



OER SUSTAINABILITY CASE STUDY:

SUNY FREDONIA

Using Incentives and Transparency in Textbook Prices to Grow OER
and Maximize Student Savings

August 2019

The State University of New York at Fredonia (Fredonia) is a public master's degree granting University with about 4,400 undergraduate students (4,600 total students). Fredonia began its Open Education Resources (OER) initiative in May, 2017 when it received initial OER grant funding from the SUNY system.¹ Some faculty at the University were already using OER resources, but the grant funding served as a catalyst to significantly scale up the work. Fredonia developed and delivered 21 OER courses (49 sections) in 2017-18; 3,200 OER course enrollments saved students more than \$200k in textbook costs, according to Fredonia.

Lowering textbook costs are part of the University's strategic plan to reduce costs across campus. While the University's primary motivation for OER is student savings, faculty are motivated by the pedagogical opportunities it offers; faculty also acknowledge that many students are not purchasing textbooks.

Approach and Vision

Fredonia's OER work is coordinated by the University's Professional Development Center, Reed Library, and Office of Online Learning. The Professional Development Center leads the OER team, but it functions as an integrated unit; there is no designated OER coordinator. The Associate Provost for Academic Affairs also supports the effort.

Fredonia began its OER work with a series of information sessions in summer 2017 and proceeded to identify faculty already using OER resources. They kicked off their OER initiative at the annual Teaching and Learning Conference in August, which included a nationally recognized OER speaker discussing the impact of OER on student success. Faculty and staff from other SUNY campuses with more advanced OER programs also presented at the event.

Faculty interested in developing an OER course were required to apply, and the application was then reviewed by the librarians and members of a textbook affordability committee. Priority was given to faculty proposing to use OER across all sections of a course, in general education courses, or in courses with high textbook costs (current textbook prices were submitted with the application). Proposals from all 36 instructors who submitted were approved, with some faculty creating multiple courses (54 stipends awarded). Faculty could either adopt or

create OER, and many utilized existing resources from Lumen Learning.

During the redesign process, librarian support was available to faculty. Librarians also reviewed the completed syllabus, checked the licensing to ensure a majority of the materials were OER, and confirmed that any required course materials cost less than \$50 per student. After the course was approved, the faculty member received one of three stipends: 1) a \$600 stipend per course; 2) a \$750 stipend per faculty team member when all sections of a course were converted; or 3) a \$750 stipend for converting a general education or high enrollment course (50+ students). The larger stipends paid to faculty team members incentivized full course conversions in English, chemistry, and math.

As the Fredonia team considers options for developing a sustainable OER model, they have expressed interest in a full- or half-time OER coordinator. However, with the University's current budget situation they don't expect new funding will be available to support that position. Instead, they may need to consider alternative ways to reallocate existing resources to support and lead the work, which is currently an additional responsibility to their existing workload.

¹ The information included in this case study was drawn from a team interview with 6 members of SUNY Fredonia's OER Sustainability Plan project team on August 28, 2018, OER documents provided by the team, and information from the SUNY Fredonia website.

OER Resources and Communication

The nature of Fredonia's organizing framework ensured that faculty support was built into the course development process. In addition to kicking off the project at the annual Teaching and Learning Conference, the OER team hosts two-hour OER workshops every other Friday to provide information on OER and assist faculty in locating materials; scheduled appointments are also available. The library also offers an extensive online "Libguide" with information on OER resources, copyright, and faculty support.

In addition, instructional designers are available to provide personalized support, such as helping faculty evaluate different courseware options or providing technical guidance on editing online textbooks. The Office of Online Learning also offered a workshop on integrating OER into online courses.

Fredonia also has made progress developing infrastructure around OER. They worked with the Registrar's office to add a data system identification flag for low-cost courses, and

developed workflow processes that allows them to identify OER courses.

Although Fredonia's process for recruiting and developing courses proved successful, it was quite time consuming. They recognized that management of the process could be simplified by establishing a single date for the course deliverables instead of tracking custom dates for each faculty member. They also now have processes in place to track faculty's OER projects.

Fredonia has been forward-thinking about how it markets OER to administrators. They've provided informational email messages to department chairs identifying the courses successfully converted to OER, the savings to students, and the process for faculty to propose developing an OER course. The team also contributes to the monthly Academic Affairs update, and shared information during the Associate Provost's meeting with the Deans.

Exemplary Practice: Textbook Affordability Committee

Fredonia previously assembled a textbook affordability committee—comprised of faculty and representatives from the bookstore, library, and financial aid—to address concerns about textbook costs. The committee has played a unique role in the OER initiative. In addition to serving as part of the OER proposal review and selection committee, the committee's activities also helped recruit faculty for OER course development.

The committee worked with Fredonia's in-house college bookstore to identify courses with high cost textbooks (priced at \$200 or higher). This course list was shared with the academic Deans, many of whom were unaware of the high-priced textbooks that faculty were using. The Deans then met individually with the faculty members teaching those courses to discuss their textbook costs and inquire if they were willing to use OER instead.

Lessons Learned: The textbook committee approach was an innovative way to recruit faculty and maximize savings to students. Approximately 5 of 36 OER adopters were faculty that the committee had approached. These faculty generally hadn't considered cost as a factor in their textbook selection process and agreed to use OER instead of commercial textbooks. Fredonia plans to continue this recruitment strategy in the coming year. This approach exposes Deans and faculty to systemic concerns about textbook affordability, provides a way to directly address those concerns, and offers an opportunity to further educate the academic community on the financial and pedagogical benefits of OER.

Looking Ahead: Sustainability Planning

Fredonia has already developed many of the processes and supports that lead to sustainability. As Fredonia continues to build on its initial OER successes, it should focus on developing the resources and culture necessary to sustain the effort. In the proposed sustainability framework, priority areas for Fredonia are highlighted in blue and initial recommendations are provided below.

Infrastructure

- » Finalize the addition of a low-cost course identification tag in the course catalogue so students can identify and search for low-cost courses.
- » Document the process being developed to review and update OER course materials.

Resources

- » The role, responsibilities, and cost of an OER coordinator should be determined so potential funding options can be explored for the position. Alternately, discuss whether the current OER work can continue to be “funded” by reallocating time of the current staff and possibly offloading some of their other responsibilities.
- » Consider whether the faculty incentive structure for converting multiple course sections could be modified to create greater efficiencies (e.g., teams split a larger stipend to create a single OER course that is used across sections).
- » Identify the number of course sections that utilize a fee-based platform (e.g., Lumen Learning) and explore how these courses can be sustained if the current SUNY subsidy is removed.
- » Investigate platforms to accept direct student payments for access to OER materials.



Culture

- » Develop a plan to market OER courses to current and prospective students once the low-cost course attribute is visible in the course catalog. Consider engaging with student groups (e.g., student government) to help promote OER.
- » Continue to develop marketing/recruitment materials for faculty and administrators that highlight the program successes; draw connections to the University’s strategic vision around student cost reductions.
- » Connect with institutional research to identify new metrics that could support faculty and administrators’ interest in OER as a driver of student success.

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