



Contact: Shep Ranbom (202) 955-9450 x 315

sranbom@communicationworks.com

After one year, largest initiative to promote the use of open educational resources for degree completion finds robust course development, strong faculty support, and broad-based leadership for OER use.

SILVER SPRING, MD—June 22, 2017—Preliminary results from a national effort to expand community college degree programs that use open educational resources (OER) nationwide found high levels of faculty interest and engagement in OER. OER are freely available learning materials that users can download, edit and share.

The study, *Launching OER Degree Pathways: An Early Snapshot of Achieving the Dream's OER Degree Initiative and Emerging Lessons*, was released today by Achieving the Dream (ATD). Conducted by SRI International and the rpk GROUP, the report indicates that faculty at colleges participating in ATD's OER Degree Initiative are changing their teaching and that students are at least as or more engaged using OER courses than students in non-OER classrooms.

Eighty-four percent of faculty members surveyed said that students in the new OER courses had the same or a higher level of engagement with the learning materials as compared to courses they have taught using traditional course materials. Meanwhile, faculty with experience in using OER who received assistance from technology specialists and librarians in developing their courses, were most likely to report changes in their teaching, the report says.

Participation across campuses involved a broad range of faculty from multiple disciplines. The expansion of OER use across participating colleges was led by grassroots faculty, instructional designers, librarians and technology specialists as well as top-level administrators, the report notes.

Early research also indicates that students saved, on average, about \$134 per course or between 5 to 22 percent of annual student textbook costs in those colleges. Researchers noted, however that they cannot yet estimate actual savings to students, given that not all students purchase textbooks at full price, and some OER savings may be offset by other costs. *(NOTE: A detailed report on costs is currently being developed by rpk GROUP.)*

As a result of these and other experiences, more than 7 in 10 instructors (71 percent) say that they are very or somewhat likely to promote use of OER to colleagues (42 percent very likely, 29 percent somewhat likely).

"Advancing widespread adoption of OER is a key student success strategy," says Dr. Karen A. Stout, president and CEO of the community college reform organization Achieving the Dream. "OER gives all students a chance of being equally ready on day one of class and has the promise of cutting costs to students, especially when deployed in full degree pathways. Equally important, OER has the promise of improving student engagement with course materials and can re-energize faculty engagement in course design and spark more dynamic approaches to teaching."

"These results," Dr. Stout says, "offer some important early lessons for all institutions and can help colleges target supports to ensure successful adoption of OER degrees."

Achieving the Dream's OER Degree Initiative is a \$9.8-million effort designed to help remove financial roadblocks that can derail students' progress and to spur other changes that will increase the likelihood of degree and certificate completion. The initiative involves 38 community colleges in 13 states and is spurring them to build the infrastructure needed to launch OER degree programs. Thus far, the report

says, 80 percent of instructors participating in the survey have been involved in introductory level courses in the program's first year, and the initiative is on track to make OER degree programs available to a minimum of 76,000 students over a three-year period.

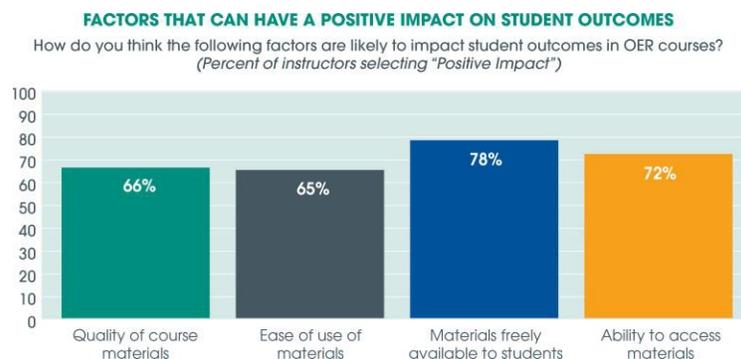
The report also identifies key challenges to address to ensure that open educational resources can improve student outcomes in the nation's community colleges. These include the need for faculty to have adequate time to locate and vet OER materials; for colleges to create systems, policies, and incentives to support OER use; and for identifying funding to sustain the program.

"This formative study is the first of a series to explore the implementation, cost, and impact of OER at the 38 colleges and provides a broad look at what is happening and how OER is being adopted and beginning to take hold at these institutions," said Rebecca Griffiths, a senior researcher in SRI International's Center for Technology in Learning. "It shows that faculty members are strongly behind the program, that training and support make a difference in how well institutions can implement OER, and identifies a range of strategies that institutions can use to overcome key challenges."

Five funders are supporting the OER Degree Initiative and related research: The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates, the Shelter Hill Foundation, and the Speedwell Foundation.

Among the research findings:

- **The use of OER builds on faculty members' interest and previous experience in using OER.** While more than half of the instructors participating in the ATD initiative had not used OER before, most (83 percent) had experience teaching online and hybrid courses that make use of similar digital resources. Targeting faculty with previous experience with developing and/or teaching OER courses helped accelerate participation and gave OER-savvy faculty members the ability to influence development and implementation of the degree program from the beginning, the report says. Personal interest (80 percent), encouragement from a department chair or administrator (55 percent) a stipend (29 percent) and recommendations from colleagues (27 percent) top the list of factors supporting faculty involvement.
- **Quality of materials drives selection.** The top three factors faculty cited for selecting required course materials were quality of materials, cost to student, and comprehensive content and activities. The ranking of these criteria differs remarkably from the 2014 Babson survey findings, in which only 2.7 percent of faculty members identified cost as one the top three factors, compared to 70 percent in this survey. Adaptability/editability of content was ranked relatively low on the list of criteria for selecting course content.
- **Cost savings rank high in perceived benefit.** Instructors remain more likely to point to cost savings than other improved outcomes as the chief benefit of OER initiatives to date.



Overcoming key challenges

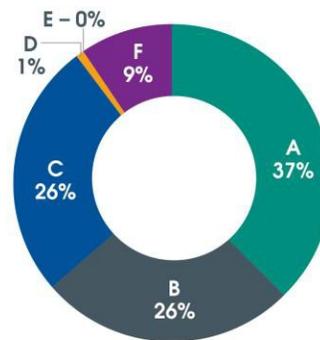
As institutions continue to develop degree pathways around OER, ongoing challenges include fostering faculty engagement and lowering barriers associated with course and program development. These

include the lack of time to locate and vet OER, licensing, course mapping, technical challenges, skill development, the creation of systems and policies to support their use, and identifying ongoing funding and resources. The OER Degree Initiative asks colleges to use strict free licensing guidelines and requires that course material be authenticated by its OER facilitation partner, Lumen Learning.

The report suggests that key actions to overcome these barriers include:

- Investing time and resources in training and supports;
- Getting students involved in evangelization;
- Aligning instructional incentives (such as performance evaluation criteria and compensation) with desired practices;
- Communicating the broader, long-term vision of the OER degree;
- Fostering collaboration to address time challenges;
- Training and enlisting non-instructional personnel; and
- Staff time and resource demands associated with developing or adopting new courses.

FACULTY INVESTMENT OF TIME		
In your experience developing a new course or adapting an existing course, does using OER take more or less time than using traditional textbooks?		
A	Much more time (twice as much or more)	37%
B	More time (about one and half times as much)	26%
C	About the same amount of time	26%
D	Less time (about three quarters as much)	1%
E	Much less time (about half as much or less)	0%
F	Don't know	9%



Over the next two years, Achieving the Dream in partnership with SRI, will continue to assess the cost, impact and sustainability of OER degree programs launched through the OER Degree Initiative, with ongoing collection of course outcome data and surveys of students, faculty, and administrators involved in the program.

Methodology. Researchers surveyed more than 400 faculty members and conducted 43 phone interviews with faculty and administrators and support services at 15 of the participating colleges. The survey involved faculty from six broad subject areas, including business and administration, computer information systems, health and STEM fields, liberal arts and general education, languages and literature, and social studies and psychology. The largest share of instructors using OER materials in the survey included the health sciences and other STEM fields (31 percent) followed by the social sciences and psychology (19 percent).

Achieving the Dream (ATD) leads a growing network of more than 200 community colleges committed to helping their students, particularly low-income students and students of color, achieve their goals for academic success, personal growth, and economic opportunity. ATD is making progress closing academic achievement gaps and accelerating student success through a unique change process that builds each college's institutional capacities in seven essential areas. ATD, along with more than 100 experienced coaches and advisors, works closely with Network colleges in 39 states and the District of Columbia to reach more than 4 million community college students.

SRI Education, a division of SRI International, is tackling the most complex issues in education to identify trends, understand outcomes, and guide policy and practice. We work with federal and state agencies, school districts, foundations, nonprofit organizations, and businesses to provide research-based solutions to challenges posed by rapid social, technological and economic change. SRI International is a nonprofit research institute whose innovations have created new industries, extraordinary marketplace value, and lasting benefits to society.

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