University of Pittsburgh

Office of the Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor

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Patricia E. Beeson
Provost
Senior Vice Chancellor

Dear Colleagues,

In January 2018, the University of Pittsburgh's Student Government Board passed a resolution supporting expanded use of Open Educational Resources (OER) and open textbooks as a means to control these escalating costs of course materials. The College Board Annual Survey of Colleges concluded the average full-time student spends up to $1,250 on course materials including textbooks and associated technologies with the average cost of a textbook as much as $300.

In response to the Student Government Board's resolution, and out of an interest in keeping access to course materials as affordable as possible for students, I convened a working group to learn about current practices and trends, and to explore opportunities with open educational resources. I am writing to provide an update on the group's work.

I charged the committee to evaluate the current availability of OER, awareness of OER on campus, barriers to OER adoption, and models for creation of these resources by Pitt faculty. It has provided recommendations to me about how to support and advance the use of OER at the University.

In response to these recommendations I am:

- Creating the funds to support faculty who adapt and/or adopt OER into course materials through:

    - Small grant programs ranging from $500-$2,000 to promote adapting an open textbook or OER course component changes such as online homework, lab manuals or support materials

    - Development funding from $2,000-$5,000 to support individual or team-based development of open textbooks, or for combining an open textbook with course-specific development

- Asking that the creation of OER course materials be noted in annual reports and promotion and tenure processes similar to the creation of other types of course materials such as textbooks.

- Asking the Center for Teaching and Learning to develop assessment models to measure student outcomes in courses using OER.

- Asking that a mechanism be created for students to identify OER course materials in course catalogs.

- Creating a standing committee in the Office of the Provost to provide a targeted and sustained OER awareness program.

I thank the committee for their work on this important topic. Reducing costs of course materials is one way to further help our students on their educational journey. I refer you to the committee's full report along with the Student Government Board's resolution.

If you have questions or suggestions, please contact Nancy Tannery at tannery@pitt.edu.

Sincerely,

Patricia E. Beeson