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SIUE Faculty and Students Test Open Educational Resources Pilot

As a result of rising textbook costs and the proliferation of Open Educational Resource (OER) materials, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is conducting a pilot program in order to gauge the feasibility of using OER as a no-cost or low-cost alternative to traditional textbooks.

Eleven faculty members from various disciplines worked with Information Technology Services (ITS) and Library Information Services (LIS) during the summer to identify or create OER to be used in select courses being offered during the current fall term.

In place of traditional textbooks, faculty and students participating in the pilot instead are relying primarily on other electronic resources, most of them freely available in the public domain. The selected courses will use OER in place of the standard textbook, using the iPad mini as the delivery device.

SIUE students have benefited from the University's textbook rental program, which has kept their costs relatively affordable. Textbook costs have continually increased, with average annual textbook costs now at nearly \$1,200 per student, according to the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) Education Fund and The Student PIRG.

In contrast, SIUE's undergraduate students pay an average of \$165 per semester for a 15 credit hour course load. SIUE has been able to keep costs affordable by amortizing the costs over several terms by reusing textbooks.

"The future of the textbook market and our program looks quite different as publishers begin to shift toward digital content," said Joseph Pearson, director of the Morris University Center. "As publishers introduce digital content, they charge per user, per seat, per semester, which significantly increases the costs of these course materials."

"While it's always difficult to predict the future, recent trends support the idea that most course materials will transition to digital content during the next few years," said Matthew Schmitz, associate director of Online and Blended Education in the SIUE department of Information Technology Services. "While this change most certainly could be more expensive, the transition to digital content also offers opportunities to provide access to a wider variety of learning activities, resources and content than traditional textbooks offer."

Changes in technology have provided faculty access and the ability to create and self-publish high quality, open educational resources.

Sorin Nastasia, assistant professor of public relations in the Department of Applied Communication Studies within the SIUE College of Arts and Sciences, is participating in the pilot program. The course "Technology

Applications in Public Relations (ACS 315)” involves 31 students. The students gain expertise in the Adobe CS6 package with which they are directed to create logos, business cards, newsletters, brochures and websites.

“ACS 315 lends itself perfectly to this type of approach,” Nastasia said. “Using open educational resources rather than traditional textbook materials allow students to understand and become proficient in technology applications. They need to go through tutorials and see examples of possible outcomes.

“From their course schedule, students have direct access to tutorials and examples pertinent for a specific week, topic and project. They are guided to go through all OERs for a course date before they come to class. They also have apps on their iPads that can help them with their projects.”

“For a hands-on course like ACS 315, all of these are of great help to the faculty as teaching tools and to the students as learning tools,” Nastasia added. “They are more up-to-date than traditional textbooks and they allow for increased dynamism in the class. I definitely see this trend of using OERs for some courses continuing successfully in the future.”

During the fall semester, students in the pilot will be surveyed at various intervals to determine the effectiveness of the OER material selected for their courses. In addition, ITS instructional designers and LIS librarians will be working with faculty members to locate OER for any additional topics that might arise as a result of course activities or discussions.

At the conclusion of the pilot, all faculty, staff and student participants will be surveyed. The collected data will be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, and presented to the University administration. This report will determine the future of OER initiatives at SIUE.

Along with ITS and LIS, the OER pilot project is the result of collaboration among many other University offices including the Office of the Provost, the University Bookstore, Textbook Services and the Office of the Registrar.

Additional information about the SIUE OER pilot project is available from [the resource site](#).

About Open Educational Resources

The Hewlett Foundation defines OER as “teaching, learning and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software and any other tools, materials or techniques used to support access to knowledge.”

About SIUE

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River’s rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of nearly 14,000.