

TOPIC: RECOMMENDATION FOR REALLOCATION OF OER
CONFERENCE FUNDS

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I. SUMMARY

This discussion item requests approval for the reallocation of a portion of the open educational resources (OER) conference funds to be applied to the Department's current *No Lapse in Learning* initiative in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

II. BACKGROUND

OER in Colorado

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) has supported the open educational resources (OER) initiative at the Department since its inception. Led by the statewide OER Council in conjunction with Department staff, Colorado's open education work contains student costs while enriching teaching and learning in classrooms across Colorado. Since 2018, the Department has invested in the training, professional development and obtained comprehensive grant programs necessary to support the infrastructure needed to expand open education and the use of OER in Colorado.

Response to COVID-19

Over the past month, Colorado higher education institutions have transitioned to remote or online instruction in response to COVID-19. This has allowed for continued high-quality educational experiences while not compromising the health of Colorado students or communities. However, our most vulnerable students are at risk of being left behind if they do not have access to sufficient technology and equipment to adequately engage in online and remote learning.

Given this challenge, the Department consulted with the higher education institutions to identify immediate needs. As part of that response, the Department administered *Institutional Technology Need Survey*, to assess the technological needs of institutions in moving to fully online instruction for the remainder of the academic year (and potentially beyond). The survey results revealed a significant need for technology-related supplies such as laptops, cameras, monitors and hotspots to enable remote learning. One institutional response from the survey reads:

"The student population we serve... are usually 1st generation college students with few resources who straddle the digital divide in our region. With our campus shutting down due to Coronavirus, we are at a high risk of losing them because the only tech they use is their phone or PCs in the campus computer labs. But a laptop or Chromebook would give

them access to the Google office suite and our Blackboard system to keep them engaged and on track. It would be a critical safety net.”

To address these needs, the Department initiated *No Lapse in Learning* to help provide such technologies for students in need. Preliminary projections based on the survey responses suggest a need for over 1,200 laptops in addition to other supplies.

Open Education Supporting Online Learning

Because many OER are digitally accessible, the OER Council has taken a special interest in supporting institutions as they scale online learning rapidly. In addition to compiling and disseminating practical open education-related resources and supporting online instruction at their home campuses, the OER council believes it is within its mission to support the *No Lapse in Learning* initiative financially.

In collaboration with Department staff, the OER Council initially budgeted \$40,000 for the 2020 Statewide OER Conference, set to take place June 4 and 5 at Colorado School of Mines. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the OER Council has postponed the annual conference to October 2020. Therefore, the council would like to reallocate this budget of \$40,000 to the *No Lapse in Learning* initiative.

As noted in the attached letter from the OER Council chairs (Attachment A):

“... We are all adapting to remote instruction, so too are students who are looking for ways to access these new course formats... Educators are charting new territory as our higher education institutions seek to deal with COVID-19 and we recognize that, while the transition to remote instruction may be necessary, our students are at risk of being left behind because they don't have access to the required technology. Providing access to technology, such as laptops and hotspots, is consistent with the objective of open educational resources: the cost of education should not be a barrier for students. “

II. STAFF ANALYSIS

This proposal embodies the spirit of open education and expanding access to education for Colorado students. The OER Council's report, submitted to this Commission, the Joint Budget Committee and the Education Committee, found increased adoption of freely available teaching and learning materials could significantly benefit students through cost savings, improved learning and higher student retention. HB18-1331 created the statewide OER Council and grant program that was informed by a 2017 CDHE Report. Since 2018, CDHE has been working to assist public higher education institutions in lowering learning material costs by developing and expanding the use of OER in tandem with the Colorado OER Council. The OER Council strives to make education more accessible and equitable through freely available teaching and learning materials. While the Council's plans for the year have shifted due to the extreme circumstances, this opportunity to support

this program to ensure Colorado students continue to receive a high-quality education, and assists the overall transference to digital learning statewide with access for all Coloradans.

By approving the transfer of these funds, the Commission will help meet the following needs in alignment with the *Master Plan Goals of Colorado Rises*:

- **Erasing Equity Gaps:** furthering access for students in need of technologies will not only help meet an immediate need for technology, but also demonstrate a long-term commitment to open education infrastructure in Colorado institutions of higher education.
- **Improving Student Success:** expanding access to necessary technologies will help support student success in online and remote learning, ensuring their access to the high-quality experiences provided by their institutions
- **Containing costs and pursuing innovation:** expanding access to technologies and furthering enabling the use of OER on campuses is consistent with the longstanding mission of this initiative, while affording student access to necessary technologies helps to contain costs for their educational and everyday needs.

The reallocation of the conference funds to support the *No Lapse in Learning* initiative will assist expanded access to open educational resources both for the immediate needs of students learning online and in the long-term investment to enable infrastructures necessary for sustainable open education work. OER Grants already awarded will remain intact as institutions continue to incorporate OER in everyday instructional practices.

III. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission approve the reallocation of OER Conference funds, in the amount of \$40,000, to the No Lapse in Learning initiative to expand access to essential technologies for students in need due to the COVID-19 crisis.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

Pursuant to [HB 18-1331](#), the Commission shall award grants through the grant program and shall take into account, but is not bound by, the recommendations of the council and staff in doing so. The Commission also receives recommendations for policies from the OER Council to be implemented and executed by the Department staff.

ATTACHMENT(S):

Attachment A: Letter from OER Council Chairs (on behalf of the Colorado OER Council) to the Commission