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PRESS RELEASE

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Report Shows Oregon’s Public Investment in Textbook Affordability is Saving Oregon Students Millions

Salem, OR – The Higher Education Coordinating Commission is pleased to share a new report submitted to the Oregon Legislature showing that Oregon’s statewide investment in textbook affordability is having a significant impact on making postsecondary education more affordable. The report analyzes the impact of the state’s investment from 2015 to the present on developing and promoting high-quality, no-cost and low-cost course materials—Open Educational Resources (OER) —for use in Oregon’s public colleges and universities. One key component of the funding supports project grants to faculty cohorts to redesign coursework using OER. These funds are currently supporting 71 faculty projects serving more than 12,000 students at 18 public institutions. Students have already saved \$1.6 million cumulatively in the 2019-2021 biennium from these projects, and are expected to save \$2.6 million by July 1, 2021.

Student savings from these redesigned courses compound over time, as more students take the courses; by the end of the current 2019-21 biennium, total savings from all grant cohorts since 2015 are expected to approach \$10 million. In addition to the grant-supported projects, another component of the state’s OER work is focused on broadening overall awareness and statewide use of OER across all institutions. These cost saving options are increasingly clear and transparent for students, as public community colleges and universities are required to clearly designate in course schedules which courses are offering no-cost and low-cost course materials.

Amy Hofer, coordinator of statewide open education library services for Open Oregon Educational Resources, says, “We expect that every grant dollar spent by the state will translate to six dollars saved by students in the current budget cycle. Faculty, librarians, and campus store managers are aware of the financial pressures facing students and are increasingly interested in using open educational resources or other low-cost alternatives to commercial textbooks. Affordable textbooks are especially important with students struggling to meet basic needs as a result of new hardships brought on by the pandemic.”

This statewide effort to promote Open Education Resources (OER) was spearheaded by the HECC in coordination with campus-led activities, and supported by investments made by the 2015, 2017, and 2019 Legislative Assemblies. The state’s investment is coordinated through Open Oregon Educational Resources (openoregon.org), a program that facilitates widespread adoption of open, low-cost, high-quality materials at Oregon community colleges and universities through convening of faculty, policy leadership, professional development, and course redesign grants to faculty.

Kyle Thomas, director of legislative and policy affairs for the HECC, says, “Oregon’s forward-looking investment in expanding OER is successfully reducing the unexpected high costs that far too many students face with textbook and course materials. For every course that this investment supports in shifting to OER, hundreds of students can be impacted over many years. We commend the faculty, administrators, and our partners at Open Oregon Education Resources for their innovative work for students, and we look forward to continuing this momentum.”

The report also summarizes a 2019 analysis of 19 public community college and university course schedules, describing the impact of courses being designated no-cost or low-cost, a requirement imposed by legislation in 2015. In 2017-19, 12 percent of courses at the reporting institutions were designated as no-cost or low-cost, representing an estimated savings of \$34 million for over 375,000 students in those two academic years. In addition, Oregon community colleges significantly reduced the estimated cost of course materials for transfer degrees during the four years between 2015-19.

Oregon is a national leader in open education, with a well-developed community of practice around OER development and implementation. In addition to the grant funding, a new development in this work is external funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for 2020-2022, enabling Open Oregon Educational Resources to develop a statewide professional development course: the Equity & Open Education Faculty Cohort Model. This professional development course, designed by library faculty member Jen Klaudinyi at Portland Community College, is now available to faculty to help them consider open educational practices with an equity lens, including universal design, cultural relevance, and diverse perspectives. The next cohort will convene during summer term.

Detailed information about Open Oregon Educational Resources can be found via <https://openoregon.org/>.

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The State of Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) envisions a future in which all Oregonians—and especially those whom our systems have underserved and marginalized—benefit from the transformational power of high-quality postsecondary education and training. For more information, go to www.Oregon.gov/HigherEd