Open Education Resources: A Cheap Alternative to Textbooks

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The cost of higher education is on the rise. While used or rented books can help students cut costs, textbooks are still a huge expense for students. However, less expensive text book options are becoming available. The Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA), Metro’s Student Senate, and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) are working together to promote Open Educational Resources (OERs) around the state. OERs are free, licensed textbooks that are available online to download, share or print.

OERs are available in a large variety of disciplines, yet Metropolitan State isn’t using them. One of the reasons for this is that many professors are wary of using OERs because they are concerned about credibility. Another reason is that many professors simply don’t know about them. In light of this, MSUSA, Student Senate and MnSCU have begun implementation of a two phase plan.

The first phase of the plan, which has already been completed, included working with faculty from various disciplines to review textbooks from the Open Textbook Network. In the second phase, MnSCU plans to provide funding to campuses for the use of OERs and will begin to raise awareness of available materials, as well as promote the use of these affordable textbooks. According to MSUSA statistics, as of July of this year, 22 percent of MnSCU faculty had already adopted the use of OERS, 47 percent planned on adopting and 28 percent were undecided and only three percent specifically planned on not adopting the OER option.

According to Amber Hamm, the president of Student Senate, “The main thing we’re trying to do right now with the affordable textbooks is just making sure that faculty know that they exist so they can start using them and encouraging them to use them.”

Students can join a number of groups to help spread the word on OERs to fellow students and faculty. For more information about how to get involved with the affordable textbooks project, contact the Student Senate or MSUSA. To check out the University of Minnesota’s Open Textbook Library, visit open.umn.edu