning may be very interested in joining efforts to promote open education on campus because OER allow for pedagogical innovation and instructional improvement.
- The Creative Commons licenses behind OER allow instructors to make content more accessible, inclusive, and culturally relevant. The [Creative Commons Certificate](#) allows educators to learn more about open licensing.

AVOIDING COMMON PITFALLS

Change can be hard. Grosz's advice and lessons learned may help you avoid some of the common pitfalls in implementation.

- Don't be overzealous and alienate your audience. I was so excited about OER when I first heard about it that I said things like, "Do the right thing! Adopt an open textbook!" in presentations. It was easy to alienate faculty in this way. Respect where faculty are at in the process. They may have long-standing relationships with publishers and be using course materials that they are satisfied with, and all you can do is share with them how OER provide a different path. Consider the [Diffusion of Innovations](#) theory as a model; you will have some innovators, some early adopters, some in the early and late majorities, and some who never get on board, and that's okay. Respect their academic freedom and their decision to engage with OER or not.
- Don't avoid your campus bookstore as you plan this initiative. Instead, try to get them on board with the shared understanding that saving students money is good for everyone. You may find this article by Steven Bell entitled "[What about the bookstore? Textbook affordability and the academic library-book store relationship](#)" helpful as you consider the bookstore's role in your open education initiative.
- Don't think you can't begin or grow an open education initiative without a ton of money. Financial incentives are just one way to motivate participation, and they aren't always the most successful. Personal invitations to a workshop, the promise of food/drink at a meeting, a letter of participation that goes in one's Promotion and Tenure folder, and faculty awards like the [University of Kansas' Textbook Heroes](#) award are all alternatives to financial incentives.
- Don't try to go it alone. Librarians and instructional designers are often the unsung heroes of growing open education initiatives, and you may find allies in the student government, campus store, Center for Teaching and Learning, Student Development, and other areas on campus devoted to student well-being. Build your village.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Tanya Grosz, Ph.D., is the Director of Educational Programs for Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota. Grosz oversees current and future educational programming for the OEN. Grosz has worked in higher education for over 20 years, first as an English professor, then as the Dean of Graduate, Online, & Adult Learning at the University of Northwestern - St. Paul (UNW) in Minnesota where she oversaw the dual enrollment program, blended learning, degree completion, graduate learning, and online programming. In 2012, she completed her Ph.D. in Education with an emphasis in Online Learning. She began the open textbook initiative at UNW after meeting the Executive Director and founder of the Open Education Network, Dave Ernst, and partnering with him to offer faculty workshops with the goal of getting faculty to review an open textbook in the Open Textbook Library. While at UNW, Grosz facilitated the creation of the first Z Degree in Minnesota. Grosz's passion for making learning accessible led her to full time work at the OEN in 2019.



Amy Williams joined the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) as its Executive Director in 2019. NACEP has a 20-year history of supporting programs, practitioners, and policy to advance early access to quality college courses for high school students. Previously, Mrs. Williams served as Montana's Director of Career & Technical Education and Dual Enrollment working closely with the Governor's office to lead state-wide efforts to aggressively expand access and increase affordability of dual and concurrent enrollment. Mrs. Williams has a background in research science and two decades of experience in secondary and postsecondary education.