

Grant aims to reduce textbook costs

HOLYOKE – With the help of a federal grant, Holyoke Community College is continuing its efforts to make college more affordable and inclusive by increasing the use of free Open Educational Resources (OER) in place of costly textbooks in its classrooms.

HCC is part of a consortium of six state colleges, along with the state Dept. of Higher Education, sharing a \$441,367 grant from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). The three-year grant project aims to boost the number of college courses that make use of Open Educational Resources.

The project – Remixing Open Textbooks through an Equity Lens (ROTEL): Culturally Relevant Open Textbooks for High Enrollment General Education Courses and Career and Professional Courses at Six Public Massachusetts Colleges – will test the hypothesis that underrepresented students will achieve higher academic outcomes if colleges use free, culturally-relevant course materials that reflect their experiences.

Open Educational Resources, or OER, are teaching, learning and research materials that are not protected by copyright and readily available in the public domain for free use, duplication and distribution.

Framingham State University is the lead partner in the project. The other colleges taking part are HCC, Fitchburg State University, Northern Essex Community College, Springfield Technical Community College, and Salem State University.

“We are excited about the project’s potential and outcomes for our students,” said Millie González, interim dean of Framingham State’s Whittemore Library



A student studies in the HCC library during the spring 2021 semester.

Submitted photo

and the lead project manager. “We will track performance measures, including numbers of courses, sections and faculty using new OER materials, student grades and satisfaction in those courses.”

The grant will help faculty at the six participating colleges create 36 new OER textbooks and 36 adaptations of existing textbooks using a diversity, equity and inclusion lens. According to the grant administrators, student savings on textbooks during the three-year grant period could amount to more than \$1.6 Million per year.

Representing the three community colleges as one of the co-managers of the grant is Jessica Egan, coordinator of Instructional Design at HCC.

“The goal of the project is to create a new model that provides continued savings long into the future,” Egan said.

HCC has been active in OER since 2013 when it first offered faculty workshops to help teachers explore and create OER classes. In 2016, the college established an OER Taskforce with the goal of communicating OER opportunities campus wide. In the fall of 2018, HCC launched an OER Business Mass Transfer Degree program that allows students to receive a two-year associate degree in Business Administration with no textbook costs.

At the end of the three-year grant, the project results will be disseminated to all 29 Massachusetts colleges and universities.