Open Education Resources (OER)
Cost Savings and Return on Investment

Overview

In April 2021, MHEC convened a working group of institutional, state and national leaders to help advise its efforts to develop a set of principles to improve consistency and reliability in the field for measuring cost savings and the return on investment of OER. This group will advise MHEC throughout this process. The first meeting focused on defining what we hope to accomplish, why this work is important, whom it is designed for and how we should develop the principles. The group collectively acknowledged that this is a big challenge with multiple dimensions, but also a worthwhile endeavor. Below are key themes and takeaways from the first meeting that will guide and define the scope of this work.

What are we doing and what do we need to keep in mind?

We are creating common principles to improve consistency and reliability in the field for measuring cost savings and the return on investment of OER. The final product will make it possible for someone to create and replicate a final number, whether a single number is published as part of this work will be determined through the development process.

The audience for these principles mirror's MHEC members and the membership of other regional compacts. These members are decision-makers including legislators, system heads, institutional leadership typically asked to make decisions about resource allocation. The final product should also be accessible for students and the public who vote for or support leaders who decide on public expenditures and who make decisions about personal expenditures.

Why is it important?

- Advocates need a concise statement that clearly and accurately communicates the value of OER.
- Decision-makers need a reliable and valid way to measure the cost savings and return on investment for OER to students and their organization.
- Leaders need to understand the good work and progress already created to measure the impact of OER so that they can use it within their efforts.
- Practitioners with limited time need a short-cut to help them understand how to communicate cost-savings and the return on investment within their own OER efforts.
- We all need to ensure that OER is helping us increase higher education's efforts to increase attainment.

What are essential considerations?

- There is a complicated tension between the goals of the OER movement and the textbook industry.
- Context matters, the principles and framework should allow for multiple contexts including different types of state governance structures, different institution types and different academic subjects.
- Consensus is important, the principles will not be perfect, but they should have sufficient agreement across stakeholders so that they align and help unify the field.
- The perfect should not be the enemy of the good, the principles and any associated framework should offer a pragmatic approach that most stakeholders could implement or execute.

What key questions do we need to answer in route to our product?

- What are the current models of cost savings and return on investment in the research and what are their strengths and weaknesses?
- What are best practices for states and institutions already measuring cost savings and ROI?
- What is the difference between cost savings and ROI?
- How is cost savings and ROI different for the state, the student and institutions?
- How should we define OER when measuring cost savings and ROI?
- What is the time horizon for measuring the impact of ROI?
- How do we account for non-monetary costs (i.e.: faculty time, structural changes) and returns (i.e.: student learning, additional access, increased retention, greater equity)?

Who do we need to consult?

The following groups have been identified for outreach. We will be working with contacts to set up focus groups and interviews. This group may expand as we identify other organizations who should be consulted.

- Other OER Advocates (DOERS, RLOE)
- Global/International organizations
- Legislators/Executive Staffers (Regional Compacts, NCSL, ECS)
- Institutional Roles (NACUBO, AIR)
- System Leaders (AGB, NASH, SHEEO, APLU, AACC)

Remaining questions to answer:

- What will the final product look like?
- What should we call this?
- Will we produce a final number?
- How will we use contextual information, including case studies?
- How will we get the word out and encourage broad adoption?