



FLOURISH

UPEI Student Union Policy Priorities 2022-2023

The UPEI Student Union is located on unceded Mi'kmaq territory. Epekwitk is covered by the historic Treaties of Peace and Friendship. The UPEI Student Union pays its respects to the Indigenous Mi'kmaq People who have occupied this island for over 12,000 years; past, present, and future.





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2022 - 2023 Executive Committee

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MISSION:

The UPEI Student Union exists to represent the interests of UPEI students and improve the student experience at UPEI.

VISION:

Through our efforts, students will enjoy the best possible academic and social experience while enrolled at UPEI.

CORE VALUES:

INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY: Entrusted with handling students' resources and advocating on their behalf, our employees and elected representatives will conduct themselves in an honest and ethical manner and show consistency in their actions. We commit to what we say, we take responsibility for our actions, and we will work diligently to rectify any mistakes we might make.

OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY: Our members, staff, and the greater community want to know what is happening in our organization, and we will communicate with them in a transparent way that meets their expectations. We will practice transparency by default, even when it is uncomfortable or difficult. We believe that justification is required to keep things private, not to make them public.

INCLUSIVITY: We represent a diverse range of students from different places of origin and with different lived experiences. We will endeavour to make our organization as accessible as possible by actively incorporating all voices and dismantling barriers to participation so that all students feel included in student life.

EVIDENCE-LED: The use of evidence enhances the quality of our work and lends legitimacy to our positions and decisions. We will rely on consultation and research to guide our work in all aspects of the organization.

FINANCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: We will conduct our operation in a fiscally and environmentally responsible manner. Meeting the needs of our current members will not compromise the ability of future members to meet their needs.

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Increasing Investments in Student Mental Health

PRINCIPLE

All students should have access to adequate Mental Health supports to thrive academically and personally.

CONCERN

With the Covid-19 pandemic, students are having negative mental health consequences and are thus unable to perform academically to the best of their potential.

RECOMMENDATION

The UPEISU recommends that the Government of Prince Edward Island increase student Mental Health funding from \$25 to \$50 for all post-secondary institutions.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE:

For students, having a healthy mental state is a crucial component of their post-secondary studies and well-being. A study by Western Michigan University in 2005 found that students who were known to suffer from depression scored half a letter grade lower than students without depression, which equates to a 0.49 loss in grade point average (GPA). Students suffering from poor mental health reported having difficulty in achieving similar performance to their mentally-healthy counterparts. This difficulty was found to increase with time, causing a compounding effect on the student's academic success¹.

However, the study also demonstrated that by increasing the availability and reducing the cost of finding effective mental health support systems for these students, the decrease in GPA can be largely offset. Students with depression who were able to gain access to quality mental health support only suffered a loss of 0.05 points on their GPA, compared to students who did not suffer from depression or other debilitations of their mental health. This means that suitable treatment for negative mental health can prevent 90% of students' academic dropoff due to mental health issues¹.

At UPEI, creating and retaining positive mental health is a major issue for many students. A survey circulated by the UPEI Student Union in 2020 found that 63% percent of the 1,131 students surveyed were having trouble with their mental health. 11% of those students stated that they have had thoughts of

¹Hysenbegasi et Al, "The Impact of Depression on the Academic Productivity of University Students," *Western Michigan University*, 2005. Accessed: July 2022
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16278502/>

taking their own lives². Of particular concern is that of the students who had problems with their mental health, only 13% of them accessed existing campus support systems. Many reported they did not know that the supports were available, and students from the Atlantic Veterinary Clinic were unable to access these supports because they were only available between 8:00am-4:30pm, the time when the learning hospital was in session².

These problems have continued into the post-lockdown era. A survey circulated by the UPEI Student Union in September of 2022 found that 47% of respondents had experienced a decline in their mental health than in the previous years, with 6% of respondents saying that they had recently been diagnosed with a mental illness or anxiety. An elaboration question found that 43% of students were experiencing depression, 69% were stressed about finances, 75% were having anxiety over academics, 71% were generally more anxious than before, 11% reported using drugs or alcohol, and 15% were having thoughts of suicide or self-harm³. For these students, the primary issue of concern was attempting to navigate the switch from online to in-person learning, with 66% of respondents saying that it had caused them additional stress and anxiety. Secondary issues included the housing crisis and fear surrounding the continued Covid-19 pandemic³.

In 2018, after negotiations with the Student Union, the Government of Prince Edward Island pledged \$25 per student towards student mental health. This money went towards bolstering existing mental health supports across the university. While the support offered by the Provincial Government is admirable, it does not do enough to offset the problems students are facing with their mental health. The survey by the Student Union in 2020 was taken after the initial financial assistance was offered. This means that despite assistance from the university, students are still unaware or unable to access much-needed mental health support. This support is particularly important in the continuing stages and aftermath of the pandemic, as many effects of the pandemic have persisted beyond lockdown.

The mental health of Indigenous students is especially of concern. In a study done by Transcultural Psychology in 2020, Indigenous students systematically scored higher across Canada in areas of concern when compared to non-Indigenous students. While the complete list of statistics and differences are listed

² Higgins, B. "Student Survey Sheds Light on Mental Health Issues at UPEI," *CBC News*, 2020. Accessed: July 2022 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-university-mental-health-survey-student-union-1.5819253>

³ UPEI Student Union, "UPEI Policy and Priorities Survey 2022," UPEI, 2022. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16278502/>

in the table below, what is important to note is that Indigenous students scored higher in every category when compared to non-Indigenous students. Of particular relevance are the following; Indigenous students were 2% more likely to consistently feel hopeless or overwhelmed, 3% more likely to feel lonely on campus, and 5% more likely to feel incredibly angry or afraid⁴.

Table 2. Prevalence of mental health outcomes of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal post-secondary students survey respondents.

Mental Health Indicator	Non-Aboriginal Students		Aboriginal Students		Adjusted PR*	95% CI
	Prevalence	95% CI	Prevalence	95% CI		
<i>Psychological Distress: Have you ever... (within the past 12 months)</i>						
Felt things were hopeless	53.75%	53.21–54.30%	55.42%	52.43–58.37%	1.05	0.997–1.11
Felt overwhelmed by all you had to do	89.22%	88.88–89.56%	91.44%	89.64–93.02%	1.03	1.01–1.04
Felt exhausted (not from physical activity)	86.87%	86.49–87.23%	89.07%	87.08–90.85%	1.02	1.0003–1.04
Felt very lonely	63.84%	63.32–64.37%	66.82%	63.96–69.59%	1.07	1.02–1.11
Felt very sad	68.40%	67.89–68.90%	72.42%	69.69–75.04%	1.06	1.02–1.10
Felt so depressed that it was difficult to function	37.38%	36.85–37.90%	41.58%	38.65–44.55%	1.11	1.03–1.19
Felt overwhelming anxiety	56.33%	55.79–56.87%	61.01%	58.07–63.90%	1.08	1.03–1.13
Felt overwhelming anger	42.00%	41.46–42.54%	48.60%	45.61–51.59%	1.17	1.10–1.24
<i>Self-Harm: Have you ever... (within the past 12 months)</i>						
Intentionally cut, burned, bruised or injured yourself	6.47%	6.21–6.74%	9.39%	7.73–11.26%	1.53	1.27–1.84
Seriously considered suicide	9.39%	9.07–9.71%	11.80%	9.96–13.85%	1.32	1.12–1.56
Attempted suicide	1.28%	1.16–1.41%	2.08%	1.32–3.10%	1.74	1.16–2.62
<i>Current Alcohol & Substance Use (last 30 days)</i>						
Alcohol: Current Use	70.84%	70.34–71.33%	70.74%	67.96–73.41%	1.00	0.96–1.03
Alcohol: Binge Drinking	36.02%	35.50–36.54%	36.99%	34.13–39.92%	1.10	1.02–1.19
Marijuana	15.97%	15.58–16.37%	17.92%	15.70–20.31%	1.21	1.06–1.37
Other Recreational Substances	5.60%	5.35–5.85%	7.30%	5.84–8.99%	1.32	1.06–1.63
<i>Prior Psychiatric Diagnoses</i>						
Diagnosis of Depression in Previous 12-Months	9.85%	9.52–10.17%	14.12%	12.12–16.31%	1.26	1.08–1.47
Lifetime Diagnosis of Depression	16.01%	15.61–16.42%	24.54%	22.00–27.21%	1.31	1.17–1.47
Diagnosis of Anxiety in Previous 12-Months	12.14%	11.79–12.50%	15.90%	13.79–18.19%	1.18	1.02–1.35

CI: Confidence Interval.

*Adjusted Prevalence Ratio (PR) for age and gender.

Additionally, a survey by plos journals found that, amongst 1,173 student participants in the United Kingdom, 72.0% found that relationships with their friends and family had deteriorated since the start of the pandemic. 40.2% of participants even reported a decline in their ability to maintain or initiate personal relationships. 52.5% of students surveyed received a score denoting clinical depression on the patient health questionnaire (PHQ9), a test to determine the severity of depression⁵.

⁴Nolan et Al, "The Prevalence of Distress, Depression, Anxiety and Substance Use Issues Among Indigenous Post-Secondary Students in Canada," *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 2020. Accessed: July 2022
<https://campusmentalhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Indigenous-Student-Mental-Health-Report.pdf>

⁵Chen, T, and Mike Lucock, "The Mental Health of University Students During the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Plos One*, 2022. Accessed: July 2022
<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0262562>

Another study by the National Library of Medicine found that mental health issues are the number one impediment students face in regard to their academic success. The most common issue students faced pre-pandemic was anxiety, with 62.7% of students saying that their anxiety inhibits their ability to do assignments or write tests⁶. Since the pandemic, new issues have arisen, with their latest survey finding that 86% of students were having difficulty sleeping because of fears related to Covid-19. This sentiment has been echoed by UPEI students as well, with the survey circulated in August 2022 finding that 47% of respondents were struggling more with their mental health in the 2022 school year than in other years³.

Students surveyed also had trouble with their finances, with 59% saying the pandemic has had a negative effect on their income and budgeting⁶. This is particularly notable because students often are reluctant to spend money on services like counselling, therapy, and other mental health supports, placing stress on the existing free resources available. It is imperative that the Government of PEI expand upon these resources to lessen this stress, as well as the stress of the students involved.



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Recommends:

The Government of PEI to increase its support of positive student mental health by donating \$50/student on an annual basis towards student mental health initiatives.

⁶Eysenbach et al, "Effects of COVID-19 on College Students' Mental Health in the United States," *National Library of Medicine*, 2020. Accessed: July 2022
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7473764>

Creating Student Dedicated Affordable Housing

PRINCIPLE

All students should have access to secure and affordable housing over the course of their education.

CONCERN

Due to the rising inflation and cost of living, as well as a lack of affordable and accessible housing, students are forced to contribute a large portion of their limited income to rent if they are able to find housing at all.

RECOMMENDATION

The UPEISU recommends that the Government of Prince Edward Island develop a needs-based student-dedicated housing assistance program that would offer rental supplements to students year-round.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE:

The Housing Data and Trends 2017 report states, "Stable, safe, adequate housing is a fundamental human need, and provides a foundation from which Islanders can achieve success in education, employment, community participation, and health". For students, accessibility to affordable housing is essentially important when pursuing post secondary education. According to a study by Maya Brennan of the Canadian Observatory of Homelessness, having a place to stay that is safe, comfortable and affordable leads to an increase in student achievement, class attendance, and retention. Students who know they have reliable housing are able to focus their efforts on schoolwork and becoming better, more productive members of society⁷.

Despite this great need, PEI has been historically poor at offering affordable housing for students in sufficient quantities. In 2022, UPEI's residence services filled their four-hundred and forty available rooms for September by the middle of May, forcing students to attempt to find alternate accommodations. This resulted in UPEI needing to quickly find houses for students who had no place to go. The situation became so dire that UPEI asked their own staff members to open their homes to house students for a term, something that should not have to be an option⁸.

⁷Brennan, M, "The Impacts of Affordable Housing on Education: A Research Summary," *The Canadian Observatory of Homelessness*, 2021. Accessed: July 2022
<https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/impacts-affordable-housing-education-research-summary>

⁸Marketing And Communication, "UPEI Asks PEI Community for Help With Housing for Students," *UPEI*, 2022. Accessed: July 2022
<https://www.upei.ca/communications/news/2022/08/upei-asks-pe-community-help-housing-students>

This crisis is especially detrimental to international students, who have been hit the worst by the lack of available and affordable housing options. The CBC reported that one student had been apartment hunting on foot for between three and four hours per day due to the shortage. In 2021, a student was forced to stay in a room with a curtain in place of a door and still had to work part-time in order to cover the expense⁹. With the steady increase in international students coming to UPEI, it will continue to become increasingly difficult to find adequate housing, and it is imperative that the government step in to assist.

In August 2022, the UPEI Student Union created and distributed a survey to students gathering information on their current housing conditions and whether they were being negatively affected by the low vacancy rate. From this survey, it was determined that students on average were paying 67% of their income towards housing, before being subject to taxes. This exceeded the income percentage limit set forth by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which defines affordable housing as costing less than 30% of a person's income, by more than double the benchmark¹⁰.

For students, that number is quite small. A student working a part-time job of fifteen hours per week with a salary of \$14.00 an hour (thirty cents above minimum wage) is earning about eight hundred and fifty dollars per month. However, the study done by the UPEI Student Union in 2022 found that students on average are paying \$451 at the low end, and over \$1000 per month at the high end for rent, with 35.00% of students paying at least \$600 each month. This translates to roughly 71.14% of students' income and does not always include the price of utilities. Furthermore, the survey found that 9% of students were found to be paying more than \$1000 for their rent, exceeding the average amount earned by students by \$150. This leads to students going into debt of at least \$1200 each school year, for an eight-month rental agreement.

In an article released by UPEI in 2022, the acting director of Ancillary Services, Laura O'Laney, says that her department is becoming inundated with calls asking for housing options, and they don't currently have much to offer them. O'Laney has asked that any Islander who has "a house, an apartment, a room" that would be suitable for students contact Ancillary Services immediately¹¹. The residences are also full, with a waitlist over four hundred students long, and

⁹ MacLean, L, "International Students Feeling the Squeeze of Inflation, PEI Housing Crisis and Fees," *Saltwire*, 2021. Accessed: July 2022
<https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/international-students-feeling-squeeze-of-inflation-pe-housing-crisis-and-fees-100663419/>

¹⁰ Canadian Marketing and Housing Corporation, "About Affordable Housing in Canada," *Government of Canada*, March 31, 2018. Accessed: July 2022
<https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/professionals/industry-innovation-and-leadership/industry-expertise/affordable-housing/about-affordable-housing/affordable-housing-in-canada>

the UPEI homestay program is at capacity as well. In order to fill the demand, the UPEI homestay program would need to increase its volunteer participants by one hundred and fifty houses¹¹.

In March 2020, the Government of PEI installed a \$1000 rental subsidy program that included students. The temporary rental assistance benefit was aimed at assisting renters who had suffered financial losses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and was paid directly to the landlords. Tenants who had applied for the program and were approved received a \$500 rental subsidy for the first month, followed by \$250 rental subsidies for each of the following three months. Although this program provided some temporary relief to students who were suffering financially, it was extremely short-lived and students were left without assistance starting in September 2020.

Existing subsidies for housing do not include students in their target populations. Currently, PEI offers the Family Housing Program and Senior Housing Program, rental assistance initiatives for those with dependents and for those of sixty years of age or older, respectively. There is no current plan or program in place to assist students with rent prices in a time where inflation on PEI has grown 11.1%, the highest year-over-year increase of any province in Canada (as of August 2022). This includes a rent increase of 8.9 % across the province, resulting in more students than ever before having a hard time finding accommodations¹².

International students are also hit particularly hard by the increase in inflation, as their average cost of living is substantially higher than those of domestic students. Student fees and tuition for international students in Canada are on average more than five times the amount that a Canadian citizen has to pay. At UPEI, international students' tuition and international fees have them pay \$14,274 per annum¹³. This is without taking into account rent and other costs of living, let alone the process of finding a place to stay in the first place. While these students can gain assistance through Study Abroad Canada's homestay program, those offering their homes to students are doing so on a volunteer basis, and this results in a great degree of uncertainty with regard to how many homes will be available¹⁴. Because of this, and because international students require secure housing before they're permitted to travel to Canada, offering a government-subsidized

¹¹ UPEI. "UPEI Asks PEI Community For Help With Housing For Students," UPEI, August 16, 2022. Accessed September 2022 <https://www.upei.ca/communications/news/2022/08/upei-asks-pei-community-help-housing-students>

¹² Government of PEI. "Consumer Price Index Monthly," Government of PEI, August 2022. Accessed August 2022 <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/finance/consumer-price-index-monthly>

¹³ UPEI. "Tuition and Fees," UPEI, August 2022. Accessed August 2022 <https://www.upei.ca/fees>

¹⁴ Study Abroad Canada. "Homestay Program," Study Abroad Canada, 2016. Accessed August 2022 <https://www.studyincanada.ca/homestay-program/>

rental supplement to students would be a far more effective way to ensure that UPEI students from all over the world are able to survive and thrive in academia.

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Recommends:

The Government of Prince Edward Island develop a separate needs-based student-dedicated housing assistance program that would offer rental supplements to students year-round.

Continuing investments in Open Educational Resources at UPEI, in order to Lower the Costs of Textbooks

PRINCIPLE

With the cost of inflation rising and tuition fees going up year over year, the UPEISU feels that the cost of being a student is becoming more and more prohibitive, leading to stark differences in the quality of education between an affluent student and a financially troubled student.

CONCERN

Students are paying too much for textbooks and are sacrificing basic needs to afford academic materials.

RECOMMENDATION

The UPEISU recommends that the Government of PEI continue to invest \$50,000 annually in a multi-year fund for Open Educational Resources to make post-secondary education in PEI more accessible and affordable.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE:

The costs of university textbooks in Canada have risen 1,024% since 1977, with an increase of more than 88% between the years of 2006 and 2016. Compared to inflation, which has risen by 318.46% in the same period, textbook prices have risen by almost three times the consumer price index¹⁵. With most of these textbooks being mandatory, this is increasingly putting students in a difficult position in their post-secondary education.

A 2020 survey of over four hundred students by Douglas College in British Columbia found that some students are either not purchasing the required materials for their courses, or are foregoing other necessities to purchase textbooks. The majority of students surveyed were from first or second-year standing. Of those students, 15% did not purchase their required textbooks, instead relying on exterior materials such as past versions of said textbooks or PDF versions found online. A further 60% of students were forced to work extra hours or take out extra loans in order to afford the cost of their academic materials, with half of the students working an extra eight hours to cover their textbooks, and 15% taking loans of more than \$100 for their courses¹⁶.

The extra costs of textbooks are not just causing students a harder time financially; they are also producing a divide in the quality of education between students across racial and financial lines. According

¹⁵ UTA Libraries. "Introduction to Open Educational Resources," *University of Texas*, August 2022, Accessed August 2022.

<https://libguides.uta.edu/oer/cost#:~:text=The%20price%20of%20college%20textbooks,times%20the%20art%20of%20inflation.>

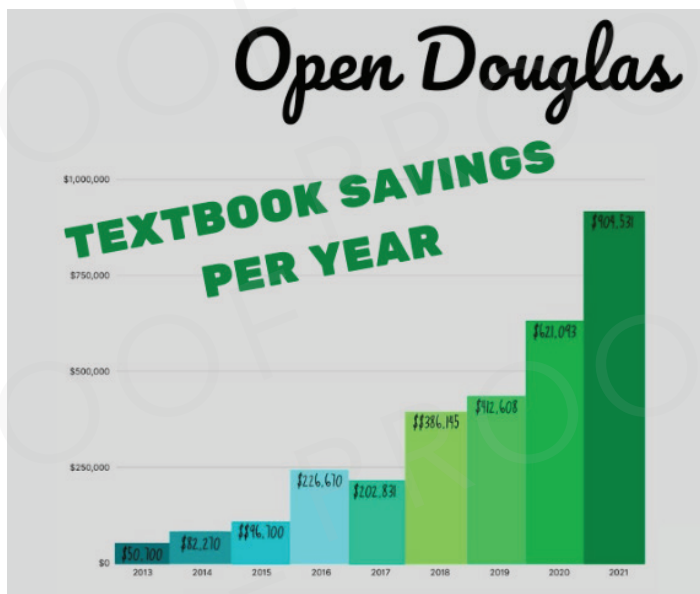
¹⁶ Douglas Students Union. "2020-2021 Academic Materials Survey," *Douglas College*, October 2020. Accessed August 2022.

<https://www.thedsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2020-21-Academic-Materials-Survey-Report-FINAL.pdf>

to a survey done in 2018 by Achieving the Dream, a non-profit organization devoted to improving the lives of students, 52% of students who are members of marginalized or financially disadvantaged groups had a harder time gaining quality education from classes that used traditional textbooks over OERs. Those students across the board reported that their quality of learning and instruction went up with the addition of OERs, as well as a positive shift in mental health and a decrease in anxiety¹⁷.

Furthermore, the implementation of OERs has had positive effects on post-secondary institutions as well as their students. The study by Achieving the Dream found that 28% of students who saved money on OERs put that money towards taking an additional course at their institution. A further 24% of students prioritized selecting courses with OERs available while they were picking courses. This survey shows that students are actively aware of the costs of materials and factor them into considering which courses they wish to attend and that students would be willing to invest more into their university or college if they were to offer OERs¹⁷.

There is historical evidence that OERs are successful. BC Campus in 2012 began uniting Open Education initiatives to collaborate on a database of OERs, forming the Open Education Resources Textbook Project. The program helped students across British Columbia save over 1.8 million dollars in textbook costs in just four years from 2012-2016, and as of 2022, crossed the threshold of 30 million dollars in student savings. That's an average of three million dollars per year of the program. Furthermore, the growth of an OER program goes up exponentially, with Douglas College saving students nearly one million dollars in 2021 as compared to 2020¹⁸.



¹⁷ Schauffhauser, D. "Report: Students Prefer Courses that Use Open Educational Resources." *Campus Technology*, October 12, 2018. Accessed August 2022. <https://campustechnology.com/articles/2018/10/12/report-students-prefer-courses-that-use-open-educational-resources.aspx>

¹⁸ Caldwell, J. "Celebrating Ten Years of Open Textbooks B.C.," *BCcampus*, March 7, 2022. Accessed August 2022. <https://bccampus.ca/2022/03/07/celebrating-10-years-of-open-textbooks-in-b-c/>

This trend is also true for UPEI. In 2020, UPEI launched the Open Educational Resource Development Program, devoting \$25,000 towards the advancement of OERs. This has resulted in the completion of five OER projects, with six projects currently ongoing. Total student savings from this program have exceeded \$51,000 from the year 2020 alone¹⁹.

Though this grant has done a lot to offset the cost of textbooks for students in its one-year trial, evidence suggests that continuing to support the program will result in exponentially more savings for students. Projections estimate that doubling the amount of funding to \$50,000 will result in students having \$151,000 in savings. Continuing to put \$50,000 into the OER program annually will result in a minimum savings of \$655,000 over five years.

It is important to note not just the savings themselves, but also what they are going towards. 46% of students surveyed by Douglas College said that they would use their savings on textbooks for living expenses. A further breakdown of that 46% shows that 44% of those students would spend the money on groceries, 26% would spend the money on rent, 13% would spend it on transportation, and 18% would spend it on other bills. Of the students not spending the money on living expenses, 38% said that they would have put their savings towards paying off student debt and tuition¹⁹.

Furthermore, there is a large amount of evidence that OERs are beneficial to the environment. The primary way to access the materials generated as OERs is in digital form, which means they take up less space and are returned less frequently²⁰. Book publishing also generates a colossal amount of carbon emissions, with an average of 3kg of carbon released into the atmosphere per book produced. OERs, contrarily, reduce carbon emissions. Only the exact amount of OERs needed in papers are ever produced, which results in no unsold textbooks rotting on bookstore shelves, or being returned or otherwise disposed of after use. Additionally, with a physical OER, you are merely printing the material out as paper. There are no wash solutions used, no harmful chemicals going into the cover and spine, and the energy used to bind the book is conserved²¹.

¹⁹ Robertson Library. "OER Development Program," *UPEI*, 2022. Accessed August 2022. <https://library.upei.ca/oerprogram>

²⁰ Greener Ideal Staff. "6 Environmental Benefits of eTextbooks," *Greener Ideal*, July 25, 2018. Accessed August 2022. <https://greenerideal.com/news/6-environmental-benefits-etextbooks/>

Zara, A. "The Book Industry And The Environment," *Booknet Canada*, November 15, 2021. Accessed August 2022. <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2021/11/15/the-book-industry-and-the-environment>



**UPEI
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Recommends:

For the continued advancement in equality and affordability in education, as well as the preservation of the environment, the UPEISU recommends that the Government of PEI continue to invest \$50,000 annually in a multi-year fund for Open Educational Resources to make post-secondary education in PEI more accessible and affordable.



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