



Open Educational Resources

2023-25 Biennial Budget Initiative

Issue: Student Debt – Open Educational Resources

Through 2021, students in the United States have accumulated \$1.75 trillion in student loan debt. In Wisconsin, students have accumulated \$23.1 billion and the median debt for a technical college student graduate is \$10,179. Student debt not only creates a hardship for Wisconsin families, but also creates a strain on the economy because debt lowers credit scores and limits purchasing power. This ultimately means individuals with debt are less able to participate and help grow the economy. Providing Wisconsin students with Open Educational Resources (OER), which are free-of-cost course materials, would be a state investment that will assist in alleviating student debt and future negative implications on the economy. This budget initiative is in alignment with Wisconsin Student Government’s legislative priorities.

Background

OER are teaching, learning and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. OER may include full course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software and any other tools, materials or techniques used to support access to knowledge. Instructors may access these resources through multiple different sources such as national repositories like OpenStax, OER Commons, LibreTexts and the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) OER Repository. The average postsecondary student spends between \$600 and \$1,500 annually for books and supplies as of the 2021-22 academic year. Providing students with access to OER materials would be a major step in saving money and reducing debt.

In 2016, with the assistance of a grant from Achieving the Dream, the City University of New York (CUNY) System began adopting OER as a policy initiative to help students save money and reduce debt. In 2018, the state invested \$4 million which helped leverage the grant and propel OER adoption. With its investment to date, 708,856 CUNY students have saved \$71 million from zero-cost textbook materials and a \$12.40 return for every dollar invested into OER. As of 2020, 30,522 individual course offerings have converted from high-cost proprietary materials to OER.

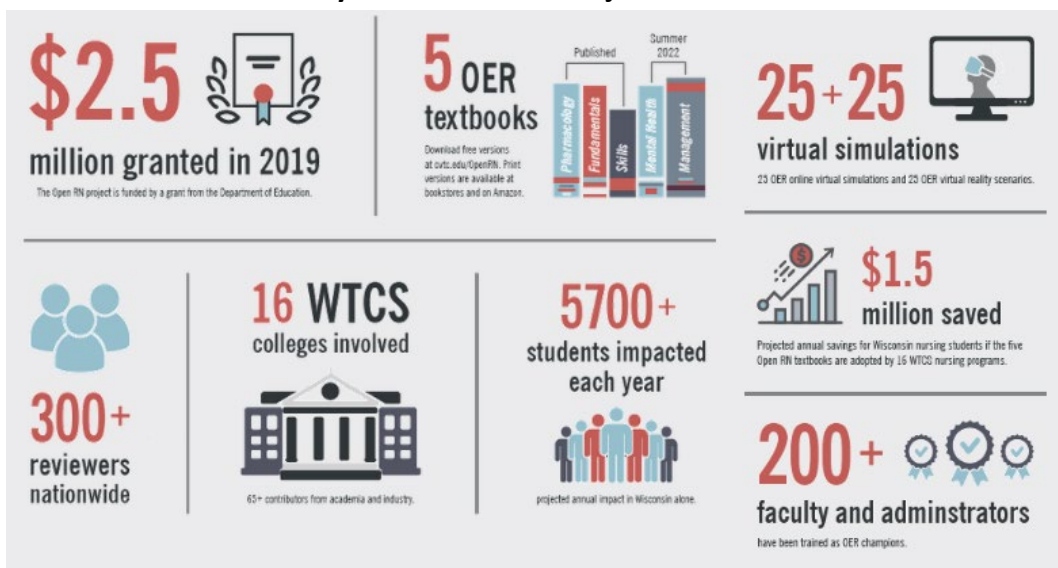
All WTCS districts have implemented the use of OER on their campuses and have been working collaboratively to leverage resources locally and nationally. The colleges have developed a step-by-step process on developing and/or adopting available OER for their courses. Each one of the

technical colleges have an OER champion that works directly with their faculty to identify, develop and utilize these resources. Furthermore, several of the colleges identify their OER courses through advertising, which they have found to be a significant determining factor for students who are enrolling in those courses.

Currently, WTCS colleges have been accessing OER materials for general education and other courses that are available in the public domain due to having similar design of curriculum. However, many WTCS occupational and technical course offerings are unique due to the needs of local business and industry within the WTCS district or the state. This requires the colleges to develop these materials from the ground up to ensure the competencies and rigor meet the local workforce demands. Furthermore, OER textbooks that are available may not have ancillary materials that are available in traditional textbooks, such as assessments, presentations and student guides. Developing OER materials for one course can vary considerably and may cost upwards to \$100,000 due to the time and effort it requires for faculty and staff to author, edit, design, create graphics, proof and license all the associated materials.

WTCS has been successful in developing OER textbooks for System-aligned programing. As illustrated in the figure below, one System-wide project created five OER textbooks for nursing courses with OER virtual reality simulation scenarios. This effort was made possible by a \$2.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. On an annual basis, an estimated 5,700+ WTCS students will have access to these materials, with a projected savings of \$1.5 million. Students are projected to save \$10.5 million over ten years.

System-wide OER Project Results



The colleges are working to expand this effort by leveraging the COVID-19 stimulus funding to develop an OER textbook for the Nursing Assistant program. These resources are projected to

save students, including high school students in dual enrollment, \$650,000 annually. These savings will be available to WTCS students and any student who attends a college or university that chooses to access these free, open-source materials.

The most recent OER project adopted by WTCS is a textbook for the Medical Terminology program, which involved multiple faculty and staff across the System. The textbook will be available in fall 2022 and is projected to impact an estimated 8,600+ WTCS college students and 3,300+ dual credit high school students annually for an estimated savings of \$895,000 each year. With new state investment in OER, colleges have indicated they would next develop OER resources in Automotive Technology, Mechanical Design, Information Technology, Early Childhood and Culinary programs.

OER materials have benefits beyond the dollars and cents they save students and employers' college reimbursement programs. According to the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education, OER can be a key enabler for better learning outcomes, closing equity gaps and facilitating faculty engagement, among other positive results. In addition, using continuously updated OER can better align WTCS course materials with constantly changing workplace competencies.

Request

An increase of \$1 million GPR in 2023-24 and \$2 million in 2024-25 and thereafter in s. 20.292(1)(f) to provide grants to technical colleges to create OER textbooks and other materials that can be utilized by all colleges within the Wisconsin Technical College System.