

HB 2213 Hearing for House Higher Education Committee

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Slides:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1cTFIUdibOzOiFFFOJlzjlcOG7rngg_vtG4xV6iBWFwk/e/dit?usp=sharing

Senator Wagner, members of the committee, my name is Amy Hofer, Coordinator, Statewide Open Education Library Services, Linn-Benton Community College. Thank you for having me today. I'm going to provide some background on why HB 2213 is needed to make higher education more accessible to Oregon's students.

We have a problem: textbooks cost so much that students can't afford to buy them anymore.

Textbook prices go up about 6% every year - much faster than the consumer price index, and even faster than industries that we think of as high inflation, such as housing and medicine.

Students, of course, have developed a variety of strategies to cope with costs. These are some of the legal coping mechanisms that we see.

There are also institutional strategies. Bookstore managers in particular have been leaders in finding ways to get costs down. Faculty and librarians have also shown creativity in using free or library resources as course materials. Each of these low-cost solutions helps students because every dollar counts.

Open Educational Resources are different from all of these strategies, because they solve the root cause of the cost problem by using open licenses in addition to traditional copyright. Faculty can download the material, tailor it to their learning outcomes, and share it back out with attribution, all without violating copyright. This gives faculty a lot more control over the quality of their course materials than with a traditional publisher textbook. The open license gives permission to redistribute for free online or in print at low cost.

If we look at overall cost of attendance in the state, we can see that the cost of textbooks is a relatively small slice of the pie, especially compared to housing costs. According to the HECC snapshot, books and supplies are about 7% of the total, approximately \$1400 of the total \$19,000. Why should we focus on this small dollar amount?

Research shows that what might be considered a small dollar amount can have an outsize impact on completion, and that \$1400 can be an emergency that causes a student to drop out. An analysis of over 700 Emergency Aid Programs, intended to keep students in school, defines an emergency as an unexpected need of under \$1500. What this chart shows is that most types of emergency aid are likely to be for dollar amounts of \$100-\$500. Saving this seemingly small amount of money can prevent the kinds of emergencies that arise when you don't have a financial cushion and therefore have an impact on retention.

Oregon has used legislation to help solve the problem of unaffordable textbooks since 2015. I was originally hired on the recommendation of the Oregon Community College Distance Learning Association, out of the Community College Support Fund. House Bill 2871 went into effect for the 15-17 biennium. One of its provisions was that all public colleges and universities designate no-cost and low-cost courses in course schedules. For the current biennium, HB 2729 allocates more faculty grant funding,

and combines my position in the colleges with also working with the 7 public universities, among other activities.

These efforts are consolidated under Open Oregon Educational Resources, which promotes textbook affordability for community college and university students and facilitates widespread adoption of open, low-cost, high-quality materials. You can visit the openoregon.org website for more information showcasing what's happening across the state.

Investing in affordable textbooks has a high return for students. For example, statewide funding supports grants for faculty to redesign their courses. Student returns vary but on average, in the program from the 2015-17 biennium, I found that students saved \$4 for every program dollar spent in the first year of the change. Savings compound over time as more students enroll in the redesigned courses.

I've also done research that shows that between 2015 and 2017, average course materials costs for three of the most common transfer degrees in Oregon's colleges has fallen by about 15%. The tiny yellow bar shows the lowest possible cost pathway through the AAOT degree requirements. If you took that pathway your schedule would look very strange, but it is a proof of concept that demonstrates both the real impact of faculty choices and also the importance of prominently designating courses in the class schedule to make the savings information readily available to students. This drop in costs correlates with the statewide funding made available through HB 2871 and HB 2729.

These are just a few of our college and university mission statements, and they are representative. It's not a stretch to see how affordable textbooks align with existing institutional goals around access and student success.

Thank you, any questions?