

Minutes

University Academic Affairs Committee (Regular Meeting)

February 24, 2025 3:00pm

Online (Zoom)

In attendance:

Theresa Grana (CAS), Alex Honold (Secretary, COE), Jennifer Magee (CAS), John Marsh (COB), Xin-Wen Wu (Chair, CAS),

Ex Officio: Rita Dunston (Registrar), Melissa Yakabouski (Dean of Admissions & Associate Vice President)

Other Attendees: Paul Boger (Head of Reference and Scholarly Communications), Amy Filiatreau (University Librarian), Ian Finlayson (Associate Professor, Computer Science)

1. Call to Order: 3:00
2. Meeting Minutes
 - a. Previously approved
3. Old Business
4. New Business
 - a. Discussion of Motion on Designation of OER (that is, Open Educational Resources). Details are in the Appendix (on the next page).
 - i. Guest shared rationale of motion about changing the designation (see appendix)
 - ii. concern about a “no cost” only designation if class uses some low-cost materials (e.g., homework pack)
 - iii. suggestion for both low cost and no cost option
 - iv. UMW currently designates low cost as \$40 or less
 - v. Five-year review of OER (falls on this year coincidentally), which can be good time to revisit amount of low cost and no cost designation. However, it might be more work to have three different categories (cost, no cost, and low cost) for department and faculty (especially because registrar asks for the information so early).
 - vi. Students often unfamiliar with term OER means. Would like to see two options (low cost, no cost). 60% of courses don’t report course materials. Shared resource:
<https://provost.umw.edu/oer/what-are-oer/>
 - vii. Some professors mostly use research papers through library.
 - viii. Studies show cost of textbooks matter a lot to students

- ix. We need outreach to students to let them know about low-cost/no-cost, otherwise they are unlikely to look. The new options could be added over the summer, but difficult before spring registration.
 - x. \$100 might be too high for low cost.
 - xi. \$40 could be increased to \$50 (using inflation calculator)
 - xii. UMW meeting with library; suggested that they can come up research-based proposal on what other institutions are doing.
 - xiii. Discussion of getting rid of OER designation—just need to define low cost to communicate to students.
 - xiv. No motion to vote on yet; will send statement to faculty council
 - xv. Will adjust the motion to include low cost (\$50 or less) along with no cost
 - xvi. Suggestion for electronic vote on new motion
- 5. Announcements: March meeting reminder
 - 6. Adjournment: 3:35

Appendix

Motion

A motion was proposed to change the designation, "Open Educational Resources" or "OER", to "No Textbook Cost", by Dr. Ian Finlayson.

Rationale:

First, "OER" and "no cost" are not the same thing. OER means the text is available under a license which allows for unlimited redistribution, editing, and so on. This almost always implies no cost. However, textbooks which have no cost for our students are sometimes not OER. For instance, the book I am using for CPSC 305 is free for our students through the UMW library website (as many texts are), but is not open, i.e. it does not have a license which allows for editing and redistribution. This distinction comes up a lot in software where people use the terms "free as in speech/free as in beer" or "libre/gratis" to distinguish. I am once again struggling to decide whether to list the text I use as "OER" for the Fall '25 schedule when it is gratis but not libre.

I think the vast majority of our students care more about "no cost" than "OER". I doubt many of them know what "OER" even means to be honest. Using that term instead will make it clearer to them when they are browsing the schedule. It will also make it more clear to faculty whether they should include that designation for their classes or not. I've

spoken to several of my colleagues about this issue and we are not sure whether to list gratis, but not libre, materials or not. I wonder how many classes have material which is no cost for the students, but which doesn't include the designation because texts aren't actually OER, or they are not sure if they are.

The reason we began listing this information in the first place is because [§ 23.1-1308 of the Code of Virginia](#) compels us to. The relevant parts read:

E. The governing board of each public institution of higher education shall implement guidelines for the adoption and use of low-cost and no-cost open educational resources in courses offered at such institutions. Such guidelines may include provisions for low-cost commercially published materials.

F. The registrar or another appropriate employee of each public institution of higher education shall identify conspicuously in the online course catalogue or registration system, as soon as practicable after the necessary information becomes available, each course for which the instructor exclusively uses no-cost course materials or low-cost course materials.

This leaves the decision to us as to what exactly we list in terms of open/commercial and low/no cost. I was speaking to someone in the VIVA library group, and she told me some schools had tried to define "low cost" as \$100 or less which in my opinion is kind of ridiculous. I would argue that "No Textbook Cost", or perhaps "No Material Cost" is the most straightforward way to list this information. Using the term "OER" is less helpful for students and more confusing for faculty. It's a small change but I think it is worth discussing.