



12 July 2022 – for immediate release

Grants awarded to develop no-cost textbooks for uni students

CAUL awarded \$34,500 in grant funding this month to 15 CAUL Member institutions across Australia and New Zealand through its Open Textbook Grant Pilot Program.

The CAUL Open Educational Resources Collective Pilot was established at the start of 2022 to build institutional capability to support open textbook publishing, build community across participating institutions, and provide grant funding for open textbook projects. The two year pilot involves 32 CAUL Member institutions across Australia and New Zealand.

Australian students are under increasing financial pressure. A [2019 study](#) focused on students receiving Centrelink benefits found that approximately 80% of participants have struggled with the cost of essential study items and course fees, and about 35% have had to withdraw from studies due to financial stress. Almost 90% of participants indicated they had to skip at least one meal a week and 30% said they skipped six or more meals per week. For many students, purchasing expensive textbooks is not an option.

"Open textbooks have the potential to reduce financial pressure on Australian students and impact positively on student success", said Fiona Salisbury, Program Director for CAUL's Enabling a Modern Curriculum Program. "They also provide the opportunity to redress imbalances in representation in traditional textbook publishing, and to ensure content is contextualised for an Australian audience."

While they may be free for students to access, open textbooks are not free to create. Aside from the investment of academic time in writing an open textbook, there are production costs including platform fees, the cost of a professional editor, library staff time in providing copyright and licensing advice, and overheads associated with running a peer review process.

"In the United States and Canada, government funding supports open textbook grants programs," said Kate Davis, Director, Strategy & Analytics, CAUL. "In the absence of such funding in Australia, we wanted to provide an opportunity for academics at CAUL Member institutions to access small grants to support the costs of publishing an open textbook."

This year, the OER Collective Governance Group awarded 15 grants to author teams lead by academics at Bond University, Curtin University, Deakin University, James Cook University, La Trobe University, Queensland University of Technology, University of New England, University of South Australia, Victoria University of Wellington, and Western Sydney University, involving authors from 15 Australian and New Zealand Universities, in addition to industry partners. The grants provide authors with funding for costs associated with publishing their open textbook, in addition to stipends for peer reviewers. \$34,500 in funding was awarded this year across from categories: High

impact projects; Australian and New Zealand content; Rebalancing representation; and Emerging disciplines. Projects focus on a diverse range of disciplines, including health science, law, sociology, psychology, business, languages, education, science, statistics and Indigenous studies.

[Information about the projects](#) is available on the OER Collective website.

“In the longer term, our aim is to build on the work we’re undertaking as part of the Collective and use this as a platform for advocacy moving forward,” said Kate. “To fully realise the potential of open textbooks, we need to see funding for grants programs at the levels we’ve seen in the US and Canada. The Collective grants are an important step in pushing the open textbook agenda forward in Australia and New Zealand, but we hope this is just the beginning.”

About the Council of Australian University Librarians

The [Council of Australian University Librarians](#) Inc. (CAUL) is the peak leadership organisation for university libraries in Australia and New Zealand. CAUL members are the University Librarians or equivalent of the 39 institutions that have representation on Universities Australia (UA) and the University Librarians or equivalent of the 8 institutions that have representation on Universities New Zealand (UNZ) and which form the Council of New Zealand University Librarians (CONZUL), a committee of UNZ. CAUL makes a significant contribution to higher education strategy, policy and outcomes through a commitment to a shared purpose: To transform how people experience knowledge – how it can be discovered, used and shared. CAUL’s vision is that society is transformed through the power of research, teaching and learning. University libraries are essential knowledge and information infrastructures that enable student achievement and research excellence.

Contact

Dr Kate Davis, Director, Strategy & Analytics, Council of Australian University Librarians,
kate.davis@caul.edu.au