

In response to HB 4058 (2012), the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) convened a workgroup to discuss textbook affordability and submit a legislative report on the findings. Due to the tight timeline associated with the creation of the report the workgroup identified areas for follow-up.

Over the past year, a small workgroup has been engaged in conducting this follow-up. Activities completed by the workgroup include:

- A national literature review and review of current activities in Oregon related to textbook affordability;
- Student Textbook Affordability Survey; and
- Regional Forums.

Several institutions indicated that they are engaged in activities to reduce textbook costs. These include library textbook checkout programs; student textbook exchange consortiums; the development of Open Education Resources (OER) and even the hiring of a statewide OER librarian for the community colleges as part of a one-year grant. In addition, the Oregon Community College Distance Learning Association is currently seeking grant proposals “that implement high-impact, collaborative projects in support of open education and reduced textbook costs for students”.

As a result of the national/statewide review, student survey and regional forums, several promising practices were identified in relation to textbook affordability. These promising practices included:

- Book Buying Consortiums;
- Used Books /Rental Programs;
- Student Book Exchange;
- Fixed Fees; and
- OER

To further examine these practices, a statewide regional forum was held. Attendees spent time conducting a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threat Analysis for each of the promising practices.

SWOT ANALYSIS OF OERS

The primary strength identified included the low-cost of OERs to students. Additional strengths included customization of texts and the ability for OERs to inform pedagogy. Opportunities that were identified include faculty participation in OER development, faculty using their own books, library/faculty interactions and creating an institutional culture for OER use.

While OERs provide many opportunities for textbook cost reduction, they are not without associated weaknesses and threats. Identified weaknesses include that they are not always “free”, students encounter barriers to access without the availability of high-speed internet. Investment of faculty time is needed to gain knowledge of the resources or develop them. In addition, high numbers of part-time faculty make the use of OERs difficult and delivery platforms often pose barriers to OER use. Threats to the use of OERs include the quality of the content and/or the perception of the rigor associated with the materials. The lack of availability of funds to develop and/or research OER content is also a challenge. Many bookstores also contribute to the general fund of an institution, making OER development a form of competition. Alternative formats for students with disabilities were also identified as a potential barrier to their use.

After review of the existing literature and consultation with stakeholders, the workgroup has tentatively identified the following to be considered as part of 'best practices' related to the future utilization of OERs:

- A focus on statewide general education courses (such as those contained in the Oregon Transfer Module¹) should be considered as the starting area for statewide OER development;
- Cross-institutional faculty engagement should be encouraged to support the increased use of Oregon OERs;
- Quality peer review should be included in the process associated with the development of OERs;
- Copyright issues should be addressed to ensure “free access”;
- Ensuring American with Disability Act compliance will be vital to the ability for institutions to use OERs;
- Technology barriers such as access to high-speed internet should be considered and addressed.

¹ The Oregon Transfer Module is an approved 45 unit subset of general education courses (foundational skills and introduction to discipline courses) that are common among Oregon's colleges and universities.