

## USG Incubator Proposal – April 8, 2013

**Title:** Reducing Costs for Students through Open Education Resources

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**Project category:** Proof-of-Concept or Start up

### Overview of Project

According to the 2011 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), over a third of University of Georgia (UGA) students had unmet financial needs. Financial needs contribute to student attrition and extended graduation rates. Textbooks and other educational materials contribute to those financial challenges, costing students an average of \$900 to \$1200 a year (Wiley, Green & Soares, 2012). Open Education Resources (OERs) are textbooks and other learning materials in the public domain with open copyright licenses that are available at no cost to faculty, students, or the institution. While high quality OERs are plentiful, the challenges for faculty are the time and incentives to abandon textbook-based lesson plans in favor of OERs. This project is designed to provide a faculty member who teaches large enrollment courses with needed time, incentives, and instructional development resources to make the transition from an expensive textbook to an OER-based course.

### Impact on Completion

The targeted impact of this project is to transition a large enrollment course that currently uses an expensive textbook to OER resources. The goal is to impact approximately 1,200 students each academic year through a single course. The transition of a large enrollment course with a textbook expense of \$150 would result in a \$180,000 savings for students each academic year. This project would serve as the first step toward lessening the higher education financial burden on students and thus contributing to greater college completion success.

### Potential Lessons to be Learned

There are a number of lessons to be learned via this project. A clear understanding of the time and resources required to transition a course from textbook dependency to OERs will emerge and be documented. Research-based approaches will be implemented to compare OER student achievement against student grades on past assessments. Data regarding student perceptions of OER resources and OER-based courses will be gathered. Through these data-driven approaches, a clear picture will emerge regarding processes, learning gains, and the value-added by a fully-integrated OER approach.

## Concept Description

The reasons for increases in college tuition are well documented, and ultimately, such increases result in students shouldering more of their college costs each passing year (CBS MoneyWatch, 2012). Most certainly, such increases impact many students' ability to complete college on time or at all. As reported in the University of Georgia's Complete College Plan, more than one-third of those who responded to the NSSE at UGA in 2011 indicated that "after all financial aid is taken into consideration, [they] still have unmet financial need that makes pursuing a degree difficult." Such statistics highlight the scope of the financial challenges students collectively face at many state institutions such as UGA. It is imperative that colleges and universities consider a portfolio of strategies that have the potential to positively impact the financial challenges students face. One such domain is in the cost of textbooks and other related educational resources.

While Open Education Resources (OER) have existed for over a decade, "OERs have not noticeably disrupted the traditional business model of higher education" (Kortemeyer, 2013). With that said, recent accomplishments in what is termed the Textbook Zero model suggest that new avenues and opportunities are now emerging which have the potential to lower the cost of higher education to students and, as a result, positively influence college completion rates. The broadest example of the efficacy of such a model can be found at Tidewater Community College in Virginia, where the total cost of an associate's degree in business administration was cut by one-third by simply using OER textbook alternatives instead of traditional textbooks (Hulette, 2013). While decreasing the total cost of a degree at a four-year university by one-third through textbook elimination is improbable, tangible and significant cost savings do exist. This has been demonstrated at the University of Massachusetts – Amherst, where they estimate over \$750,000 has been saved by students in classes that utilize OERs instead of textbooks (UMass Amherst Libraries, 2013). In short, courses that opt for OER textbook alternatives would contribute significantly to Complete College Georgia strategies, such as enhancing instructional delivery and improving time to degree. A focus on instructional change and fiscal impact is the purpose of this proposal.

The Center for Teaching and Learning at UGA has engaged in conversations and explorations of OER textbook alternatives throughout the spring semester with various faculty and constituents across campus. Those activities culminated in a campus visit by David Wiley on March 26, 2013. Dr. Wiley is the architect of the Tidewater Community College Textbook Zero program, and his visit included meetings with faculty and CTL staff, as well as a university address. As a result, several faculty have expressed an interest in pursuing a Textbook Zero approach in their course(s). We feel UGA is uniquely poised to enact an OER textbook initiative that has the potential to positively contribute to the University's Georgia Complete College Plan.

At UGA, our greatest probability for impact exists in high enrollment courses that require expensive textbooks. For example, a new, introductory textbook in many science courses costs approximately \$150. If a single faculty member teaches two sections of 300 students in a given semester (600 students total), the potential cost saving for those students in a single semester is \$90,000. These savings could increase significantly in each subsequent semester as more faculty members adopt OER for their courses.

Our proposal, then, focuses on providing a single faculty member who teaches high enrollment courses with resources and incentives to support the transition from an expensive textbook to OER options. Given the typical dependency most courses have on required textbooks, such a transition is non-trivial. A broad course redesign process is required that not only provides opportunities for the reordering of course content and the re-examination of lectures, it also provides opportunities for the reconsideration of in-course instructional strategies. An opportunity for the faculty member to transition from passive learning strategies to active learning approaches should be an inherent part of any such broad course redesign initiative.

As proposed, the budget for this project has the potential for an eight-to-one return on investment for students over the span of the first year of implementation with approximately \$180,000 saved by students in textbook costs for a single high enrollment course that is offered in Fall and Spring semesters. The resulting course materials, as well as OER course development processes and resources, would then be shared with other institutions around the USG system. While this proposal would certainly establish methods for future OER courses at UGA, the potential impact, if our resulting OER course alone was adopted at multiple USG institutions, could reach into the millions in saved student textbook costs within a year or two.

#### References

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## **Project Plan - Major Project Phases, Activities, and Milestones**

April 30<sup>th</sup>

- Select a faculty member interested in using OERs in fall 2013 from the several who have expressed interest

May 13<sup>th</sup>

- Grades due for spring semester
- Graduate student summer hires finalized

May 15<sup>th</sup>

- First full project team meeting
- David Wiley presents recommended OERs for consideration given course topic

May 20<sup>th</sup>

- Core OER(s) selected and course transition/development begin

May 20<sup>th</sup> – August 9<sup>th</sup>

- Faculty member works closely with project team and graduate students to choose and customize materials; update instructional approaches; refine assessments; and re-conceptualize the instructional activities within the course
- Faculty and graduate student(s) modify course assignments/activities as needed
- Document the process of course design
- Submit IRB for data collection in the fall

Fall 2013

- Faculty member pilots OERs in course (possibly for the entire course) and receives copious, ongoing support from the CTL
- Project team and faculty gather data throughout semester on student performance and satisfaction

Spring 2014

- OER Adoption complete – traditional textbook no longer part of the course
- Analyze data, present findings at USG Teaching and Learning Conference
- Make course materials available to USG system

## **Goals and objectives**

- Decrease financial burden on students by adapting quality OERs instead of costly textbooks
- Evaluate student learning outcomes when using OERs versus traditional textbooks
- Develop resources to assist faculty in adapting OERs to their own needs
- Provide an exemplary OER-based course and materials for use by faculty at other USG institutions
- Provide an evidenced-based design process that addresses active learning and OER for USG institutions for the development of OER-based courses. This documentation will provide clear descriptions of challenges and solutions
- By the end of fall 2013, we will be able to compare student learning assessment data of those who used OERs and those who used traditional textbooks. We will also evaluate both faculty and student reactions to using OERs. Within 12 months from the start of the project, we will be able to present our findings with regards to student costs/savings, learning outcomes, and faculty and student perceptions.

## **Consideration of potential measures or data sources for evaluation**

- Measures of cost savings for each student, for each class, and for the semester across participating classes
- Student assessment data when using OERs compared against previous semesters/other classes *not* using OERs
- Interviews/focus groups/surveys with students using OERs
- Interviews with the faculty member teaching with OERs, gathered at various points throughout the project (development and execution)

## **Consideration for sustainability or work will inform other efforts once project is complete**

- The project team will work with participating faculty and graduate students to develop resources to assist faculty (at UGA and beyond) in the steps necessary to adapt existing OERs to their own needs and set the stage for continued efforts along these lines across the USG community.