OER Mini-Grant Proposal

Introduction and background

The O’Grady Library requests a grant of $3,500 to pilot a two-year initiative on campus to raise awareness of and encourage the use of open educational resources (OERs). According to the Hewlett Foundation, OERs 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 restriction.”¹ OERs have become one of the most highly regarded ways the colleges and universities can counter the rising costs of higher education.

For a number of years now, the rising costs of a college education have become a crucial issue. According to The College Board, students during the 2018-2019 school year will spend an average $1,240 on books alone.² NBC News reported in 2015, that Bureau of Labor Statistics data show that between January 1977 and June 2015, textbook costs ballooned 1,041%, three times the rate of inflation in the same period.³ This rise in costs has very tangible consequences. A 2016 study of Florida colleges and university students showed that 66% of students did not purchase textbooks because of cost, negatively affecting their grades; but, high textbook prices also affects retention and time-to-graduation rates, with 47.6 percent of students reporting that they took fewer courses, 45.5 saying they did not register for courses, and 26.1% and 20.7% of respondents claiming they respectively either dropped or withdrew from courses because of these costs.⁴

Description

The OER pilot initiative will explore the viability of a longer-term commitment to encourage SMU faculty and adjunct faculty members to integrate OERs into their courses. In the spring of 2019, Kael Moffat, Information Literacy Librarian, will be heading up an interest group on campus that will explore ways to raise awareness of these educational resources on campus and discuss how to encourage faculty to adopt/adapt them in their classes.

¹ https://hewlett.org/strategy/open-educational-resources/
A common practice for colleges and universities in the United States is to offer grants or stipends to faculty to investigate, use, and create OERs. Because finding these materials and then re-designing a course to use an open textbook can be very time intensive, many schools have elected to financially reward faculty who make such efforts.

The O'Grady Library proposes to use the $3,500 requested to offer two types of stipends to faculty members: the first would be a $100 stipend for faculty members to read and review an OER textbook in their field; the second would be a $500\textsuperscript{5} stipend for faculty members to go one step further and adopt or adapt an OER textbook. In the fall of 2019, the library would offer five review stipends and one adoption/adaptation stipends; in the spring of 2020, we would offer five review stipends and four adoption and adaptation stipends.

Faculty members would need to apply for the stipends. Those faculty receiving an OER textbook review stipend, would need to write and post a review of the book on OER Commons, The Minnesota Open Textbook Library, or other such aggregator of OER materials that includes a reflection on how they might actually use that textbook.

For the adoption/adaptation grants, faculty would need to write a one-page summary of how they used the textbook and a reflection on their experience that includes at least two statements from students. Additionally, they would need provide a statement on student cost savings based on their previous textbook.

These written materials could be used to both assess the stipend program and to encourage other faculty members to adopt or adapt OER textbooks.

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\textsuperscript{5} Library Dean, Amy Stewart-Mailhiot has decided to add an additional $250 to this stipend to allow three installations of $250 for this stipend.