Senate of College Councils
February 4th, 2019
S.R. 1911

S.R 1911: In Support of the Creation of a University-Wide OER Faculty Award Program

Summary: Open Educational Resources (OERs) are research/learning materials in any medium (digital, print, etc.) that are public domain and available at no cost to the user.¹ Rising textbook prices pose a financial obstacle to student success, and the no-cost nature of OERs make them a potential solution to this problem. UT Austin has made great strides in increasing OER access to students - an initiative that has been led largely by the librarians on campus and the University of Texas Libraries. This legislation would encourage professors to utilize OERs through the creation of a University-Wide OER Faculty Award Program. This program would allow students to nominate professors who use OERs in an effort to make their classroom more affordable and accessible. Nominations would be vetted by a committee and winners would receive a monetary reward meant to subsidize the time it may have taken for professors “build” this resource and tailor it to their course.

Frequently Asked Questions:
1. Why is this legislation necessary?
   a. College textbooks have become an increasing financial burden on students. Textbook prices have increased 1041% in the last 42 years,² and an average college student spends an average of $1,200 on textbooks in a year.³
   b. Open educational resources are an excellent way to mitigate the cost of textbooks and are available on a wide range of topics and platforms.
   c. A faculty award program focused on rewarding the use and development of OERs would raise awareness of OERs and encourage more faculty to consider switching over.
2. Where will the money for the award come from?
   a. Dr. Lorraine J. Haricombe, the Vice Provost and Director of the University of Texas Libraries, has been an advocate in increased funds towards OER accessibility. In our last meeting with her, she indicated that UT Libraries was receiving multiple grants

¹ https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-knowledge-societies/oer
² https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/freshman-year/just-over-half-all-college-students-actually-graduate-report-finds-n465606
⁴ https://tocker.org/
from the Tocker Foundation and that these funds could be put towards a Faculty Award Program. 4

3. How will an awards program be structured?
   a. Professors will be nominated for the award through an online survey by either students or via self-nominations. Judging can be done by a student and faculty-chaired committee that evaluates each candidate by certain criteria that evaluate the academic and economic impact of the OERs use. Winners of the award receive prize money.
   b. See the addendum for more details regarding the structure of the awards program.

2. https://finaid.utexas.edu/
5. https://library.tamu.edu/services/scholarly_communication/open_ed_awards.html
6. https://libraries.uh.edu/oer/incentive/
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WHEREAS, UT Austin has expressed its commitment in the past to college affordability and the reduction of student costs and debt by “...[making] the university an option for high-potential students, regardless of income.”; and,

WHEREAS, In June of 2017, Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed into law SB 810 which includes the creation of a statewide OER grant program; and,

WHEREAS, Textbook prices have increased by 1041% in the last 42 years with the average student paying an average of $1,200 for textbook per year; and,

WHEREAS, This increase in textbook prices has caused 65% of students nationally to skip buying textbooks at some point in their college career; and,

WHEREAS, These increases in textbook prices have produced a barrier in student affordability, and the students who do buy textbooks are at an academic advantage compared to those who do not/cannot afford to buy them; and,

WHEREAS, There are numerous precedents of OER awards programs at other public universities, including Texas A&M University and the University of Houston, among others; and,

WHEREAS, There are studies that show that implementing OERs in classrooms produces a statistically significant increase in grades, especially for non-white students; and,

WHEREAS, Legislation supporting an OER awards program for faculty has already been passed by Faculty Council; and,
WHEREAS, Faculty Council passed a Resolution On The Support of Principles for Advancing Openness through Journal Negotiations from the UT Libraries Committee; and,

WHEREAS, The resolved clause calls on the UT System administration to provide a public statement to support open access to academic research; therefore, be it further,

RESOLVED, That the Natural Sciences Council supports the creation of an OER awards program that rewards faculty for using OERs in an impactful way as outlined in Appendix A; therefore, be it further,

RESOLVED, That this resolution of the Natural Sciences Council be sent to Dr. Lorraine Haricomb, Vice Provost and Director of UT Libraries, Dr. Gregory L. Fenves, President of the University of Texas at Austin, Mr. Carlos Martinez, Chief of Staff to the President, Dr. Soncia Reagins-Lilly, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Provost Maurie McInnis, Executive Vice President and Provost at The University of Texas at Austin, Dr. Shelley Payne, Advisor to the Dean for Diversity and Inclusion within the College of Natural Sciences, Dr. Paul Goldbart, Dean of the College of Natural Sciences, Dr. Sharon L. Wood, Dean of the Cockrell School of Engineering, Dr. Charles Martinez, Dean of the College of Education, Dr. Douglas J. Dempster, Dean of the College of Fine Arts, Dr. Ann Huff Stevens, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Dr. M Lynn Crismon, Dean of the College of Pharmacy, Dr. Sharon Mosher, Dean of the Jackson School of Geosciences, Dr. Jay C. Hartzell, Dean of the Red McCombs School of Business, Dr. Jay Michael Bernhardt, Dean of the Moody College of

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APPENDIX A.

A copy of the Faculty Award Program proposal as sent to Dr. Lorraine Haricome.

**OER Legislation Proposal**

**Background:**
Open educational resources (OERs) are freely accessible, openly licensed assets that can be used as educational resources in a classroom setting. These resources exist in a public domain and can ideally replace textbooks or various forms of media that pose financial and accessibility barriers to students.

Natural Sciences Council is interested in writing legislation to support a UT Faculty OER Award Program that recognizes faculty for their use of these resources.

**Purpose Statement:**
It is important for students to have access to OERs to minimize financial barriers to academic success. Ensuring that all students have access to required classroom materials at low to no cost provides every student with the opportunity to do well in their classes. An OER award for professors who utilize these resources will encourage other professors to follow suit.

**Outline for the Awards Program:**
To plan and implement an OER awards program, we can evaluate existing award programs for elements of what makes them successful.

**Texas A&M**

2. [https://finaid.utexas.edu/](https://finaid.utexas.edu/)
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6. [https://libraries.uh.edu/oer/incentive/](https://libraries.uh.edu/oer/incentive/)
Texas A&M University currently implements its own OER award program through which students can nominate professors for two awards via an online form.

The first award is called the “SGA Open Educator Award”. It is awarded to three faculty members of diverse ranks (tenured professors, associate professors, lecturers, etc.) who “demonstrate exemplary usage of open access materials in their own classrooms”. The second award is the “SGA Open Educator Champion Award”. This award is given to one faculty member who displays the most compelling and positive impact on their students using OERs.

The criteria through which professors can be nominated varies between the two awards, but they generally consist of an evaluation of the quality of their OERs as well as the financial impact they have. The award nomination opens February 13 and ends March 27. Winners are selected April 10 and the ceremony happens April 17. Winners are presented with a plaque and an undisclosed monetary reward.

**University of Houston**

The University of Houston has its own OER award program, but it significantly differs from the one implemented by Texas A&M University. The process does not require a nomination. Instead, professors who meet certain criteria can claim a monetary reward, and there is no limit to how many professors can receive the award.

In order to receive the award, professors must replace traditional textbooks with OERs, meet with an OER coordinator, and submit a syllabus and a report on how they plan to implement OERs in their classrooms. The feasibility of their plans and the financial savings to students are used to evaluate how much a professor receives in the award. The professors can receive anywhere from $500 to $2500. Applications are submitted by professors on or before August 20.

**University of Connecticut**

The University of Connecticut used to have an OER awards program that functioned similarly to the University of Houston called the UConn Open and Affordable Initiative. Professors submit
an application themselves to be rewarded, and there was no limit to how many professors were rewarded. The program has since been disbanded until further notice.

Professors are eligible for a reward of $250 for reviewing an OER for use in their classroom, and they are eligible for a reward of $1000 who transition to using OERs. This initiative was funded by the Davis Educational Center. No deadline for applications is mentioned on the UConn website.

University of Maryland
The University of Maryland is part of a more systematic approach to encouraging OER use by professors. It is part of the Open Textbook Network, an alliance of higher education institutions working to improve access, affordability and academic success using open textbooks. There is no stated limit as to how many professors can receive the reward.

Suggested OER Awards System
The university provides small grants of an unspecified amount to faculty who redesign their curriculum to include OERs. The OERs are accessible online through the University of Maryland’s library system.

For the awards program, many of the administrative processes behind it will be based on precedents set by the aforementioned colleges with similar awards programs. Faculty nominations will occur via an online form. Professors can be nominated by students or other professors in their department or via self-nomination. Nomination method will not be taken into account during the evaluation process, but we predict that a majority of nominations will come from student or departmental nominations. Students and faculty will be made aware of the nomination form through departmental emails and through a link on the eCIS form.

2. https://finaid.utexas.edu/
5. https://library.tamu.edu/services/scholarly_communication/open_ed_awards.html
6. https://libraries.uh.edu/oer/incentive/
Judging will be conducted by a committee that is comprised of a diverse set of students and faculty from a range of disciplines. Committee members will be chosen by the student and faculty sponsors of the award. A maximum of 3 nominated faculty members will be given the award. Winners will receive a monetary prize.

Evaluation criteria will be as listed below:

- Economic Impact: Size of student body affected, Price of alternative textbook
- Individual Contribution: Did nominee switch to pre-existing OER or did nominee write own OER
- OER Quality: Determined via student survey and faculty
- Extent of OER Use: Does the OER comprise of all course material or are there other required materials