

# Open Educational Resources (OER): Expanding Access, Reducing Costs, and Driving Student Success

*A briefing for Boards of Visitors at Virginia Public Institutions of Higher Education*

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## What Are Open Educational Resources (OER)?

OER are free, high-quality teaching and learning materials—such as textbooks, videos, test banks, and lab manuals—that can be customized by faculty and used at no cost to students. They are either in the public domain or carry open licenses that allow for free use, revision, and sharing.

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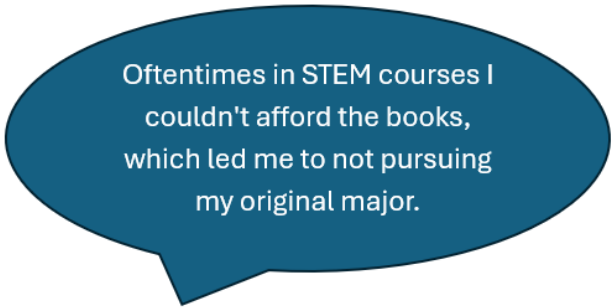
## Why OER Matters for Virginia Students

- **Affordability:** Students can save hundreds of dollars per semester. Since 2017, an OER program run by VIVA, Virginia's academic library consortium, has saved students over **\$31 million** with just **\$1.6 million** in grants—a return on investment of **19:1**. Virginia higher education institution-level programs have saved students an additional several million dollars.
  - **Access:** Students have immediate, unrestricted access to course materials from the first day of class.
  - **Academic Success:** Studies show that OER use improves student performance, course completion, and persistence, especially for first-generation and historically underserved students.
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## The Need

According to the 2025 Virginia Course Materials Survey:

- 7 in 10 students are worried about meeting their course material costs.
- 53% of students select the institution they attend based, in part, on course material costs.
- 26% of students did not register for a specific course due to the cost of required course materials.
- 19% reported earning a poor grade or failing the course for the same reason.
- Students report having to choose between textbooks and basic needs like food or housing



Oftentimes in STEM courses I couldn't afford the books, which led me to not pursuing my original major.

## Compliance and Responsibility

Virginia law (§23.1-1308) requires public institutions to develop guidelines for selection and use of course materials, including OER. Institutions must also clearly label no-cost or low-cost course sections in course catalogs and registration systems.

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## What OER Is Not

- Fee-based materials such as Inclusive Access or Equitable Access programs
- Resources requiring payment or logins
- Materials without an open license

## OER compared with Inclusive or Equitable Access programs

- **OER is Truly Free for Students:** OER are permanently free to access, download, and share—students don't lose access at the end of the term or face hidden fees.
  - **OER is Transparent and Customizable:** Faculty can fully review, revise, and adapt OER. Inclusive/Equitable Access materials are locked behind publisher controls and contracts.
  - **OER Supports Long-Term Institutional Savings:** OER investments reduce dependency on commercial publishers, while Inclusive/Equitable Access locks institutions into recurring costs.
  - **OER Enables Student Choice and Data Privacy:** OER doesn't require student opt-outs or collect personal learning data; IA/EA programs often do.
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## Recommendations for Boards of Visitors

- Publicly support OER as part of the institution's commitment to affordability and student success.
  - Invest in infrastructure, incentives, and support for faculty to create and adopt OER.
  - Encourage campus leadership to set measurable goals and track progress toward OER adoption.
  - Highlight institutional successes, such as the Virginia OER Impact Award winners, to build momentum and share best practices.
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## Sources

- Virginia law §23.1-1308 <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title23.1/chapter13/section23.1-1308>
- VIVA. Understanding Vendor Inclusive & Equitable Access Programs <https://sites.google.com/view/understanding-inclusive-access/home>
- VIVA and BayView Analytics. *2025 Virginia Course Materials Key Findings*.
- VIVA: *Virtual Library of Virginia Open Grants ROI Data* (2025) – <https://vivalib.org/va/open>
- SCHEV/VIVA Virginia Open Educational Resource Impact Award (2025) <https://www.schev.edu/Home/Components/News/News/694/263>

## Selected Literature

- Does OER improve student learning / academic achievement?
  - Cho et al. (2021) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102365>.
  - Colvard, et al (2018) <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1184998.pdf>
- Does OER improve degree completion?
  - Griffiths et al. (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00817-9>
- How do course materials affect Virginia college students?
  - VIVA, *Virginia Course Materials Survey* (2021, 2025) <https://vivalib.org/va/open/survey>