

CARLI OER Committee's Statement on the Need for Funding for Open Education in Illinois

We believe that statewide support for Open Education is vital to the success and sustainability of higher education. It eliminates barriers to access, builds opportunities for student engagement and faculty agency, and improves teaching and learning in Illinois.

The cost of course materials is undermining student success. It has become an equity issue because students do not have equal access to courses if they are unable to afford textbooks. According to the National Course Materials Survey 2023, more than half of college students have taken fewer courses or avoided registering for a specific course due to the cost of course materials, including textbooks.¹ The Consortium of Academic & Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) administered a survey to Illinois higher education students in 2023 and many of the comments indicated that students are making difficult choices between purchasing textbooks or purchasing other necessities, such as food, housing, or medication.² Other comments suggested that students are experiencing significant stress due to their financial situation, and the costs of course materials add to the stress. The Illinois General Assembly and federal legislators have expressed strong support for reducing the cost of textbooks and other course materials.³ Similarly, faculty and instructors are intensely interested in promoting Open Educational Resources (OER); they see firsthand the impact of textbook costs on their students.

With OER, students have day-one access to materials, which keeps students that cannot afford traditional instructional materials, like textbooks, from falling behind in their coursework. Further, OER can improve student success, particularly amongst groups that are most negatively impacted by the rising cost of instructional materials. Research from a recent article on the impact of OER in the *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* indicates that moving from commercial textbooks to OER can improve grades, as well as decrease drop, failure, and withdrawal rates for students, with disproportionately positive effects on Pell eligible students.⁴

Open Education presents opportunities for rich learning experiences for students and increased freedom for instructors. Due to the open licensing attached to OER, instructors have the ability to edit and modify content to incorporate up-to-date information in their fields, add material that brings the local context into instruction, and can allow them to add and eliminate subject matter as needed to meet the learning goals of the course. Flexible Open Pedagogical practices can bring students into the realm of OER as authors in the discipline of study, such as generating new or updating existing OER content as part of their coursework. This gives students the opportunity to see themselves as researchers and creators of academic content that is not only valuable to their peers in class but is open and available to a worldwide audience. It also provides opportunities for students to have research and publishing experience for their portfolios upon graduation.

Benefits of Open Educational Resources and Practice

Open Education is about more than cost savings—it is about empowering students and faculty by creating collaborative learning environments that promote engagement, invite innovation, and build a sense of belonging.

Advantages include:

- **Expanded access to learning** - Students can access OERs at any time, and they can access the material repeatedly in formats that are effective for all learners.
- **Augmentation of class materials** - OERs can supplement textbooks and lectures where deficiencies in information are evident.
- **Enhancement of regular course content** - Information presented in multiple formats may help students to more easily learn the material being taught.
- **Showcasing of innovation and talent** - A wide audience may learn of faculty research interests and expertise. Potential students and donors may be impressed, and student and faculty recruitment efforts may be enhanced.
- **Continually improved resources** - Unlike traditional textbooks and other static sources of information, OERs can be updated quickly. Instructors can take an existing OER, adapt it for a class, and make the modified OER available for others to use.
- **Co-creation** - Instructors can incorporate students' diverse perspectives and experiences so that they move beyond being consumers of knowledge and become collaborators in teaching and learning.⁵

Request for support

Illinois has been a leader in Open Education, and librarians at Illinois higher education institutions have committed to collaborating with faculty, students, administrators, and other partners to reduce the cost and increase the accessibility and inclusivity of textbooks and other course materials. Colleges and universities across the state have been making the most of existing forms of support for OER work. The U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education Open Textbooks Pilot Program funded the CARLI Illinois SCOERs (Support for Creation of Open Educational Resources) grant which has produced innovative instructional materials for a variety of disciplines that will benefit students across the state. In FY24, the state of Illinois provided \$3 million to the Secretary of State in support of OER. CARLI worked with the Illinois State Library to administer the funds, resulting in the creation of 128 OER. Numerous proposals were not funded and many more institutions in Illinois require external support to cultivate Open Educational initiatives on their campuses before they can undertake OER creation.

Funding Open Education is a good investment. Research conducted by Student PIRGs shows that pandemic-era OER grant programs in the US and British Columbia resulted in \$2.5 million in student savings; further, this 2023 report suggests that "Every dollar invested in OER Grants can save students \$10 - \$20."⁶

Support could be used for:

- **Authoring** – Creating and adopting a substantially new open textbook or open course where it is possible to demonstrate that quality resources are not currently available to meet learning objectives.
- **Revising/Remixing** – Adapting existing OER with major revisions or developing custom course content from multiple Open Educational Resources and original open content to support learning objectives not met by existing open resources.
- **Creating Ancillaries** – Adopting existing OER and creating ancillaries such as quiz banks, lecture slides, or lab manuals.
- **Updating** – Updating and adopting existing OER that requires minor editing for currency, relevance, or accessibility, without major changes to the content or structure.
- **Training** – Support for the use, adaptation, or creation of OER for librarians, faculty, and staff, as well as outreach and internal award program funding.

Colleges and universities across the state want to adopt, adapt, and create OER and ancillaries so they can recruit, retain, and support students through graduation and provide them with the critical skills Illinoisans need to thrive in the 21st century. Continued funding opportunities from the state are essential to keep this vital work progressing.

The CARLI OER Committee members request that the state supports Illinois students through funding used to educate, train, and support faculty in selecting, using, and creating OER and implementing Open Educational practices. An allocation of \$3 million in FY26 would enable Illinois higher education institutions to work toward building robust Open Educational programs and expand the library of Illinois-created OER that can be used to ensure that students in the state's colleges and universities can flourish and meet their academic and career goals.

On behalf of the CARLI OER Committee

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¹ Bay View Analytics. (2023). National survey on student course material affordability, 2023. Retrieved from https://www.bayviewanalytics.com/reports/student_course_material_affordability.html

² The “[2023 Illinois course materials survey: Student perspective report](#)” created by CARLI © 2024 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois System and is licensed under a [CC-BY 4.0 International](#).

³ College Course Materials Affordability and Equitable Access (CCM) Task Force. (2023, March 1). *Illinois college course materials affordability and equitable access collaborative study*. Retrieved from <https://www.isac.org/e-library/research-policy-analysis/Task-Forces-Working-Groups/CCM-Task-Force/Documents/IL-CCM-Task-Force-Rpt-FINAL03012023.pdf>; SPARC. (2025, February 26). Affordable

College Textbook Act reintroduced in U.S. Congress. Retrieved from <https://sparcopen.org/news/2025/affordable-college-textbook-act-reintroduced-in-u-s-congress/>

⁴ Colvard, N. B., Watson, C. E., & 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), 262-76. Retrieved from <https://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/ijtlhe-issue.php?v=30&n=2&y=2018>

⁵ Adapted from Pennsylvania State University. (n.d.) Benefits of using OER. *OER and low-cost materials at Penn State*. <https://oer.psu.edu/benefits-of-using-oer/>

⁶ Xie, D. (2023). *Open textbooks: The billion dollar solution* (2nd ed.). *Student PIRGs* <https://studentpirgs.org/campaigns/make-textbooks-affordable/>