2020/2021
Open & Affordable Annual Report

PREPARED BY THE IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY OPEN & AFFORDABLE EDUCATION COMMITTEE FOR PROVOST WICKERT

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KEY FINDINGS

Iowa State University has established itself as a leader in the state of Iowa for our use of open and affordable course materials such as Open Educational Resources (OER), library licensed materials, and Immediate Access content. Interest in both Immediate Access and OER has grown substantially in the years since these initiatives began, and student savings have been growing steadily. Key findings from our work suggest that **the promotion of open and affordable course content continues to profoundly impact Iowa State students.**

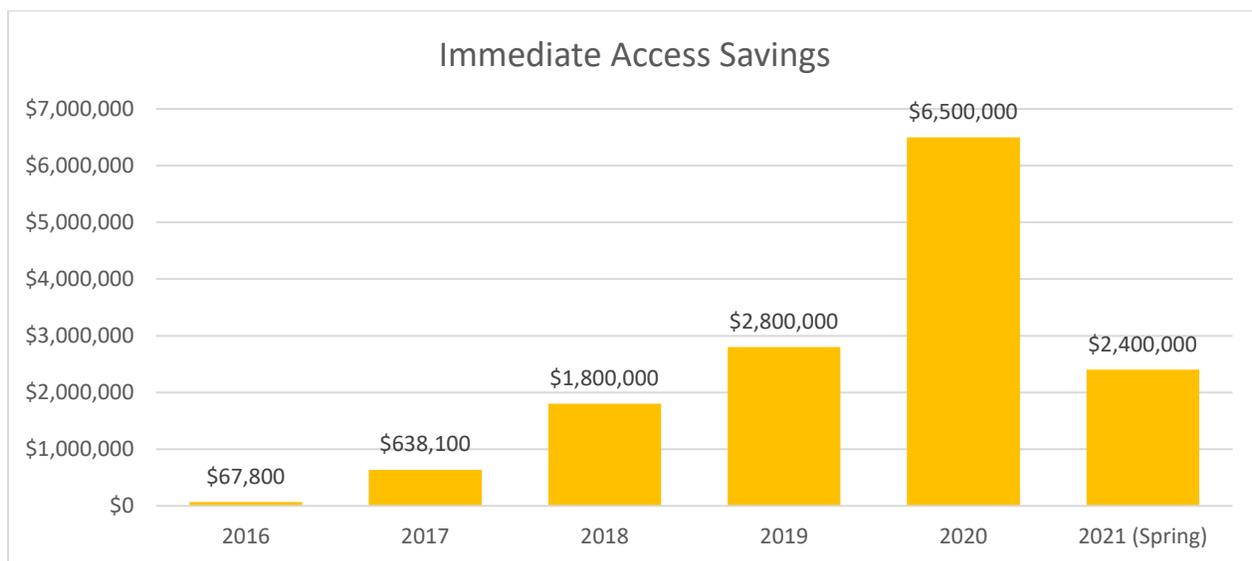## The Use of Open and Affordable Course Content is Rising

Figure 2. Student savings from the use of the Immediate Access Program

The Immediate Access Program has seen exponential growth in adoptions from faculty members on campus. In 2020, courses using Immediate Access materials saved students approximately $6.5 million, double the student savings from IA in 2019. This growth in interest for the Immediate Access Program was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many instructors to teach online for the first time. Having these online course materials available for students made the move to online teaching and learning easier for many.
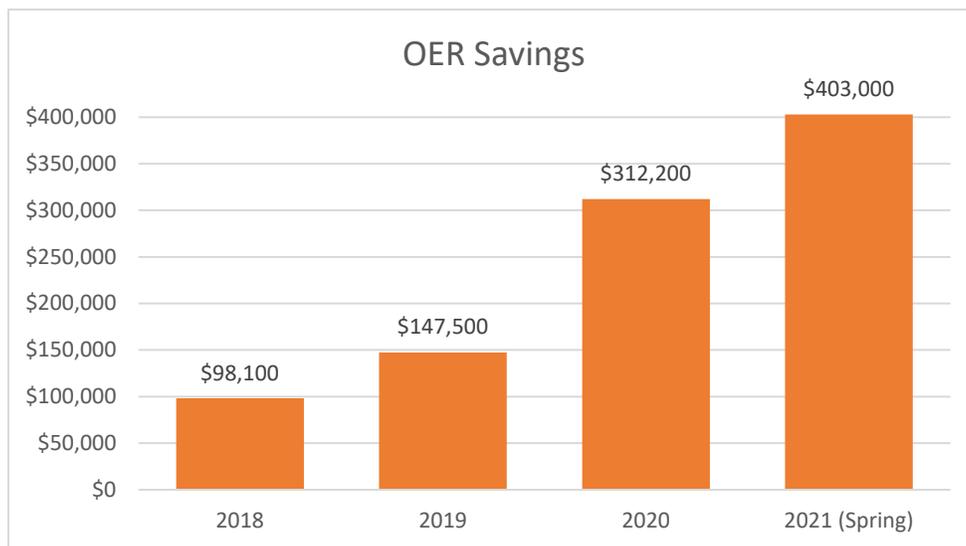
Figure 1. Student savings from the use of OER

Like the Immediate Access Program, interest in OER has also seen continued growth over the past year. In 2020, 33 courses reported using open educational resources, up from only 28 courses in 2019. These 33 courses saved students approximately **$312,200** in 2020, over twice the amount saved in 2019. With the savings for spring 2021 already **$403,000**, more than double spring 2020's numbers, this trend of exponential growth will likely continue into the next academic year.

Open and Affordable Course Content Supports Student Success

Access to affordable course content has been shown to enable higher enrollment numbers, lower drop rates, and better learning outcomes for students.[1,2] Open and affordable course materials do not just support better course outcomes because they are better materials. In fact, most studies find that open and affordable course materials are on par with traditional, full-price textbooks. These materials

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[1] Nicholas B. Colvard, C. Edward Watson, and Hyojin Park, "The Impact of Open Educational Resources on Various Student Success Metrics," *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 30, no. 2 (2018): 262-276. http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/pdf/IJTLHE3386.pdf

[2] Lane Fischer, John Hilton III, and Jared Robinson, "A multi-institutional study of the impact of open textbook adoption on the learning outcomes of post-secondary students," *Journal of Computing in Higher Education 27*, no. 3 (2015): 159-172. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12528-015-9101-x

promote better learning outcomes because they are affordable: students who are not able to afford more expensive course content can actually access affordable content assigned for their courses and thus, succeed.[3] By investing in these programs, we are investing in our students' success and persistence through college.

Faculty Need Incentives to Use Open & Affordable Course Content

Although using affordable course content can help students succeed in a course through access to their material, any change in a course's design necessitates instructional design support as well. State and national surveys have found that faculty need incentives to make extensive changes to their courses, like creating OER or adapting a course to incorporate new course materials and assessment methods.[4] As a recent study found, "when implemented at the institutional level, OER initiatives result in a measurable rise in the number of faculty who are aware of OER."[5] The OAEC provides some support for faculty doing this work already. For example:

- CELT provides instructional design workshops and learning communities that can ease the path to adapting a course to a new teaching style,
- the Book Store provides negotiation help for faculty interested in Immediate Access materials for their courses,
- the University Library's Open Access Librarian provides consultations to aid faculty in locating and integrating OER into their courses, and
- the OAEC supports the Miller Open Education Mini-Grant Program.

To expand upon this support, we are interested in advocating for additional incentives for faculty utilizing affordable course content, such as an institutional award or other support from administrative entities for course material affordability.

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[3] Phillip J Grimaldi, Debshila Basu Mallick, Andrew E Waters, and Richard G Baraniuk, "Do open educational resources improve student learning? Implications of the access hypothesis." *PLoS ONE 14*, no. 3 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0212508

[4] Elder, Abbey K., et al. "2021 Iowa OER Annual Report." (2021). http://bit.ly/2021IowaOER

5 Spilovoy, Tanya, Jeff Seaman, and Nate Ralph. "The impact of OER initiatives on faculty selection of classroom materials." Bay View Analytics and WCET. (2020). http://onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/impactofoerinitiatives.pdf

INTRODUCTION

Committee Charge

The Open & Affordable Education Committee (OAEC) at ISU is a partnership formed in 2017 between the University Library, CELT, ISU Book Store, faculty, Student Government, and the Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost. Through our various initiatives, we aim to lower the cost of course materials for Iowa State students.

In 2019, the committee was charged to:

- Examine national trends regarding OER and make recommendations regarding best practices of their use.
- Examine the current use of OER across ISU and make recommendations to increase their use while respecting faculty rights and responsibilities.
- Identify any impediments to OER and other affordable course materials adoption at ISU.
- Explore additional affordable course material initiatives that could be developed in the future.
- Continue to lead and administer the committee's existing OER initiatives (Open and Affordable Education Committee Charge).

Committee Membership

- Abbey Elder, University Library (Chair)
- Heather Dean, ISU Book Store (Co-Chair)
- Curtis Brundy, University Library
- Julia Campbell, Student Government
- Lesya Hassall, CELT
- Harrison Inefuku, University Library
- Roberta Johnson, Financial Aid
- Sayali Kukday, GDCB
- Monica Lamm, CBE
- Christopher Paulson, Student Government
- Geoff Sauer, English
- Rob Whitehead, Architecture
- Cyndi Wiley, Digital Accessibility

Affordable Course Content Definitions

What are Open & Affordable Course Materials?	Open Educational Resources	Immediate Access Content	Library Licensed Content
	• Free for everyone • Open licenses allow faculty to update & edit content	• Typically < $100 • Bundles subscription publisher content in an online package	• Free for students • Paid through the University Library • Includes books, films, articles, and more.

Figure 1: Open & Affordable Course Material Descriptions

- **Open educational resources (OER)**: educational materials that are free of cost and access barriers, and which also carry legal permission for reuse. Materials can be accessed online or in print.

- **Immediate Access**: a program offered through the ISU Book Store that works with vendors to provide a discounted rate on a textbook and other learning materials by opting students in to pay for a digital package through their U-Bill.

  - **RedShelf**: an e-book platform that works with the ISU Immediate Access program to offer easy access to online textbooks.

- **Library licensed content**: Materials available through the University Library. This content may be used in a course or for research purposes.

  - **Course Reserves**: a program offered through the University Library that sets aside library-licensed materials that are used by a class. These materials can include streaming videos, articles, e-books, and physical items such as books.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

As the cost of higher education has risen, institutions have targeted the cost of textbooks to improve college affordability for students. One of the first affordable course content types promoted by the committee was open educational resources (OER), teaching materials that are to access and openly licensed. We also support other affordability programs such as Immediate Access and Course Reserves.

National Trends

Affordability Is a Major Concern for Colleges

- College affordability has been a major concern for decades, but these concerns have been amplified in recent years as increases in tuition and fees, along with growing student poverty rates, have contributed to growing levels of student homelessness and hunger.[6,7]

- High textbook costs have resulted in a rise in piracy among college students, many of whom are choosing to download an illegal copy of their course text rather than purchase it.[8]

Affordability Initiatives Are Making an Impact

- Student spending on textbooks has begun a gradual decline over the past ten years, and students are increasingly using digital materials (i.e. ebooks, Immediate Access texts) and free course content (i.e., OER, Course Reserves), though full-price, print texts are still commonly purchased.[9,10]

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[6] Clare Cady, "Students shouldn't have to choose between books and food," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 28, 2016, https://www.chronicle.com/article/Students-Shouldn-t-Have-to/235519

[7] Wick Sloane, "Food Is a Basic Need: Dealing With Hunger on College Campuses," *Higher Education Today*, May 31, 2017, https://www.higheredtoday.org/2017/05/31/dealing-with-hunger-on-college-campuses/

[8] Agnete Steine, "The Increased Problem of Textbook Piracy in Educational Publishing," *Medium*, October 21, 2018, https://medium.com/@17072902/educational-publishing-and-textbook-piracy-b3d2de3725e3

[9] Julie Nemec, ibid.

[10] National Association of College Stores, "Highlights from Student Watch Attitudes & Behaviors toward Course Materials 2017-18 Report," n.d., https://www.nacs.org/research/studentwatchfindings.aspx

- Access to affordable course content can support higher enrollment, lower drop rates, and better learning outcomes for students, if this work is supported on campus.[11]

- Using open & affordable course content can benefit learners and educators beyond cost savings by allowing for further innovations in teaching and learning.[12]

Transparency Helps Students Benefit from Course Affordability

When it comes to the cost of course materials, a common thread in conversations with students is transparency. Student Government has brought up concerns around optional versus required readings in courses for a few years now. Bundled with these issues are the "hidden costs" of textbooks, which students aren't always able to work into their limited budgets. One way to circumnavigate these concerns is through course markings to designate whether a course is using no-cost or low-cost course materials. While this was not an option available to us with the previous Book Store information system, thanks to the Book Store's new Booklist software, we can now pursue this option for sharing course materials information on a more granular level. Course markings to denote material costs are in use throughout the United States and Canada. Three prominent examples include:

- The University of Kansas

- Affordable Learning Georgia

- Washington Community and Technical Colleges

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[11] Lane Fischer, John Hilton III, and Jared Robinson, "A multi-institutional study of the impact of open textbook adoption on the learning outcomes of post-secondary students," *Journal of Computing in Higher Education 27*, no. 3 (2015): 159-172. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12528-015-9101-x

[12] Online Learning Consortium, *2018 Digital Learning Innovation Awards*, 2018, https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/about/olc-awards/2018-digital-learning-innovation-award-winners/

CURRENT PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT

Outreach and Awareness

Since the OAEC's inception in 2017, the group has worked consistently to promote the use of OER and other affordable course content on campus through marketing efforts, funding opportunities, and other support for faculty.

Websites

One of the projects that the OAEC continues to support is an OER website, which includes information to educate stakeholders on the use of open educational resources and the work that the OAEC does across campus. Specifically, the website provides:

- resources about OER, including an FAQ, information for students page, and several informational pages for faculty;
- information about the Miller Mini-Grant Program, including profiles of past grant projects;
- a showcase of OER Trailblazers, showcasing 35 faculty members who are currently using OER in their courses or who have adopted OER for their courses in the past year; and
- an About Us page with information about the OAEC, our work, and the other affordable course content initiatives we promote.

On average, 209 unique individuals visit the OAEC's website each month (based on IP address). Most of the visits focus on the websites for the Miller Open Education Mini-Grant Program and the OER Trailblazers showcase, followed by our FAQ.

In addition to the OER website, the OAEC promotes its work in the following places:

- The Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost acknowledges our work through the websites' Initiatives page for Course Content Affordability.
- The ISU Book Store's website has a section on Affordable Course content that hosts the brochures developed by our committee.
- The University Library has resources available for faculty about Open Education and OER.

Presentations Across Campus

While our team was beginning to ramp up presentations about affordable course content across campus in 2019 and early 2020, this work had to be halted at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, our team is working on more electronic marketing materials, such as videos and brochures that we can actively share with the campus community. In the 2021/2022 academic year, we hope to resume our presentations about course material costs for academic departments, and to grow faculty awareness of our work even further.

News Articles Shared

- Communication is key with learning technologies in Canvas (February 2020)
- Videos are a common focus in new round of OER grants (August 2020)
- Get help finding Open Educational Resources for your courses (February 2021)
- Now accepting 2021 Miller Open Education Mini-Grant Proposals (February 2021)
- Open Education Week Recap (March 2021)
- March Open Scholar Café to highlight Open Education (March 2021)

Miller Open Education Mini-Grants

The Miller Open Education Mini-Grants provide funding that enables faculty to create and use open educational resources (OER). Through the Miller Open Education Mini-Grants, faculty interested in OER can get additional support to develop or integrate OER into courses taught at Iowa State.

Projects

Now in its third year, the Miller Mini-Grants have funded 23 finished projects, with an additional 9 in development for 2020. From Fall 2018 to Spring 2020, Iowa State faculty using OER saved students approximately $940,000, approximately 1/3 of which is directly tied to funded Mini-Grant projects. The return on investment for these projects is exponential, with savings for students growing each year that the content is in continued use.

The next steps for the Miller Open Education Mini-Grant Program will be to develop a new track for

proposals to fund updates to existing projects, such as a second edition of an open textbook funded in 2018.

Student Government Support

Since 2017, the Student Government has stayed a steadfast partner of the OAEC, with a sitting representative on the committee each year. In addition to the resolution and proclamation in support of OER passed in previous years, the Student Government is now looking to support faculty using open & affordable course content in their classrooms more proactively.

Affordability Awards for Faculty

In the spring of 2020, we worked with Student Government on the creation of a new award for instructors who use OER in their classrooms. While a good show of support, we hope to adapt these awards next year to have more reach and impact for faculty. Specifically, we will change the awards from trophies given to every faculty member using OER to a nomination-based award for faculty doing excellent work to increase the affordability of their course for students. Professors eligible for the new award may use OER, Immediate Access texts, or free course materials in their courses, such as library-licensed materials.

To fill in the gap where Student Government had previously given thanks to all professors using OER, our committee will send letters of recognition to faculty who have adopted open educational resources in their courses at the end of each academic year.

- **Purpose:** To promote the continued use of open and affordable course content on campus by expressing appreciation for instructors who adopt these materials in their courses and to provide incentives that have weight that could support an instructor's tenure and promotion case in the future.

Student Stories Videos

In 2019, the OAEC worked with Student Government to develop two proof-of-concept videos about the student experience with textbooks at Iowa State, titled Student Stories. To expand upon this series and

give our students the chance to share their experiences using both expensive and affordable textbooks in the classroom, in 2021 we launched the Share Your Story campaign. This campaign, including both a promo video and website, asks students to submit videos sharing their experiences dealing with textbook costs and celebrating courses that use affordable course content. These submissions will be proofed, edited, and shared by the committee in summer or fall.

- **Purpose:** To raise awareness about the ways that ISU students deal with high textbook costs and to allow students to share their experiences with both low-cost and high-cost textbooks and how these differing costs affect the student body.

Faculty Feature Videos

To accompany the Student Story videos, the OAEC is partnering with faculty on Feature videos that highlight instructors using Immediate Access texts, OER, or Course Reserves to lower the cost of materials in their classes. The first set of these videos are now available on the OAEC's new YouTube channel.

- **Purpose:** To highlight and promote instructors who are doing good work to make their courses more affordable for students and to share the stories of what it takes to adopt affordable course content in a wide range of subject areas.

NEXT STEPS

Based on the findings in this document, the committee has compiled the following recommendations to sustain and further develop our work:

VISIBILITY

Continue to raise awareness across campus and promote affordability

To foster a Community of Practice for faculty interested in issues related to course content affordability, the Open & Affordable Education Committee will take the following approaches over the next academic year:

1. Develop new **education & outreach materials** to help dispel confusion around the differences between Immediate Access, OER, Course Reserves, and other affordability options available to faculty. This will include the development of fact sheets, promotional materials, and events hosted by the University Library and CELT.

2. Promote the use of **course markings** in the Book Store's Booklist to denote when course content being used is no-cost or low-cost for students. Having course material costs highlighted in the Booklist for students can attract new students and show that the institution values and supports student success and affordability. As a land-grant institution, these concerns are particularly important as we can show that we support our local students and those around the world who want to pursue an Iowa State education.

3. Begin planning an **Affordability Summit**, a day-long event in 2022 which will feature speakers, workshops, and research related to course content affordability. **Note:** We had originally planned this event for 2021, but had to delay our plans due to the COVID-19 pandemic's affect on our members and the campus community at large.

FACULTY INCENTIVES

Develop new incentives for OER and continue to support existing programs

Our committee is looking into additional ways we can support instructors who are making changes to their course to accommodate the use of new, more affordable course materials. There are two projects in the works that will help with this work:

1. **Student Government Awards**. For the past two years, the ISU Student Government has given out awards to all faculty using OER as thanks for adopting free course materials. Moving forward, we would like to adapt these awards into something more noteworthy so that instructors can note the awards in their promotion & tenure packets. To do this, in 2022, the Student Government Affordability Awards will be limited in number and based on nominations rather than being awarded automatically. This will give the awards more weight and save the Student Government some funds in ordering a smaller number of awards.

2. **Letters of recognition**. To make up for the "automatic" Student Government OER awards going away, our committee will begin drafting letters of recognition as a "thank you" to instructors doing the work of locating, evaluating, and integrating OER into their courses. This will serve as a reminder that adapting a course is not always easy, and a form of recognition for instructors who have reported their adoption of OER.

Finally, we will continue to support the Miller Open Education Mini-Grant Program. The Mini-Grant Program has helped faculty at Iowa State locate, develop, and integrate OER into their courses more effectively than they might have on their own. This impact, coupled with the requests for funding noted in our survey of faculty, show a clear need for continued support to help instructors adopt new and innovate materials that can be used at Iowa State.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Develop an Institutional Resolution or Recommendation for affordability

One of the concerns that came out of our discussions with faculty was the belief that Iowa State does not care about textbook affordability and that departments do not value faculty work to make their courses more affordable. One way this could be mitigated is through an institutional or faculty resolution to support the use of OER and other affordable course content on campus. As Skidmore (2019) states:

"Policies have the ability to reflect and support the culture of their institutions by establishing and codifying procedures that will sustain particular visions. Policy can be a grassroots tool as much as an administrative one, especially when we recognize that policy is often established in

response to and part of an ongoing dialogue on topics of institutional importance."[13]

Examples of such policies/recommendations are provided below:

- [California State University Faculty Senate Resolution Regarding Affordable Learning](#)

- [Inclusion of OER in The University of British Columbia Tenure & Promotion Guide](#)

- [Open Education Strategic Plan 2018-2023](#)

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[13] James M. Skidmore and Myrto Provida, A Place for Policy: The Role of Policy in Supporting Open Educational Resources and Practices at Ontario's Colleges and Universities. (Ontario: eCampus Ontario, 2019). https://www.ecampusontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2019-08-07-skimore-oe-policy-report.pdf