



## Adopting Open Educational Resources in a Fashion Merchandising Curriculum

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### Background and Purpose

Open Educational Resources (OER) are defined as teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge (*Open Education Defined*, 2022). OERs come in various forms including course materials found from an OER repository (e.g., OER Commons, Openstax, MERLOT), a customized learning module that an instructor built from publicly available online sources such as TED talks ([www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)) and anything in between. OERs are cited as part of the reason that traditional textbook use in higher education is on the decline because they provide no cost alternatives for students and allow faculty flexibility to “mix and match materials” to suit their course outcomes (“6 emerging trends”, 2019).

A considerable challenge when teaching a course related to the business of fashion is that the content and examples provided in a textbook are often not current with the industry trends due to the timeline of traditional textbook publishing. On average it takes between 18 and 24 months for a textbook to be published (Bloomsbury, n.d.); this may be problematic when teaching courses such as fashion retailing. To be effective in teaching such courses, instructors often need to update the course content based on the changes that the fashion retailing industry has recently gone through. This challenge is relevant to many fashion merchandising instructors, as they strive to encourage students to engage their critical thinking skills to solve current problems that the fashion industry may be faced with. As instructors, we need course content to be flexible and responsive often to the fashion business headlines of the day. This responsiveness is one of the many benefits of OERs which leads to easy adaptability. In addition to this particular need, there is a general atmosphere of colleges increasing the adoption rate of OER, as one of the critical tools to decrease the rate of escalating cost of college education. More importantly, courses using OER compared to non-OER courses had a decreased rate in student course withdrawal and a better retention rate (Read, et al., 2020; Stagg, 2014). Scholarly research in the topic of OER is in its initial stages, and often they were examined at a general institutional level (Colvar, et al., 2018); therefore, there is a lack of research related to adoption of OER in the fashion merchandising area. The purpose of this research is to examine the effectiveness of adopting Open Education Resources in fashion merchandising curriculum.

### Innovative pedagogical approach

Adopting OER for a fashion merchandising course material may be an innovative, cost-effective, and practical approach in that it can be used as a tool to (a) increase the level of student engagement and interest by providing them with the most current information about the fashion industry, (b) to utilize course material that is easy for instructors to adapt and for students to access, and (c) to help lowering the cost of higher education. The first and second objectives above may ultimately lead to a better academic performance (Stagg, 2014). For example, using OERs may be beneficial for students to learn current fashion merchandising practice with more visual and interactive course content (e.g., case studies, videos) that can be easily inserted into the LMS. Updating course content in OER is much easier (e.g., inserting a new video or replacing a case study with a more current example) than it would be in a traditional textbook where updated content needs to go through a lengthy publication process. Developing an OER that is easily adaptable in a variety of formats will meet the learning needs of this specific group of students as well as provide no cost access to such course content. The third objective may help with an improved retention and graduation rates as well as serve as a critical tool to provide equal opportunities to students

of lower socioeconomic groups. It has been reported in previous studies that using OER is cost-effective and practical (Colvar et al., 2018) and that it can ultimately increase the retention and graduation rates (Read et al., 2020). Colvar et al. (2018) reported that switching from an expensive traditional textbook to a free and online accessible course material was not only cost effective but also helpful in improving academic performance, proven with a better grade and a lower DFW (D, F, and Withdraw) rate.

### Implementation of the Pedagogical Strategy

In general, there is a lack of availability of OER in the area of fashion merchandising, in OER repositories. A review of OER Commons, Openstax and MERLOT, three of the largest OER repositories, revealed that there are no OERs available that are specific to fashion merchandising. Therefore, the researcher has been building course materials on a Learning Management System (LMS), in this instance Canvas. For each learning module, the OER will be composed of articles or videos from fashion trade publications, white papers from business vendors, relevant sections or a chapter from an OER material from an OER repository, and publicly available educational materials on video platforms.

### Method

The researchers of this study will adopt a survey design as a quantitative research method. The survey questions will be adapted from the OER Research Toolkit (Open Education Group, n.d.) in a way that is specific to and appropriate for fashion merchandising courses and objectives, in order to measure the effectiveness of using OER and to identify an effective format of OER in a fashion merchandising course. An approval from the Institutional Review Board will be sought, the questionnaire will be distributed to fashion merchandising students who have taken any fashion merchandising course that adopted OER for course material.

### Implication

There is a need to conduct research on using OER in the field of fashion merchandising. Many institutions in higher education are promoting instructors to adopt OER. Furthermore, they encourage instructors to create new OER or build upon and update existing OER. As mentioned above, there are many benefits of adopting OER. It is necessary to explore how fashion merchandising instructors may create and utilize OER in their classrooms.

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