



## **Submission to the UBC Board of Governors Regarding Student Support and Priorities During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

First and foremost, we would like to express our tremendous appreciation to UBC faculty and staff for their efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are incredibly grateful for those continuing to work on campus, provide support for students, and those working to ensure that UBC continues to offer an exceptional university experience for students come fall. As we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for the summer and fall terms, we would like to stress the importance of clear and consistent communication to students, compassionate approaches to teaching and learning, new work and career development opportunities, and accessible, low barrier support for students.

The economic recession caused by the ongoing pandemic continues to have a significant negative effect on students, resulting in uncertainty about job prospects and educational plans, loss of income, heightened housing and food insecurity, and increased mental health struggles. The combination of these factors renders students a particularly vulnerable population during this time of hardship. Furthermore, COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities in available student support. We would like to highlight the particularly vulnerable student populations on campus that have slipped through the cracks, such as international students that continue to be ineligible for government programs, students with dependents, Indigenous students, and students with accessibility needs.

While the AMS acknowledges that the University is under increased financial pressure, it is essential that student-facing priorities continue to be funded and that this be a priority for the University this fiscal year. The AMS has identified these areas of priority and concern to continue funding and assessing as student priorities:

### **Preservation of Student Priorities**

#### **Orientations and First-Year Experiences**

We expect to see the university sustain funding allocations made to Orientations and First Year Experiences, and that the appropriate amount of funding is provided to these valuable transition programs. We are excited to see the realized efforts various UBC teams have already put into creating new and engaging Orientations and First Year Experiences online.

#### **Maintaining Clear and Timely Communication**

In order to best support students, it is important to maintain consistent communication frequency during the ongoing pandemic. All students deserve to have a clear idea of what their next academic year will look like, as well as various opportunities to feel engaged with a virtual campus community. We recommend aligning social media strategies with UBC Broadcast communications to ensure the delivery of clear messaging.

### **Acceleration and Development of Capital Projects**

As the economy moves into a recession, now is an opportune time for UBC to accelerate student-focused capital projects. The AMS has highlighted student services, housing, transit, recreational spaces, and learning infrastructure as key categories for student-priority development items. We hope the University takes action to take advantage of lowered development costs.

### **Work Opportunities and Experiential Learning**

COVID-19 has created an incredibly daunting job market for new graduates and current students alike. We call on UBC to develop and invest in experiential learning opportunities, skill development, certification courses, WorkLearn and Co-Op programs, particularly for Indigenous and racialized students, and for students with accessibility needs. Funding that was allocated towards cancelled WorkLearn and Co-Op positions should continue going towards student-facing priorities in career development.

### **Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources**

With mental health challenges on the rise due to this global pandemic, it is important for the university to be proactive and take action on creating remote/online counselling and wellbeing infrastructure, as well as promoting the academic support services available for students if they are struggling.

## **Providing Bursaries and Financial Support**

Students continue to encounter difficulties accessing financial aid from both UBC and government sources. The university should pursue low barrier forms of financial stress alleviation, such as a rental relief program that matches the BC Temporary Rental Supplement Program, and continued investment into emergency bursaries.

### **Reducing Tuition and Student Fees Where Possible**

The university must demonstrate it has made a concerted effort to reduce student fees for the upcoming year, and at the very least minimize cost increases.

### **Housing Costs and Rental Subsidies**

While the CERB, CESB, and the BC Temporary Rental Supplement are sources of income that alleviate financial stress, many students do not qualify leaving a gap in support for UBC residents. We call on the University to match equivalent funding as the BC Temporary Rental Supplement, for student housing contract holders in order to address this inequity.

### **Increased International Student Support**

International students are a particularly vulnerable population within the UBC community. International students are unable to access governmental support such as the BC Housing Subsidy, or the CESB/CERB. We hope to see clear examples of increased support for these students during these challenging times.

## **Academic Equity and Access**

### **Ensuring Technological Equity**

For many students continuing their studies remotely and online, they will have differing access to working internet, quality computers, and technological access. Promoting the UBC Library Technology Endowment

Fund will improve access for students who are otherwise unable to access adequate technology, including shipping costs and set up costs. Ensuring that students have access to a platform through which they are able to learn effectively, is a crucial step in bridging the gap in academic equity.

### **Accessibility in the Online Classroom and Compassionate Academic Practices**

The pandemic has left a drastic mark on students' wellbeing and usual routine. UBC must endeavour towards creating an equitable, compassionate experience for all students, regardless of where they are located in the world, their disability, or how their course content is being delivered.

### **Prioritization of OERs**

The shift to online learning has presented a unique challenge, due to the shortage of resources available for online learning and assessment. When considering the financial situation of students and the future of online learning, we call on the University to allocate funding towards the development of Open Educational Resources. Prioritizing OER development will showcase UBC's ability to be a leader in academic development during a time when many students and universities are struggling to adapt to online learning.

For further reading, please see **Schedule A** following this submission.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a unique challenge, but we have seen the UBC community come together to support each other. Through adversity, comes opportunity and we look forward to working with UBC in supporting students through this pandemic. We thank the Board for its consideration of this submission.

Kind Regards,



**Cole Evans**  
**President**  
**AMS of UBC Vancouver**



**Georgia Yee**  
**VP Academic and University Affairs**  
**AMS of UBC Vancouver**

# SCHEDULE A

## Supporting Students Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

### Providing Bursaries and Financial Support

A study on the “[Gaps in Post-Secondary Student Support During COVID-19](#)” conducted by the Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities (UCRU) coordinated a national student survey on the financial impact of COVID-19 on Canadian post-secondary students with 3157 respondents nation-wide. Even for students and families accessing support, fall tuition and living expenses continue to pose a significant financial burden and barrier. 79% of respondents are concerned about affording tuition for the fall, while 76% of respondents are worried about how they will pay for fall rent and utilities.

Q6.4 - Are you aware of the financial resources offered by UBC's Enrolment Services? Click here to see the options available to you.  
Asked to all students

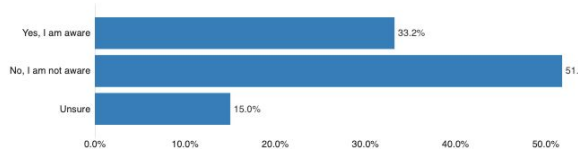


Figure 1.1: From COVID-19 Impacts on UBC Students, conducted by UBC PAIR, AMS & GSS

Q6.8 - How helpful did you find your Enrolment Service Advisor during this pandemic in managing financial stress?  
Asked to all students

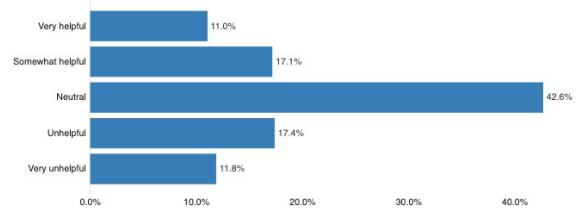


Figure 1.1: From COVID-19 Impacts on UBC Students, conducted by UBC PAIR, AMS & GSS

Students continue to encounter difficulties accessing financial aid from UBC or the Federal Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CESB/CERB). The University should pursue low barrier forms of financial stress alleviation, such as a rental relief program that matches the BC Temporary Rental Supplement Program, tuition waivers, and continued investment into bursaries.

While there are resources directed to students to help to clarify their eligibility for financial aid or which circumstances Enrolment Services may be able to help with, many students have reported being turned away as they are not immediately suffering from housing or food insecurity. The University should be proactive in reaching out to students who may be in need, not waiting for students to be in crisis and expecting them to reach out. This has resulted in decreased student confidence in how they are supported by the university and their ability to reach out to campus resources.

The current process of seeking financial aid often bounces students between UBC units, such as Student Housing, to Enrolment Services, and back to Student Housing, leaving students exhausted and confused about their financial aid options with limited support. Communication between UBC units should be coordinated as much as possible to help students navigate a complex crisis and reduce student confusion. In this great time of financial stress, it is essential to expand flexible, low-barrier bursaries that students are aware of and are able to access easily.

### **Reducing Student Fees Where Possible and Tuition**

Student fees should reflect the unique financial situation we are navigating in the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic recession. Students are highly concerned about their lack of access to on-campus facilities as they will be largely attending classes online. Therefore, if a student will not have access to such facilities, it is disproportionate to charge fees for them. As faculties announce their decisions regarding online courses, there will be a significant decrease in students utilizing recreation facilities and participating in intramurals. The AMS urges the University to reduce the Athletics and Recreation fee, and provide remote-learning students the option to opt out of paying this fee.

The University should evaluate the options of:

1. not assessing the Athletics and Recreation fee in Term 1, then assessing the Athletics and Recreation fee in Term 2 (if open)
2. not assessing the AMS \$21 contribution to the Athletics and Recreation fee.

Academic instructors should seek to utilize Open Educational Resources, when creating their course curriculum and required materials. These provide flexibility in learning to students and instructors, as they are freely available and can be remotely used - as opposed to having to pay for shipping costs or having additional costs. For further reading, this will be elaborated on the section on 'Academic Equity'.

Q13.9 - I understand the tuition costs for the upcoming school year.  
 Asked to all students

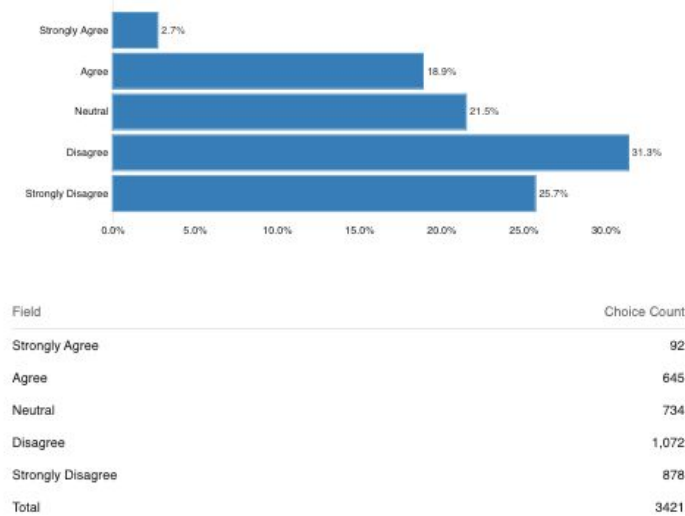
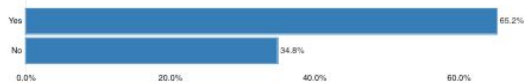


Figure 2: From COVID-19 Impacts on UBC Students, conducted by UBC PAIR, AMS & GSS

### Housing Costs and Rental Subsidies

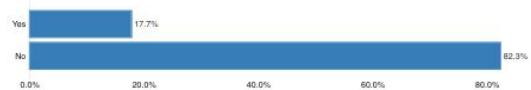
Housing insecurity continues to be a pressing concern for many students. According to a survey conducted by the Undergraduates of Canadian Research Intensive Universities, 73% of the students surveyed stated that they were worried about making summer rent and utility payments. While the CERB, CESB, and BC Temporary Rental Supplement are sources of income to ameliorate financial stress, many students do not qualify, leaving a gap in support for UBC residents.

Q10.6 - If you signed a Year Round Housing Contract for the 2020-2021 year, are you worried about how you will pay for rent?  
 Asked to all students



Field	Choice Count
Yes	448
No	239
Total	687

Q10.8 - Do you feel that that the UBC COVID-19 response has been adequate in addressing issues in student housing affordability?  
 Asked to all students



Field	Choice Count
Yes	340
No	1,580
Total	1920

Figure 3.1: COVID-19 Impacts on UBC Students, conducted by UBC PAIR, AMS & GSS

Figure 3.2: COVID-19 Impacts on UBC Students, conducted by UBC PAIR, AMS & GSS

Many students have been faced with the dilemma of being offered a year round contract, and being unable to sublet or move into their new accommodations, causing financial stress. Students should be offered the opportunity to switch to a Winter Session contract, and the current assignments process should be assessed for students with housing security needs to accommodate these unprecedented times. Student Housing should be making plans for the return to in-person classes, and the potential influx of students requiring housing outside of the regular contract cycle.

In March, the BC Government created the Temporary Rental Supplement, allowing residential tenants to receive up to \$500 towards rental payment per month. However, this does not apply to Student Housing and Community Services-owned units. We call on the University to match and *advertise* equivalent funding as the BC Temporary Rental Supplement, for student housing contract holders in order to address this inequity.

### **Increased International Student Support**

We recognize that international students are a particularly vulnerable population within the UBC community. International students are unable to access governmental support such as the BC Housing Subsidy, or the CESB/CERB. We hope to see an increased support for these students during these challenging times.

We have identified key areas of concern that face the international student population:

- Additional Financial Support
- Accommodations for Students Living Abroad and in Different Timezones
- Immigration and Post-Graduation Work Permits
- Emergency Support Plans Arriving Back in Canada

The majority of international students are unable to qualify for Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or the Canadian Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) due to work permit restrictions and balancing academic load. Therefore, we call on the University to provide additional financial support for international students in recognition of the community's vulnerability during these difficult times.

The University must consider the effect of students in different timezones. This extends beyond academic accommodations, but within university and campus life. In order to make sure that international students are accommodated, it will be valuable for University to make sure that there are hours and contact information that students in different time zones can access.

The AMS commends the work by the International Students Advising office helping international students gain access to Post Graduation Work permits, as well as support students in getting extensions to their study permits. As the situation develops, we hope to see the continual support of international students.

We recommend that for international students who are coming in from abroad, UBC should provide accommodations and contingency plans to provide incoming students with a support

network. For example, if a student is unable to find a 14-day self-isolation unit for themselves, Student Housing and Hospitality Services should provide designated locations on campus to be controlled as self-isolation units. UBC should then actively reach out to ensure this student has an established support network during self-isolation.

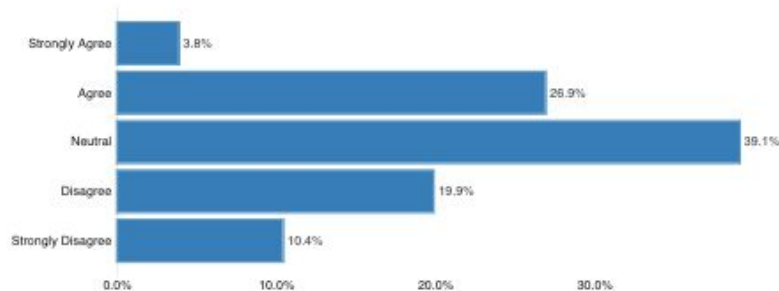
### Maintaining Clear and Timely Communications

In these challenging times, inboxes are flooded with mass emails with updates of COVID-19, from various sources with constantly changing information, while students remain uncertain about what their fall semester will look like. It is important to ensure that all communications regarding important UBC updates are reaching all members of the student body in an efficient manner.

To counteract this problem, we recommend aligning social media platform communications with UBC Broadcast emails, so that vital information is conveyed in an easily digestible manner. These social media platforms receive high traffic by students around the world for health and news updates in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

Q13.10 - I feel comforted by the updates from UBC on how they are proceeding with COVID-19.

Asked to all students



Field	Choice Count
Strongly Agree	131
Agree	920
Neutral	1,338
Disagree	680
Strongly Disagree	355
Total	3424

Figure 4: COVID-19 Impacts on UBC Students, conducted by UBC PAIR, AMS & GSS

For clear communication, there should be clear expectations and consistency between all Faculties' distillation emails. Every Faculty should communicate so that students have a clear idea of what the upcoming school year may look like for them, and whether it may be offered remotely or which classes they will need to be in person for. For many students, the information regarding



whether their courses will be offered online will affect many other factors of student life and experience, such as whether a student will need to search for housing or if they are able to work.

## **Preservation of Student Priorities**

COVID-19 further exacerbates concerns around accessibility, student involvement, career development, mental health concerns, and limits the over student experience. We ask that as UBC evaluates its financial situation, that it gives consideration to these priorities.

## **Orientations and the First Year Experience**

We hope to see the continuation of the Orientations and First Year Experience, and that the appropriate amount of funding is provided to these valuable transition programs. The amount of effort put forward into Orientations and FYE programs is essential to providing a sense of community and support for incoming students, undergoing a difficult transition into a remote learning university.

We are disappointed to hear the potential closure of first year residence, and the subsequent loss of community and employment opportunities for student staff members as a result. We understand the potential measures that must be put into place to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and maintain that orientations and peer student leader programs should still be provided in order to best support incoming students' wellbeing. We are excited to see the work the Orientations Steering Committee has put into providing an exciting new online Orientations and First Year Experience, in light of the given circumstance.

## **Capital Projects: Development of Healthcare, Transit, and Learning Infrastructure**

We recognize the amount of capital that is required to successfully transition to the new online learning atmosphere and campus life. The AMS has highlighted healthcare, teaching and learning, and transit infrastructure for the Board of Governors to consider as key student priorities when considering.

As we face this public health crisis, prioritizing healthcare infrastructure such as the Gateway building and UBC Campus Emergency Response Team, will be essential. The health ramifications, whether mental or physical health, of SARS-CoV will have lasting impact on the increase or development of chronic conditions within the student population. By prioritizing healthcare infrastructure on UBC campus, we will be able to respond to the outcomes of this pandemic and any future health challenges within our community.

Teaching and learning facilities should integrate lecture recording capabilities in order to be recorded and remotely uploaded to best accommodate students that are not able to attend physically.

Transit infrastructure will be essential to invest in, and support the RapidTransit system. Working with TransLink, students, and key stakeholders. As we set our vision for a post-COVID-19 world

and economy, we should plan to create a sustainable transport system, support job creation, and invest in affordable transit for all.

### Work Opportunities and Experiential Learning - WorkLearn and Co-Op

From Impacts of COVID-19 on Postsecondary Students, conducted by Statistics Canada

57% of participants report that their academic work placements or courses were either delayed, postponed, or cancelled.  
Most common disruption of employment (35%) was delay in or cancellation of the students respective work placement.  
Of the participants who planned to continue working at the job they held at the beginning of march, the majority had either lost their job (21%) or had been laid off (34%) two months later.

Q5.2 - Were you laid off from this position as a result of the pandemic?  
Asked to all students

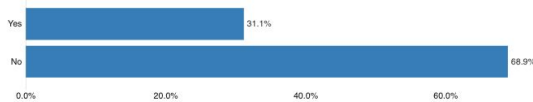


Figure 5.1: From COVID-19 Impacts on UBC Students, conducted by UBC PAIR, AMS & GSS

Q5.1 - Were you employed part-time or full-time during the start of the pandemic in March 2020?  
Asked to all students

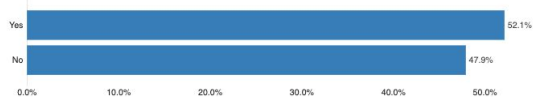


Figure 5.2: From COVID-19 Impacts on UBC Students, conducted by UBC PAIR, AMS & GSS

Many students have reported that they had lost their jobs or witnessed seeing their job prospects dry up. These factors, in combination with the global recession as a result of the worldwide pandemic, create an incredibly daunting economic market for new graduates and current students to be entering as job-seekers.

For WorkLearn and Co-Op positions that have been cancelled as a result of COVID-19, UBC must support the students that may have relied on that income. The funding that was allocated towards WorkLearn and Co-Op positions should continue going towards student priorities in career development.

UBC has a responsibility to support its new graduates and student community. We call on UBC to invest in experiential learning opportunities, skill development, certification courses, WorkLearn and Co-Op programs.

### Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources

According to a Statistics Canada report released in April 2020, Canadians report lower self-perceived mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. With mental health challenges on the rise due to this global pandemic, it is important for the university to take action on creating remote counselling and wellbeing infrastructure, as well as promoting the academic support services available for students who are struggling. This includes raising awareness so that those who are struggling with their courses may seek accommodations or support through their Academic Advising office or the Centre of Accessibility. The University must work on providing remote, freely available, and accessible mental health and wellbeing resources.

Q8.7 - This pandemic has had an overall negative impact on the status of my mental health and wellbeing.  
Asked to all students

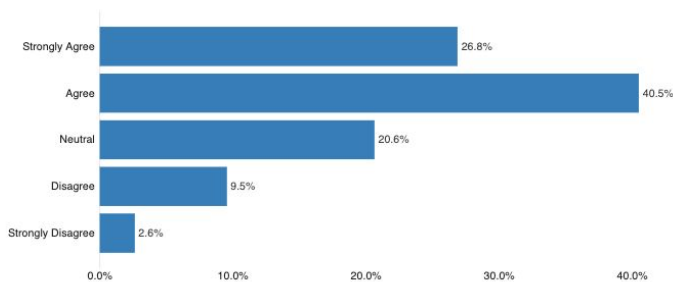


Figure 6: From COVID-19 Impacts on UBC Students, conducted by UBC PAIR, AMS & GSS

It is important to ensure that mental health support services available are culturally appropriate and cater to the diverse communities at UBC, including Indigenous student support services, LGBTQ+ resources, women centered support services, and support for international students residing outside of Canada during the course of their studies.

Rates of domestic and intimate partner violence have increased due to the mandated 'stay at home' measures. As we address how COVID-19 impacts the different intersections of gender and oppression, it is important to provide increased resources on domestic violence. As well as consider education by providing more training for the UBC Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office to share resources and support services to this vulnerable community.

We recommend for the Board of Governors to consider accessibility to these support services by international students, as there are limited mental health services and counselling options that are currently offering support to students abroad due to licensing regulations in students' respective countries.

The University should maintain the momentum on the Food Security Initiative, in acknowledgement of how food insecurity has heightened due to the COVID-19 pandemic and continue funding the AMS Foodbank.

## **Academic Equity and Access**

### **Ensuring Technological Equity**

For many students continuing their studies remotely and online, they will have differing access to working internet, quality computers, and technological access. It should be a priority within course design that students should have access to their course materials, from wherever they are located in the world. For example, instead of having to stream a video in real time, a student would be able to download it and watch it another time.

Promoting the UBC Library Technology Endowment Fund will improve access for students who are otherwise unable to access adequate technology, including shipping costs and set up costs. Ensuring that students have access to a platform through which they are able to learn effectively, is a crucial step in bridging the gap in academic equity.

### **Accessibility in the Online Classroom and Compassionate Academic Practices**

The pandemic has left a drastic mark on students' wellbeing and usual routine. In acknowledgement of the situation with many students travelling home, having a sudden shift in routine, having loved ones affected by COVID-19, it is vital for the University administrators to create a culture of compassion within academic practices.

In the transfer to remote learning in Winter Term 2, many students who identify as disabled may be left behind. Course instructors should be endeavouring to incorporate accessibility and with disabled students in mind within the design of their course and assessments, in coordination with the Centre for Accessibility.

UBC must endeavour towards creating an equitable experience for all students, regardless of where they are located in the world or how their course content is being delivered.

### **Prioritization of Open Educational Resource Development**

The shift to online learning has presented a unique challenge, due to the shortage of resources available for online learning and assessment. This is particularly evident within the large first year courses that cannot be taught in person.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, UBC students reported that they were spending \$884.00 on textbooks per year in the Academic Experience Survey conducted by the AMS. Under COVID-19, students face extraordinary financial hardship. Students who are already struggling with finances have limitations on their ability to learn, due to the economic barriers posed by COVID-19 and the costs of textbooks. When considering the financial situation of students and the future of online learning, we call on the University to allocate funding towards the development of the Open Educational Resources.

The development of Open Educational Resources supplements the aforementioned point regarding Accessibility in the Classroom and Technological Equity. For international students who

are unable to purchase physical copies due to shipping restrictions and costs, Open Educational Resources allow students to access digital copies. This reduces the amount of work that is required of instructors to develop specific online material, and reduces the costs to students, as OERs are sustainable and freely available.

Prioritizing Open Educational Resource development will showcase UBC's ability to be an academic leader in resource development during a time when many students and universities are struggling to adapt to online learning.

For further reading, please refer to December 5, 2019 Board Submission on Open Educational Practices at UBC.

## References

For further reading, please visit:

Undergraduates of Research Intensive Universities. [Gaps in Post Secondary Student Support During COVID-19](#) (2020)

Statistics Canada. [How are Post Secondary Students Impacted by COVID-19?](#) (2020)

Usher A. [An Open Letter to Provosts and Presidents - HESA](#) (2020)

[REPORT TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS - OPEN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES](#) (2019)