

Course marking practices for free, low cost, and open course materials at post-secondary institutions in Canada

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Overview

- Introduction to course marking
- Overview of the survey
- Findings
 - Institutions with course marking
 - Institutions without course marking
- Next steps
- Q&A

What is course marking?

Course marking: The process of assigning specific, searchable attributes to courses.¹

Cost indicators: Cost indicators (also referred to as course markings) identify attributes of a course, such as:

- Zero Textbook Cost
- Low Textbook Cost
- Using OER
- Using free library content²

¹ Hare, S., Kirschner, J., & Reed, M. (Eds.) (2020). *Marking Open and Affordable Courses: Best Practices and Case Studies*. Mavs Open Press. <https://uta.pressbooks.pub/markinopenandaffordablecourses/>

² Bccampus (2026). *Cost Indicators Project*. BCcampus. <https://bccampus.ca/projects/cost-indicators/>

Example of course marking (KPU)

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☐	ENGL 1100 L17 33796 Introduction to University Writing	3	Langley	Lecture	Open	25	Betty Anne Buirs
♦ Class : Sep 04, 2018 to Dec 03, 2018 — Thu @ 13:00 - 15:50 in room Langley, East 2590							
♦ Final exam : Dec 13, 2018 to Dec 13, 2018 — Thu @ 12:00 - 15:00 in room Langley, East 2590							
More Info: This course section has ZERO TEXTBOOK COSTS. For information about programs that you can complete with zero required textbook costs, visit ZedCred .							
☐	ENGL 1100 S11 33820 Introduction to University Writing	3	Surrey	Lecture	Open	25	Gillian Dearle
♦ Class : Sep 04, 2018 to Dec 03, 2018 — Mon @ 10:00 - 12:50 in room Surrey, Cedar 2005							
♦ Final exam : Dec 10, 2018 to Dec 10, 2018 — Mon @ 08:30 - 11:30 in room							
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☐	ENGL 1100 S13 33867 Introduction to University Writing	3	Surrey	Lecture	Open	25	Gillian Dearle
♦ Class : Sep 04, 2018 to Dec 03, 2018 — Mon @ 16:00 - 18:50 in room Surrey, Fir 322							
♦ Final exam : Dec 10, 2018 to Dec 10, 2018 — Mon @ 15:30 - 18:30 in room Surrey, Fir 322							
More Info: This course section has ZERO TEXTBOOK COSTS. For information about programs that you can complete with zero required textbook costs, visit ZedCred .							
☐	ENGL 1100 S15 33807 Introduction to University Writing	3	Surrey	Lecture	Open	25	Paul Tyndall
♦ Class : Sep 04, 2018 to Dec 03, 2018 — Tue @ 10:00 - 12:50 in room Surrey, Fir 322							
♦ Final exam : Dec 11, 2018 to Dec 11, 2018 — Tue @ 08:30 - 11:30 in room Surrey, Fir 322							
More Info: This course section has ZERO TEXTBOOK COSTS. For information about programs that you can complete with zero required textbook costs, visit ZedCred .							

Current environment

- Findings of the OER Course Marking Landscape Analysis Survey (Midwestern Higher Education Compact, 2023)
- Minister's revised directive on the costs of educational materials to publicly assisted colleges and universities (Ontario)
 - Each publicly assisted college and university shall ensure that students are informed of the costs of all textbooks and other learning materials that are mandatory and optional in the course syllabus for each course.
 - Effective for all courses beginning in or after January 2025
- BCcampus Cost Indicators Project (2025-2028)
 - "BCcampus is offering funding to public post-secondary institutions in B.C. and the Yukon to support the implementation or expansion of cost indicators."
 - Developing a toolkit to support institutions in implementation

Research Questions

- How common is course marking as a practice in Canadian post-secondary institutions?
- What individuals/units, processes, and systems are involved in course marking at Canadian post-secondary institutions?
- How are course marking data shared with students at Canadian post-secondary institutions?



About the survey

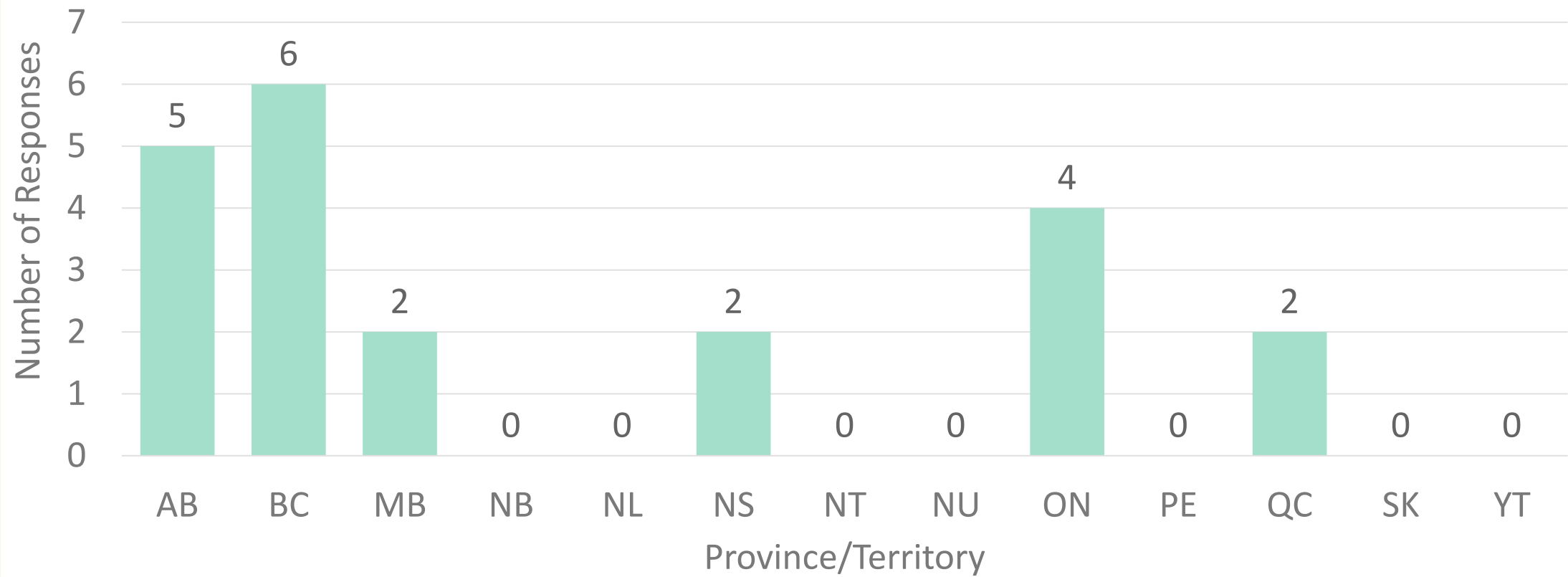
- Survey instrument adapted from [MHEC course marking survey](#)
- Survey and recruitment materials available in both English and French
- Distributed to various email lists and newsletters related to open education, librarianship
- Data collected using LimeSurvey in November/December 2025
- Approximately 15 minutes to complete

Responses

- Received 26 total responses
- Removed 1 response that appeared to be someone who wanted to review the survey questions before answering (all answers “n/a” or “not sure”)
- Received multiple responses from 3 institutions
 - Condensed these into one response for each institution
 - Some discrepancies between answers, I’ll note anytime this happens
- Analyzed data for 21 post-secondary institutions in Canada

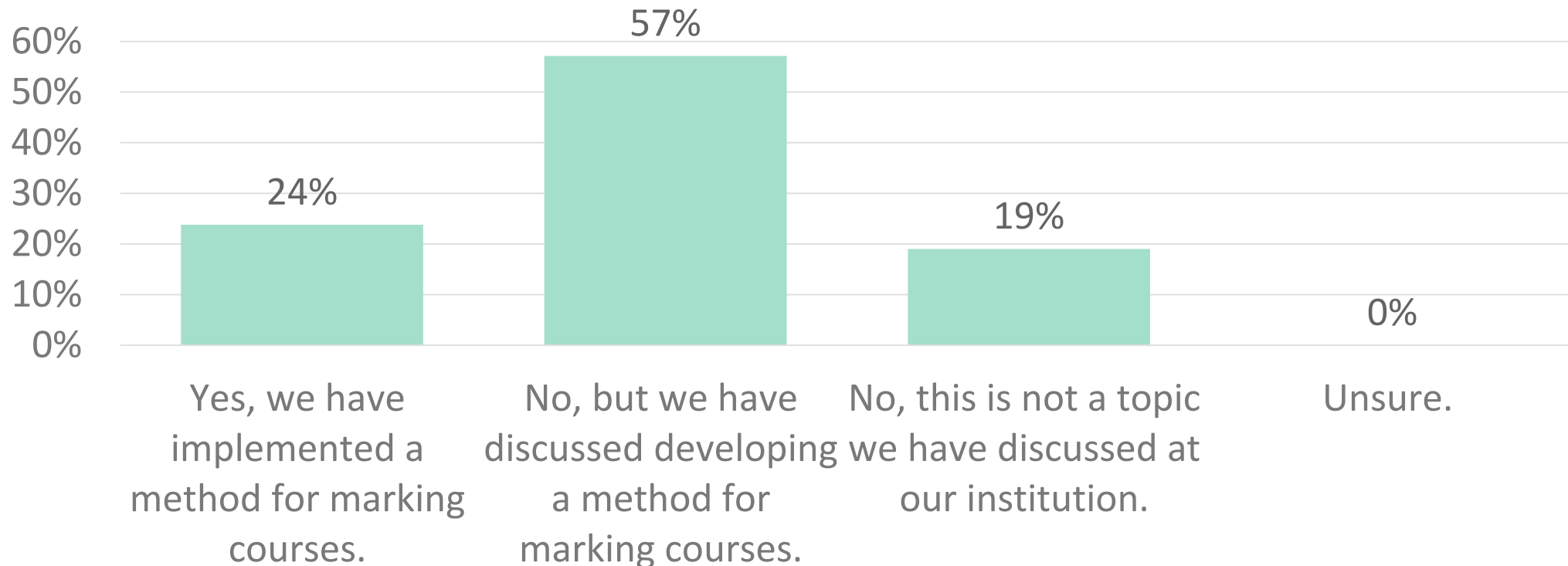
Province/Territories represented

In which province or territory is your institution located?



Prevalence of course marking

Does your institution have a method for marking courses that use open educational resources (OER), no-cost course materials, and/or low-cost course materials?



Types of course marking programs described

- Course marking system in the institution's student information system for ZTC and/or LTC courses (3 institutions)
- Public-facing website indicates "No-cost textbooks are available for this program" (1 institution)
- Course materials information provided to students in course outlines upon registration in the class (1 institution)

Course marking designations

- No cost to students/Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) (3 institutions)
- Low cost to students/Low Textbook Cost (LTC) (2 institutions)
 - One institution indicated they defined LTC as \$40 or less
- OER (1 institution)
- "No-cost textbooks are available for this program" (1 institution)

What units or individuals are involved in course marking at your institution?

- Faculty (3 institutions)
- Registrar or Scheduling Office(3 institutions)
- Library (2 institutions)
- Bookstore/campus store (1 institution)
- Program Assistants (1 institution)
- Students' Union (1 institution)
- Marketing (1 institution)

How are course marking data shared with students at Canadian post-secondary institutions?

- Registration system (4 institutions)
- Course catalogue (2 institutions)
- Institutional website (2 institutions)
- Guide for students on how to register (1 institution)
- Tabling events for new students (1 institution)

Institutional & Provincial Policies

- The survey asked all respondents about any province-level or institutional policies related to course marking.
- When asked if there is a province-level policy related to course marking, only **one** institution said yes.
- The provincial policy referenced was the [Minister's revised directive on the costs of educational materials to publicly assisted colleges and universities](#) (Ontario).
- When asked if their institution had a policy related to course marking, only **one** institution said yes.

Trends in institutions without course marking

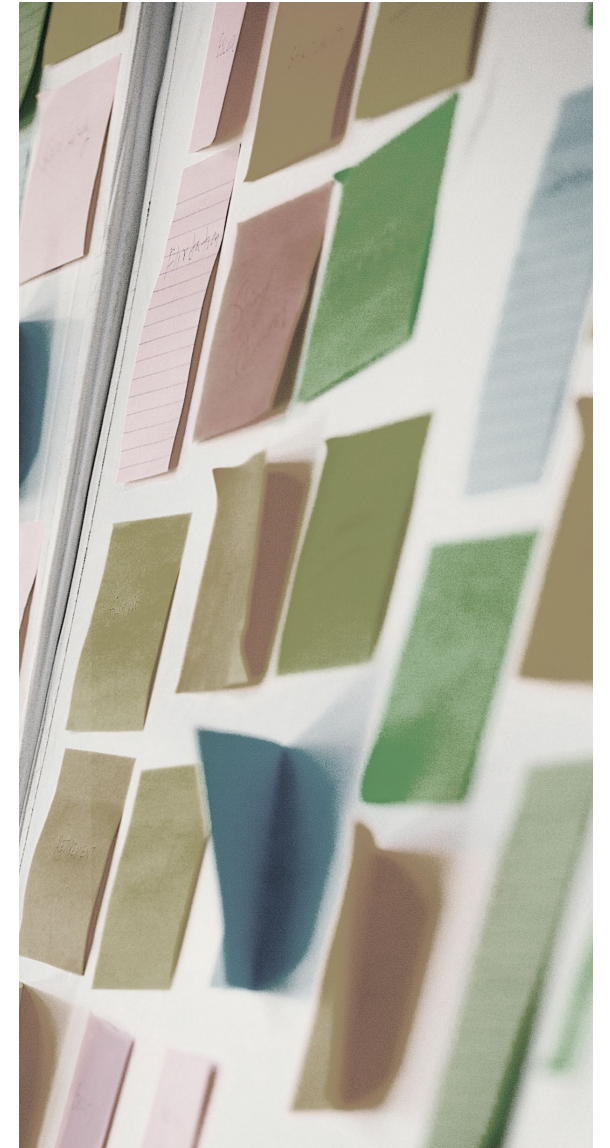
- Two institutions are working on launching course marking
- Two institutions described themselves as being in the “early stages” of considering course marking.
- Several respondents mentioned interest in starting course marking programs but being held back by barriers such as limitations in their current SIS (2), keeping markings up to date (1), and resistance from faculty (1).
- Two institutions mentioned working with or hoping to work with BCcampus on a province-wide course marking project

Limitations

- Findings based on 21 institutions in Canada from 6 provinces
- Institutions where course marking has been implemented or discussed may be over-represented in the results
- Different understandings of what we mean by course marking
- Self-report nature of the survey, relying on the knowledge of the respondent

Next steps

- Writing and submitting a manuscript for publication
- Publishing survey data in McMaster Dataverse
- Sharing at an upcoming CARL Open Education Community of Practice meeting
- Using these results in conversations about affordability and course marking at McMaster



Thank you!

- This project was funded by a CARL Research in Librarianship Grant
- Thanks to Gina Johnson, Jenny Parks, Annika Many, and Liliana Diaz for granting me permission to adapt the survey instrument used in the MHEC course marking survey project.
- Questions? Email me kharding@mcmaster.ca

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