



Higher Education Open Educational Resources (OER) Grant Pilot Program

Report to the Legislature as required by RCW 28B.10.819
December 2019

Executive Summary

Open educational resources reduce costs for students

The 2018 Washington State Legislature directed the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to create and administer an open educational resources (OER) grant pilot program for the state's public four-year institutions of higher education (IHEs) [Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1561 (section 1)]. The intent is to expand OER use, thereby reducing students' cost of attendance.

Open educational resources means freely accessible, openly licensed educational textbooks, documents, materials, and media that reside in the public domain for free use and repurposing for the intention of teaching, learning, assessing, and researching.

The goal of the grant program was to determine the savings to students when faculty and campuses are provided a financial incentive and support to transform curriculum materials from heavy reliance on commercial textbooks into free or low-cost OER course materials.

WSAC provided \$36,000 each to Western Washington University and Central Washington University to fund faculty stipends and a campus coordinator. This small investment facilitated the adoption of new OER course materials with anticipated associated savings to students of \$748,117 during the 2019-20 academic year.

The projects not only increased the capacity to build OER in specific courses funded by this grant, but also influenced the development of OER in other courses the faculty teach. Further, it influenced other non-participating faculty colleagues to consider adopting OER into their curricula.

WSAC reached out to several states around the concept of establishing a multistate OER network that would provide a platform for peer review, coordinating, and sharing of OER. Most states already engage with one of several well-established OER networks and communities of practice. This report includes descriptions of the networks most often referenced in conversations with other states.

This report summarizes several issues that continue to challenge broader adoption of OER. WSAC found that viable nationwide OER networks already exist, and our colleagues in other states are actively using them. There is support for a new multistate OER network or initiatives to address funding that would support broader adoption and sustainability, and shared technology to support institutional capacity and collaboration.

Overview of the Legislation

In 2019, Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) created and administered an open educational resources (OER) pilot grant program. This report summarizes the number of grant proposals WSAC received and awarded, and how the participating institutions of higher education (IHEs) used the grants to expand their OER use. It also describes WSAC's outreach to other states and summarizes their feedback on the concept of establishing a multistate OER network platform for peer review, coordinating, and sharing of OER.

Pilot Grant Program

The pilot grant program aims to reduce the cost of education for postsecondary students by supporting Washington's six public, four-year IHEs in their efforts to replace high-cost textbooks with high-quality OER. The goal that emerged of the grant funding was to seed development of OER at the IHEs, anticipating these faculty would use OER in more of their courses and assist other faculty in developing OER for their courses.

WSAC received four proposals from the following in response to its Call for Proposals posted in November 2018:

- Central Washington University (CWU)
- Western Washington University (WWU)
- Eastern Washington University (EWU)
- Washington State University (WSU)

In January 2019, WSAC's review panel selected two institutions, CWU and WWU, based on highest estimated cost reduction to students and greatest potential impact on building faculty skills in adapting OER for use in course materials.

WSAC divided the total grant funding of \$72,000 evenly, awarding each grantee \$36,000 to be used on faculty stipends and a campus coordinator. The IHEs created or adopted their OER-related programs on or before August 31, 2019, and reported their

results to WSAC on September 30, 2019, providing a description of how they used the grants to expand OER use at their respective institutions, beginning in academic year 2019-20.

Table 1 summarizes the anticipated student savings on course materials in academic year 2019-20 as a result of this grant program.

Table 1. Estimated Student Savings in Course Materials (Academic Year 2019-2020)

	CWU	WWU	Total
Enrollment in courses with OER	5,205	3,500	8,705
Course material savings	\$476,162	\$271,955	\$748,117
Average savings per student	\$91.48	\$77.70	\$85.95
Courses now using OER from grant work	26	5	31

How Grants Expand OER Use

Both institutions used some grant funds on faculty stipends to incentivize OER use. The stipends served to compensate faculty for their time and effort to adopt existing courses or author new course materials. In addition, each institution used grant funds to build capacity by funding a campus coordinator who provided leadership and guidance on OER development and adaptations. Each institution's grant activities are described below.

WWU

WWU had already been offering summer OER workshops for the past several years with demonstrated success. Grant funds allowed WWU to offer the workshops to more faculty. The WWU project boosted the awareness and adoption of OERs among seven faculty across various disciplines, transforming five different courses. Faculty participated in an established faculty development program that focuses on course transformation and instructional design.

Participating faculty reported the following positive benefits from this training:

- Easier ability to organize course content.
- Improved quality in teaching materials.
- Increased ability to update future course materials.
- Increased subject area knowledge from the process of building textbooks.

The grant also provided stipends to faculty members to create OER in different formats.

The campus coordinator, in addition to working with faculty on gathering textbook options and compiling selected materials, distributed promotional materials to communicate the benefits of OER. This included a new public website ([Open Educational Resources at WWU](#)), an OER Practices Toolkit, posters, flyers, and teaching methodology idea cards.

Participation in the grant resulted in the adoption of seven new OER texts for use in five courses, including:

- Political theory readers (for two versions of the same class).
- Management textbooks (one for online delivery, one for blended delivery).
- Online and interactive computer science textbook.
- Interactive music history textbook.
- Repository of technical writing documents to be used departmentally.

An estimated 3,500 students will take a course in the 2019-20 academic year that uses an OER textbook or course materials funded by this grant, and students will collectively save \$271,955 in course materials. The new OER courses will be Z-courses, a term used for courses without fees for course materials.

CWU

CWU introduced OER into its newly established general education framework classes, which often require the purchase of expensive textbooks. Grants funds helped CWU build toward its goal to create pathways through the newly established general education framework in which a student does not have to purchase a textbook.

To meet CWU's graduation requirement, a student must take one course in each of seven areas of knowledge in the framework, as well as a first-year experience course, first-level academic writing course, quantitative reasoning course, and a culminating experience. CWU staff identified 26 courses in the framework where significant textbook savings would greatly benefit its students. Many of these courses use expensive textbooks. By offering at least 11 courses that use OER—one in each knowledge area and one in each of the four other specific areas—a student could complete the framework without spending money on textbooks.

The grant provided stipends to faculty members to modify their course curriculum and adapt OER materials in place of current costly textbooks. Under the leadership of CWU Libraries staff, 26 faculty participants who teach classes in the general education framework met with a campus coordinator and course designer to break down the learning outcomes for the course and review materials to see if there are existing OER to achieve the required learning outcomes. This included reviewing course materials from available OER textbooks, professional association websites, YouTube videos, scholarly articles, and government resources.

With this grant, 26 courses in the general education framework will begin using OER textbooks and course materials, creating various pathways through the framework where many of the courses have no textbook cost—a goal CWU is still working toward.

CWU estimated 5,205 students will save in the range of \$353,505 to \$598,818 (median \$476,162) on course materials in the 2019-20 academic year. CWU considered that students can acquire course materials from a variety of vendors, and therefore provided the low and high costs of those materials in their estimate of savings to students.

CWU reported the following positive outcomes that will expand the use of OER resulting from this grant funding:

- Professors who received stipends to change over their courses to OER realized the importance of OER and began adopting OER in other courses they were teaching as well.
- With the adoption of OER in so many general education courses, other teaching faculty are being positively influenced by their colleagues to consider using OER.
- The bookstore is working with library services to identify courses in the student scheduler that have no textbook cost.
- CWU leadership anticipates this transformative path of using OER in the general education courses will continue for many years and the savings will multiply for the students.
- Staff is working with departments across its campus to create majors with no textbook cost so that students can complete an entire degree at CWU with no textbook costs.

Outreach to Other States: Multistate OER Network

As directed by the legislation, WSAC explored “whether there is interest in establishing a multistate OER network to facilitate and establish a platform for peer review, coordinating, and sharing of OER.”

This section recaps the feedback WSAC received through outreach to other states on this concept.

Methodology

WSAC contacted several state higher education agencies that referred us to their statewide OER leaders and subject matter experts. WSAC exchanged initial emails and then met either in person or via conference call with OER leaders throughout 2019.

WSAC staff reached out to experts affiliated with the following organizations, inquiring about their interest in and need for a multistate OER network:

- Higher education agencies and affiliated state agencies in six states: Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Rhode Island, and Texas.
- IHEs in Washington State: CWU, WWU, University of Washington, and Pierce College District.
- Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.
- OER networks: Driving OER Sustainability for Student Success (DOERS³) Collaborative, and Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources (CCCOER).

WSAC explored with other states the need for a **multistate OER network**. We defined the new network as a platform for peer reviewing, coordinating, and sharing of OER. We suggested the network might have these attributes:

1. Contain curated OER materials.
2. Offer curation of submitted OER materials.
3. Maintain a repository of scholarly (peer-reviewed) materials and textbooks.
4. Promote and nurture a community of OER developers and users.

Feedback from other states and Washington IHEs

This section provides a summary of the common themes that emerged from the feedback collected through our outreach.

Viable networks already exist

While each statewide OER leader expressed value for a cross-state collaboration, they each actively use networks that already exist. Throughout the nation, there are multiple networks with curated and non-curated collections or that support a community of practice. At least half of the feedback from our conversations focused on the viability and usefulness of the existing networks that other states already utilize.

WSAC lists here the existing networks most often referenced in our conversations. Following is a description of those OER networks, and a few comments made about each.

Actively used networks

Driving OER Sustainability for Student Success (DOERS³) Collaborative

Many state leaders participated in DOERS³'s first convening in Texas where the focus was sustainability and support for system-wide efforts in the movement toward greater use of OER. DOERS³ is a relatively new network, but state leaders expressed optimism about its effectiveness in bringing together OER leaders throughout the nation.

DOERS³ is a community of practice network where participants create and freely share, in virtual communities, knowledge based on experiences at their institutions with other OER adopters. Its goal is advancing the design of effective open educational practices and policies that promote its adoption. DOERS³ maintains an active listserv with which many of the other states engage.

DOERS³ was launched in 2018 by the University System of Maryland, in collaboration with City University of New York and State University of New York, as a multistate collaborative made up of public higher education systems and state- and province-wide OER organizations.

Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources (CCCOER)

Several states mentioned their statewide leaders' familiarity with and participation in CCCOER.

CCCOER is a national consortium of community and technical colleges committed to expanding access to education and increasing student success through adoption of open educational policy, practices, and resources. It builds community through convenings and an active listserv. It also offers resources to learn about the evolving practice of open education, as well as to develop and use OER, especially open textbooks, in community college courses.

CCCOER membership includes hundreds of colleges across North America. It is part of the global Open Education Consortium, which promotes and supports open education worldwide.

Open Textbook Network (OTN)

OTN supports the development of high-quality open textbooks in a multitude of subjects, offering a collection of over 350 open textbooks. OTN began as a way to bring the same level of credibility into open publishing as is true of commercial publication. It provides a trusted peer review process, though some statewide leaders said it may not be as rigorous as print publishing.

OTN teaches onsite workshops with member institutions on how to do their own peer review of OER-developed materials. OTN has found that faculty who write an in-depth review of an open textbook are much more likely to adopt the book in their classes.

OTN was created by and is hosted at the University of Minnesota. University of Washington (UW) and Washington State University (WSU) are active members of OTN, and UW has had onsite training in the development and review of OER.

OER Commons

OER Commons provides college-level open textbooks from higher education institutions around the world, and its virtual library contains over 50,000 high-quality OER. OER Commons provides an opportunity to collaborate with other educators and learners who are at the forefront of educational technology and learning. It provides a collection of various open resources, including textbooks, lesson plans, assessments, simulations, diagrams, and more.

The Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME) created and maintains this network.

Other Networks

Statewide OER leaders mentioned other OER networks less often in our conversations, but stated these as important resources in their respective states.

1. Rice University's OpenStax, which claims its textbooks are used in over half of the U.S. colleges and universities. (WSU is an institutional partner.)
2. SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition), which provides training to academic librarians to support faculty in identifying openly licensed educational resources.

Support for new OER network or initiatives

The concept of establishing a new OER network was not immediately supported in our outreach conversations, mainly due to the number of highly effective OER networks already in use. However, statewide leaders would consider joining an OER network

should the State of Washington develop it. The main concern was the cost to participate in a new network.

Statewide leaders in Washington and other states mentioned several specific issues that continue to challenge the wide adoption of OER, and that could be addressed by establishing a new network or by strengthening the existing networks. This section summarizes those comments.

Create a sustainable funding model to support mainstream usage. The greatest frustration expressed by all statewide leaders is the need for sustainable funding for OER—development, training, publication, and usage in the classroom. Most funding currently comes from grants or provisional state funding that has an expiration date. State leaders noted the substantial cost savings for students, especially over time. But the funding needed to make the transition from a relatively grassroots movement to mainstream acceptance and usage is lagging in all states.

Fund a reliable and consistently available publishing platform. A network with a sustainably-funded publishing platform would address some of these needs for supporting and nurturing the OER development at IHEs. The popular publishing platform Pressbooks, an open source platform for OER creation, requires educational institutions to pay an annual subscription fee. IHE's library staff help faculty with OER development, but do not have the capacity to provide support at the level of professional publication provided through commercial publishers. In order to ensure that OER textbooks and course materials are high quality and reliable, faculty need support with peer review, editing, and curating of resources. A network that offers a no-cost publishing platform with a system for vetting those documents would be very popular with OER developers in Washington and other states.

Expand collaborative for peer reviewing of OER developed materials. Concerns about OER quality are widespread, and are often part of the professional development conversations instructional developers have with faculty. For instance, one institution shared that they review existing curated collections internally with faculty experts and use a vetted review rubric as a basis for peer review to determine the suitability and reliability of course materials. State partners believe the value of OER networks could be enhanced by offering peer review options where experts from other IHEs would weigh in on the materials being developed.

Include the development and publication of OER course materials and textbooks in faculty tenure and lecturer evaluations to stimulate greater interest in adopting OER in course curricula. Several states supported the concept of including OER publications in tenure and promotion evaluations. Permitting an OER to count as a published work would be a great motivator for faculty to develop new course materials and texts. It was mentioned that Canada's University of British Columbia has already instituted an OER component in its faculty evaluations. One institution suggested initiating this with the evaluation of lecturers, who are more focused on teaching than on research, as a way to promote OER development.

Build collaborative OER authorship teams across state lines to create Z-degree curricula. All the states we interviewed are interested in developing Z-degree programs of study, where a student can earn a certificate or a diploma without paying for course materials. However, it is a challenge for the states with lower population density to support this kind of program because they don't have the infrastructure or sufficient number of faculty using OER. Many of the states presented and supported the idea of collaborating across universities to create a Z-degree program of study.

Leaders in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana have recently discussed this idea. They mentioned that community colleges have already developed this kind of collaboration and would like to see more of it at the four-year IHEs. Idaho mentioned this as a top priority due to its many rural areas with low population densities. They see this as a way to distribute education more equitably to rural populations. Montana agreed, and mentioned the need to bring private and tribal universities into the collaboration because of their essential role in the educational system. However, there may be funding limitations if public grant funds cannot be used to support private and tribal college initiatives.

Leaders in Rhode Island agreed that a cross-state platform would be helpful in their OER development with more collaboration about use of OER, what it is, and how it can be leveraged (academic freedom and affordability). Using OER more often in upper-level courses is also of interest in Rhode Island.

Suggested reach of new collaborative

While existing networks seem to meet the need for OER collaboration and the sharing of open education documents and textbooks, state leaders suggested a couple of organizational structures in the event that Washington state moves in the direction of establishing a new network. Several of the states located in the western region of the United States suggested initiating a new collaborative network in the western states aligned with organizational structures that already exist. They suggested bringing together member states that are part of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) as a good way to organize a new network. Other states also suggested mimicking the successful UW Medical School Collaborative WWAMI (Washington Wyoming Alaska Montana Idaho) plus Oregon to bring together less populous states that have an expressed need for greater collaboration.

Appendix

WSAC consulted with the following individuals, states, and organizations regarding their interest in a multistate OER network. CWU and WWU provided the results of their grant-funded OER projects.

- Maura Valentino | Central Washington University
- Justina Brown | Western Washington University
- Boyoung Chae | Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
- Lauren Ray | University of Washington Libraries
- Quill West | Pierce College District
- Amy Hofer | Open Oregon – Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission
- Daniela Fairchild | Rhode Island Office of Innovation
- Christina Trunnell | Montana University System
- Jonathon Lashley | Idaho State Board of Education
- Spencer Ellis | Colorado Department of Higher Education
- Deepak Shenoy | Deep Consulting (DOERS³ consultant)
- Una Daley | Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources
- Rebel Cummings-Sauls | Florida Academic Library Services Cooperative
- Rebecca Karoff | The University of Texas System

About the Washington Student Achievement Council

The Washington Student Achievement Council is committed to increasing educational opportunities and attainment in Washington. The Council has three main functions:

- Lead statewide strategic planning to increase educational attainment.
- Administer programs that help people access and pay for college.
- Advocate for the economic, social, and civic benefits of higher education.

The Council has nine members. Four members represent each of Washington's major education sectors: four-year public baccalaureates, four-year private colleges, public community and technical colleges, and K-12 public schools. Five are citizen members, including one current student.

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