

10,000 CT students
from collectively
incurring more than
\$1.2 million in additional
college costs.



That's a **5.23x ROI** for the state.

Despite the success, funding for the OER Council was eliminated in 2024.

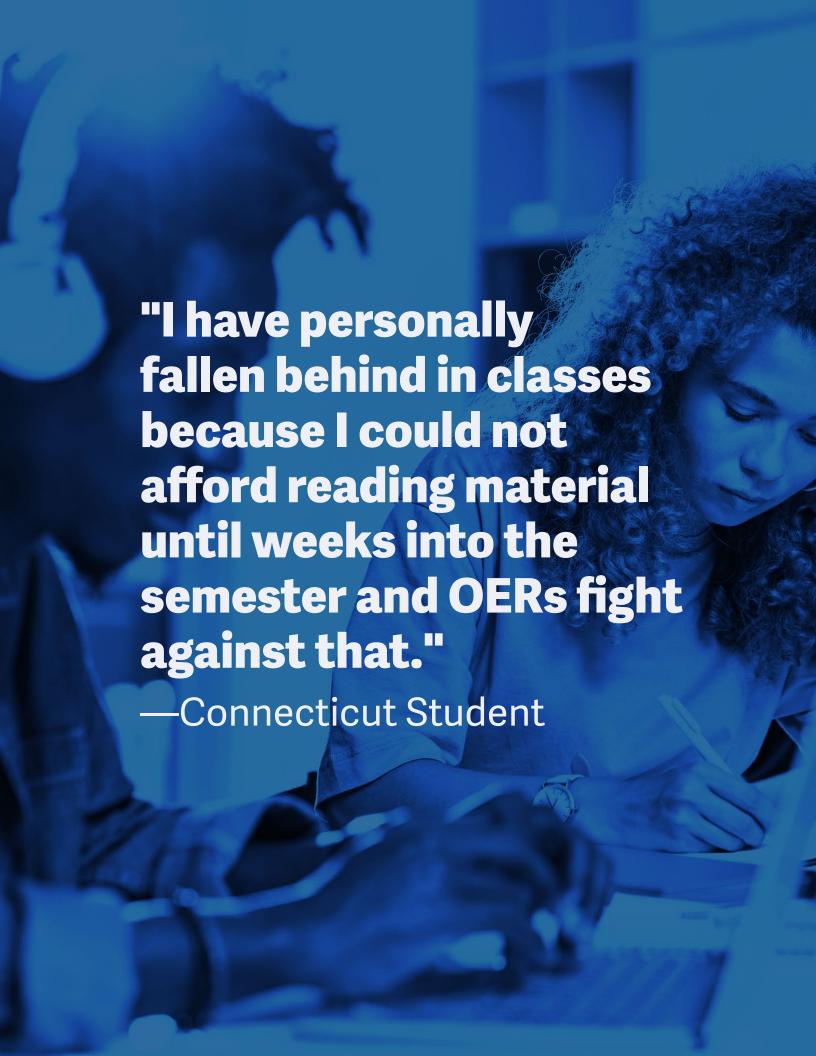


A small investment will make a big impact on students across Connecticut.





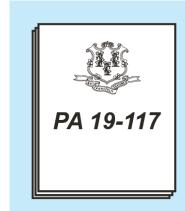
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Summary

Open Educational Resources (OER) are freely available and openly licensed online teaching and learning materials that can be used, shared, and adapted. As a no-cost alternative to traditional textbooks, OER save students money and fosters their success.

Recognizing the benefits of OER,
Connecticut enacted <u>Public Act Number</u>
19-117 in 2019. This Act resulted in the
formation of the Connecticut OER
Coordinating Council, a statewide body
consisting of faculty, administrators,
academic support staff, and students
from Connecticut's colleges and
universities. Among other roles, the
council is charged with:



OER SAVED

10,000

CT STUDENTS MORE THAN

\$1.2 million

IN EXTRA COLLEGE COSTS

- Identifying high-impact courses for which OER will be developed, converted, or adopted
- Establishing a program of competitive grants to increase access, affordability, and achievement for students through OER
- Promoting strategies for the production, use, and access of OER

Since its formation, the council has published **Annual Reports** detailing its work and the status of OER in Connecticut.

With the current report, the council must alert the state that the status of OER in Connecticut is imperiled. Despite a cumulative return of \$5.23 for every dollar investment, the state eliminated all FY2024 and FY2025 funding for the council's grant program. This divestment in support of the success of Connecticut's students will prevent the council from offering future grants or professional development opportunities. The council urges the state to restore funding.

The status of OER in Connecticut is imperiled.

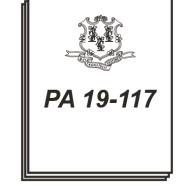
The Council urges the state to consider a full restoration of funding.

The Story of OER in Connecticut: A Record of Success, a Future in Peril

Connecticut's OER movement is rooted in the needs of its students and the convictions of its educators. From 2006 to 2016, the cost of textbooks had risen by 73 percent (four times the rate of inflation), and Connecticut students were feeling the pinch. Indeed, data showed that students at

state-affiliated colleges and universities had spent over \$147 million on textbooks in the 2014-2015 academic year alone. The burgeoning OER movement offered a potential solution, but the state lacked infrastructure, funding, and policies (such as an OER Model Policy - see page 15 and the Appendix) to support it.

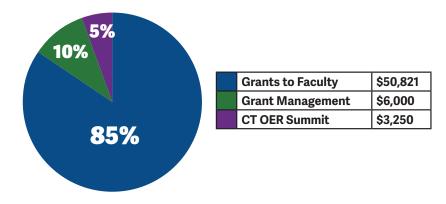
Action was needed, and State Representative Gregg Haddad and State Senator Mae Flexer responded by proposing legislation that resulted in **Special Act No. 15-18**, which established a 2015 pilot study to promote and assess the impacts of OER. Then, in 2016, Martha Bedard (the Director of



the UConn Library) and Kevin Corcoran (Executive Director of the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium) took up the mantle by leading a statewide task force that conducted a survey of faculty across the state. The survey's findings showed that faculty were interested in OER but needed additional resources and expertise.² These needs included not just an understanding of OER-basics but also developing and applying the skills to customize an existing OER or create a new one.

Public Act Number 19-117 was enacted in 2019 to address these gaps in resources and expertise. Through its establishment of the CT OER Coordinating Council, the Act created a standing body of diverse and dedicated educators to cultivate the growth of OER in Connecticut, and, through the annual allocation of \$100,000, the state gave the council adequate resources to fulfill its role.

Council Use of Remaining Funds in 2024



University of Connecticut & Connecticut State Colleges & Universities. (2016). Open source task force report. https://hdl.handle.net/11134/3846185

² University of Connecticut, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, & Connecticut State Colleges & Universities. (2017). Open source textbook report. https://hdl.handle.net/11134/3786846.

A key area of focus for the council has been its grant program, which propelled Connecticut's OER movement into the 2020s. In the council's five grant cycles (offered annually from 2020 to 2024), the council has helped 161 faculty teaching 373 course sections at 28 institutions to implement a variety of OER projects that increase access, affordability, and achievement for students. In total, 9,907 students achieved a documented savings of over \$1.2 million. This significant cost avoidance represents a return on investment (ROI) of 5.23x from the state's cumulative investment of \$229,483.

In addition to its administration of a grant program, the council has conducted annual surveys (now administered biannually) of the state's institutions of higher education. The surveys have shed light on the uptake and impacts of OER and helped the council to identify areas of need (e.g., training and support structures).

Finally, the council has provided the state's educators with professional development opportunities. Since 2020, the council has nourished the growth of an OER-focused community of practice by organizing statewide <u>OER summits</u>. These annual events have drawn 798 participants and addressed topics like OER accessibility, assessment, implementation, and open pedagogy.

Connecticut's OER success story halted in the summer of 2023 when the council learned that, despite its strong record of success and without explanation, the state had eliminated funding. This change denies the council adequate resources to carry out its charge and imperils the future of OER in Connecticut. And, while Connecticut divests, other states are taking the lead. The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, for example, has recently reported that an investment of \$440,699 in OER and other no-cost textbooks has resulted in a student savings of over \$15 million in 2023.³ If Connecticut does not fund OER, it risks being left behind as other states make strides to ensure that education is affordable and accessible.



Did You Know?

OER is part of the 2024-28 State Educational Technology
Plan of the Connecticut Commission for Educational
Technology. Goal 1.3 concerns OER use, Goal 1.4
concerns access (via the GoOpenCT repository), and
Goal 1.5 concerns training. In the Commission's 2024
Annual Report, the CT OER Coordinating Council is
identified as a partner in carrying out these goals.

³ Awkward, Robert. (2024). The state of OER FY23: Chief academic officers briefing. https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1K1BZ0qfaHgIToCYKg57DI3rUi79wANZm/edit#slide=id.p1

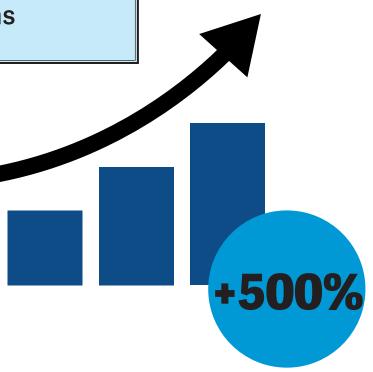


Grant Program Impact

SINCE 2020, **\$229,483** IN GRANT FUNDS:

- **121** awards
- **9,907** students
- **161** faculty
- 28 institutions
- 373 course sections

Cumulatively since 2020, the state's **\$229,483** grant helped **nearly 10,000** CT students avoid more than **\$1.2 million** in text book costs.



That's a 5x Return on Investment.

2024 Grant Program

Using a small reserve of leftover funds prior to the state's divestment, the council funded ten proposals submitted by Connecticut faculty for OER-related projects.

In total the council's 2024 grant program has enabled 208 students across 11 course sections to avoid \$21,181 in textbook costs. These savings will continue to be realized each semester that the course sections are taught using OER.



Remaining Funds Used in 2024

Enabled **208** students across **11** different course sections to avoid **\$21,181** in textbook costs

As Table 1 shows, the savings were accompanied by positive outcomes in student performance and persistence. On average, 96% of students completed their coursework and 87% of the students received a grade of "C" or better.

Table 1

Students	Sections	Persistence	Performance	Savings
208	11	96%	87%	\$21,181

Although the savings are substantial, they are less than prior years' savings, when state funding allowed the council to award more grants. Indeed, the average initial one-year student savings indicated in the council's prior four Legislative Reports (covering years in which the council received state funding) is \$235,000. In contrast, this year, when the council only had a small reserve of grant funds to award, the initial one-year savings is only \$21,181. Unless state funding is restored, there will be zero student savings to indicate in future reports due to the elimination of the grant program.



2024 Grant Program

Table 2

Grantee(s)	Institution	Course(s)	Focus
Danielle Cooper	University of New Haven	Juvenile Justice System	Developing slides and student-centered activities to accompany an OER.
Molly Daly and MaryAnn Murtha	Western Connecticut State University	Introduction to Human Communication	Accompanying OER with in-class exercises, team projects, homework assignments, and videos.
Robert Dolan*	University of Connecticut	Multivariable Calculus	Using an OER TO replace a traditional textbook.
Bernadine Franco	Eastern Connecticut State University	Latin American Art Topics: Inclusion of Women	Replacing traditional textbooks with an OER that includes more diverse resources for students.
Patrice Hamilton	CT State Community College Tunxis	Group Communication	Adopting an OER in a course offered for the first time at CT State Tunxis.
Leslie Lindenauer	Western Connecticut State University	American History to 1877	Creating a new workbook designed for the online modality and that emphasizes open pedagogy.
Jason Malli	Goodwin University	Music and the Humanities	Redesigning a course to incorporate OER.
Kenneth O'Konis	CT State Community College Asnuntuck	General Chemistry I (Combined Lecture/Lab)	Using an OER to replace a traditional textbook.
Aja Shabana	CT State Community College Middlesex	Quantitative Literacy	Adopting an OER for a course that has not been taught for many years.

^{*}Received two grants for separate projects involving the same course.





"[OER] goes beyond textbooks and traditional lectures—it's about empowering learners and making education more inclusive, accessible, and impactful."

Jennifer Croughwell Eastern Connecticut State University student

"The OER Grant program provided access to classes to which I would otherwise not have had access."

Nina Bakum Connecticut College student





"I appreciate [OER's] convenience and the ability to reference it whenever needed."

Le Nguyen Czaja Central Connecticut State University student

Reflections from Faculty Grantees:

Reflections from Students Using OER:

"The majority of the students had a very positive experience using this Chemistry 2e. They saved money and found the usability of the OER to benefit their overall course experience."

—2024 grantee

"There were no challenges using OER and I plan to continue to use them anywhere I teach."

—2024 grantee

"The textbook transcended its role as a text for us to examine and became the foundation for several of our class activities, including exam prep"

*—*2024 grantee

"I would absolutely recommend the use of OER for future sections! It enhanced my learning of the lecture material and was a strong resource for exam prep. I loved that it was used for class collaboration so that we could all work together to help each other prepare for the exam. Game changer!"

—CT student

"The OER materials were clear, wellorganized, and user-friendly, making it easier for me to understand the course content."

—CT student

"OERs provide a great solution without compromising the quality of education, so I think they should be implemented in more courses."

—CT student



2024 OER Summit

On March 8, 2024, seventy faculty, administrators, librarians, and academic support staff from twenty colleges and universities across Connecticut gathered to participate in the council's fifth annual CT OER Summit, which was hosted by Central Connecticut State University.

In the keynote presentation, Dr. Andrea Lanoux (Professor of Slavic Studies at Connecticut College) discussed the open pedagogy project she created for her first-year experience course, **Being Ukraine**. The summit also featured short presentations by faculty and librarians from the University of New Haven, Southern Connecticut State University, and



Naomi Toftness (Librarian, CT State Community College) talks with colleague.

Connecticut State Community College. The full agenda is posted at this link.

Feedback was positive! Eighty-two percent of the participants rated the summit as Excellent (the highest possible rating), and the remaining 18 percent rated the event as Good (the second highest possible rating).

Using what remains of the reserve of funds prior to the state's divestment, the council is currently planning a sixth annual CT OER Summit for Spring 2025 and looks forward to announcing details soon. Without restoration of state funding, the council will not be able to sponsor additional summits.



Sara Harrington (University of Connecticut) and William Lugo (Eastern Connecticut State University)

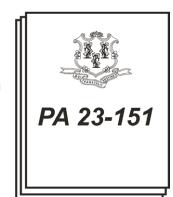
Keynote speaker Andrea Lanoux (Connecticut College).

Ariela McCaffrey (CT State Three Rivers) and Debbie Herman (CT State Manchester).

Model Policy

In 2023, the state both eliminated all funding for the council and added a new task to its charge. Public Act Number 23-151 directed the council to:

Develop a Model Policy for adoption by institutions of higher education that establishes (A) definitions for terms related to OER, (B) methods for data collection concerning the use and availability of OER, and (C) ways to present online course catalogs to students to clearly identify each course utilizing OER.



To develop the Model Policy, the council formed a working group with membership including academic professionals in a variety of roles and institution types:

- Patrick Carr (chair), Program Manager for Library Consortium Operations at the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities System
- Lígia Correia, Adjunct Professor at the University of New Haven
- Paula Dowd, Academic Dean of Nursing and Health Careers at Connecticut State Community College
- Tina Huey, Associate Director of Faculty Development at University of Connecticut
- Peter Kootsookos, Instructor, Engineering & Computer Science at CT State Community College Middlesex
- Jillian Maynard, Reference and Instruction Librarian at Central CT State University ·
- Jeanette Moore, Coordinator, Praxis Study Center and Adjunct Professor of Education and Educational Psychology, Western CT State University
- Kevin Redline, Scholarly Communications, Research & Instruction Librarian at Quinnipiac University

Drawing on input from Connecticut's higher education community and after reviewing other states' policies, the working group initiated a process of input-gathering, drafting, and revision. The intended outcome is a Model Policy that addresses the needs of Connecticut's colleges and universities and will result in changes that positively impact these institutions, their students, and the state.

At present, the working group has completed a second draft of the model policy (included as the Appendix), and is soliciting additional input from Connecticut's higher education community. Once the Model Policy is completed, the council will promote it to Connecticut's colleges and universities and (to the extent possible without funding) support implementation at interested institutions.

Plans for 2025

In prior years, the OER grant program has been a primary focus of the council's activities. Unless funding is restored, the council will be unable to offer 2025 grants, thereby discontinuing a program that, from 2020 to 2024, provided students with an initial one-year savings of \$1.2 million and provided the state with an initial return of 5.23 on its investment. These benefits are compounded each additional year that the faculty grantees continue to use the OER.

The council's plans for 2025 include:



Organizing a 2025 CT OER Summit (using the small amount of state funding that remains)



Completing an OER Model Policy and supporting its consideration for adoption



Administering a 2025 survey concerning the usage and impacts of OER at Connecticut's colleges and universities

To allow the council to more fully realize its potential to achieve savings for Connecticut's students, the state should re-invest in OER through a full restoration (\$100,000 annually) in funding.

"I work to pay my rent and purchasing books has always been a stressor for me, so being able to have access to [OER] materials via my professors has relieved me of so much stress."

—CT student

Council Membership

- Tiara Arnold, Research Services Coordinator, Fairfield University
- Rachael Barlow, Director for the Center for Faculty Career Development, Wesleyan University
- Thomas Barron, Director of Business and Technology Programs, Charter Oak State College
- **Patrick Carr,** Program Manager for Library Consortium Operations, Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (Chair)
- Paula Dowd, Academic Dean of Nursing and Health Careers, Connecticut State Community College
- Kristina Edwards, Electronic Resources Librarian, University of Connecticut
- David Ferreira, Provost, Charter Oak State College
- Tina Huey, Associate Director of Faculty Development, University of Connecticut
- Mary Isbell, Associate Professor of English, University of New Haven
- Aura Lippincott, Instructional Design, Western Connecticut State University
- Kristi Newgarden, Instructional Design, Charter Oak State College
- Eileen Rhodes, Director of Library Services, Connecticut State Community College Capital
- **Brian Sommers,** Professor of Geography, Central Connecticut State University
- Sasha Teplyaev, Professor of Mathematics, University of Connecticut
- Olivia Viel, Student, University of Connecticut
- **Bob Wyckoff,** Professor of English, Connecticut State Community College Housatonic

Acknowledgements

For their assistance in the statewide distribution of the information associated with the council's work, the council thanks the **Connecticut Office of Higher Education**, the **Council of Connecticut Academic Library Directors**, and the **CSCU OER Advisory Council**, which is co-chaired by **Hayley Battaglia** (Serials and Electronic Resources Librarian, Southern Connecticut State University) and **Jillian Maynard** (Reference and Instruction Librarian, Central Connecticut State University).

The council thanks **Central Connecticut State University** for hosting its 2024 CT OER Summit and particularly acknowledges Carl Antonucci (Director of Library Services) and Kimberly Brown Smith (Assistant to Library Director) for their extraordinary support in planning the event.

Thanks also go to the **Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology**, which administers **GoOpenCT**, the platform that grantees use to deposit their completed work.

Within the **CSCU System Office**, the council thanks **Aynsley Diamond** (Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs) for her administrative support and invaluable guidance. The council also expresses gratitude to **Chelsea Neelson** (Interim Senior Director of Government Relations and External Affairs) and **Marcy Ritsick** (Interim Associate Director of Government Relations) for their assistance in matters related to the council's communications with the Connecticut General Assembly. **Andrew Morris** (Web Communication & Design Coordinator) deserves thanks for his timely help in addressing problems with the council's website. For her assistance in processing payments of 2023 and 2024 grantees, the Council thanks **Kelly Corbin** (Associate for Finance & Accounting, CSCU). Lastly, the council is deeply indebted to **Amanda MacTaggart** (Executive Director of CSCU Success and Director of Strategic National Partnerships, Network Engagement, and Innovation) and **Adam Wisnieski** (Visual Communications Designer), who formatted and designed the contents of this report.

Appendix: Draft 2 of the CT OER Model Policy

Part I: Definitions

The council recommends that colleges and universities use two key designations concerning their course sections' instructional materials (regardless of format): OER and NoLo. The designators should be consistently defined as follows.

Open Educational Resources (OER) Designator

OER should be defined as a designator indicating that a single course section's required instructional materials consist entirely of Open Educational Resources (OER), which are ADA-compliant teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or that have been released under an intellectual property license (e.g., a Creative Commons license) that permits their free use and repurposing by others.

Consistent with the above definition, the following course materials are not OER:

- Materials that are freely available online but that are not openly licensed or in the public domain.
- Materials that are only available through a library-licensed database, e-book, streaming video, etc.

For avoidance of doubt, examples of OER include:

- Materials in print format that are provided to students free of charge and that have been openly licensed or that are in the public domain.
- Materials that are developed through Open Pedagogy, which is a set of pedagogical practices that include engaging students in openly licensed content creation.

No-Cost/Low-Cost (NoLo) Designator

NoLo should be defined as a designator indicating that a single course section's required instructional materials are either no-cost or may be purchased for permanent access to a new copy from the institution's bookstore for an amount that, in total, is \$50 or less (pre-tax). Exempted from the \$50-or-less calculation are tools and supplies (e.g., lab coats, lab notebooks, manual, goggles, art materials, calculators) and any materials that are recommended but not required by the instructor.

NoLo is a term originally developed by the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities System, and it encompasses instructional materials that receive an OER designator.

Consistent with the above definition, NoLo should not be applied:

- On the basis of pricing for rental costs.
- On the basis of pricing for used copies.
- On the basis of pricing from vendors other than the institution's bookstore.
- To sections that are part of a sequence of courses that use overlapping instructional materials that exceed \$50. Consider, for example, a textbook that costs \$120 and that is used across a sequence of three courses. Even though the cost-per-course-section of this textbook is \$40, NoLo should not be applied to any of the individual sections of the course sequence.
- To library resources in which the institution's library does not provide all of the following:
 - Perpetual access.
 - ADA-compliant access.
 - Concurrent user access to an extent that equals or exceeds the number of students who may be enrolled in the course section. For example, NoLo should not be applied to a section that allows for an enrollment of twenty students and requires a library-licensed e-book that limits access to just three concurrent users.

For the avoidance of doubt, examples of materials that individually fall within the parameters of NoLo include:

- Any material that qualifies for an Open Educational Resources (OER) Designator.
- A new textbook costing \$50 or less to purchase from the institution's bookstore.
- A course material bundle (e.g., purchase of a new textbook plus a digital access code, such as for a homework website or supplementary course content costing \$50 or less.
- A faculty-developed course pack costing \$50 or less.
- A library-licensed e-book with unlimited concurrent users.
- A resource that is freely accessible online.
- Instructional materials that the instructor has indicated to students are freely available online (i.e., that fall within the above definition of NoLo) and that may optionally be purchased in print through the institution's bookstore for an amount greater than \$50. Note that this example presumes that the bookstore designates to students that purchase of the materials are optional. If the bookstore designates to students that the materials are required, then the materials do not qualify for the NoLo designation.

Responsibilities

Working in consultation with their bookstore, registrar's office, library, and department chair, it should be the responsibility of the instructor of a course section to:

- Determine if the section qualifies for either or both designators.
- Address questions from students regarding the applicability of OER and NoLo designators to the instructional materials required in their course sections.

Automatic Textbook Billing

If an institution participates in an automatic textbook billing program (typically marketed as "Equitable Access" or "Inclusive Access"), the OER and NoLo designations should still be applied to course sections as described above provided that the program (a)institution gives students the ability to optout and (b) provides students with permanent textbook access of the program.

Part II: Data Collection

For each academic term, the council recommends that institutions collect the following data concerning course sections that have been designated as OER and (separately) as NoLo:

- Course section identifier
- Course name
- · Credits offered
- Course section modality
- Number of course sections
- Modalities of course sections
- Number of students who enrolled in the course section
- Persistence of students: Indicate the number of students who have completed the course
- Performance of students: Indicate the number of students who have received a grade of C or higher (or, in the case of students who were graded on a pass/fail basis, indicate the percentage of students who received a passing grade.)

The council recommends the **OER Data Collection Template** as a tool for data collection.

Data should be collected in such a way that it can be disaggregated by section, department, and academic level (e.g., 100-level, 200-level, etc.). This data should be reported to the Connecticut OER Coordinating Council through the council's biennial surveys of colleges and universities.

Institutions should designate a specific position or department to coordinate data collection.

Part III: Presentation of Information in Course Catalogs

The council recommends that colleges and universities leverage the fields and functionalities of their Student Information Systems (SIS) in ways that make it easy for users to identify course sections that have received an OER and/or NoLo designation. While configurations will depend on the specific SIS in use at the institution, at a minimum, the SIS should:

- Prominently define and display the designators
- Allow (when appropriate) a course section to be designated as both OER and NoLo.
- Allow a user to limit searches to course sections that are OER and/or NoLo.

Full definitions (see "Definitions" section above) in the SIS should be preceded by brief definitions for easy reference. Suggested language for the brief and full definitions:

NoLo:

- Brief: Textbooks cost \$50 or less
- Full: This course section's required instructional materials are either no-cost or may be purchased for permanent access to a new copy from [name of institution's bookstore] for an amount that, in total, is \$50 or less (pre-tax). Exempted from the \$50-or-less calculation are tools and supplies (e.g., lab coats, lab notebooks, goggles, art materials, calculators) and any materials that are recommended but not required by the instructor.

OER:

- Brief: Textbooks are free and open
- Full: This course section's required instructional materials consist entirely of Open Educational Resources (OER), which are ADA-compliant teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or that have been released under an intellectual property license (e.g., a Creative Commons license) that permits their free use and repurposing by others.

Part IV: Additional Recommendations

Colleges and universities who wish to pursue aspects of this Model Policy should strive to:

- Find ways to educate their communities about the meanings of NoLo and OER (e.g., orientation materials, email messaging, signage, FAQ webpage).
- Establish processes through which instructional materials are selected prior to the point at
 which students can begin registering for courses in the relevant academic term. Doing so
 ensures that students can identify course sections with NoLo and OER designations prior to
 making registration decisions.
- Create an advisory group to analyze and determine their institution's NoLo amount.

