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OPEN EDUCATION POLICIES IN THE NORTHEAST

A regional analysis, suggested models and
best practices

NEW ENGLAND BOARD
of HIGHER EDUCATION



Open Education policies in the Northeast: A regional analysis, suggested models and best practices

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Acknowledgments

NEBHE launched its Open Education initiative in 2019 and soon after identified and convened a regional Open Education Advisory Committee, composed of higher education leaders representing the six New England states, New Jersey and New York. We express our gratitude to these individuals who have selflessly given their time and expertise to help us identify our priorities as we collaborate across our region to assist in and build upon coordinated state initiatives, develop policy frameworks, share best practices and ultimately accelerate the utilization and integration of Open Education in the Northeast thus providing students and faculty with equitable access to high-quality, low-cost postsecondary education instructional materials options.

A special thank you to Rachael Stachowiak, Associate Director, SARA at NEBHE, Stafford Peat, Senior Consultant at NEBHE, John Harney, Executive Editor of the *New England Journal of Higher Education*, and Tanya Spilovoy, Ed. D., Director, Open Policy WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies, for providing feedback and guidance on this document.

About NEBHE

Founded in 1955, the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) engages policymakers in the six New England States of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. NEBHE develops collaborative, multistate programs to expand resource efficiency, policy innovation and cross-state alignment. It works in partnership with governors and their education advisors, legislators, K-12 and higher education commissioners, leaders of public and independent or private colleges and universities and business. Learn more at nebhe.org.

About the Author

Lindsey Gumb is the Fellow for Open Education at the New England Board of Higher Education and is an assistant professor and the scholarly communications librarian at Roger Williams University, where she oversees OER adoption, revision and creation and focuses heavily on OER-enabled pedagogy collaborations with faculty. She co-chairs the [Rhode Island Open Textbook Initiative](#) Steering Committee.

She is the co-author of “Library Support for Scaffolding OER-enabled Pedagogy in a General Education Science Course” in K. Hoffman and A. Clifton (Eds.), [Open Pedagogy Approaches](#) and the author of “OER-enabled Pedagogy Meets Info Lit: Empowering the Next Generation of Open Scholars,” in E. Dill & M. A. Cullen (Eds.), *Intersections of OER and Information Literacy* (forthcoming 2021).

As a 2019-20 OER Research Fellow through the [Open Education Group](#), Gumb is currently co-conducting research on: 1.) institutional copyright policies and potential implications for Open Education and 2.) faculty communication of student agency, rights, and responsibilities in open pedagogy participation.

Executive Summary

Defining Open Educational Resources

Open Educational Resources (OER) offer an alternative to expensive and copyrighted commercial learning materials, which according to a [2020 study](#) conducted by U.S. PIRG are a very real barrier to 66% of students attending institutions of higher education in the United States.

“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 restrictions.” - UNESCO



Student Access Barriers to Required Learning Materials

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, textbook prices have sharply risen above the consumer price index for the last several decades -- over 200%. This increase leaves many students at both public and independent institutions unable to afford the required learning materials for their courses, which the [College Board](#) recommends budgeting nearly \$1,300 annually for a four or two-year institution.

When access barriers to learning materials like textbooks exist, either financial or circumstantial disruption (as in the case of COVID-19), we know that students who can't afford the books may either have to risk their health and safety and borrow from their peers or go without the required textbook and risk poor grades.

Publisher Monopolies & Inclusive Access Models

Like OER, inclusive access models aim to ensure that all students have access to their learning materials on the first day of class. **The major difference, however, is that OER are free and inclusive access material is not.** Often when colleges and universities sign inclusive access contracts with publishing companies, they include a materials cost on the student's tuition bill, also known as "automatic textbook billing."

In February 2020, [U.S. PIRG Education Fund](#) reviewed 31 of these contracts across the country which affected approximately 700,000 students. [The report](#) revealed that a significant number of the contracts "fail to deliver real savings for students, reduce faculty and student choice, and give even more power to a handful of monolithic publishing companies." In a [subsequent report released in June 2020](#), US PIRG found that 17% of students reported skipping the purchase of the access code often required to use digital commercial textbooks, which may include homework assignments.

Students lose access to these materials provided through inclusive access programs after the semester ends because of copyright restrictions and limited license agreements between the publisher and the institution. **OER, which have open licenses, in contrast, allows students to retain learning materials in perpetuity, serving students and learners of all ages and stages.** This is important for students who may have to retake a course or who are enrolled in a sequence (ex. Biology I and Biology II), where having access to the previous semester's book is essential.



Graphic by Danielle Curran licensed CC-BY

OER Promotes More Equitable Student Success Metrics

While faculty have little to no control over tuition costs, they can exercise their academic freedom and elect to use OER to help alleviate the high cost of textbooks, which helps all students. [A 2018 study](#) by Colvard, et al. found that OER also benefits student success metrics like increasing grade point average and reducing drop, fail, and withdraw rates for all students, but particularly for those who are non-white and pell-eligible. Cost-savings associated with OER do not compromise the quality of the resources or student performance, rather, students perform the same or better than those assigned a traditional, commercial textbook.

Regional OER Policy Highlights

To view a more extensive state-by-state overview of the work being done in the Northeast, you may wish to consult NEBHE's [Landscape Summary](#).



1. Empowering diverse and representative leadership

One of the main barriers that grassroots practitioners, senior leaders, and policymakers face together is a lack of means to communicate with each other about how to effectively, logistically, and sustainably move this work forward. When considering what successful policies look like that can help advance the adoption and use of OER, identifying a broad spectrum of key in-state, system, or campus leadership is essential. Statewide OER committees whose membership comprises a broad representation of faculty, state administrators, students, librarians, and instructional designers are effective in fostering collaboration and ensuring several different perspectives are brought to the table when recommendations are developed.

Additionally, the way OER is marketed and supported at public and private institutions can vary greatly, and having committees that broadly represent the different needs, challenges, and opportunities at each has significant benefits to both institution-types; More cross-pollination between public and private institutions increases the availability and quality of OER across multiple disciplines and lessons learned can be shared and challenges tackled collectively.

2. Inclusive and sustainable institutional policy making

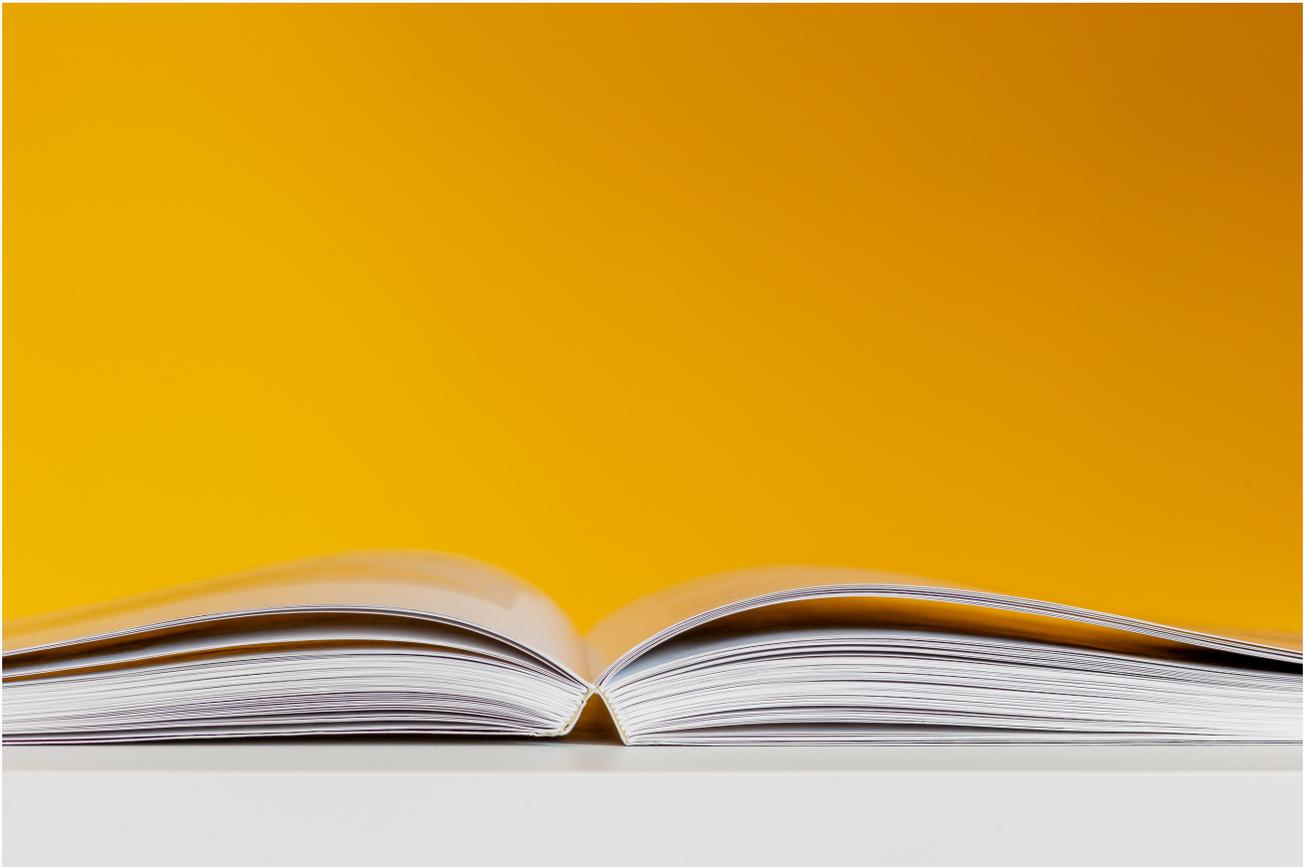
Developing institutional policies that encourage the use and adoption of OER require that this work is supported, acknowledged, and rewarded in various capacities. Creating flexible policies that support and recognize this work either through financial incentives or acceptance and recognition in the tenure and promotion process is an easy way to acknowledge the time commitment necessary for faculty to develop and maintain high-quality, free content; It's also a surefire way to ensure the advancement of OER adoption is sustainable. Policy mandates are highly discouraged, but opt-in campus, system, or state "challenges" can generate significant interest and energy in saving students money and exploring how OER can positively shift teaching and learning practices.



3. Supporting the student voice and interest

OER help to break down existing and shifting barriers to student access to essential educational resources that support their learning and educational success; Incorporating their voice and participation is a key consideration when crafting policies and strategies for advancing the adoption of OER.

Having students as peers and equals on state committees allows for organic collaborations that can inspire and cultivate real-time and direct benefits for students who are struggling with the out-of-pocket costs of learning materials. Several institutions in the Northeast have active Student PIRG hubs including the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the University of Connecticut, and Rutgers University, all of which help spread the word of textbook affordability amongst their peers, faculty and administrators. OER efforts exist to fulfill student access needs, which prove to be ever-changing with the times: to not include students in these conversations would be contradictory and harmful.



4. Sustainable funding & return on investments

In the Northeast we've seen the best success where state support is more inclusive in terms of who can participate in resource allocation and training, further bridging the gap between public and private institutions. Small investments can lead to substantial savings for students, however, states, systems, and institutions will benefit from moving away from a project mindset and towards making these investments part of a larger cultural shift that aims to normalize supporting faculty adoption and creation of OER.

5. Professional development

While it's becoming common practice to provide faculty with grant incentives to carry out this work, professional development and training opportunities are essential in making sure that the individuals creating these free resources have the necessary skills to help them navigate the nuances of copyright and open licensing, accessibility, technology platforms and several other new skill sets. States don't need to invest large amounts of resources to see a significant return on investment in supporting OER initiatives that save students money and make a postsecondary education more attainable in our region.

Background

Defining Open Educational Resources

Open Educational Resources (OER) offer an alternative to expensive and copyrighted commercial learning materials, which according to a [2020 study](#) conducted by U.S. PIRG are a very real barrier to 66% of students attending institutions of higher education in the United States.

“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 restrictions.” - UNESCO



Open Education, an umbrella term often used to describe the products, practices and communities associated with OER, allows for the expansion of the cost-savings narrative to include the pedagogical benefits that emerge when copyright barriers dissolve and faculty can customize their learning materials to better align with their course learning outcomes, while engaging their students as co-creators of resources that can be shared back into the Knowledge Commons. Open Education is built upon and encompasses several foundational theories of pedagogy that center the student both in terms of knowledge access and creation and subsequently place the faculty as facilitators rather than the “sage on the stage.” At the intersections of Open Education and Critical Pedagogy, teaching and learning resources become far more equitable and flexible.

*The term "Knowledge Commons" refers to information, data and content that is collectively owned and managed by a community of users, particularly over the internet.

Student Access Barriers to Required Learning Materials

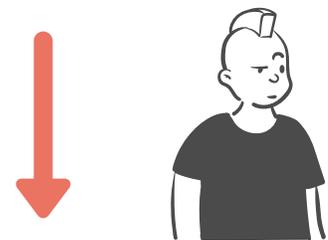
Postsecondary institutions in New England have seen a steep increase in tuition and required fees over the past five years with community college rates increasing 21% and four-year public rates increasing 20%. These figures have outpaced increases in the maximum Pell Grant (7.38%), leaving a widening gap for low- and moderate-income families to fill with additional institutional or state aid and family financial aid resources. These tuition and fee increases demonstrate that families are being asked to contribute more to cover college costs than ever before ... and this, as the region struggles through the COVID-19 health crisis and its devastating economic effects. Students and families will also feel an increased burden of out-of-pocket costs associated with a postsecondary education like textbooks and other learning materials.

For the past several decades, textbook prices have sharply risen above the consumer price index—over 200% since 1997. This increase leaves many students at both public and independent institutions unable to afford the required learning materials for their courses, which the [College Board](#) recommends budgeting nearly \$1,300 annually for a four or two-year institution.

The *Florida Virtual Campus Office of Distance Learning and Student Services* conducted [a large-scale study](#) in 2018 to examine textbook affordability and the associated implications. Among the many key findings, notably the cost of textbooks negatively impacts student access to required materials and learning. This study revealed that **64%** of students did not purchase one or more of their required textbooks because of the cost. When access to required learning materials is financially unattainable, it is not surprising that students perform worse. This study also identified that **36%** of students earned a poor grade in a course(s) that they could not afford the textbook for and **23%** ended up dropping a course because of the cost of the required textbook.



Tuition prices
Financial aid



How Textbook Costs Impact Student Decisions



Data taken from 2019 Florida Virtual Campus Student Textbook & Course Materials Survey. Tallahassee, FL.

As a band-aid solution, students often rely on borrowing a copy of their required textbook or materials from a classmate or the campus library—options that have very quickly become obsolete as higher education enters a new world of social distancing and online learning and digital course delivery. When access barriers to learning materials like textbooks exist, either financial or circumstantial (as in the case of COVID-19), we know that students who can't afford the books may either have to risk their health and safety or go without the required textbook and risk receiving poor grades. This is particularly true for those who rely on the library or a classmate to borrow the book.

Read NEBHE's [one-pager on OER and COVID-19](#) to learn more about the particular value of OER as institutions navigate the nuances of reopening during a global pandemic.

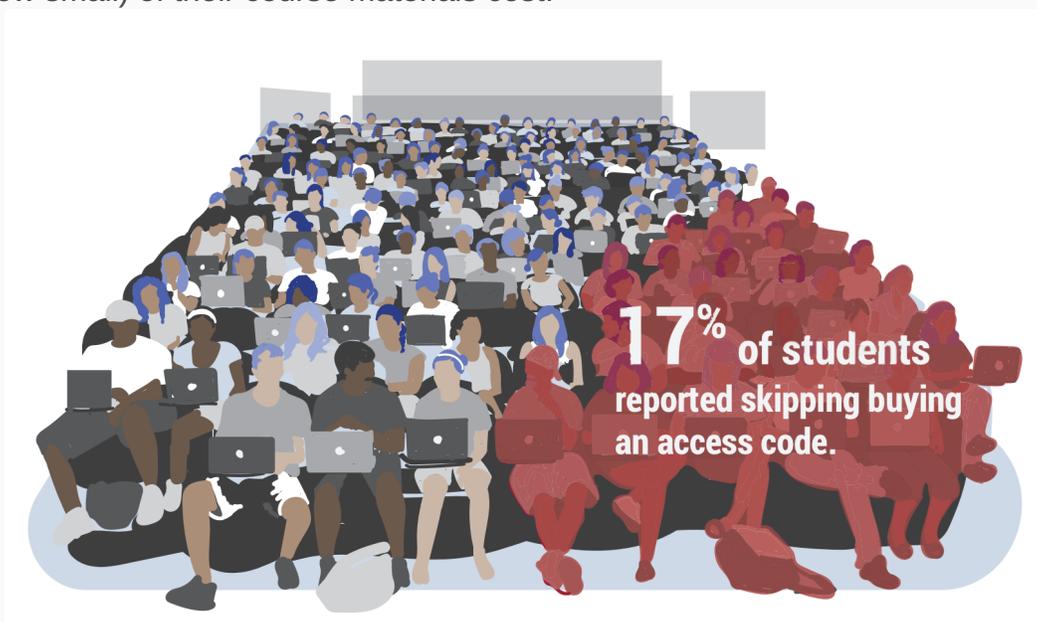
Publisher Monopolies & Inclusive Access Models

Commercial textbook publishers have worked to address student cost complaints as well as faculty complaints of students not having access to their learning materials on the first day of class. Their solution, inclusive access, often gets conflated with OER and further confuses faculty trying to help their students. Cengage and McGraw-Hill Education announced in 2019 a proposed merger. According to [an announcement from the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition](#), the merger of these two industry giants would have combined the second and third largest higher education publishers (Pearson Education being the largest), turning the college textbook market into an effective duopoly that would have stifled competition in an industry already known for rapidly rising prices. Fortunately just after the one year anniversary of its announcement, the merger negotiations between textbook publishing giants Cengage and McGraw-Hill Education were called off on May 4, 2020.

Like OER, inclusive access models aim to ensure that all students have access to their learning materials on the first day of class. The major difference, however, is that OER are free and inclusive access material is not. Often when colleges and universities sign inclusive access contracts with publishing companies, they include a materials cost on the student's tuition bill, also known as "automatic textbook billing."

In February 2020, [U.S. PIRG Education Fund](#) reviewed 31 of these contracts across the country which affected approximately 700,000 students. [The report](#) revealed that a significant number of the contracts "fail to deliver real savings for students, reduce faculty and student choice, and give even more power to a handful of monolithic publishing companies." In [a subsequent report](#) released in June 2020, US PIRG found that 17% of students reported skipping the purchase of the access code often required to use digital commercial textbooks, which may include homework assignments. While significantly lower than the percent who skip purchasing the other types of materials (66%), there is often a direct impact on the grade because without the password to assignments that the access code provides, students cannot turn in required assignments. With the rise of access codes, many students are being priced out of participating in class, especially since homework can be up to 20% of their grade. The move to digital also provides new challenges and questions on student data privacy.

Inclusive access models also strip students of their rights under the "[first sale doctrine](#)" that so many have taken advantage of before the age of digital textbooks. This doctrine, codified at 17 U.S.C. § 109, states that an individual who knowingly purchases a legal copy of a copyrighted work (in this case, a textbook) from the copyright holder, receives the right to sell it in the secondhand market. No longer are students able to get back a portion (no matter how small) of their course materials cost.



With inclusive access programs, students lose access to these materials after the semester ends because of copyright restrictions and limited license agreements between the publisher and the institution. In contrast, with OER, open licenses allow students to retain learning materials in perpetuity, serving students and learners of all ages and stages. This is important for students who may have to retake a course or who are enrolled in a sequence, for example, Biology I and Biology II, where having access to the previous semester's book is essential. As higher ed grapples with the realities of COVID-19, more than ever, the flexible licensing structures of OER can help students participate and complete coursework during times of personal, societal and systemic disruption.

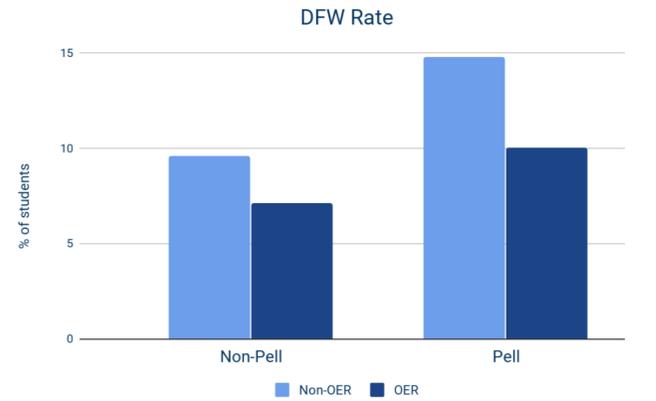
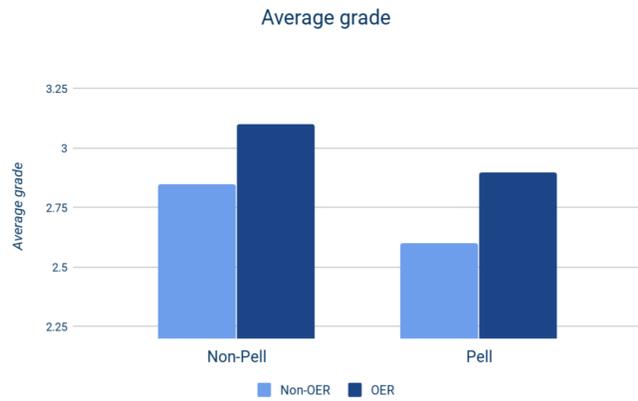
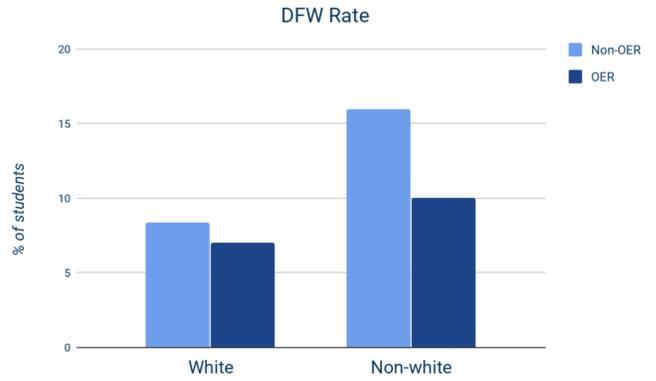
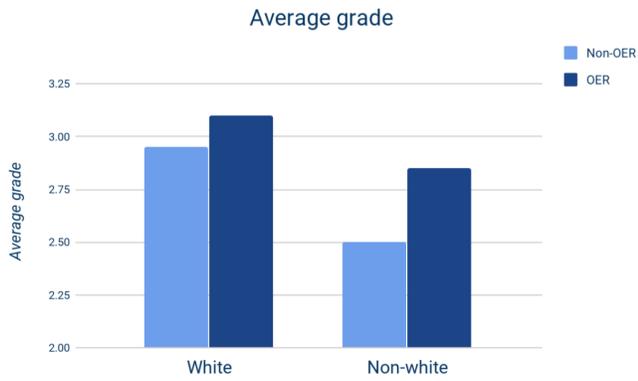
OER Promotes More Equitable Student Success Metrics

"Education is the key to advancing society's greatest goals, from building a strong economy to leading healthy lives. By increasing access to education and creating a platform for more effective teaching and learning, Open Education benefits us all."

From SPARC's ["Why Open Education"](#)

Academic hardships aren't the only repercussions of expensive textbooks for our students. Many are forced to make tough decisions like skipping meals, falling behind on rent and other cost-of-living bills in order to afford their course materials. The staggering and accelerating gap between state funding and tuition is putting an increased burden on students and their families to come up with the money to fund their education. While faculty have little to no control over tuition costs, they can exercise their academic freedom and elect to use OER to help alleviate the high cost of textbooks, which helps all students. A [2018 study by Colvard, et al.](#) found that OER also benefits student success metrics like increasing grade point average and reducing drop, fail, and withdraw rates for all students, but particularly for those who are non-white and pell-eligible. [A 2017 study](#) by Jhangiani & Dastur found that **cost-savings associated with OER do not compromise the quality of the resources or student performance, rather, students perform the same or better than those assigned a traditional, commercial textbook.**

OER Promotes Student Success



Colvard, N., Watson, C., & Park, H. (2018). The impact of open educational resources on various student success metrics. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 30(2), 262-276. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1184998.pdf>

Regional OER Policy Highlights

Overview

While there is no one-size-fits-all policy, model or practice in Open Education, several New England states engaged in this work have identified and demonstrated practical approaches to successfully advance initiatives at both the state and institution level. Particular barriers that inhibit OER adoption such as funding, faculty recognition in the tenure and promotion process, and practitioner support can all be addressed by well-developed, informed and flexible policies. The following section describes observations of sound practice NEBHE has observed. These include regional exemplars addressing several approaches to these barriers that advance OER adoption and awareness and support of Open Education. To view a more extensive state-by-state overview of the work being done in the Northeast, consult NEBHE's [Landscape Summary](#).

1. Empowering diverse and representative leadership

When considering what successful policies look like that advance the adoption and use of OER, it is essential to identify a broad spectrum of key in-state, system or campus leadership. One of the main barriers that grassroots practitioners, senior leaders and legislators encounter is a lack of means to communicate with one another about how to effectively, logistically and sustainably move this work forward.

Examples of Statewide committees include:

The [Massachusetts Department of Education OER Advisory Council](#), whose membership comprises a broad representation of faculty, state administrators, students, librarians and instructional designers, have been effective in fostering collaboration across the state and most importantly, bringing several different perspectives to the table in advising the Department of Higher Education of recommended best practices like steering clear of endorsing programs and practices that on the surface look good but are actually harmful to students, like inclusive access. The advisory council has also identified areas inhibiting the scaling of OER adoption at public institutions in the state and have formed subcommittees to directly address and present solutions for these issues. Large committees are often unwieldy, but this council seems to have found a balance that offers broad representation without compromising size.

Rhode Island's [Open Textbook Initiative Steering Committee](#) and Connecticut's [OER Coordinating Council](#) each have member representation from both public and private institutions, which is particularly important because private institutions make up about 61% of New England's colleges and universities yet they have traditionally been left out of opportunities to contribute their voice and experiences in state initiatives. Often, the way OER is marketed and supported at public and private institutions can vary greatly, and having committees that broadly represent the different needs, challenges and opportunities from each sector has significant benefits to both institution-types. More cross-pollination between public and private institutions increases the availability and quality of OER across multiple disciplines and lessons learned can be shared and challenges tackled collectively.

The State University of New York (SUNY) received \$4 million from New York state over the past three years to fund the sustained use of OER. SUNY has [more than tripled the impact of that investment](#). These funds have not only saved students money but also created the infrastructure that can be sustainable over time to support student learning. OER are leading to a more individualized learning experience and generating better outcomes for SUNY's students.



While legislation and state funding can certainly help advance OER initiatives, it's not always required to successfully get efforts off the ground. The investment and attention of a key leader on a campus can significantly impact the momentum and faculty buy-in of OER adoption. At Thomas College in Maine, [the Provost is leading the charge](#) and has intentionally tied the institution's mission and core values to these efforts.

Statewide "challenges" (like the Rhode Island Open Textbook Initiative), rather than legislative action, can also have a powerful impact on empowering institutions to claim agency over how they implement OER programs that best fit their campus cultures. Such challenges allow for flexibility and institutional autonomy. Each institution's liaison has the freedom and ability to "read the room" and develop and implement appropriate strategies aligned with their own mission that will help toward the overall success of the statewide initiative. With less structured challenges also come the need for an established team on campus to assist with the identification, collection and analysis of various defined data like enrollment figures, cost savings, disciplines and courses using OER, status of faculty members, etc. This data collection and analysis not only contributes to the state's efforts, but also can provide benchmarking opportunities to identify ways to scale the adoption of OER.

2. Inclusive and sustainable institutional policy making

Developing institutional policies that encourage the use and adoption of OER require that this work be supported, acknowledged and rewarded in various capacities. OER are free for students and others to access and use in perpetuity, but faculty and support staff spend countless hours creating, revising, editing and thoughtfully incorporating accessibility measures and appropriate pedagogical technologies for content delivery and assessment of OER.

Unpaid labor of OER development can be problematic, particularly for vulnerable populations like faculty of color and part-time faculty. These individuals are often asked to do more than their white or full-time peers, for little or no compensation. Part-time faculty are often not eligible to participate in paid professional development opportunities and don't have access to professional development funds that could help them gain the necessary skills to successfully engage with OER. They often take on this work in their own time and "on their own dime."



Responsible and sustainable OER policies should address equitable access for both full- and part-time ([as of 2018 46% of faculty teaching at degree-granting postsecondary institutions were part-time](#)) as well as tenured and tenure-track faculty.

Examples of effective practices and considerations include:

- A **course release policy** acknowledges the time commitment required of faculty to develop and maintain high-quality, free content. At Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport, CT, the administration has crafted an Additional Responsibilities (AR) policy that allows for a course release in a faculty member's teaching load to do OER adoption work (OER course design).
- **OER is not yet acknowledged in academia as a valued form of scholarship, research or service to be counted toward the tenure and promotion process.** While part-time faculty face significant barriers to participating in and advancing their OER work, full-time, tenure-track faculty struggle with normalizing their OER contributions in tenure and promotion. Some student government associations in the Northeast have rallied to develop "OER Champion" awards for faculty as a way to express gratitude and acknowledge the efforts of these individuals in actively choosing to use OER to save students money, however, recognition like this typically falls under the "service" category only. Service recognition is certainly commendable, but at several institutions, particularly research institutions that place more value on scholarship and research, this type of award won't be as helpful in promotion and deters junior faculty from investing time in OER adoption and creation.

- Promotion decisions often occur at the department level, so flexible and adaptable policies that encourage departments to consider and value OER creation would be extremely helpful. At unionized campuses, this means that contractual language or memorandums of understanding would need to be developed to officially acknowledge this challenging work.
- **Flexible and inclusive OER mini-grant programs and access to professional development funds foster sustainable progress.** OER initiatives at many of the University System of New Hampshire institutions fund all faculty—**full- or part-time**—exactly the same way, and part-time faculty also have access to the professional development support events that are designed to help those who receive mini-grants. This is also the case at Roger Williams University in Rhode Island, where the Office of Academic Affairs has supported adjunct faculty by giving them the **flexible** options of receiving mini-grant funds in their paycheck (which is taxed), or directly applying the funds toward professional development costs, including conference and travel expenses. Either option **significantly stretches the awarded monetary value.**
- Policy mandates are highly discouraged, but **opt-in campus, system or state “challenges”** (as seen in *Rhode Island* (p. 15)) can generate significant interest and energy in saving students money and exploring how OER can positively shift teaching and learning practices. Additionally, encouraging and supporting resolutions from faculty and student governance structures is a powerful way to lead change from the ground up as observed in Massachusetts (p. 17).



3. Supporting student voice and interest

OER help break down existing and shifting barriers to student access to essential educational resources that support their learning and success. Incorporating their voice and participation is a key consideration when crafting policies and strategies for advancing the adoption of OER.

In 2017, the University of Rhode Island developed [a set of videos](#) to share with its faculty to raise awareness of the need for more affordable learning materials. A [2019 Bayview Analytics Report](#) found that 70% of faculty are the sole decision-makers in using online homework systems and the same researchers found in 2014 that 76% of faculty were the sole decision-makers regarding required textbooks (as opposed to department or administrator decisions). A video campaign highlighting student experiences and struggles is a powerful and authentic way to inform faculty of the problem and engage students in advancing institutional efforts to support and incorporate OER.

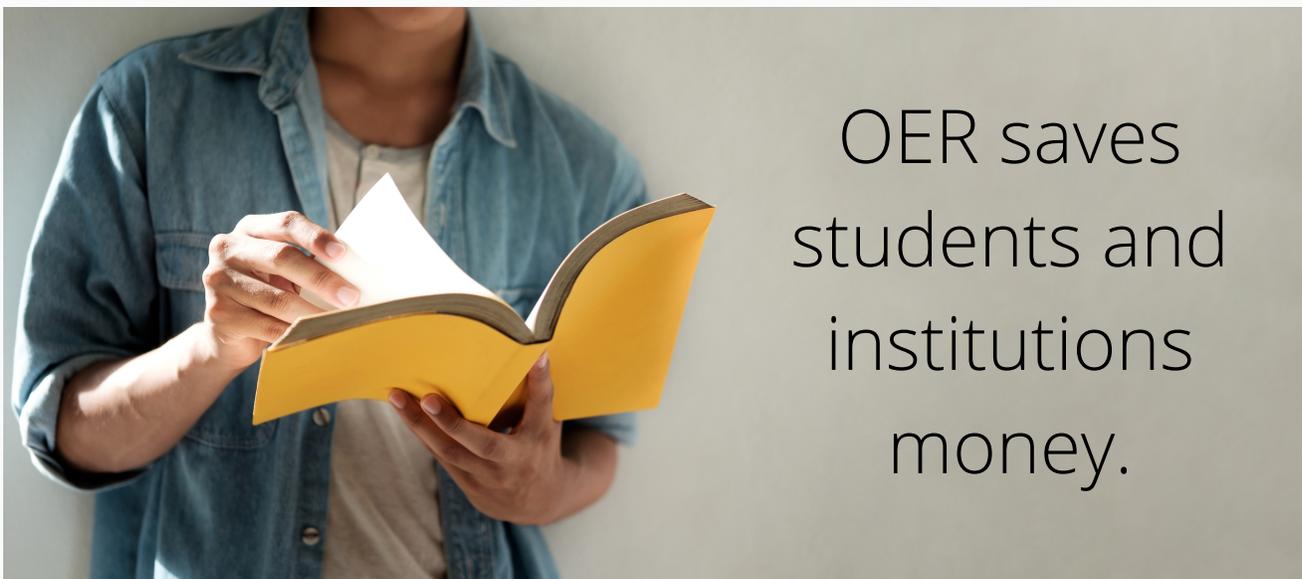
The current Massachusetts OER Advisory Council was born out of the statewide Student Advisory Council (SAC) in April 2018, when the student organization presented a resolution to the state Board of Higher Education asking for recognition of OER as a viable means to save students money on textbooks. SAC then called on the state Department of Education to explore and identify opportunities for implementing OER on a broader scale.



Today, the Massachusetts OER Advisory Council includes student members who are active on their respective campuses as well as in larger national groups like [Student PIRGs](#). The state OER Working Group’s [Final Report and Recommendations](#) suggests as an action that the Department of Higher Education “Enable, Activate, and Support Student Advocacy for OER,” in which partnering with students who directly bear the costs of expensive course materials and who are able to convey these struggles with key decision-makers is a priority. Having students as peers and equals on state committees allows for powerful collaborations that can inspire and cultivate real-time and direct benefits for students who are struggling with the out-of-pocket costs of learning materials. Several institutions in the Northeast have active Student PIRG hubs including UMass Amherst, UConn, and Rutgers University. OER efforts exist to fulfill student access needs, which are ever-changing: To not include them in these conversations would be contradictory and possibly harmful.

4. Sustainable funding & return on investments

State-level support for OER efforts which encourage initial steps and actions, no matter how small, can have a significant impact on return on investment with minimal but sustained funding. In the Northeast, we've seen the best success where state support is more inclusive in terms of who can participate in resource allocation and training, further bridging the gap between public and private institutions. Small investments can lead to substantial savings for students, however, states, systems, and institutions should move away from a project mindset and toward making these investments part of a larger cultural shift that normalizes supporting faculty adoption and creation of OER.



OER saves
students and
institutions
money.

Although budgets are tight, significant savings can still be observed in New England states like New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Maine and Connecticut, where small amounts of seed money have been granted to public institutions in a variety of ways to support faculty adoption and creation of OER in the curriculum.

The University System of New Hampshire's Open Education Initiative has been supporting 45 faculty per year, for the past five years, as faculty integrate open resources and pedagogies into their courses to improve student engagement and make higher education more affordable. In the 2019-20 academic year, savings for students surpassed \$1 million. The University of Massachusetts at Amherst has generated over \$1.8 million in savings for students through its grant program, and the University of Southern Maine similarly offers mini-grants to faculty to incentivize them to redesign their courses using OER to save students money. Connecticut's OER Coordinating Council is working with its second round of grants for OER, which are available for faculty at both public and private institutions in the state. The biggest barrier for these initiatives is helping states and institutions move from a project mindset to a programmatic systematic mindset: Sustained funding for these programs need to not only be baked into budgets but also into the higher education culture.

5. Professional Development

While it's becoming common practice to provide faculty with grant incentives to carry out this work, professional development and training opportunities are essential in making sure that the individuals creating these free resources have the skills to navigate the nuances of copyright and open licensing, accessibility, technology platforms and other new skill sets. Responsible curation of OER starts with copyright, yet [a 2015 study](#) found that 80% of both academic and public librarians at top-ranked institutions received no copyright or IP-specific on-the-job training.

Partnerships between state entities are a good way to help with cost-sharing for professional development opportunities to intercept skills gaps. In 2017, the Rhode Island Office of Innovation and the Rhode Island Office of Library and Information Services teamed up to host a free two-day copyright bootcamp for all librarians in the state. The workshops helped librarians develop the necessary knowledge base and skills to support the governor's challenge to [save RI students \\$5 million over five years in textbook costs](#) using open textbooks or OER. States need not invest a lot of money to see a significant return on investment in supporting OER initiatives that save students money.



Summary

Open Education has the potential to provide various pathways for engaged learning and innovative pedagogies. It can increase opportunities for intentionally building in UDL (Universal Design for Learning) practices that expand accessibility, empower our students as content creators and contributors to the Knowledge Commons, and leverage equitable access to high-quality learning resources for all students, particularly historically underserved groups.

Well-defined and supported policies can ensure students have free, perpetual access to their learning materials, even during times of unforeseen disruption and that practitioners have the necessary support infrastructure in place to ensure their needs are being met to sustainably and ethically continue this work. With diverse committee representation, campuses, systems and states can ensure the most inclusive perspectives and recommendations for developing and implementing policies that discourage the use of Inclusive Access and instead acknowledge and reward faculty who adopt and create OER. The more cross-pollination that can occur between our public and private institutions in creating sound OER policies, the more robust and thoughtful collaborations that can develop and supply our postsecondary students with high-quality OER, increasing equitable access for lifelong learning.

Questions? Comments?

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