# Alberta

### Grande Prairie Regional College (GPRC)

Excerpt from [Wisdom magazine](https://www.gprc.ab.ca/alumni/wisdom/flips/wisdom2018/document.pdf):

Dr. Daryl White has become the first instructor at GPRC to use OER in all of his courses. White, who teaches history, said he is constantly adapting his teaching style according to student feedback. His students told him that not only were they unhappy about the cost of their textbooks, but most also found that they did not end up using the book much. White now tries to incorporate multiple sources of information (audio and visual as well as print) from as many free online sources as possible.

Many of White’s students also reported struggling with a heavy reading load throughout the semester, and White has found providing sources students could absorb visually or audibly helped lighten the load.

Of course, not all students have the same preferences. White mentioned some of his students miss using textbooks – but that number has been surprisingly low. “I’d say it’s probably one or two a year who still want a textbook,” he said. Overwhelmingly student responses to the change have been “really positive.”

Tyler Barr is one student who sees the introduction of OER as positive. A first-year student pursuing his Bachelor of Education, Barr has completed two history courses with White and says he has not found himself missing the textbook at all. “Having all of the relevant materials available online has made it much easier for me to study,” said Barr. “Wherever I have an internet connection, I can access them.” Barr also pointed out the environmental benefits of reducing paper consumption and the benefit in reduced costs to students. “The cost for postsecondary students could be reduced significantly if there was a large migration towards cheaper or free online-based textbook resources,” he said.

Casey Caines, a third-year GPRC student majoring in history and Indigenous studies, adds that OER often deliver higher quality learning material than purchased textbooks. “In traditional classes, we generally get one textbook, and that’s where all our information comes from,” she said. “But with OER, we can pull from 15 different textbooks and use only the best information from each source.”

GPRC Business Administration Instructor Cibylla Rakestraw began using OER when she noticed students were struggling to afford the textbooks she assigned. She explained that many textbooks have hidden extra costs attached to them. “Textbook publishers now tend to combine the textbook with additional online resources,” she said. “While this can be great, students purchasing a used textbook often have to separately purchase, at significant cost, access to those online resources, which often ends up costing more than buying a new text with an access code.” To help her students avoid this frustration, Rakestraw turns to OER.

“OER give me more flexibility,” she said. “They are just as valuable as any other learning materials.”

**SUPPORTING AND PROMOTING OER AT GPRC**

The OER used by White, Rakestraw, and many other GPRC faculty members, are often developed in-house by GPRC’s Educational Technologies (Ed Tech) Centre. When faculty need OER developed, Ed Tech is where they can go for assistance.

Currently, 37 courses at GPRC are taught using OER, but Ed Tech is working toward growing that number. “We’ve partnered with the Students’ Association to organize events and advertise our services and resources,” said Anna Gillis, GPRC Instructional Designer and an active proponent of OER in the classroom.

“We also offer an Open Educational Resource Awareness Course to GPRC staff and students. The course is free, and faculty who complete it can partner with Ed Tech to create or use OER.” Faculty interested in the course can also access funding to complete the project.

Gillis emphasized the role student advocacy has played in making OER in the classroom a reality. “The Students’ Association began advocating for the use of OER in 2016,” she said. “GPRC is student-centred and committed to supporting this very important initiative.”

**IS ADOPT AND ADAPT THE ANSWER?**

Although White, like many instructors at GPRC, has embraced the OER movement, he understands why some students and instructors shy away. “We’re fundamentally conservative,” he said. “We’re loath to give up something we see as functional. However, when new ideas come into the system, there’s often a culture of, ‘everybody has to get on-board.’” Even as he puts OERs to use in his classroom, White is cautious about prescribing OERs as a one-size-fits-all solution for all learners.

Nonetheless, Rakestraw thinks more instructors should give OER the ‘old college try.’ She mentioned that the library offers several free learning resources that work just as well as any purchased textbook. She acknowledges that teaching a class using OER can require a bit more time and planning than other, more conventional class structures, but maintains “it’s worth it.”

Gardner is also encouraged by the OER trend. “The nice thing about OER and open access is that I feel like it brings us back to the whole point of an educational institution: to be creating and providing access to new knowledge and information.”