

Open Education Initiatives in Kansas Higher Education

Executive Summary and Report



Kansas Board of Regents OER Steering Committee

https://www.kansasregents.org/academic_affairs/open-educational-resources

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Executive Summary

On March 19, 2024, the KBOR OER Steering Committee distributed a survey to all public higher education institutions in Kansas. This survey was created to gather baseline information on how Open Educational Resources (OER) are currently being implemented across the various colleges and universities in the state. The 2024 survey represents the fourth year this survey has been distributed. After reviewing the responses to the 2024 survey, major findings were identified:

There has been little change in the number of institutions with a policy, program, or committee to support OER, but increased interest.

Seventeen of the 30 responding institutions indicated that they have a policy, program, or committee to support OER use on campus. One institution, Colby, which had been planning to adopt, has done so, while the list of institutions planning an OER initiative this year rose from 2 to 5.

Access to grant money, a huge driver of OER Initiatives, is missing from most institutions.

Institutions continued to cite funding as a concern. While five institutions outlined their internal OER funding opportunities, only four indicated applying for external grants, with only two receiving them. As these national and international opportunities for funding related to OER initiatives are often awarded to large consortia, Kansas institutions, even acting collectively, have often been considered too small for consideration. As such, the KBOR OER Steering Committee has investigated state-level funding solutions.

Time, resources, and awareness are challenges to OER adoption. Funding/support was the most common support or service suggested to overcome these barriers.

In line with last year's assessment, the reported common challenges to OER adoption were lack of time, resources, and awareness. Funding/support was the most commonly suggested support or service to overcome these challenges.

Introduction

(Footnotes are available in Appendix A.)

Open Educational Resources (OER) “are teaching, learning and research materials in any medium—digital or otherwise—that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions¹.” OER includes built-in permission to retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute the material².

Since 1967, the cost of educational books and supplies (which is primarily textbook costs) has increased over 2000% compared to an 800% increase in the overall consumer price index^{3, 4}. As of 2023, textbooks have continued to increase in cost at three times the rate of inflation, with average costs at community colleges exceeding those at four-year institutions⁵. Because of their high cost, many students forgo the purchase of textbooks due to limited funds, putting them at a disadvantage. In 2019, the Kansas Board of Regents Student Advisory Committee conducted a survey to demonstrate the burden of textbook costs on students at Regent Institutions. 48 percent of 6,474 regent institutions’ students indicated they did not purchase or rent a required textbook in the spring semester. Sixteen percent said they did not buy or rent three or more required textbooks⁶. With OER, all students get equal and immediate access to educational materials.

The cost of textbooks is having a more profound impact on college students. A 2018 survey of 1,651 former and current students found that “Thirty percent of survey respondents said they had forgone a trip home to see family, 43 percent said they skipped meals, 31 percent registered for fewer classes, and 69 percent worked a job during the school year—all to save money for books⁷.”

There is also evidence that student success is positively impacted by replacing commercial textbooks and materials with OER. A recent analysis showed a 29 percent decrease in the risk of college students withdrawing from open textbook courses (78,593 students) compared to commercial textbook courses (100,012 students)⁸. Learning outcomes were equal between the courses. In a study at the University of Georgia system (sample of 21,822 students), students in courses using OER had a final GPA that was significantly higher than students in courses using traditional textbooks, and DFW rates (students earning a grade of D, F, or withdrawing from a course) decreased compared to non-OER courses. Further, they found that OER course student improvements in GPA and DFW rates were more significant among Pell recipients, part-time, and non-white students, who traditionally had lower student success⁹. Content tailored to a course by the instructor is a contributor to student success. After financial

savings and easy access, customization was the third most cited benefit by K-State students¹⁰. Several other states, like Colorado, Georgia, Oregon, California, and New York, have been pushing OER implementation for years, and students in their systems are reaping the benefits.

Who We Are

To encourage OER use across public institutions in Kansas, the OER Steering Committee was created in 2019 and is made up of representatives from all Kansas public higher education institutions interested in learning more and expanding OER use across our system.

We understand that OER is one of many answers to the problem of expensive course materials; however, we would like to increase awareness of these resources and the work being done to make them better for students and instructors in Kansas.

This survey was created to review and quantify the work done to support OER adoption and creation across the state. After the baseline established by the 2021 survey, ongoing research identifies similar challenges and subtle changes that we hope inform the future of OER's use and benefits in the state of Kansas.

Participants

The survey was sent to the Chief Academic Officer at each institution to direct the appropriate respondent to answer the survey questions accurately.

Thirty-two of the 33 public higher education institutions in Kansas completed the survey. Respondents included 19 community colleges, five technical colleges, and seven universities, including the University of Kansas Medical Center. A full list of the institutions that replied can be found in Appendix B.

Results

Seventeen of 30 institutions indicated that they have a policy, program, or committee to support OER use on campus. Breaking out by institution type, 7 of 7 Universities (the University of Kansas Medical Center is considered its own type of institution and is not aggregated with the others), 11 of 19 community colleges (Colby, Hutchinson, Fort Scott, Barton, Johnson, Seward, Cowley, Dodge City, Garden City, and Butler), and 0 of 5 technical colleges have a policy, program, or committee to support OER use. Among those who did not have one established, nine indicated they are exploring the possibility

of adding a policy, program, or committee to support OER. Data show an increase in one policy now known to be in place compared to last year, as well as four additional institutions exploring policies.

Respondents ranked institutional entities' role in coordinating institutional OER initiatives (Figure 1). Library and Academic Departments were the most highly ranked, continuing a trend of ranking administration less involved than in previous years. Whereas last year, English was the most often identified academic department, this year, respondents cited myriad departments, including Business, Mathematics, Social Sciences, and others.

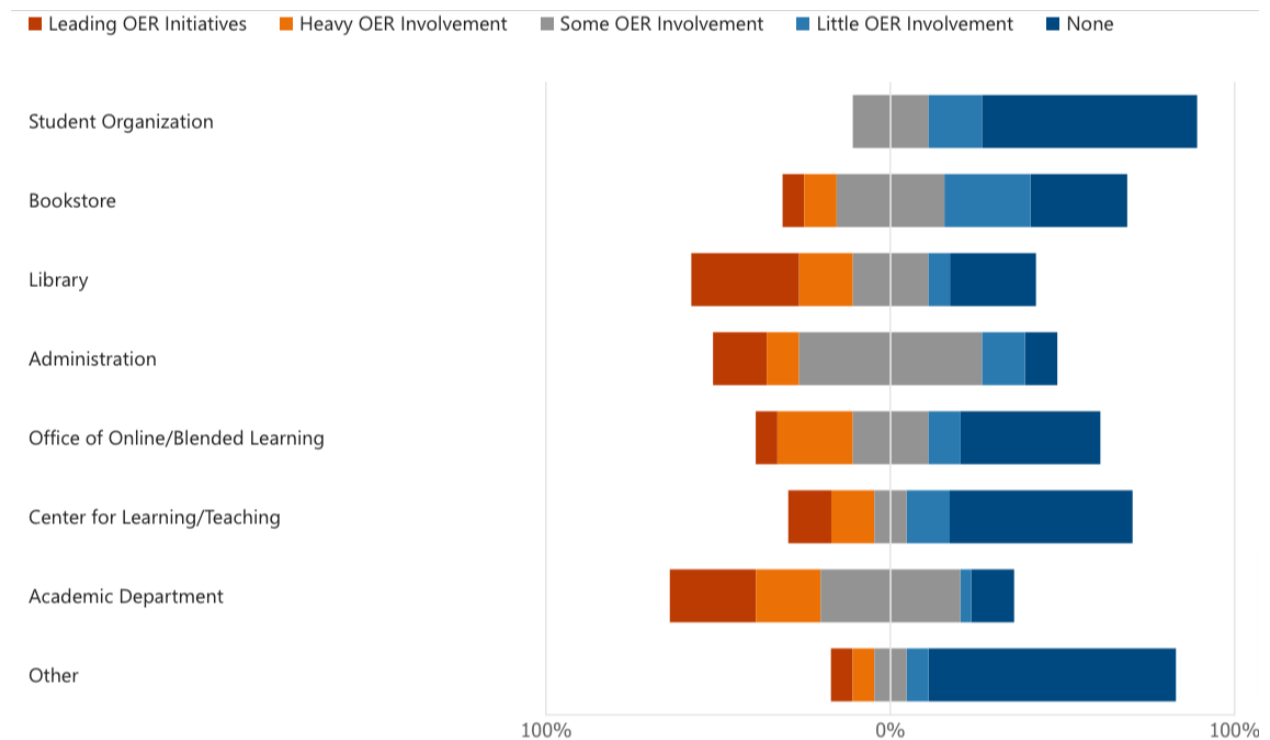


Figure 1. Reported ranking of roles institutional entities played in coordinating institutional OER initiatives

Among the practices reported to be in place, Professional Development support, OER Committee/Working Group, and Instructional design support were the most commonly available (Figure 2). Reports were similar to previous years.

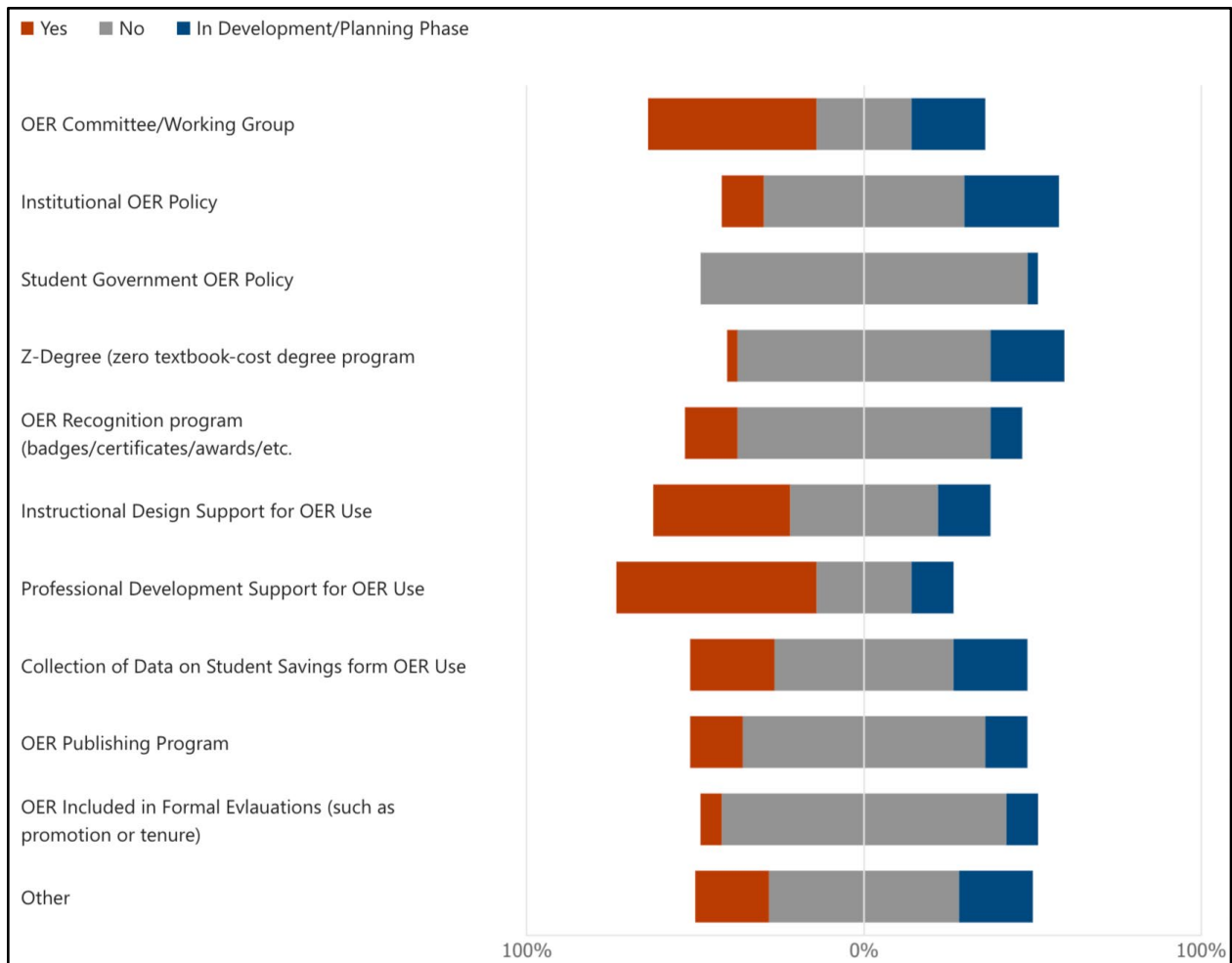


Figure 2. Reported practices currently in place to support OER

The library, bookstore, and administrators were more often reported to be “extremely aware” of OER than students and faculty. However, there is an increase in both administrator and faculty awareness since 2023 (Figure 3).

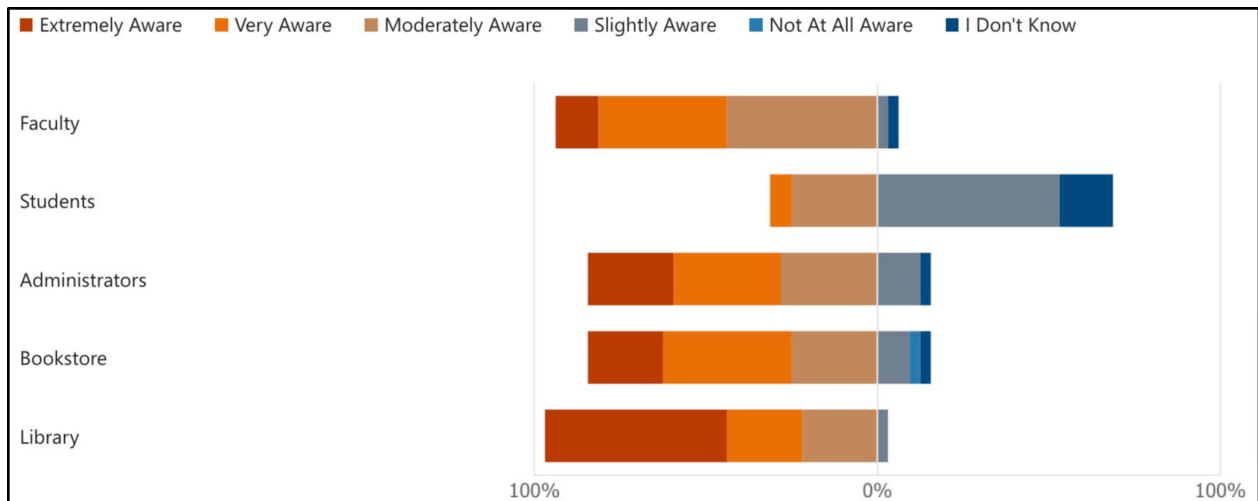


Figure 3. Reported Awareness of OER

Breaking this down by different institution types, reported faculty awareness was higher at technical and community colleges than at universities (Table 1). Reported student awareness was low and similar among different types of institutions. Reported administrator awareness was highest in technical colleges, but universities were lower than other institution types. Reported bookstore awareness was higher at universities and community colleges than technical colleges, though reported awareness at technical colleges was higher than in previous years. Reported library awareness showed great disparity between the three institution types, though still some of the highest awareness across institution types.

Table 1. Mean OER Awareness by institution types

Institution Types	Faculty	Students	Administrators	Bookstore	Library
Universities	2.3	1.5	2.4	2.9	3.9
Community Colleges	2.7	1.4	2.7	2.7	3.1
Technical Colleges	2.8	1.5	3	2.2	2.8

Calculated by assigning scores as follows for responses: 0 - Not aware at all, 1 - Slightly aware, 2 - Moderately aware, 3- Very Aware, 4 - Extremely aware, I don't know - no score assigned.

Previous reports on percentages of instructors utilizing OER as primary course resources (textbooks, lab books, or textbook replacements) were limited to “More than 10%”. This year, the categories included: More than 20%, 11-20%, 6-10%, 1-5%, Less than 1%, None, and Unknown/I don't know. What was found was that 6-10% was the most common response, but more reported more than 20% than 11-20% (Figure 4).

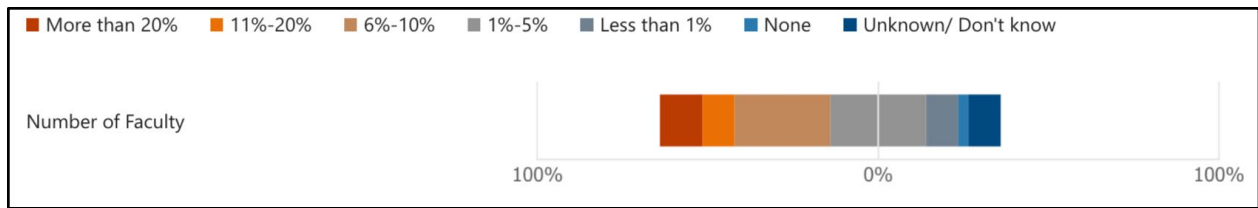


Figure 4. Reported percentage of instructors at institutions that are utilizing OER as their primary course resource in at least one of their courses

We also asked what percentage of General Education/Kansas Systemwide Transfer courses use OER at each institution (Figure 5). The largest category of response from institutions was 1-5%, though More than 10% and 6-10% were also sizable.

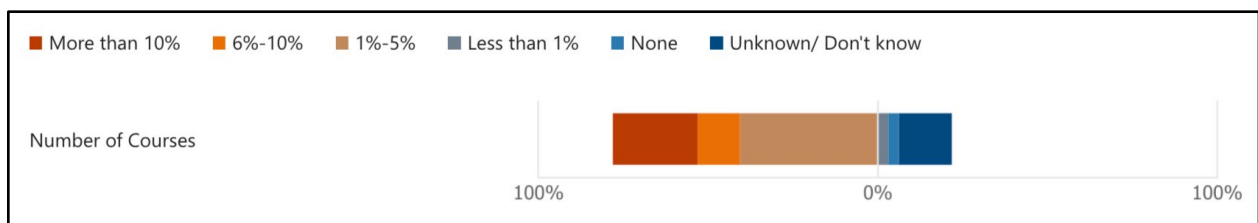


Figure 5. Reported percentage of instructors at institutions that are utilizing OER as their primary course resource in General Education/Kansas Systemwide Transfer Courses

All seven universities, as well as Barton, Colby, and Butler Community Colleges, have implemented OER/free/low-cost course marking. Five institutions now indicate plans for course marking. In choosing the language for marking courses, most institutions chose an indicator of “zero cost.”

Most institutions cited a lack of resources as the leading barrier to OER adoption. Universities frequently cited a need for more time and funding for OER to be adopted, as well as infrastructure and sustainability concerns. Desires for units like dedicated staff and librarians for material review, selection, and faculty support were also included in responses. University-reported challenges can be found in Appendix C. In addition to time and fiscal resources, community colleges and technical colleges frequently cited faculty perceptions of interest and material quality as barriers. Those faculty attitudes critical of OER demonstrated concerns about the time required for OER adoption and resistance to change. A complete listing of reported challenges for community and technical colleges can be found in Appendices D and E.

Among the support or services referenced, universities most commonly reported that funding/support would help overcome challenges related to OER use. A complete listing of university responses can be found in Appendix F. Community colleges cited funding, promotion, and training around OER resources as desired support. They were also the only group to have a response of “none” or “n/a”, with one institution indicating that they

believed their progress and support were adequate. A complete listing of community college responses can be found in Appendix G. Technical colleges repeated concerns from last year that material may not yet be available for some career and technical education courses. Lack of support staff and existing contracts with textbook vendors were also cited as challenges. A complete listing of technical college responses can be found in Appendix H.

Conclusion

These survey results will help inform our approach, activities, and strategies as we seek to continue to support the growth and development of OER throughout Kansas higher education. We greatly appreciate the time taken to complete the survey and look forward to conducting similar surveys to understand OER progress and changes throughout the system.

Appendix A

Works Cited

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Appendix B

List of Institutions Participating in the Survey

1. Allen Community College
2. Barton Community College
3. Butler Community College
4. Cloud County Community College
5. Coffeyville Community College
6. Colby Community College
7. Cowley College
8. Dodge City Community College
9. Emporia State University
10. Flint Hills Technical College
11. Fort Hays State University
12. Fort Scott Community College
13. Garden City Community College
14. Highland Community College
15. Hutchinson Community College
16. Independence Community College
17. Johnson County Community College
18. Kansas City Kansas Community College
19. Kansas State University
20. Labette Community College
21. Manhattan Area Technical College
22. Neosho County Community College
23. North Central Kansas Technical College
24. Pittsburg State University
25. Pratt Community College
26. Salina Area Technical College
27. Seward County Community College
28. University of Kansas
29. University of Kansas Medical Center
30. Washburn University
31. Wichita State University
32. Wichita State University Campus of Applied Sciences and Technology

Appendix C

Reported Challenges (Universities)

- "Incentive/compensation -The majority of faculty are aware of Open Educational Resources but lack the time to locate and/or adapt the materials to fit their course.
- Availability -OER options are limited for some disciplines and upper-level courses.
- Ancillary Materials -OERs often lack ancillary materials which dampers faculty interest.
- Homework Management Platforms -Few OERs offer software to help manage coursework.
- Awareness - Faculty awareness of OER continues to grow, but we still have work to do in this area.
- Publisher Representatives - Publisher representatives make it easier to find traditional materials."
- Faculty interest and funding
- Lack of time
- "Limited staffing: we're doing as much as we presently can in the Libraries' with our current staffing level and competing obligations.
- Limited fiscal resources: we're very lucky to have funds dedicated to support OER
- Grants and other projects. However, a \$1000 adoption grant doesn't begin to address the labor of redesigning a complex program that enrolls hundreds or thousands of students per academic year. Course releases for instructors to adopt/create OER would be incredibly useful, but those cost money.
- Capacity: when instructors are curious about OER they have limited additional capacity to think about implementing OER in their classrooms. Another unknown is how using OER might impact evaluation (annual eval, P&T, etc.)
- Lack of awareness: more instructors are aware of textbook cost issues and how that impacts their students, that OER are a solution and where to find and implement OER but this awareness isn't widespread across campus.
- Communication: consistent and clear messaging about OER to all campus groups
- (faculty, instructors, students and administrators); so how they engage with OER is a challenge."

- Faculty Time, not enough money to justify work involved, Awareness/Interest
- Dedicated personnel for promoting and curating OER.
- Same as above, most key texts are already provided free of use for students. A medical center is a different from most undergraduate programs in that there are key texts that our library subscribes from Access Medicine and Clinical Key where students don't have to purchase most textbooks as they are already provided free of charge from the library.
- not enough money, conflict with the campus bookstore (Barnes and Noble), and trying to build University support

Appendix D

Reported Challenges (Community Colleges)

- Time commitment and a lack of uniform processes regarding OER creation and adoption (although this is in the works).
- "LMS or course software support is of interest to faculty, Faculty time, some courses have few or no resources"
- Even though there have been ample opportunities (internal and external) for employees to learn about what can be developed through OER, some fear OER because it is a change that is not understood and, therefore, is unwanted. Some employees have expressed concern over how long it would take to make their courses OER. Also, some employees feel they should be compensated if they restructure courses to be OER.
- Revenue loss. Getting faculty on board.
- Convincing faculty that "Free" or "Low Cost" OER can be just as good or better than the established presses.
- Faculty support for OER textbooks and the quality of the OERs.
- I think adoption is fairly widespread.
- Resistance at the leadership level to OER, no cost instructional materials, seems to be the key issue -- as the current practice is to charge per credit hour fees regardless of the type of instructional materials being used. Providing faculty incentive and time to explore, develop, implement OER is another challenge. Another challenge is the lack of staffing in my area to adminstrate additional initiatives, even those as important as this one.
- Most faculty use Cengage Unlimited which provides textbooks for approximately \$4 per credit hour.
- Probably the biggest challenge to us is faculty awareness and acceptance of these resources.
- Lack of funding that would result from a shift to OER (from textbook rental/digital textbooks). If we remove the textbook rental, we would have to shift that fee to something else to make-up for the loss in revenue. For example, if we remove textbook fees then we would need to add or increase our technology fee.
- "Time limitations
- Lack of interest
- Lack of knowledge
- Lack of acknowledgement for the need"
- Faculty unwilling to make the change due to the ease of use of materials that are included with their purchase when they buy a normal textbook (completed lesson plans, grading assistance/software, etc.). The idea that free is not as high of a

quality than that of something that one has to buy. Money = Quality and Ease to our faculty.

- The publishers make it hard to get faculty to change with all their included resources
- Funding, time, faculty knowledge, vendor incentives
- Time and material availability. There are certain areas of study (e.g. Allied Health) where there just isn't as much OER available as opposed to other areas.
- I'm often told there aren't enough choices for the instructors. They "can't find" any books relevant to their course. Instructors seem to back away from OER usage. Perhaps it is not perceived as a viable tool for their classes. I am told by instructors that the OER books they have access to are not "acceptable" for their class. Because they are free, I think the instructors think OERs do not have the same value.
- Faculty who like to use 3rd party applications and textbooks that they are familiar with and have more content.
- Instructors independently evaluate course materials and most are reluctant to use OERs. Additionally, we have a rental system for textbooks which decreases the financial burden significantly for students.

Appendix E

Reported Challenges (Technical Colleges)

- Applicability across technical programs.
- Training for faculty on the use of OER.
- There are no OER options for technical education courses (automotive technology, industrial engineering technology, computerized machine tool, welding technology, etc.)
- Staffing
- Contract with our textbook platform provider, BibliU stipulates we have a certain percentage of our textbooks with them.

Appendix F

Support or Services to Help Overcome Identified Challenges (Universities)

- "Funding to compensate faculty for adopting, adapting, and/or creating OER.
- Funding for course release/stipend for two or three faculty leading OER efforts on campus.
- A list of recommended OER textbooks/platforms/ancillary materials for high enrollment courses.
- Access to support/training for faculty interested in OER adoption/adaptation/creation.
- LibreText training sessions."
- funding
- Funding for course release time for faculty working on OERs
- "Recommended reward structures for instructors; what incentives are most valued by instructors so they are both empowered and attracted to use OER if/when it meets their needs?"
- Data: help surveying students and instructors about their knowledge, needs, experiences, etc. Also help analyzing that data."
- Support or services that increases the value of using OER so it increases the priority of it would be helpful.
- See Question 28 (Dedicated positions).
- We continue to promote OER's as a resources and help support any faculty wishing to know more.
- Grant suggestions, other types of funding from KBOR, and suggestions on how to deal with organizations working against OER initiatives

Appendix G

Support or Services to Help Overcome Identified Challenges (Community Colleges)

- A study regarding the cost-to-benefit ratio of release time for faculty to create and/or adopt OER.
- course software support that could replace access codes
- An OER-dedicated resource center to support those personnel developing or migrating courses to an OER format.
- Access to professional development funds; statewide support for access to an OER resource hub.
- A possible grant to help compose a repository for OER that faculty can access and review.
- Financial support to allow faculty to create OER and or time to explore OER options.
- None.
- Perhaps conversation about the benefits of OER in committees where Presidents and Chief Financial Officers could share the benefits of OER as well as how to meet challenges of initiating/implementing campus-wide OER>
- External financial support.
- Professional development opportunities here on campus for my faculty. Resources for me to share with them or some other presenter at our inservice or training days.
- The OER task force has done a great job providing examples of how OER benefits students. More work needs to be done with Presidents, CFO, Board of Trustees, etc. on how this benefit for students more directly impacts enrollment and revenue especially given diminishing enrollments and increasing costs.
- Time for OER education and research, etc.
- Forced adherence to a new OER policy.
- Funding to pay faculty for development and adoption
- State focused funding, active faculty collaboration between institutions
- n/a. I think the Steering Committee has done a lot of work to make resources readily available.
- Perhaps if we presented the books that are available, prior to the instructors knowing they are OERs, they might take another look at them. Those that have adopted OERs, they are very happy with them.
- Being on the OER committee has helped with our plan, however I am the representative and have class at the time it is held this semester. Hoping to attend more in the upcoming months
- none

Appendix H

Support or Services to Help Overcome Identified Challenges (Technical Colleges)

- A more robust OER library.
- Professional Development opportunities virtually
- Grant information and recommendations,
- Money for staffing
- Support to help with research and selection of OER material that meets the needs of our faculty and students.