

Thank You, OER Champion:

Utilizing a Gratitude Campaign as a Marketing Tool

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In September of 2022, I began my first term as the Textbook Affordability Librarian at Clackamas Community College (CCC). Clackamas’s librarians had successfully convinced the college to create this position the previous year, and we were all excited about its potential. *Textbook affordability* is a general term used to describe a variety of initiatives, but they all have one goal in common: to reduce the financial barriers students face when obtaining their course materials.

In 2022, the average college textbook cost an estimated \$105.37, and the price increased by an average of 12 percent with each new edition (Hanson, 2022). That upward trend in cost is not new; between 1977 and 2015, the cost of textbooks increased by 1,041 percent, outpacing inflation by 238 percent (Hanson, 2022). For college students, textbook costs are often about more than just the price tag. A 2016 survey of over 20,000 college students found that textbook costs can have negative impacts on academic performance and even extend students’ time to graduation (Florida Virtual Campus). In 2020, textbook affordability was defined as a social justice issue by a study that found that textbook costs were a significant barrier for all students, but “those barriers were even more significant among historically underserved college students” (Jenkins et al., 2020, p. 9).

While all college students are affected by the rise in textbook costs, community colleges like Clackamas have seen textbook prices disproportionately impact their students. The United States Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) found that 28 percent of students at four-year public colleges report using financial aid to pay for their textbooks, while 50 percent of community college students report the same. Additionally, two-year institutions have a consistently higher average annual cost of textbooks than four-year institutions do (Hanson, 2022).

Open educational resources (OER), which are openly licensed course materials that are free to use and share, have become a particularly popular textbook affordability initiative among college faculty. See Table 1 for an explanation of textbook affordability in relation to OER. As OER have grown in popularity, so has OER research. Studies have shown that using OER in college courses positively impacts all students in a variety of ways, but they have also found that those positive impacts are magnified for traditionally marginalized students. A 2018 study found that OER improved final grades (+8.6%) and reduced drop, fail, and withdrawal rates (-2.68%)

for all students, but improved these at higher rates for non-white students (+13%, -5%), Pell-eligible students (+12.3%, -4.4%), and part-time students (+28%, -10%) (Colvard et al., 2018).

Textbook Affordability	Open Educational Resources (OER)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Textbook affordability is a broad term that encompasses a variety of initiatives. Any initiative designed to reduce course material costs is a textbook affordability initiative. Textbook affordability includes OER. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OER are in the public domain or are licensed through Creative Commons. Anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt and share OER. OER are not limited to textbooks. There are OER course shells, assessments, tutorials, worksheets, and more. Free does not necessarily mean OER. Some free course materials are not openly licensed, so they are not considered OER.

Table 1
Textbook Affordability and OER

With these findings in mind, I spent the months leading up to my first day on the job learning about what others had done to bolster textbook affordability at their institutions. I browsed listservs, watched webinars, and scoured textbook affordability guides. I started a list of potential initiatives, which quickly doubled and then tripled in length. Among the many possibilities I had gathered was a clear need to get CCC’s community as excited about textbook affordability as I was. I ended up with a bolded question at the top of my list: How should I market textbook affordability and OER?

The 2022–23 academic year was the first year that the Clackamas community was back on campus after the pandemic had transitioned all our classes to an online-only modality. Most faculty returned to campus part time, on the days they taught in person, and students returned with them. It did not take long, however, before I realized that most faculty weren’t on campus every day. Stopping by empty offices and struggling to find in-person time in common was not helping me achieve my marketing goals; I was going to need a better way to connect with people who were hard to catch in person.

Cold-calling (or cold-emailing) was decidedly not the best way to get faculty on board with textbook affordability projects. The work I was proposing would require some level of course redesign, which our already-busy faculty would be hesitant to sign up for without a clear understanding of the benefits. While I could easily share textbook affordability facts and figures with faculty, I thought it would be more effective to see how their peers were already doing textbook affordability work. I was further encouraged to explore this idea by Lumen Learning’s playbook for building OER awareness and enthusiasm, which includes a “play” dedicated to recognition of faculty successfully doing textbook affordability work (2018). With some further brainstorming, I decided to utilize a gratitude campaign as a way to showcase CCC faculty who had transitioned to teaching with OER, even with limited time and resources.

While OER are becoming more popular among faculty, their positive outcomes are not common knowledge. I wanted to make sure that faculty already using OER were aware of the

impact they were having on their students. After many iterations of potential ways to celebrate CCC faculty and their OER successes, I stumbled across an example of an OER gratitude campaign designed by Jonas Lamb from the University of Alaska Southeast. The campaign consisted of a thank-you letter that included pertinent information about savings and the positive impacts of OER on student success. I adapted the letter (which was permitted according to its open licensing) to include current facts on textbook affordability and to encourage faculty to reach out to me with their experiences (see Figure 1).

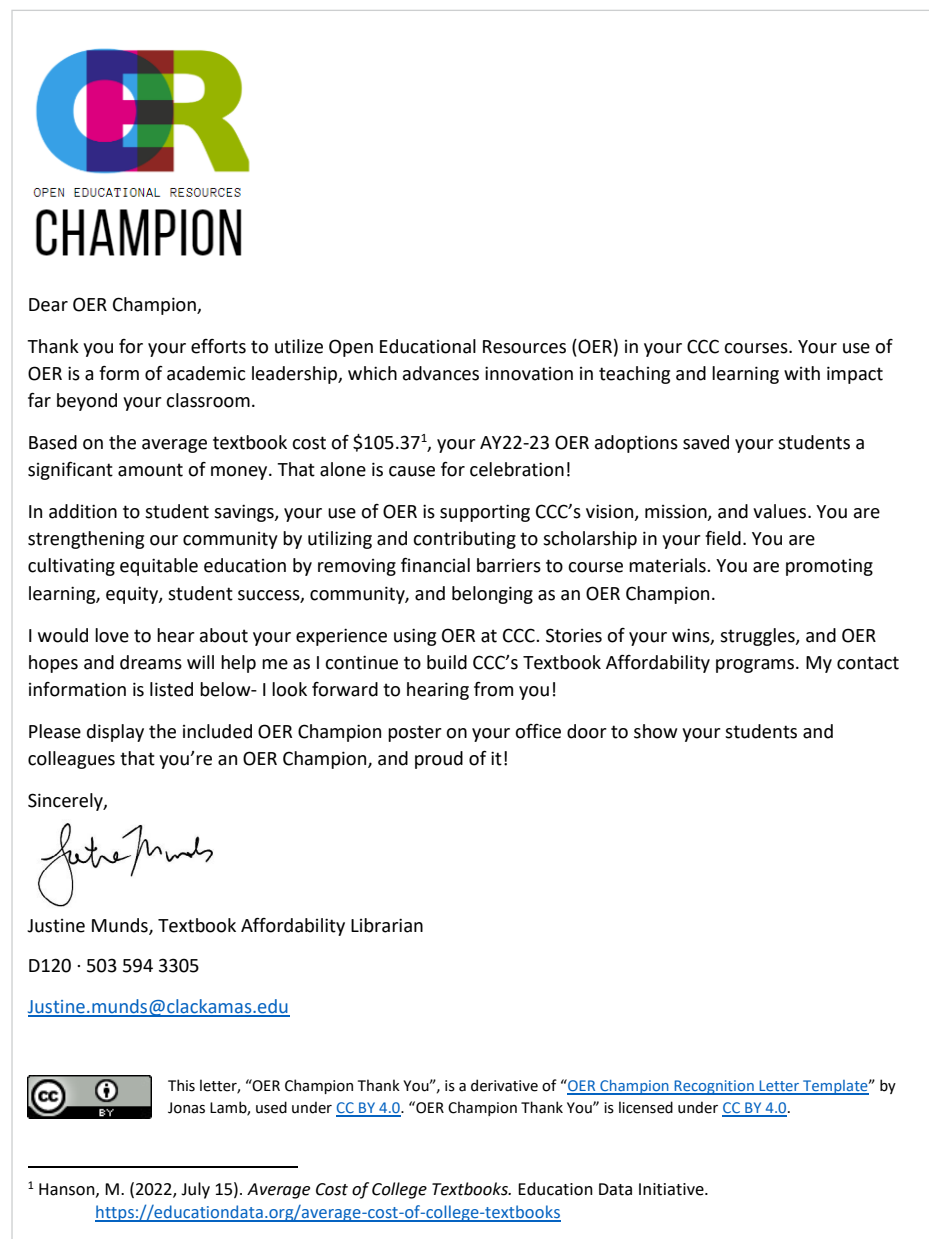


Figure 1
Thank-you Letter for OER Successes

While the thank-you letter was a good start, I wanted to include additional items that faculty could display as markers of their OER champion status—this was a marketing initiative after all. Ultimately, I decided on an OER informational poster containing my contact information for faculty to place on their office doors, in hopes that it would spark interest in their students and peers (see Figure 2). I also included a small sticker in the gratitude package, because everyone loves a good sticker! Figure 3 shows the sticker.



Figure 2
OER Poster



Figure 3
OER Sticker

My intention for this marketing campaign was for faculty already using OER to feel proud of what they were doing for their students (and themselves), for students to recognize what their instructors were doing, and for other faculty to perhaps be envious enough of the poster to give me a call. Buy-in is the driving force of textbook affordability work; without faculty participation, there is only so much I can do. Investing in faculty and student awareness and showing gratitude for those who engage in textbook affordability work are imperative to my program's success.

This gratitude campaign is still in its early stages. Packages went out to CCC faculty in the spring of 2023, and some faculty have already reached out with excitement about displaying their posters. My intention is to continue the project's momentum by sending new packages to faculty who adopt OER in the future. It's my hope that the majority of CCC's office doors will soon have OER champion posters taped to them.

In keeping with the spirit of open education, all the materials I created for this campaign are openly licensed. I encourage you to run a gratitude campaign of your own!



Buy-in is the driving force of textbook affordability work.

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