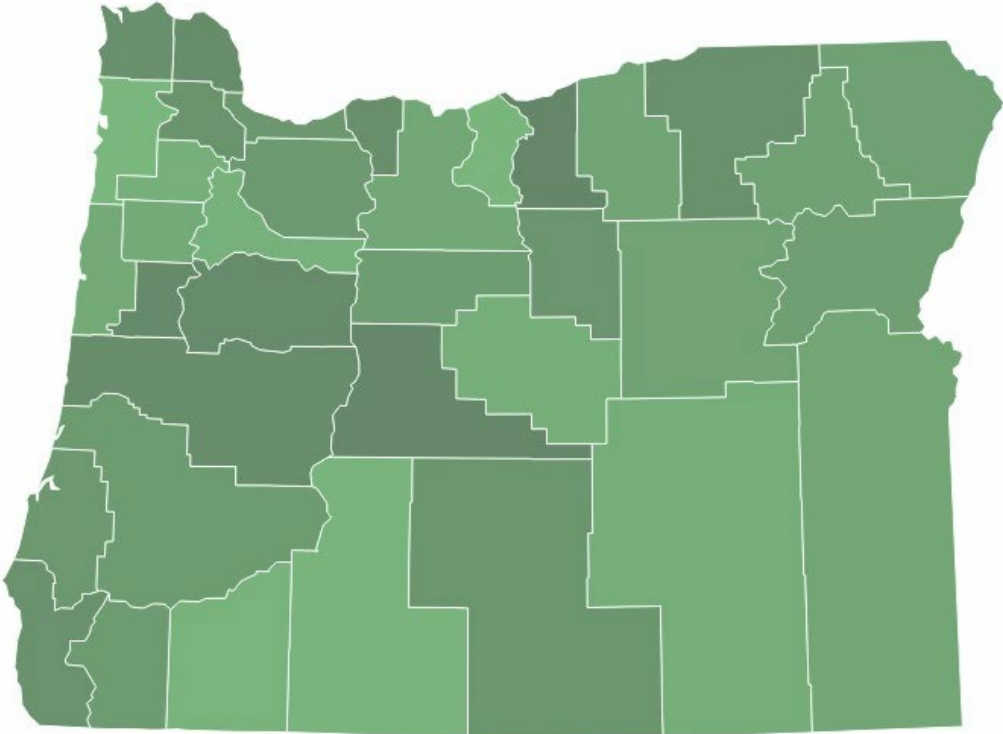# Evaluating Oregon's Open Educational Resources Designation Requirement

POLICY BRIEF

JUNE 2018

Brooke Freed, Amber Friedman, Sarah Lawlis, Angie Stapleton
University of Oregon School of Planning, Public Policy and Management
Master of Public Administration Capstone

Executive Summary

Textbook affordability is a significant issue nationally, particularly as it pertains to overall affordability and access to higher education. Oregon House Bill 2871 (2015) and House Bill 2729 (2017), which passed with bipartisan support, were intended to provide students and faculty with access to Open Educational Resources (OER) in order to lower the cost of textbooks for students. As defined in HB 2871, Open Educational Resources (OER) refers to "teaching, learning and research [that] reside[s] in the public domain or that have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and repurposing by others."

This research was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the methods that Oregon community colleges and public universities use to designate courses that use no-cost and low-cost textbooks or course materials in response to the requirements set forth in House Bill 2871.

Summary of Key Findings

- **Varying designation methods within and across institutions make finding OER/no-cost/low-cost courses difficult for students**

- **Many college students surveyed have been affected academically or have made a decision about a course due to the cost of required textbooks**

- **The majority of students surveyed are unaware of what the abbreviation "OER" means**

- **Community colleges have implemented more designations than public universities, and their students are generally more aware of no-cost or low-cost resources at their institutions**

- **Students primarily learn about no-cost/low-cost course materials from their instructors, but not early enough to influence their course selection at the time of registration**

- **Overall, most students don't know where to find no-cost and low-cost courses**

- **Students would like to see designations everywhere that they look for courses and course materials, including in person at the campus bookstore**

Recommendations

Use a simple icon or phrase that is easily understood (NOT OER!)
Oregon OER legislation allows institutions to use "OER" as designation for OER and other no-cost/low-cost course materials. Inventory of designations implementation across institution found that some institutions use "OER" as a designation for OER and no-cost/low-cost courses without providing a definition of the term. With a low level of student awareness of the meaning of the term OER, using a simple icon or phrase to designate no-cost/low-cost materials would improve student ability to find and choose these courses.

Consistently designate no-cost/low-cost courses everywhere students search for classes and course materials, including at the bookstore
Students that participated in the survey and in group interviews shared a desire for OER/no-cost low-cost designations, that include both an easily identifiable icon and a short description, to be displayed in more than one location when searching for and registering for courses. Consistent designation across search platforms would likely improve student ability to identify and choose no-cost/low-cost courses.

Post required materials lists earlier, in time for registration
Most survey respondents who reported an awareness of no-cost/low-cost resources learned about them through their instructors. Some institutions do not require instructors to report OER courses prior to the registration deadline. This makes it difficult for students to choose courses based on no-cost/low-cost status prior to the first day of class or without emailing instructors. Student survey respondents and group interview participants reported that the timing of the availability of the course materials list is an important factor in selection of courses based on textbook costs, making posting of required materials prior to registration critical. Late course material reporting also limits bookstores' ability to post designations in a timely manner for students purchasing books.

Consider adopting a uniform designation or icon across all 24 institutions
Currently, varying methods of designation and icons are used within and across each institution, which may contribute to the lack awareness by 74 percent of community college and 85 percent and university students of OER available at their institution. Uniform designations could contribute to an increased student awareness of OER and would make it easier for students moving between institutions (e.g. from a community college to a university) to find no-cost/low-cost courses.

Future Research

Conduct large, representative group interviews to determine best designation icon.
HECC could offer support to institutions by taking the lead on market research for best designation methods that all schools could adopt.

Conduct research to determine the best methods to encourage instructors to implement no-cost and low-cost materials in their courses.
Faculty knowledge of OER remains low, despite more than a decade of OER availability (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Hilton, 2016; Morris-Babb & Henderson, 2012). Previous national research found several barriers to adoption of OER by faculty, including: faculty found it difficult to find the needed OER resources; lack of resources for specific subjects; concern about updates of OER; and a concern about quality level of OER resources (Seaman & Seaman, 2017). Though many faculty have reservations about OER, nearly 90 percent of faculty also reported the cost of textbooks for the student as important in their selection decisions of required course materials (Seaman & Seaman, 2017). With most faculty expressing concern for student textbook costs, finding methods of encouragement, such as workshops, trainings, or stipends, would likely increase adoption of OER materials by faculty across institutions.

For the full text and analysis of this research project, see:
Freed, B.A., Friedman, A., Lawlis, S., Stapleton, A. Evaluating Oregon's Open Educational Resources Designation Requirement: A Report for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, June 2018.

References

Allen, E., & Seaman, J. (2014). Opening the curriculum: Open educational resources in U.S.

Hilton, J. (2016). Open educational resources and college textbook choices: a review of research on efficacy and perceptions. Educational Technology Research & Development, 64(4), 573–590. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-016-9434-9

Morris-Babb, M., & Henderson, S. (2012). An experiment in open-access textbook publishing: Changing the world one textbook at a time 1. Journal of Scholarly Publishing, 43(2), 148–155.

OR HB 2729 (2017). Relating to open educational resources at post-secondary institutions of education; creating new provisions; repealing ORS 348.753; and declaring an emergency.

OR HB 2871 (2015). Relating to higher education; and declaring an emergency.

Seaman, Julia Seaman, Jeff. (2017) Opening the Textbook: Education Resources in U.S. Higher Education, 2017. Babson Survey Research Group. Retrieved from www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/oer.htm