

## OPEN TEXTBOOK LANDSCAPE SURVEY REPORT: UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

by Bianca Masuku

### Introduction

Open textbooks are digital, free to use and openly licensed collections of course-related teaching and learning content published on platforms and in formats that provide affordances for the integration of multimedia and ancillary practice or assessment components. These locally published textbooks present opportunities for inclusive, collaborative authorship strategies. The open licensing aspect also means that these resources can be legally shared and redistributed, both within and beyond the institution.

The Digital Open Textbooks for Development (DOT4D) project in the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching at the University of Cape Town (UCT) aims to better understand the affordances of open textbook publishing for supporting openly licensed, localised content development approaches that address curriculum transformation and cost alleviation – both at UCT and at other South African higher education institutions (HEIs).

This report presents findings from the DOT4D landscape survey. As the first open textbook initiative at UCT, there was a project imperative to survey the institutional open textbook publishing terrain in order to gain a sense of current open textbook production and publication activity taking place within the university. The aim was also to produce an openly licensed baseline dataset on open textbook activity which can be utilised in further research and advocacy activity.

### Method

This landscape survey utilised a desktop review approach combined with selective consultation with key boundary partners in order to produce a comprehensive list of open textbooks published at UCT.

The desktop review component comprised online searches of the OpenUCT<sup>1</sup> and ZivaHub<sup>2</sup> institutional repositories through searching the keywords 'textbook' and 'open textbook' in the resource title, abstract and metadata. The repository search was followed by a Google search using the keywords 'textbook' and 'open textbook' to capture resources that might have been missed within the OpenUCT and ZivaHub search. The Google search surfaced additional resources in Vula (the UCT learning management system [LMS]), the UCT Libraries Continental Platform<sup>3</sup>, and alternative websites. This desktop review component was conducted over two cycles. The initial cycle was in 2019<sup>4</sup> and this was followed by a second cycle in 2021<sup>5</sup>, in which the same online searches of the institutional repositories stated above were conducted in order to confirm resources that were originally found and to surface new resources that had been produced in the interim.

<sup>1</sup> <https://open.uct.ac.za/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://zivahub.uct.ac.za/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://openbooks.uct.ac.za/uct/catalog>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bit.ly/36Ls0jM>

<sup>5</sup> <https://bit.ly/3exUAcS>

The Digital Open Textbooks for Development (DOT4D) is a research, advocacy and implementation initiative based in the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT) at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Initiated in 2018, the project aims to develop a baseline dataset of open textbook publishing at UCT that can be built on in further open education research and implementation activity.

The consultation with key boundary partners entailed conversation with colleagues who were open education advocates and practitioners, in order to draw on their institutional knowledge of published resources.

Details of the open textbooks identified in the online search were captured in a processing spreadsheet with the following fields: type of resource; author(s) and author affiliation; who by whom the resource was compiled; year; findability; peer review and quality assurance processes; inclusion of multimedia, and shareability of the resource; possibility of annotation; platform in which the resource was housed; findability of the resource through URL links; publisher; whether the resource is public and open access; whether URL links are active; the copyright and licencing on the resource; format and print functionality; and usage data.

It is possible that there are other UCT-authored textbooks on platforms which we have not been able to identify; and that there are other kinds of resources (not immediately identifiable to us as textbooks) which are being used as textbooks, such as reference works and manuals.

## Findings

This section presents select findings from the UCT open textbook landscape survey, which were notable to the DOT4D project. The complete data processing spreadsheet can be accessed for exploration of other data fields.<sup>6</sup>

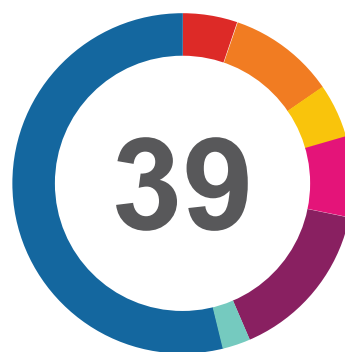
<sup>6</sup> <https://bit.ly/3exUAcS>

### Number of resources found



- Centre for Higher Education Development: 7
- Commerce: 5
- Engineering and the Built Environment: 3
- Health Sciences: 11
- Humanities: 4
- Law: 3
- Science: 6

### Types of resources found



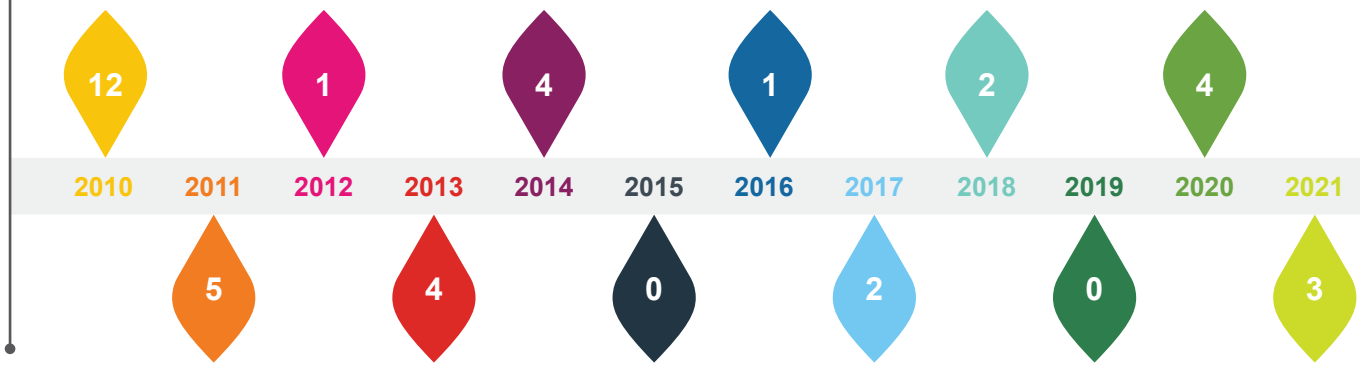
- Atlas: 2
- Book: 4
- E-book: 2
- Lecture notes/outline: 3
- Manual: 6
- Monograph: 1
- Textbook: 21

### Evidence of quality assurance

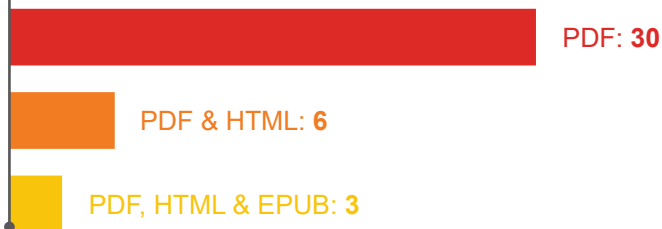


Peer review and quality assurance statements: 27

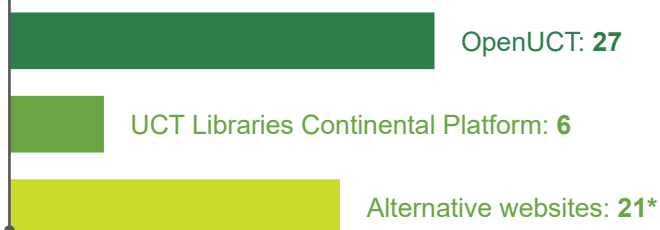
## Outputs by year of publication



## Format



## Dissemination platforms



\* Resources duplicated on other platforms in addition to OpenUCT and UCT Libraries Continental Platform

## Creative Commons licensing



CC BY: 11  
 CC BY-NC-SA: 9  
 CC BY-NC: 7  
 CC BY-NC-ND: 6  
 CC BY-SA: 4  
 CC BY-ND: 2

## Summary of insights

The landscape survey revealed that there were (at least) 39 open textbooks published by UCT authors in the period 2010–2021, and that there was uneven distribution of open textbook output across different faculties.

The resources surveyed revealed varied authorship approaches, including solo authorship and collaborative co-authorship, as well as some instances of inter-institutional collaboration.

The UCT open textbook landscape survey revealed some similarities, but also a great deal of difference, between the 39 textbooks found. The following insights emerged from an exploration of the resources identified.

# 1

## Insight 1: Open textbooks can be tricky to define

The varied types of resources that were explored within the landscape survey surfaced questions in relation to what can be classified as an 'open textbook'. The resources were identified in different ways by their authors (e.g. as e-books, textbooks, manuals, guides and lecture notes). In some instances, the metadata parameters of hosting platforms also played a role in determining how a resource was identified at source.

Filtering by degree of 'technological sophistication' or of open licensing was also tricky, as resources were published in varied formats (predominantly PDF); and were sometimes hosted in platforms which dictated licensing and access. The presence of a Creative Commons (CC) licence, rather than a particular variant of a CC licence, was the only requirement considered necessary for inclusion in this survey.

These factors highlight definitional tensions around the concept of 'open textbooks' and the different ways in which authors of these resources are perceiving and defining the resources they are producing.

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** The definition of an 'open textbook' is malleable and varied, but there is a basic requirement for open licensing (as with any other open educational resources).

# 2

## Insight 2: There is evidence of quality assurance

The survey revealed 27 instances in which peer review processes by external reviewers and editors were acknowledged. These statements were typically in the 'Acknowledgements' section of the book.

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** There is evidence of quality assurance mechanisms being adopted in open textbook creation processes at UCT.

# 3

## Insight 3: Spike in textbook publication date aligns with institutional effort to make open educational resources more visible

More open textbooks were published at UCT in the year 2010 (12 of 39), than in any of the following years. The 2010 'spike' aligns with the period in which there were significant resources invested in promoting and publishing open educational resources at UCT. This was also the year in which the UCT OpenContent portal was launched. The metadata captured for these resources at this time (along with the actual resources) were later migrated to the OpenUCT repository.

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** There was a spike in open textbook publication in 2010, which aligns with institutional efforts to promote open educational resources.

## 4

### Insight 4: Resources are mostly PDFs

The resources surveyed are in varied formats that allow for different levels of access and usage. The resources have predominantly been published in PDF format, with varying amounts of images and other graphic material included. These resources are downloadable and offer print capabilities, but are limited in terms of integrating multimedia, dynamic tools and software to enhance the student learning experience.

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Resources are mostly published in PDF format with limited multimedia and interactivity.

## 5

### Insight 5: Multiple versions across multiple platforms

The survey revealed that numerous (21 of 39) UCT open textbooks were hosted on more than one platform, with OpenUCT and the UCT Libraries Continental Platform being the primary host environments. In addition to these institutionally curated spaces, UCT lecturers also shared their textbooks on Vula, departmental and other websites (including those of external publishers). The links to alternative websites listed in primary platform metadata did, however, frequently not work.

In instances where resources were hosted on both institutional and external publishing websites, there were varied forms of access (i.e. sign-in versus click through), depending on which link of the resource you were using. There were also varied terms of use, in that external publishing websites dictated licensing.

The multiple platforms utilised had varying degrees of usage data available to indicate how, where and by whom the resources were being used.

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Multiple versions of resources on different hosting platforms have different degrees of accessibility.

## Conclusion

The DOT4D survey of institutional open textbook publishing activity at UCT in 2019 indicated that a number of academics were engaging in open textbook publishing. The 2021 survey indicated that academics continue to produce resources.

The survey revealed interesting insights in terms of the widely divergent definitions of what an 'open textbook' is, and the wide range of features or considerations associated with their use, such as granularity, format, quality, mode, tools and community.

This landscape survey provides insight into what is currently happening at UCT in terms of open textbook production and provides a foundation for other work that can build on this preliminary analysis.

#### How to cite this resource:

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