

Susan Written Testimony

My name is Susan Caisse, and I'm an adjunct faculty member at Clackamas Community College (CCC). I'm writing today on behalf of HB 3183. I've written two Open Educational Resource Textbooks for my students in the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) department at CCC; Explorations 1-Grammar for the Experienced Beginner and Welcome to Maple Falls-Introduction to Reading Writing and Grammar for Adult ESOL Learners. Both projects were supported by grants from Open Oregon and have provided significant benefit. I wrote the first OER in the ESOL department at CCC.

I can't speak for other colleges, and I can't even speak for other departments at CCC, but contrary to common belief, adjunct do participate in curriculum development for our departments. With the relentless reduction in full-time faculty in colleges and universities the workload of FTF has steadily increased. FTF are busy with the administrative responsibilities of managing a department and unless some aspect of curriculum becomes urgent, they often have very little free time. It isn't that FTF don't do this work, but they may have to be supported with course releases or on sabbatical (which comes every 7 years) to do the work, and adjuncts don't. In my department there are 4 full-time faculty, down from a past high of 7 in a department of 14. However, there are 9 faculty working 12 or more than credit hours per term. We will be losing one of our full-time faculty at the end of this year, increasing our FT to Adjunct ratio even more.

The process of applying for and receiving grants from Open Oregon is very competitive. It requires a lot of thought and preparation. Additionally, projects cannot be accepted for grants without being approved by our departments. I began to realize the socio-economic situation of my students as soon as I was hired. Many students could not afford to purchase textbooks. As a result, they were using the books I brought into class and taking photos on their cell phones in order to do homework. This is inefficient and difficult. As a result, students often failed to complete their homework and frequently repeated classes. I heard about Open Oregon from a friend at another college. I conceived of a project and approached my department chair for consultation and approval. That's how Open Oregon guarantees the projects it supports are needed and valued by the departments.

The impact this process had on me has been significant. I was able to delve deeply into the needs of a specific class. I thought reflectively about how commercial textbooks do and do not meet the needs of the class and the students. My co-authors and I used current research about how languages are learned best, to design activities and materials to benefit students. I was able to be compensated for this work at a fair rate. The support helped me develop my curriculum development and project management skills. Even though the work is exhausting, it was rewarding. I did not take time away from my job, and continued to teach a full complement of classes while writing.

One of the requirements for Open Oregon is to make completed work freely and easily available. At least one of my FTF colleagues has also written an OER, but the materials aren't published anywhere. The requirement of making materials freely and easily available has allowed me to serve not just my department, but also serve my field. I found out that my materials are being used in Maine through a 5 star review on an OER repository website. Additionally, I received an email from someone at PCC who had taken the first chapter of Explorations and developed an entire class around that as well as materials they have adapted and curated. I frequently receive emails when new materials are added. In this way, Open Oregon has facilitated collaboration between colleges and allowed faculty to focus on the specific needs of our students because we can adapt or adopt materials quickly and easily and without worrying about copyright. Before Open Oregon collaboration between community colleges would have been unthinkable.

Another benefit of OER in general is the flexibility. In 2020, my first book was completed mere weeks before the pandemic began. As faculty we agonized over what to do about materials and how to provide resources when students didn't have money to pay for materials and we didn't have a way for them to get materials. There was so many unknowns. One thing we did know was that the OER could be dismantled and put into our learning

management system. We could chop up the book, we could email files to students. We could do anything we needed to the book without violating copyright. This was an easy class to transition to remote instruction because the book was so flexible. I don't know where I would have been without it. I was one of many instructors spending 12 or more hours a day learning how to be an online instructor, but if I had used all OER the transition would have been simpler and easier.

The impact of OER work on students cannot be overstated. Aside from being able to serve students in new modalities, the simple act of handing a student a book can be life-changing. One term, I was handing out textbooks and a student told me he couldn't afford to buy a book. I told him the book was free. After relief washed over his face, he began to cry. He had a book on the first day that he could write in and use.

I've seen first-hand how giving students books improves their learning experience. The pass rates in my classes with OERs have gone up. Students are able to do better when they have the materials they need right from the start of class. The students pass classes more readily, which allows them to progress more quickly through our programs. When they progress more quickly, they get into jobs or transition to degree programs more quickly.

For me, I do this work because it benefits everyone. It benefits me, it benefits my department, but most of all, it benefits my students. My students never want to learn English for its own sake. They want to learn English to be able to achieve some other goal which enriches their lives. This is what OER do. OER help every student be on an equal footing. OERs help students achieve their goals more quickly and more easily. This is why I support OER and why I urge you to pass HB 3183.