



# BREAKING IT OPEN: OER Updates & Events

A Newsletter of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education OLER Advisory Council

## March 2026

Breaking It Open is a biannual newsletter from the OLER Advisory Council's Marketing and Education Committee. Here you will find a snapshot of OER news, publications, and events.



### Local Events

#### OER 101 Webinar

Wednesday, April 8, 2 to 4 p.m. on Zoom.

Sponsored by OLERAC and Open Education Network.

Visit the [Massachusetts Department of Higher Education OER website](#) for more information and to register. Webinar participants who also review their first OER textbook from the Open Textbook Library will receive a \$200 stipend.

#### Accessibility Trainings

Questions about accessibility? Join a live digital accessibility training offered by the Accessibility Center for Consulting, Education and Support Services. Topics range from Accessibility Fundamentals to sessions focused on specific types of digital content. Check the [Events Calendar](#) for upcoming sessions and registration details.

#### Creative Commons Explained

Friday, April 10, 9:30 a.m. on Zoom.

Curious about how Creative Commons licenses work? Join the [Understanding Creative Commons Licenses for OER](#) to explore how you can confidently adopt and adapt OER for your courses. Registration required.

## Nominate a Colleague or Yourself for a Statewide OLER Achievement Award

Faculty, staff, and administrators who work at a Massachusetts public college or university, and have created, adapted, adopted, or advocated for OER between April 2025 and April 2026 are eligible.

Winners will receive a certificate signed by Commissioner Noe Ortega, a monetary award of \$750, and an invitation to be an honored guest at the OLERAC-sponsored awards ceremony and lunch on May 18.

**Nominations due April 10.**

More details can be found on the [nomination form](#).

## National Events

- The [Open Education Global Conference](#) is **October 7-9, 2026**. Co-hosted by OE Global, MIT, and the Massachusetts Open & Low Cost Education Resources (OLER) Advisory Council, this is a phenomenal opportunity for Massachusetts OLER practitioners to participate in this global event. Recent conferences have been held in Brisbane, Edmonton, and Nantes, so be sure to catch it while it's local. This year's theme is *Come Invent With Us! Innovating open practices to uphold and uplift knowledge as a public good*. The Call for Proposals closes **March 30th**. [Submit a proposal today](#).



- **Open Education Week 2026** was officially March 2-6, but the OE Week calendar has programming through the end of April. Upcoming events include:
  - How Do Course Materials Impact Student Belonging? Insights from User Experience Research (CCCOER Webinar) on April 15 at 3 pm ET.
  - Technology, Colleges, & Community (TCC) 2026 Worldwide Online Conference: Human By Design: AI, Creativity, & Purpose In Education begins April 21 at 3 pm ET.

Find information about these programs and more on the [OE Week calendar](#).

- **OpenCon Ohio is May 14th & 15th.**

All of the free online programming will be on the 15th. Registration is now open. Anna Mills, visionary leader in open education and AI, will present the keynote entitled “Open Practices Can Help Us Adapt to AI, and AI Can Support Open Education If We’re Careful.”

Visit the [OpenCon Ohio website](#) for more information and to register.

## Massachusetts OLER Spotlights

### SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) Features the Work of OLERAC Member Institutions

In 2022, the U.S. Department of Education awarded a grant to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) and a consortium of six colleges and universities: Fitchburg State University, Framingham State University, Holyoke Community College, Northern Essex Community College, Salem State University, and Springfield Technical Community College to create and adapt OER through an equity lens. This successful grant-funded initiative, called ROTEL (Remixing Open Textbooks through an Equity Lens), concluded in 2025. Susan Tashjian, academic innovation programs manager at Northern Essex Community College and co-principal investigator on the initial grant, applied for a subsequent grant to fund the creation of materials that integrate artificial intelligence and career readiness into coursework. The follow-up project, called CA-ROTEL, secured \$1.98 million in Open Textbook Pilot grant funding. Read the full [Impact Story here](#).

### Bridgewater State Is Compensating Select Part-Time Faculty to Review Material in OER Commons

In an effort to expand access to affordable, high-quality learning materials in the classroom, the university is seeking part-time faculty reviewers to explore OER Commons, identify resources relevant to their fields, and provide evaluations based on quality, relevance, and potential for classroom use. Under the direction of Faculty Fellow for OER, Prof. Andres Montenegro Rosero, two reviewers will be selected from each of the university’s four colleges: Bartlett College of Science and Mathematics, College of Education and Health Sciences, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Ricciardi College of Business. Selected faculty reviewers will receive \$1,000 each for their analysis of two different sets of OER materials.

### Achieving the Dream Highlights the OER Work of Berkshire Community College (BCC)

In December, Achieving the Dream (ATD), a national non-profit organization dedicated to improving student success and advancing equity at community colleges, published a commendatory story about Berkshire Community College’s successes. BCC joined Achieving

the Dream's Rural Resiliency program in 2022. Since 2022, BCC's enrollment has gone up 72%, with a sizable increase in students of color. An important factor in BCC's success is the campus's embrace of OER. The number of courses offering OER increased from 34% to 41% from 2023–24 to 2024–25, saving students an estimated \$480,000 last year. With the help of ATD, BCC is using data to analyze and improve its use of OER to better meet the needs of its student population. Read the full story on the [Achieving the Dream website](#).



Photo courtesy of Berkshire Community College

## Finding Funding for OER

Kisha Tracy, Chair and Professor of English Studies at Fitchburg State University, has long wanted to create an open textbook on Medieval disability for undergraduate students. The creation of this textbook is about access to materials concerning a marginalized community and it is certainly a topic not well covered by other OER. However, because its audience is narrow and it would not have a big impact on institution-wide cost savings for students, it is not a textbook that is likely to get funding from traditional sources that support OER development. Kisha shares how she had to think more creatively to find funding for this project. [Read more about Kisha's project and journey](#).

## New OER Publications

### Career and AI Readiness while Remixing Open Textbooks through an Equity Lens (CA-ROTEL)

- [Applied Business Assignments and Projects](#) by Patricia Tupaj: Supplement to OpenStax's *Introduction to Business*
- [Companion Materials for Python Programming](#) by Michael Penta: Supplement to OpenStax's *Introduction to Python Programming*
- [Evaluating AI Accuracy](#) by Jason Termini: In-class activity
- [Incarceration & Alternatives](#) by Scott Joubert: A 7-week course

- [Introducing Philosophy with The Matrix](#) by James Garrison: Supplement to Sondra Peron's *Introduction to Philosophy*
- [Introduction to Philosophy](#) by Dermot Luddy and Meredith Gunning: Supplement to OpenStax's *Introduction to Philosophy*
- [Lectures and Learning Activities for Introduction to Sociological Criminology](#) by Forrest Rodgers: Supplement to Steven E. Barkan's *Criminology: A Sociological Understanding*

## More Publications from Open Massachusetts

- [A Plain Language Guide to Personal Financial Planning](#) by Miranda Lam
- [Adult Psychopathology](#) by Carolyn Davies
- [Gifts of Speech: Women's Speeches from Around the World](#) edited by David Fleming and Liz Kent León
- [Global Health Literacy and Justice Glossary, 2nd Edition](#) by Amanda Mack, Catherine Fahey, Kristine Doll, and Robin R. Leger
- [Introduction to Public Health](#) by Amanda Prophett
- [Organizational Communication](#) by Yongjun Shin
- [Preparing OER for Upcoming WCAG Requirements \(Webinar\)](#) by Rachel Oleaga

## CA-ROTEL OER Grant Project Update

Career and AI Readiness while Remixing Open Textbooks through an Equity Lens (CA-ROTEL) is the spiritual descendant, so to speak, of the original, federally-funded ROTEL grant project. CA-ROTEL is 100% funded by the U.S. Department of Education's grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, (FIPSE), and shared between three institutions: Northern Essex Community College (NECC), Framingham State University (FSU), and the University of Massachusetts-Lowell (UML).

Rather than entire OER textbooks (as was the case with the original ROTEL project), CA-ROTEL's focus is on the creation of equitable ancillaries, such as case studies, homework assignments, labs/activities, and course modules.

Interested faculty at Northern Essex Community College, Framingham State University, and UMass-Lowell should take note that the deadline for Round Two (AY 2026-27) applications has been extended to Friday, April 3rd, 2026.

[Read the full update](#) from Rebecca Dowgiert, Scholar Communications Librarian, Henry Whittemore Library at Framingham State University.

## Meet the New Library Dean at Fitchburg State University



Laura Robinson joined Fitchburg State University as Dean of the Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library in February 2026. She takes questions from the OLERAC Marketing and Education Subcommittee.

### **Could you talk a bit about your work with OER before coming to Fitchburg State?**

Supporting the development and use of open educational resources has been core to my professional life for many years. At two previous institutions I collaborated with librarians and faculty to build OER communities of practice across disciplines, from French Language, to Biology, History, Materials Science, and more. Internal grants at these universities empowered the libraries to bring instructors together to discuss the hard questions and critical concerns about OERs, while finding inspiration in new ideas from experts outside their disciplines. Concerns, such as how to find the time to vet or build the best materials for desired learning outcomes, have been persistent since the rise of OERs. Advocacy for the development of infrastructure, guidelines, programming, and online resources that address some of these challenges has been an important part of the work of academic librarians for two decades.

### **What role do you think OER plays in student success?**

OERs bring variety and, therefore, opportunity to develop innovative and timely pedagogical methods. Without access to OERs, students would be faced with not only prohibitively high-cost information sources but also information sources from a relatively low variety of publishers and creators, limiting the ability of instructors to craft a wide variety of learning opportunities. Student success looks different for every student. Success could look like the development of deep reading skills from primary sources, analyzing data to understand trends, growing subject expertise, and honing a range of literacies (AI, Media, Information, Visual, and more). The type and varied formats of OERs are an authentic reflection of the complexity of our information world. Success in all its flavors comes, in part, from exposure to and critical analysis of information written for varied purposes, and vetted by and for a diverse audience of people.

### **How do you envision supporting faculty and staff in developing and using OER in the long-term?**

Raising awareness, inspiring others to use and create OERs, and supporting librarians and faculty through strategic allocation of time, tools, and infrastructure is a crucial piece of my work as Dean of the Library at Fitchburg State. Our university has a long track record of improving students' lives; providing seamless access to high quality OERs is an important part of that success. Well before my arrival, librarians and faculty at Fitchburg State have brought online a number of platforms for publishing and disseminating OERs as part of the campus's information suite, and I am excited to support and contribute to the continuation of that work. Next up is the

spring roll-out of the university's institutional repository, FalconWorks, which will be an exciting addition to our collection of digital publishing tools. Connie Strittmatter, Strategic Projects Librarian, is managing that project.

## Introducing the Open Education Association

The Open Education Association (OEA) works at the national level to connect, advocate for, and strengthen the open education disciplinary field across the U.S. The association's strategy is grounded and informed by its community. The open education practitioners and scholars said what they needed the most from a disciplinary association is shared infrastructure, greater visibility, and the connective tissue to support open sharing at scale.

The key areas of focus for OEA are to:

- Serve as a national voice to promote and advocate for open education in U.S. higher education
- Connect and coordinate with people and organizations across the field in service of greater collective outcomes
- Offer strategic programming to address needs identified by association members and the broader field
- Curate and disseminate information about open education, making it easy to find and use
- Become established as a sustainable nonprofit organization

Membership is open to all individuals whose personal or professional activities align with the mission and values of the Open Education Association. Most members are based in the United States where the association's work focuses. Membership renews annually, and all paid tiers include the same set of benefits ensuring equal access to participation and leadership opportunities across the association.

To keep membership attainable, the Open Education Association offers three rate tiers, allowing practitioners to select the level that best fits their needs.

- Sustaining Tier - \$200/year for those who are able to provide more support individually or through their institution.
- Standard Tier - \$100/year for most members and is set at a level that individuals can afford without institutional support.
- Discount Tier - \$50/year for those who cannot afford the Standard Tier and cannot be used with institutional support.

**For more information, please visit [opened.org](https://opened.org).**