2025 Open Educational Resources Report

2025

The Colorado Department of Higher Education
Report to the Colorado Commission on Higher Education,
Open Educational Resources Council, Joint Budget Committee,
and Education Committees of the General Assembly of Colorado

Statute: C.R.S. 23-1-134

The Colorado Department of Higher Education (DHE), under its own authority and through the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE), oversees and coordinates policy for 31 public institutions of higher education (including community colleges, independent local district colleges and local area technical colleges) and authorizes and regulates private colleges, universities and occupational schools.

Mission – We support students, advocate and develop policies to maximize higher education opportunities for all.

Vision – All Coloradans will have an education beyond high school to pursue their dreams and improve our communities.

Prepared and submitted by the Colorado Department of Higher Education
under the Executive Leadership of Dr. Angie Paccione
Pursuant to the statutory authority of §23-1-134

December 2025

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2024-2025 Colorado Open Educational Resources Council

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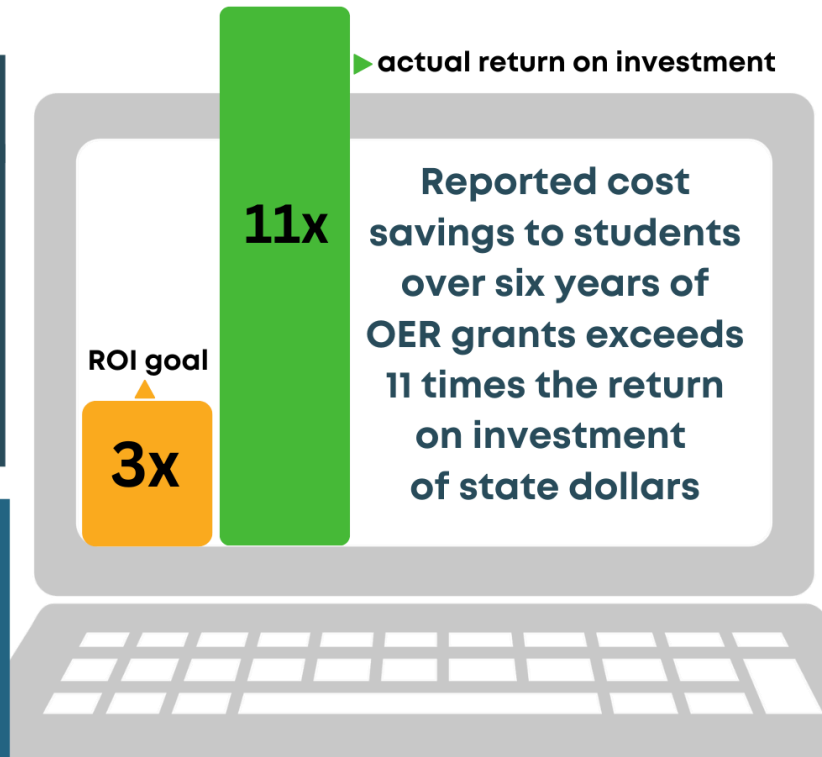
COLORADO **OER DASHBOARD**

▶ **actual return on investment**

Grant Years 1-6:

$59.7
million in estimated student cost savings over six years

11x

ROI goal

3x

Reported cost savings to students over six years of OER grants exceeds 11 times the return on investment of state dollars

from state investment of

$5.35
million in OER grants

2024-2025 COHORT 6 GRANTEES

10 **Institutional grants**

9 **Z-degree grants**

4 **Collaborative grants**

3 **Small/Individual grants**

18 public institutions reported a collective **$16.2 million** in annual student cost savings from OER and ZTC courses.

2,291
courses have been converted to OER by grantees over six years

$4.1
million in cost savings to students from the sixth OER grant cycle

176,652
students in Colorado are enrolled in a course with OER grant materials annually

COLORADO
Department of
Higher Education

Dear Members of the Colorado General Assembly and Colorado Commission on Higher Education:

It is with great pleasure that we submit the 2025 Open Educational Resources (OER) report pursuant to C.R.S. 23-1-134. OER are high-quality educational materials that are available at no-cost to students and have been released under an intellectual property license that permits free use and repurposing by others. The Department champions OER as a strategic means of meeting the demand for affordable educational materials.

The Colorado OER Grant Program has completed its sixth year. In six years, OER has resulted in more than **$59.7 million in cost savings for students**. This figure represents an **astonishing 11x return on the state's investment** in OER. Faculty, librarians, and instructional designers converted 2,291 courses over six years through $5.35 million in state grant funding to achieve this milestone.

Governor Polis reissued the Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) Challenge in May. Colorado institutions of higher education are rising to the challenge. Seventeen ZTC degrees or certificates are complete, 18 ZTC degrees or certificates are in progress, and 11 ZTC degrees or certificates were proposed for the last grant cycle. Additionally, attendance at the Colorado OER Conference increased 21% between 2024 and 2025, and in September 2025, the eighth cycle of the OER grant program experienced its largest application pool, indicating that interest in OER among Colorado educators is continuing to expand.

More than 176,000 Colorado students are enrolled in courses utilizing open educational resources annually. Colorado has cemented itself as a national leader in open education through the state-funded grant program, zero textbook degree development, leadership of the OER Council, and dedication of educators across the state.

Signed,

Angie Paccione
Executive Director
Colorado Department of Higher Education

Executive Summary

Open Educational Resources (OER) are high-quality learning resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits free use and repurposing by others. OER are remixable and customizable, allowing Colorado instructors to create materials that reflect the community and region of our state. Zero textbook cost (ZTC) programs use OER to create pathways for students to earn credentials without textbook cost, increasing the affordability of higher education for all Colorado students.

Nationally, public two-year students spend an average of $1,570, and public four-year students spend $1,330 per year on books and supplies,[1] an increase from $1,470 and $1,250 in 2023, respectively.[2] In Colorado, 48% of students at Arapahoe Community College said textbook costs impacted their course selection.[3] The use of OER has also seen significant growth, with Colorado institutions reporting an increase of more than 300 new OER or ZTC courses in the past year, and nationally, 49% of faculty reported using OER materials in at least one course.[4]

The enthusiasm for OER and ZTC continues to grow across Colorado. There are 17 completed ZTC degrees and certificates at institutions across the state, with an additional 29 ZTC degrees and certificates in progress or proposed. The 2025 Colorado OER Conference had 224 faculty, librarians, instructional designers, administrators, and students register attendance, up from 189 in 2024. In the past year, the director of open education and OER Council coordinated more than 30 hours of OER webinars, launched OER learning communities focused on advocating for open education and artificial intelligence, and embarked on an OER roadshow to rural institutions. The eighth cycle of the state OER grant program received its largest application pool in September 2025 with 35 proposals.

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[1] Ma, Jennifer, Matea Pender, and Xiaowen Hu (2025). Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2025. College Board. Source: https://research.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/Trends-in-College-Pricing-and-Student-Aid-2025-final_1.pdf
[2] Ma, Jennifer and Matea Pender (2023). Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2023. College Board. Source: https://research.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/Trends%20Report%202023%20Updated.pdf
[3] Data provided in Arapahoe Community College OER grant final report in 2024.
[4] Seaman, J.E. and Seaman, J. (2025). Deeply Digital Educational Resources in Higher Education. Source: https://www.bayviewanalytics.com/reports/deeplydigital2025.pdf

Per statutory requirements, the Department of Higher Education and the OER Council have included the following in this annual report:

1. Statewide progress on adoption and universal awareness of OER, including evaluations of policy efficacy.

2. Data on OER and ZTC usage, such as the percentage of courses and degree programs using OER, resources created or adapted by grantees, and implementation of the grant program.

3. Comparative enrollment, completion, and pass rates for OER versus non-OER courses and for ZTC degree programs versus other programs.

Key Findings

In the sixth grant cycle, **$4,150,647 in student textbook cost savings** were reported across 18 grantee public institutions of higher education. The cumulative cost savings for the first six years of the grant program are projected to surpass $75 million in spring 2026. The annual impact has continued to rise with grantees reporting 318 new courses converted to OER in the grant program's sixth year. Grantees have now converted a total of **2,291 courses** at Colorado institutions through OER creation or adoption. More than **176,000 students**[5] in Colorado were enrolled in courses with OER materials in the 2024-2025 academic year, a 637% increase from the first cohort in 2019-2020. One example of high-impact return on investment is from the University of Northern Colorado. AST 109 The Cosmos changed from a $180 textbook to the OpenStax Astronomy OER textbook[6] for an estimated annual cost savings of $49,860 for 277 students.

ZTC Programs

The development of ZTC programs is gaining momentum in Colorado. ZTC degrees and certificates provide students with a pathway to complete credentials with zero textbook cost. The terms zero

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[5] Cumulative course titles, student impact, and savings as reported by cohort six grantees in their 2025 final reports. Student counts are considered duplicated as one individual student may be enrolled in multiple courses using OER as their primary resource.

[6] OpenStax. (2022). Astronomy 2nd Edition. Source: https://openstax.org/details/books/astronomy-2e

textbook cost degree, z-degree and ZTC degree are used interchangeably in this report. Governor Polis reissued the ZTC Challenge in May.[7] There are currently 17 completed ZTC degrees or certificates at Colorado institutions as of fall 2025:

- Colorado State University Pueblo offers a ZTC bachelor's of arts in Spanish, a certificate in Spanish for health professionals, and a master's in social work.
- Colorado School of Mines offers a ZTC master's in mechanical engineering.
- Colorado Northwestern Community College offers a ZTC associate of arts and an associate of sciences.
- Colorado Community College System offers a ZTC bachelor's of applied science.
- Community College of Aurora offers a ZTC associate of arts, associate of sciences, and associate of general studies.
- Red Rocks Community College offers a ZTC associate of theatre.
- Pikes Peak State College offers a ZTC associate of arts, and certificates for emergency medical technician, early career childhood assistant teacher, infant toddler, addiction recovery assistance, and behavioral health.

An additional 18 ZTC degrees or certificates are in progress at Colorado institutions, including a bachelor's of nursing at University of Colorado Anschutz and Arapahoe Community College, bachelor's of mathematics and data science certificate at the University of Colorado Denver, bachelor's in applied science for creative industries at Front Range Community College, master's in business administration at Western Colorado University, and associate of liberal arts at Aims Community College. Metropolitan State University of Denver is leading the state in the number of in progress z-degrees with bachelor's degrees in communication studies, chemistry, hospitality, and social work. An additional 11 new ZTC degrees and certificates were proposed for cohort eight of the OER grant program, which will begin its performance period in February 2026.

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[7] Governor Polis' Zero Textbook Cost Challenge. (2025). Colorado Department of Higher Education. Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHtTXo--t-U

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Introduction

Colorado's OER program formally began in 2017 with the creation of the OER Council. The grant program was established in 2018, and since then, progress in ZTC program development has skyrocketed in 2025. There are now 17 complete ZTC degrees or certifications, and an additional 18 in progress ZTC degrees or certificates. This report focuses on the achievements of the state OER program in 2025 through the sixth cohort of the OER grant program, growth in ZTC programs, engagement with rural institutions, and skillbuilding through professional development for the state's open education community. The first six years of the OER grant program have saved Colorado students $59.7 million in textbook costs and converted 2,291 courses to OER – an 11 times return on investment of $5.35 million in state grants. More than 176,000 Colorado students were enrolled in courses utilizing OER in the 2024-2025 academic year.[8] Due to continued use of OER and other ZTC materials each semester, cost savings are estimated to be $68.6 million as of fall 2025 and are projected to exceed $75 million by spring 2026.

Figure 1: Compounded OER Grant Program Cost Savings Cohorts 1-6 (Assuming Continued Use)
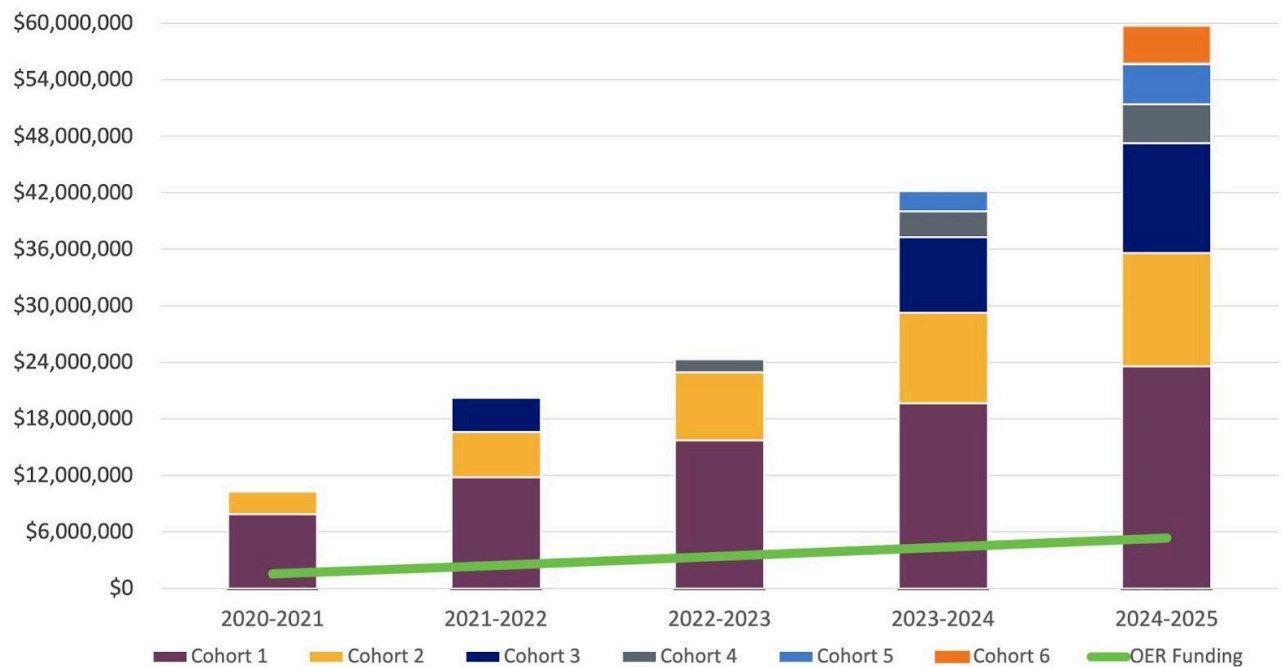
Note: Cohort refers to the group of grants in one year of the OER program. Cohort savings are calculated based on the courses converted to OER during the one year performance period and the continued annual enrollment in those courses.

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[8] Cumulative course titles, student impact, and savings as reported by cohort six grantees in their 2025 final reports.

Table 1: Annual OER Grant Program Cost Savings Cohorts 1-6

	Cohort 1 Savings	Cohort 2 Savings	Cohort 3 Savings	Cohort 4 Savings	Cohort 5 Savings	Cohort 6 Savings	Funding
2019 - 2020	$3,925,488						$ 549,108
2020 - 2021	$7,850,976	$2,411,695					$1,000,000
2021 - 2022	$11,776,464	$4,823,390	$3,619,867				$875,000
2022 - 2023	$15,701,952	$7,235,075	$5,809,689	$1,377,384			$968,803
2023 - 2024	$19,627,440	$9,646,780	$7,999,511	$2,754,768	$2,139,202		$960,017
2024 - 2025	$23,552,928	$12,058,475	$11,619,377	$4,132,152	$4,278,404	$4,150,647	$1,000,000

Source: OER Grantee Final Reports
Note: Cost savings are calculated by (the number of students enrolled in a course) x (cost of the previous textbook).
Assuming continued use of OER by faculty, the textbook cost savings experienced by students compound annually.

Grantees provide separate annual cost savings for all courses at their institution that utilize OER. Aims Community College, Front Range Community College, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and Pikes Peak State College each report that students save over $2 million in textbook costs annually. The estimated cost savings for Colorado students in the 2024-2025 academic year exceed $16 million. These cost savings apply to all ZTC courses, including those converted outside the grant program or those utilizing library resources.

Table 2: Estimated annual cost savings from OER in the 2024-2025 academic year

Institution	Estimated annual cost savings from OER
Aims Community College	$2,300,000
Arapahoe Community College	$1,200,000
Colorado Community College System	$1,136,620
Colorado Mesa University	$329,563
Colorado Northwestern Community College	$456,281.05
Colorado School of Mines	$581,000
Colorado State University	$1,158,279

Colorado State University Pueblo	$305,000
Community College of Aurora	$1,464,324
Fort Lewis College	$113,395
Front Range Community College	$2,392,249
Metropolitan State University of Denver	$2,044,000
Northeastern Junior College	$115,000
Pikes Peak State College	$2,268,666
Red Rocks Community College	$140,434
University of Colorado System	$1,213,206.24
University of Northern Colorado	$319,161
Western Colorado University	$18,846

Source: OER Grantee Final Reports

Background

Since 2018, 87% of public institutions of higher education have received funding from the OER grant program, signaling interest in open education across the state. All but one public institution of higher education has participated in OER professional development training offered by the Department and OER Council.

Legislative History

S.B. 17-258 created the OER Council and commissioned a report on OER initiatives serving higher education in Colorado. H.B. 18-1331 appropriated funds for 1.0 FTE, annual conference and workshops, web development, and established the OER grant program with $500,000 funding in 2020, then $1 million in 2019 and 2020. S.B. 21-215 re-authorized the OER Council, 1.0 FTE, professional development funding, and grant program at $1 million a year for five additional years. The OER Council and grant program are scheduled to repeal on November 1, 2026 per current statute.

Open Licenses

OERs reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license, typically a Creative Commons License[9], with the ability for instructors and students to freely retain copies, re-use, revise, remix, and share the material. The most common license that grantees have selected is the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License / CC BY-NC, which permits the right for others to retain a copy, re-use, revise, remix, and share OER as long as the author is attributed and the use is non-commercial.

Report Requirements

The Department of Higher Education and the OER Council must include the following information in their annual report:

- The degree to which all public institutions of higher education are adopting open educational resources support programs and ensuring universal awareness of open educational resources,
- Descriptions and evaluations of the efficacy of provisions included in open educational resources policies across the state,
- The number and percentage of courses offered by public institutions of higher education that use OER as the primary resources for the course,
- The number and percentage of the degree programs offered by public institutions are ZTC degree programs,
- The open educational resources created and shared by grant program recipients,
- The number of open educational resources revised and adopted by grant program recipients,
- The summarized information concerning implementation of the grant program,
- And for public institutions of higher education that receive an OER grant the course enrollment, completion, and pass rates for courses that use OER compared to courses that do not use OER,
- The enrollment and completion rates for ZTC degree programs compared to other degree programs.

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[9]Creative Commons. (2025). About CC Licenses. Source: https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/cclicenses/

OER Grant Program

The OER grant program awards approximately $1 million annually to increase the use of OER and develop ZTC programs at Colorado institutions of higher education. Grant funds are utilized for faculty time in revising course plans around an OER textbook they are adopting, adapting existing OER to meet course learning objectives or local context for Colorado students, authoring new OER textbooks or other educational materials, developing ancillary materials such as homework systems, and to provide professional development training related to open education. OER created through the grant program is shared through the Colorado Pressbooks Network,[10] the Colorado Community College System Open Textbooks,[11] Fort Lewis College Digital Press,[12] OER Commons,[13] institutional repositories such as UNCOpen,[14] and other OER platforms. Grantees also promote their OER work on institutional websites, such as More CMU MORE: More Colorado Mesa University Maverick Open Resource Educators.[15] This report primarily focuses on the sixth grant cycle, where proposals were due in December 2023, recommended grants were approved by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education in March 2023, grant performance ran from May 2024 to June 2025, and final reports were received in September 2025.

Table 3: Growth in Annual OER Course Enrollment Cohorts 1-6

Cohort	Annual student enrollment in OER courses
Cohort 1 / 2019 - 2020	23,958
Cohort 2 / 2020 -2021	30,464
Cohort 3 / 2021 - 2022	64,677

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[10] Colorado Pressbooks Network. (2025). Colorado Pressbooks Network Catalog. Source: https://colorado.pressbooks.pub/catalog/

[11] Colorado Community College System. (2025). CCCS Open Textbooks. Source: https://pressbooks.ccconline.org/

[12] Fort Lewis College. (2025). Fort Lewis Digital Press. Source: https://pressbooks.fortlewis.edu/

[13] OER Colorado Higher Education Hub. (2025). OER Commons. Source: https://oercommons.org/hubs/coloradohighered

[14] University of Northern Colorado. (2025). UNCOpen: the institutional repository of the University of Northern Colorado. Source: https://digscholarship.unco.edu/

[15] Colorado Mesa University. (2024). Open Educational Resources (More CMU MORE). Source: https://www.coloradomesa.edu/oer/index.html

Cohort 4 / 2022 - 2023	113,028
Cohort 5 / 2023 - 2024	140,385
Cohort 6 / 2024 - 2025	176,652

Source: OER Grant Final Reports
Note: Student counts are considered duplicated as one individual student may be enrolled in multiple courses using OER as their primary resource.

Changes to Request for Proposals

The OER Council significantly revised the 2023 OER grant request for proposals for cohort six in order to increase momentum and the number of ZTC pathways that provide students the ability to complete their degree with zero textbook cost offered at Colorado institutions, and to address the growth of automatic textbook billing programs. Automatic textbook billing programs are course material sales models that add the cost of digital course content automatically into students' tuition and fees.[16] In a flat-fee model, frequently called "equitable access," students pay a set amount per credit hour or semester for course materials through the program, even if a course they are enrolled in uses OER or has no textbook. The fees are equal for all students, no matter what courses or degree they are enrolled in. Students can only opt out of the program for their entire course load rather than for specific courses. ZTC programs present the strongest possibility for students at institutions with flat-fee automatic textbook billing programs to confidently opt out of the programs and realize the full benefit of OER.

Grant Categories

The 2023 request for proposals contained seven grant categories with a total allocation of $1 million. The OER Council prioritized the funding of z-degrees and collaborative grants by explicitly stating the aim to award at least $500,000 in grant funding to z-degree and collaborative proposals. The following were the seven grant categories for the sixth cycle of OER grant funding:

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[16] Inclusive Access. (2023). Get the facts on Inclusive Access. Source: https://www.inclusiveaccess.org/

1A: Complete general education/AA + major z-degree: Grants that undertake a full zero textbook cost degree (z-degree), providing OER course options regularly from start to finish in general education and major(s), so a student can complete their degree with zero textbook cost.

1B: Major coursework z-degree: Grants that convert all required coursework in a major or certificate to OER, whether through adoption, adaptation, or creation of OER. Students can complete their major-required coursework (except general education) without textbook cost.

2A: Collaborative: Grants awarded to two or more institutions (K-12 and private institutions eligible, with a lead applicant that is a public institution of higher education) to adopt, adapt, and create OER for multiple courses.

2B: Collaborative z-degree: Grants awarded to two or more institutions to adopt, adapt, and create OER with the express goal of establishing z-degrees at each participating institution.

3: Small group: Grants run by a small group of committed faculty at a single institution to adopt, adapt, or create OER for multiple courses, but not undertake a z-degree initiative.

4: General incentive grant: Grants that fund an incentive or stipend grant program to be distributed by the institution to provide stipends to adopt, adapt, or create OER for multiple courses at the institution.

5: Individual course: Grants that adopt, adapt, or create OER for a single course.

Cohort Six

At the close of the request for proposals in December 2023, there were 31 submissions for the grant, totaling more than $1.1 million in proposed projects. The OER Council selected 26 proposals to award funding: ten z-degree grants, nine general incentive fund grants, three collaborative grants, two individual course grants, one small group grant, and one remaining two-year institution grant that

began in cycle five. In the first five years of the grant program, four major coursework z-degrees were undertaken at Colorado State University Pueblo, Colorado School of Mines, and University of Colorado Denver. The changes in the 2023 request for proposals successfully tripled the amount of in-progress z-degrees, including seven new z-degrees proposed by institutions that previously had not worked on a ZTC pathway under the grant program and the first collaborative z-degree between two institutions. Additionally, the sixth cycle marked the first time multiple collaborative proposals were received in a single grant cycle.

Cohort six grantees made remarkable strides for OER on their campuses, including: Arapahoe Community College reaching the milestone of 34 courses converting to OER for its ZTC program in early career education, Adams State University implementing 16 OER courses exceeding their original goal of 10, Community College of Aurora creating OER for the first time and achieving 35% required general education required courses OER, Colorado Community College System offered 112 pooled OER courses through Colorado Online as of spring 2025, Front Range Community College launched nine courses as OER for its Bachelor of Applied Science Business, Red Rocks Community College embarked on a ZTC degree in theatre, and Western Colorado University began work on a ZTC program for business. Individual projects completed were Statics: A Student-Centered Approach[17] OER at the Colorado School of Mines and transforming Digital Music Techniques[18] courses at the University of Colorado Denver to ZTC through an OER textbook, video tutorials, and open source software. A total of 318 courses were converted to OER through cohort six grants. Additional ZTC work from cohort six is featured in the following report section on Zero Textbook Cost.

> *"OER has come a long way over the past decade. Gone are the days when faculty were suspicious of OER. And, at CCA, OER is embraced and encouraged. I checked the price of a textbook the other day that I used to use in my classes, and I was shocked to see that it was approximately $225! Thank goodness for OER!"* - Community College of Aurora Instructor.

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[17] Reynolds, S. (2025). Seeing Structures: Statics a student-centered approach. Source: https://www.seeingstructures.org/courses-topics/statics
[18] Wu, J.C. (2025). Digital Music Techniques MUSC 4820. Source: https://digitalmusictechniques.art/

Table 4: OER Course Offerings by Cohort 6 Grantee Institutions in the 2024-2025 academic year

Institution	Total OER or ZTC Courses	Percentage of total courses
Aims Community College	157	43%
Arapahoe Community College	292	28%
Colorado Community College System	112	18%
Colorado Mesa University	306	Not reported
Colorado Northwestern Community College	77	82%
Colorado School of Mines	73	7%
Colorado State University Pueblo	118	Not reported
Community College of Aurora	69	22%
Fort Lewis College	309	30%
Front Range Community College	1,316	19%
Metropolitan State University	205	9%
Pikes Peak State College	70	6%
Red Rocks Community College	618	17%
University of Northern Colorado	154	4%
Western Colorado University	21	Not reported
University of Colorado System	618	Varies across campuses

Source: Cohort 6 OER Grantee Final Reports

Collaborative OER Mathematics Textbooks

The Collaborative OER Mathematics Textbooks (COMaT) was led by the University of Northern Colorado and Fort Lewis College with the goal to support mathematics instructors across the state in authoring accessible, interactive OER material using PreTeXt, an open source publishing system that is widely used in STEM disciplines. COMaT hosted an intensive, two-day workshop at the Auraria Campus in May 2024 with follow-up engagement with participants throughout the following year, and a separate one-day workshop at the University of Northern Colorado in May 2025.

The collaborative grant converted 11 different mathematics courses across eight institutions. At Colorado State University, a professor adapted an existing pre-calculus textbook into PreTeXt for MATH 120 College Algebra. By replacing the $100 workbook in a high-enrollment course, the estimated annual cost savings will be between $60,000-$80,000. A group of three instructors at Fort Lewis College re-mixed multiple OER textbooks into a new textbook for MAT 105 Quantitative Reasoning that will be used by approximately 200 students per year. The Department of Mathematical Sciences at the University of Northern Colorado collaboratively wrote an OER textbook for STAT 150 Introductory Statistics, which is projected to impact 700-750 students and save an estimated $54,600 annually. An additional result was that participating mathematics instructors formed a community where they adopted each other's course materials and were able to learn from each other regarding PreTeXt.

The course notes from Introduction to Business Statistics at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs,[19] created through PreTeXT and hosted on GitHub, earned positive reviews from students in spring 2025, with one student sharing, "The website with all of the notes is a great tool to use for this course. It is a great summary of the content and is very useful."

Colorado OER Anatomy Hub

The Colorado OER Anatomy Hub is a collaborative project led by the Modern Human Anatomy Program at University of Colorado Anschutz with collaborators at the University of Colorado Boulder, University of Colorado Colorado Springs, University of Colorado Denver, Colorado College, Colorado State University, and Aurora Science and Tech High School to create a hub of 3D printable anatomical models, 3D viewable models, educational modules, and CT/MRI datasets. The cost of commercial anatomical models and plastinates is prohibitive for many institutions and contributes to high lab fees for anatomy courses. Digital and 3D printed models are a low-cost alternative. For example, a plastic model of a human heart is $232, whereas a 3D printed heart has a material cost of $35. 3D printed models also

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[19] Nelsen, L.M., Swetz, K. (2025). QUAN 2010 Notes Introduction to Business Statistics. Source: https://laurennelsen.github.io/QUAN2010/QUAN_2010_Notes.html

increase kinetic learning and provide students with the option to use dry-erase markers to add arteries and veins.

During cohort six, the team was able to develop the OER Anatomy Hub website,[20] 27 anatomical 3D models, DICOM files from CT/MRI scans, and educational modules. The project offers a virtual tour of the Hub through a YouTube video[21] to assist new users. The project has the potential to benefit every student in medical and science at Colorado institutions of higher education, increasing access to anatomy education for low-income K-12 schools, and adoption beyond the state. The OER Anatomy Hub was highlighted in the CU Innovations & Entrepreneur Showcase[22] in October 2024, and presented at the Human Anatomy & Physiology Society Western Regional Meeting in October 2024 and at the 2025 American Association for Anatomy Conference in March 2025. The inaugural Open CU Student OER Champion Award was given to Jamie Cronin[23] in 2025 for developing a 3D model of the brain, providing an innovative, free study tool for medical and dental students. Cronin's creation has been integrated into four courses across the University of Colorado Anschutz's medical, dental and graduate programs.

One student who used the brain and heart models during the 2024-2025 academic year remarked, "I loved the interactive part of the model. It allows me to visualize and label parts of the models as a way to quiz myself." The OER Anatomy Hub has continued in cohort seven and proposed for cohort eight to continue creating 3D printable anatomical models for additional systems of the body.

University of Northern Colorado

Since cohort one, the University of Northern Colorado has been able to support 89 different instructors

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[20] University of Colorado. (2025). Open Educational Resources (OER) Anatomy Hub. Source: https://medschool.cuanschutz.edu/ms-modern-human-anatomy/student-resources/OERAnatomyHub
[21] Modern Human Anatomy Program. (2025). Open Education Resources Anatomy Hub Tour. Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gu2llrG5XJE
[22] University of Colorado, Office of the President. (2024). CU to Host First Systemwide Innovation & Entrepreneurship Showcase Oct. 4. Source: https://president.cu.edu/news/cu-host-first-systemwide-innovation-entrepreneurship-showcase-oct-4
[23] University of Colorado. (2025). Open CU. Source: https://www.cu.edu/open-cu

or graduate students from 30 different departments as they have converted or refreshed 79 different OER courses through OER grant funding. The cohort six grant converted the following courses to OER: BIO 100 Exploring Biology, SES 220 Anatomical Kinesiology, STAT 150 Introduction to Statistical Analysis, CSD 555 Neuroanatomy and Neurophysiology of Communication, FND 455/555 Nutrition for Fitness and Performance, ECON 203 Principles of Macroeconomics, HUSR 342 Modern Concepts of Health and Disease, and AST 109 The Cosmos. One high-impact course is Principles of Macroeconomics, which will first be implemented in spring 2026 with the goal of the Economics Department offering three to four sections of the course per semester. Based on the average enrollment of 65 students per section and a previous textbook cost of $150, the course to OER promises student savings of $9,750 per section and a potential student savings of $39,000 per semester.

In fall 2024, the proportion of all students who were enrolled in at least one OER section was around 35%, which has been roughly stable since fall 2022. This suggests consistent support for OER materials at the University of Northern Colorado. Ninety percent of new first-time, full-time students had at least one section with zero textbook cost with at least 60% of their first semester courses having zero textbook cost. This represents a 27% increase in new first-time, full-time students with at least one ZTC section in the two-year period from 2022 through 2024. One student shared in an institutional survey, "Having free course materials was a game-changer. It made me able to afford my education. I wasn't sitting there, worried about how many hours I had to work to pay for the textbook or if my funding would cover it."

Cohort Seven

The seventh cycle of the OER grant program shifted the proposal due date from December to September in order to extend the grant performance period to include the spring semester. The goal of the change is to enable institutions to begin work in the spring semester and implement OER earlier into classrooms. At the close of the request for proposals in September 2024, there were 21 submissions for the grant totaling more than $1 million in proposed projects. Cohort 7 features eight

z-degree grants, six general incentive fund grants, three collaborative grants, three small group grants, and one individual grant. The seventh cohort also provided OER professional development funds to every rural institution of higher education to attend the 2025 Rural OER Pre-Conference held in May 2025 at the University of Northern Colorado and the international 2025 Open Education Conference held in Denver in October 2025. The performance period for cohort seven runs from February 2025 through June 2026.

Cohort Eight

The 2025 request for proposals was released in April 2025. At the close of the request for proposals in September 2025, there were 35 submissions. The eighth cycle is the largest and most competitive application pool of the OER grant program. Cohort eight proposals include 11 general incentive fund proposals, nine z-degree proposals, six individual project proposals, five collaborative proposals, and five small group proposals. Some z-degree proposals contain multiple projects and in total represent 11 new z-degrees or certificates and six z-degrees already in development from prior grant cycles. Additionally, the engagement with rural institutions over the last year resulted in Colorado Mountain College applying for its first grant since cohort four, Trinidad State College applying for its first grant since cohort three, and Morgan Community College applying for its first grant since cohort two.

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education will approve cohort eight grants in December 2025. The performance period for award projects will run from February 2026 to June 2027. Cohort eight is the final cycle of OER grants with present legislation repealing on November 1, 2026.

Zero Textbook Cost

ZTC degrees and certificates provide students with a pathway to complete credentials with zero textbook cost. A program must convert enough courses to using OER or other free materials for students to realistically complete all credential requirements in order to achieve ZTC program status.

This conversion process for a ZTC degree takes years, similar to earning a degree as a minimum of 20 to 40 courses must be converted by a small group of instructors and staff. As of fall 2025, there are 17 complete ZTC degrees or certificates, and 18 in progress ZTC degrees or certificates across Colorado institutions. The complete ZTC programs include six certificates, six associate degrees, two bachelor's degrees, and two master's degrees.

The development of ZTC programs through the grant program initially focused on associate level degrees and general education requirements. Colorado State University Pueblo launched Colorado's first bachelor's z-degree in 2022 for Spanish, and Colorado School of Mines achieved the first master's z-degree in 2023 for mechanical engineering. These are the only two ZTC programs that have reached maturity where the program was in place two years ago and a student could have realistically experienced a ZTC program from start to finish, enabling the first ZTC to non-OER program comparison. However, there is not significant data to report as of fall 2025. Only 32 students were enrolled in the bachelor of arts in Spanish at Colorado State University Pueblo at the start of the full ZTC program. The number of Spanish majors has increased to 64 in 2025, with zero textbook cost being one possible contribution to the increase. The master's in mechanical engineering at Colorado School of Mines had only 12 enrolled students at the start of the ZTC program. There are now 35 students as of fall 2025. Providing efficacy on ZTC programs as of the 2024-2025 academic year in which this report is focused would reflect 44 students across two z-degrees. It is difficult to generalize the impact of OER or ZTC on completion, pass, and retention rates on a small pool of students as there are other external factors for why a student may succeed in a course that extends beyond course materials, such as the instructor's teaching, stable housing, and food access. The number of completed ZTC programs increased with the start of the fall 2025 semester with more completion data being available in 2027.

Colorado tripled the number of in progress ZTC programs as a result of changes to the request for proposals for the cohort six grant cycle. ZTC highlights from cohort six are the collaborative nursing z-degree between the University of Colorado and Fort Lewis College, mathematics at the University of

Colorado Denver, and a number of associate degree achievements across the Colorado Community College System.

Nursing

Fort Lewis College and the University of Colorado College of Nursing are collaboratively creating a zero textbook cost z-degree for undergraduate nursing students. Nursing students are able to study at Fort Lewis College and earn a University of Colorado College of Nursing degree. The University of Colorado admits approximately 400 students per year. The state's first collaborative z-degree received $100,000 in cohort 6 grant funds. The cost savings after the first year of implementation is $233,468, doubling the state's investment in just one year.

In addition to the impact of cost savings, OER developed for nursing ZTC programs prepare students for culturally sensitive care and serving the state's rural and Indigenous communities. A standard textbook designed for wide use across the nation cannot reflect every community and region. The open licensing of OER permits the resources to be remixed and customized, enabling Colorado instructors to ensure the text reflects diseases specific to the region. The collaborative project is an example of community collaboration with one Fort Lewis College instructor consulting Indigenous community members about the newly developed curriculum and when developing simulations to train student nurses. Dr. Teresa Connolly, a co-lead for the grant, pulled state health data when writing a new OER textbook on pathophysiology to guarantee that key diseases within regions of Colorado were included and students would be trained for the population they are most likely to care for after graduation. The OER created by the collaborative nursing z-degree are not only free, but bespoke products that reflect all Coloradans.

The partnership between Fort Lewis College and the University of Colorado is expected to expand Colorado's nursing workforce with professionals who reflect the diversity of their local communities and to increase the number of credentialed nurses serving rural areas across the state. Dr. Teresa

Connolly of the University of Colorado and Tyler Dunn of Fort Lewis College received the 2024 Governor Workforce Z Award for their work leading this collaborative project. The nursing ZTC program at the University of Colorado and Fort Lewis College is still under development, with work that will continue beyond cycle eight of the grant program. Arapahoe Community College also has an in progress nursing z-degree. Colorado Northwestern Community College, Front Range Community College, and Western Colorado University included nursing ZTC efforts in their cohort eight grant applications.

Mathematics

Mathematics ZTC programs are steadily growing across the state. Individual mathematics courses have been targeted by OER grants since the start of the program in order to provide ZTC options for required and high-enrollment courses. University of Colorado Denver began their ZTC effort in cohort 4 of the OER grant program to create a z-degree bachelor's in mathematics, and is still under development in cohort 7. Mathematics majors are able to complete the upper-level required courses for a bachelor's in mathematics with focus options in general, data science, and applied mathematics without zero textbook cost. The focus offered in probability and statistics is still under development as ZTC. Additionally, students are able to earn a ZTC complete a data sciences certificate. The cost savings students experienced in the 2024 - 2025 academic year through the mathematics ZTC courses was $260,814. University of Colorado Denver's mathematics OER materials are shared freely through CU-Denver-MathStats-OER GitHub site.[24]

The next upcoming mathematics ZTC program is from the University of Northern Colorado. The mathematical sciences department already offers 20 courses that use OER, and proposed the first phase to complete the mathematics ZTC program for the cohort 8 grant cycle. In three years, the University of Northern Colorado will offer a complete ZTC bachelor's in data science and statistics, bachelor's in mathematics with concentration in pure and applied mathematical sciences, data analytics certificate certificate, and computer programming certificate.

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[24] CU-Denver-MathStats-OER. (2025). GitHub. Source: https://github.com/CU-Denver-MathStats-OER

Associate Degrees and Certificates

Institutions across the Colorado Community College System are leaders in ZTC degrees and certificates. Colorado Community College System offers a ZTC bachelor's of applied science, Colorado Northwestern Community College launched associate of arts and associate of sciences degrees this fall, Red Rocks Community College completed the associate of art in theatre, and students at Community College of Aurora can now meet all associate of arts requirements with OER and ZTC courses. Pikes Peak State College offers a ZTC associate of arts, and certificates for emergency medical technician, early career childhood assistant teacher, infant toddler, addiction recovery assistance, and behavioral health.

Colorado Northwestern Community College

Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC) offered zero OER courses five years ago. As of fall 2025, CNCC offers ZTC degrees in both associate of arts and associate of science degrees that utilize OER exclusively, thereby eliminating textbook costs for students pursuing in-person associate degrees at the rural community college. All OER conversion was funded through the grant program. The institutional commitment to OER has saved students $456,281.05 to date, resulting in a grant fund return on investment over 200%. CNCC is the first institution to achieve this level of conversion to OER and particularly increases the affordability of completing a degree for the rural community college's students. As a result of the dedicated work of CNCC instructors and staff who contributed to the ZTC degrees, CNCC received the 2025 Governor's Award for Institutional Advancement to ZTC.

Table 5: Colorado Northwestern Community College ZTC Progress

OER Grant Year	Total OER Course Adoptions	Annual Cost Savings	OER Grant Funds
Cohort 2 / 2020 - 2021	20	$61,814.50	$36,000
Cohort 3 / 2021 - 2022	55	$68,305.90	$35,000
Cohort 4 / 2022 - 2023	63	$90,712.00	$40,000
Cohort 5 / 2023 - 2024	75	$123,936.00	$34,000
Cohort 6 / 2024 - 2025	91	$111,512.65	$75,000
Total	**91**	**$456,281.05**	**$220,000.00**

Source: Colorado Northwestern Community College OER grant reports

Institutional Trends

The widespread use of OER and increasing ZTC pathway development indicates cultural change toward OER as a best practice in affordable education and innovative pedagogy at Colorado institutions. OER librarian positions exist at many institutions, including Arapahoe Community College, Community College of Aurora, University of Colorado, and the University of Northern Colorado. In the past year, Aims Community College and Colorado Mountain College created new librarian positions coordinating OER and the University of Northern Colorado's Center for Teaching and Learning identified OER as an opportunity in its strategic planning. A collective 4,133 courses/sections are reported by institutions as being OER or zero textbook cost at their institutions, up from 3,785 in 2024. This count is nearly twice the amount of courses funded by the OER grant program, which indicates wider use of OER and ZTC materials beyond the state program through individual faculty choice, institutional funding, and library resources. Institutional commitment to OER is evident through over 4,000 OER or ZTC courses offered across Colorado, institutional OER committees, dedicated OER positions, and the Open CU Champions supported by the University of Colorado President's Office since 2020.[25]

OER Policies

There are no institution-wide policies regarding open educational resources at Colorado institutions of higher education. Even at institutions with extensive OER adoption, such as Colorado Northwestern Community College where over 90% of all GT Pathways courses are OER and Aims Community College where 43% of all courses are OER, there is not an institutional OER policy. Grantees report that OER supports their institution's strategic plan, for example Aims Community College features OER in multiple benchmarks in achieving decreased student costs in their 2024 - 2027 strategic plan. Two institutions recognize OER in tenure and promotion guidelines. Colorado State University Pueblo's College of Humanities Arts & Social Sciences and Department of English & World Languages both include OER within their tenure and promotion guide: adoption, adaptation, and creation of open

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[25] University of Colorado. (2025). Open CU. Source: https://www.cu.edu/open-cu

educational resources is recognized under teaching; OER is recognized under scholarship and creative activity; and program development and contributions pertaining to open educational resources are recognized under department, college, and university service. Additionally, University of Colorado Colorado Springs recognizes OER as a professional practice in its tenure and promotion guidelines. More tenure and promotion guidelines recognizing OER contributions is an identified area of work by the OER Council. The OER Council will be conducting community conversations with the Colorado open education community regarding OER in tenure and promotion guidelines in spring 2026.

Institutional copyright and intellectual property policies impact OER development. Copyright policies vary by institution. Copyright for authored educational materials typically are either retained by the individual, such as at the University of Colorado System,[26] or the copyright may reside exclusively to the institution, such as for the Colorado Community College system,[27] when the projects are collaborative system-level efforts. The agreement for OER grants requires materials produced be released publicly under a Creative Commons license, which has aided grantees in superseding institutional policies that would restrict the author from retaining copyright and making the decision to license the work openly in order for other educations to be able to re-use the educational materials.

OER Committees

OER Committees have been created at Aims Community College, Arapahoe Community College, Community College of Aurora, Colorado Community College System, Colorado Mesa University, Colorado Northwestern Community College, Colorado State University, Colorado State University Pueblo, Front Range Community College, Metropolitan State University, Pikes Peak State College, University of Colorado System, University of Northern Colorado, and Western Colorado University. The committees have broad representation of institutional members, including faculty from a variety of disciplines, librarians, instructional designers, students, administrators, and staff such as from the

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[26] University of Colorado. (2025). Intellectual Property That is Educational Materials. Source: https://www.cu.edu/ope/aps/1014

[27] State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education. (2025). Copyright and Patents. Source: https://cccs.edu/about/governance/policies-procedures/bp-3-90-copyrights-and-patents/

bookstore, registrar, and institutional research.

Labeling Courses OER and ZTC

Per C.R.S. 23-1-134, public institutions of higher education are required to ensure that beginning no later than the fall of 2025, students are informed prior to and at the point of course registration about which courses and sections use open educational resources or other low-cost materials. The process of indicating to the student population unique characteristics of any individual course or section is commonly referred to as "course-marking." The Colorado Commission on Higher Education adopted guidelines for the labels of Open Educational Resources (OER), Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC), and Low-Cost defined as $20 or under. These terms refer specifically to textbooks and other instructional material costs. Institutions have reported staffing challenges in their institutional research office and inconsistent definitions as obstacles for implementing labeling courses as OER, but also reported that the deadline of Fall 2025 in C.R.S. 23-1-134 enabled them to make sufficient progress in informing students about OER, ZTC, and low-cost courses.

Student Success Metrics

There has not been an in-depth study or analysis on OER courses versus non-OER courses across Colorado. However, in a two-year study, the University of Northern Colorado found that OER courses had a passing rate of 87.2% compared to 80.2% in non-OER courses, first-generation students completed their OER courses at a higher rate than their counterparts in non-OER courses, all underrepresented groups completed their OER courses while 10% withdrew from non-OER courses, and all Pell eligible students completed their OER courses while 8% withdrew from non-OER courses.[28] Additionally, a 2024 study on the impact of no-cost/low-cost materials at a community college in the west[29] found that students across all demographic categories who participated in no-cost/low-cost

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[28] Mayer, Jennifer, "Open Educational Resources (OER) Efficacy and Experiences: A Mixed Methods Study" (2023). University Libraries Publications. 161. https://digscholarship.unco.edu/libfacpub/161

[29] Diaz Solodukhin, L., MacDonald, M., Falkenstern, C., Lane, P. & Jones, K., (2025) "No-Cost/Low-Cost and OER Impact on Time-to-Credential: An Event History Modeling Study", Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education 3(1), 130-148. doi: https://doi.org/10.31274/joerhe.17772

courses graduated at a higher rate, with a larger positive impact to older students between 2014-2021. Institutions report mixed results regarding pass and completion rates.

Colorado Northwestern Community College reports an average 4.7% increase on pass rates compared to pre-OER courses, Aims Community College reports anecdotal positive student outcomes with fewer students dropping the course and students self-reporting having their materials on the first day of class contributed to their success, Colorado Mesa University has not seen any negative or positive effects to completion or drop rates as a result of using OER, and Arapahoe Community College shared they have not conducted an in-depth study or analysis that would reveal a correlation or causation trend regarding the OER courses versus non-OER courses due institutional research staff changes. An individual faculty member at the University of Northern Colorado reported that between previous non-OER courses and current OER courses for two astronomy courses student test scores improved by an average of 9% and 8 % in those classes.[30]

Metropolitan State University of Denver converted 28 courses under the cohort six grant. Below is the pass rate comparison for five of their courses that illustrate the snapshot of student success seen in single year reports:

- General Chemistry I had a 76% pass rate in OER courses versus the 77% non-OER comparison course (fall semester), 87% pass rate in OER courses versus the 78% non-OER comparison course (spring semester). OER was first implemented in fall 2024.
- Principles of Macroeconomics had a 80.5% pass rate in OER courses versus the 75.8% non-OER comparison course (spring semester). OER was first implemented in spring 2025.
- Social Work 1050 had a 84% pass rate in OER courses versus the 79% non-OER comparison course (fall semester), 75% pass rate in OER courses versus the 67% non-OER comparison course (spring semester). OER was first implemented in fall 2024.
- Communication course Arguing Constructively had a 91% pass rate in OER courses versus the 96% non-OER comparison course (spring semester). OER was first implemented in spring 2025.

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[30] University of Northern Colorado. (2025). Faculty Spotlight: Mariana Lazarova. Source: https://libguides.unco.edu/blogs/OERcommittee/blog/Faculty-Spotlight-Mariana-Lazarova

- Medieval Early Modern Art had a 61% pass rate in OER courses versus the 72.8% non-OER comparison course (fall semester), 85% pass rate in OER courses versus the 70.4% non-OER comparison course (spring semester). OER was first implemented in fall 2024.

Additionally, courses and entire ZTC programs that are created and offered for the first time as OER do not have prior non-OER courses for comparison. The majority of grantee institutions report difficulty in gathering the required data and understaffed institutional research offices to provide assistance in data collection and analysis. It is the hope that the new course labeling requirements will aid in reliable data collection beginning in fall 2025. It is difficult to generalize the impact of OER on completion, pass, and retention rates without a longitudinal study. The OER Council will begin a longitudinal study in 2026 to better assess student success metrics as a result of OER and ZTC programs.

Conferences and Trainings

A cornerstone of the OER program is skillbuilding through professional development. The Colorado OER Conference is held annually, the Department and OER Council host regular webinars on OER and ZTC topics, and a new initiative to engage rural institutions supported travel for OER trainings. Additionally, the national Open Education Conference[31] selected Denver as its 2025 conference location. More than 150 Colorado faculty, librarians, and students attended virtually and in person through state or institutional professional development funding. Colorado Governor Jared Polis provided the welcome keynote and three undergraduate students from Colorado Northwestern Community College, the University of Colorado Denver, and the University of Northern Colorado spoke on the student insights on the future of education keynote panel.

Colorado OER Conference

The 2025 Colorado OER Conference was held on May 30 at the University of Northern Colorado. The theme of the conference was, "Mapping the Open Road: Navigating the Future of OER." The conference

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[31] Open Education Conference. (2025). Source: https://openeducationconference.org/

featured 26 sessions of presentations, workshops, and roundtables under five themed tracks - beginner, collaboration, STEM, student engagement, and sustainability. The conference had 224 Colorado faculty, librarians, instructional designers, students, administrators, and other OER advocates registrants, a 21% increase from 189 registrants in 2024.

A pre-conference was held on May 29 to provide professional development specific to rural institutions and cultivate a community among rural institutions in Colorado that will continue beyond the conference. Nicholas Swails of Colorado Northwestern Community College, who led the institution's conversion to ZTC, facilitated the pre-conference. Representatives from Adams State University, Colorado Mountain College, Northwestern Community College, Fort Lewis College, Lamar Community College, Morgan Community College, Northeastern Junior College, Otero College, Trinidad State College, and Western Colorado University were in attendance.

Additionally, the inaugural Colorado OER Awards were presented at the conference:

- **2025 Exceptional OER Team:** Los Valientes; Dr. Alegría Ribadeneira, Dr. Katherine Brown, Jorge Arroyo and Tatiana Johnston, the Spanish faculty of Colorado State University Pueblo who embarked on a three-year journey to realize the first ZTC degree in Colorado.

- **2025 Exceptional OER Project:** Mathematics ZTC program at the University of Colorado Denver, recipients Drs. Troy Butler, Joshua French, Adam Spiegler, Stephen Hartke, Yaning Liu, Pamela Whitten, Robert Rostermundt, Daniel Klie, and Yongxia Kuang of the mathematical and statistical sciences department.

- **2025 Exceptional OER Creation:** EverFlow Mandarin: An intermediate-advanced level OER Chinese Textbook[32], authored by Dr. Yingjie Li, Dr. Runqing Qi, and Yu Zhang of the University of Colorado Boulder.

- **2025 Exceptional OER Partners:** mitch cota, Reference and OER Librarian at Arapahoe Community College; and Seth Velutich, Scholarly Communications Librarian at Colorado School of Mines.

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[32] Qi, Runqing; Yingjie Li, and Yu Zhang. EverFlow Mandarin: an intermediate-advanced level OER Chinese Textbook. (2024). University of Colorado Boulder. https://www.colorado.edu/project/everflowmandarin/

- **2025 Colorado OER Champion:** Jen Mayer, Interim Associate Dean of University Libraries, University of Northern Colorado. Ms. Mayer's nomination included, "She models what it means to lead collaboratively, to prioritize student access, and to institutionalize OER in ways that are sustainable and scalable… Jen Mayer is more than an advocate—she is a builder. She has laid a foundation for OER growth at UNC and across Colorado that will benefit students and faculty for years to come."

The 2026 Colorado OER Conference will be held on May 29 at Arapahoe Community College with the theme "Open for Good: Resilience, Innovation, and Collaboration."

(Left) Jotwan Daniels and Karen Kaemmerling from Colorado Mountain College take notes during the 2025 Rural OER Pre-Conference and **(right)** 2025 Colorado OER Conference attendees from Aims Community College pose for a group photo with props that lean into the conference theme of "Mapping the Open Road." Photos courtesy of Woody Myers, University of Northern Colorado.
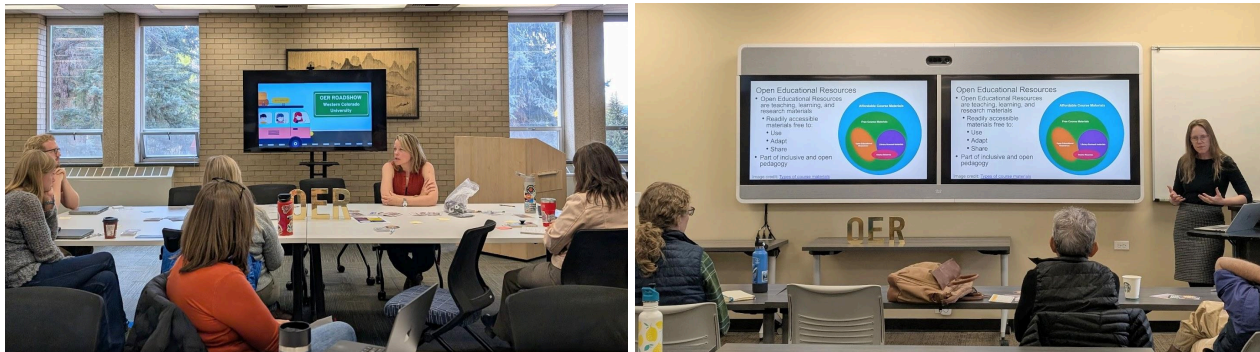
OER Roadshow

The Department's director of open education and the OER Council embarked on an OER roadshow beginning in October 2025. The free traveling mini conference provides training on open educational resources, copyright, zero textbook cost degrees, and guidance on implementing a robust institutional OER program. The roadshow kicked off with a tour of rural institutions: Adams State University,

Western Colorado University, Colorado Mountain College, Morgan Community College, and Northeastern Junior College. Roadshow stops feature speakers from successful OER projects, including the University of Colorado's zero textbook cost nursing degree and Colorado Northwestern Community College's zero textbook cost associates of arts and sciences degrees.

Impact from the first campus visits are already being realized with Colorado Mountain College instructors committing to converting 15 credits of courses to OER in the week following the event. The roadshow stops are free to attend and open to all staff, students and members of the campus community. The roadshow will continue with scheduled visits to Trinidad State College and Otero College in February 2026, and additional dates to be scheduled throughout spring 2026 at interested campuses.

(Left) OER Council member Nancy A. Henke, Textbook Affordability Librarian for the University of Northern Colorado, presents on copyright and open licensing to OER Roadshow attendees at Western Colorado University and **(right)** OER Council Member Dr. Medora Huseby, Associate Professor Microbiology, Immunology, and Pathology at Colorado State University presents on open pedagogy to OER Roadshow attendees at Colorado Mountain College.

OER Professional Development

The OER Council exceeded its goal of providing skillbuilding through professional development related to OER in 2025 with an advocacy learning community, AI learning community, and more than 30 hours of OER training webinars in the past year. Professional development webinars in the form of online

webinars, learning communities, and in-person events are promoted through the monthly Colorado OER Newsletter and Colorado OER calendar.

The Advocacy Learning Community for OER (ALCO) launched in March 2025 with a cohort of librarians, faculty, and instructional designers. The purpose of ALCO is to bring together individuals who are interested in advocating for OER at their institutions. Through this learning community, participants learn with each other, gain confidence in advocacy skills, and develop an OER advocacy plan tailored to their institution. The monthly class sessions addressed the following topics: building foundations for advocacy, exploring stakeholders, cultivating partners, compelling communication, data assessment, and creating a plan. The program was limited to 20 participants. Each class had assigned homework for participants that were discussed in working groups. Participants earned a professional development certificate upon completion.

In spring 2025, the Department and OER Council hosted two webinars each month as lunch and learns on the following topics: finding OER, adoption and implementation of OER, building an OER culture through faculty learning communities, importance of accessibility in OER, using AI to streamline OER adoption, alphabet soup of OER, and creating and housing and OER. In fall 2025, 27 hours of OER professional development training were coordinated by the Department and OER Council. The topics included OER showcase series featuring impactful OER grants, an AI & OER learning community that were held in two-parts with an instruction session followed by a sandbox session, three accessibility webinars, three webinars focused on knowledge for librarians, incorporating students in OER peer review, and evaluating OER's impact on student success.

The Department and OER Council launched a new OER professional development certificate in 2025. Participants can earn an OER Explorer Certificate by attending three webinars, OER Navigator Certificate by attending six webinars, and an OER Trailblazer Certificate by attending nine webinars in a single semester. Additionally, the OER Fourteener Certificate is earned by attendance at 14 webinars across an academic year.

Upcoming OER Council Initiatives

In last year's report, the OER Council identified engaging rural institutions with OER, skillbuilding through professional development, and promoting student voices in OER. These goals were achieved and remain as priorities for the Department and OER Council. The OER Council has been strategically planning to provide the Colorado OER community with a strong foundation beyond 2026 through the Colorado Pressbooks Network, Colorado OER Hub on OER Commons, and skillbuilding through professional development webinars. The priorities for the upcoming year will focus on cultivating a nursing collaborative group with a minimum of five institutions, conducting student success studies, and community building for rural institutions of higher education.

Nursing Collaborative

The collaborative bachelor's in nursing zero textbook cost degree grant between the University of Colorado College of Nursing and Fort Lewis College has been inspirational to other institutions. Arapahoe Community College is already developing a ZTC program for nursing. Western Colorado University, Colorado Northwestern Community, and Front Range Community College proposed nursing ZTC projects for the eighth cycle of the grant program. Additionally, Colorado Mountain College and University of Northern Colorado have also expressed interest in ZTC development. OER and ZTC pathways in healthcare can increase the affordability of completing the credential and fill critical roles in Colorado's workforce. The OER Council is forming a nursing collaborative group among these institutions in order to coordinate a group effort to complete the heavy lift of development of no-cost textbooks, educational materials, and simulations. The collaborative will meet in-person in spring 2026.

Student Success Studies

There is a lack of longitudinal studies on the impact of OER and ZTC on Colorado students. Per C.R.S. 23-1-134, institutions are required as of fall 2025 to label their courses OER, ZTC, or low-cost. It is anticipated that course labeling requirements will increase the reliability and availability of data for OER

and non-OER course comparisons, and ability to measure impact of ZTC programs. The OER Council will work with institutions to survey students, and gather data on pass rates and completion rates that extend beyond an annual grant performance period.

Rural OER Community

Many rural institutions report minimal or no library staff with faculty juggling the responsibilities of teaching, academic advising, and serving on multiple committees. Some institutions like Colorado Northwestern Community College and Fort Lewis College have been incredibly successful despite these challenges. The Rural OER Pre-Conference held on May 29 and the OER roadshow visits to Adams State University, Western Colorado University, Colorado Mountain College, and Morgan Community College were great successes. The OER Council will continue to engage rural institutions with roadshow visits to Trinidad State College, Otero College, and Lamar Community College in spring 2026 and offer targeted virtual OER trainings to rural institutions that are led by successful rural institution OER programs. The OER Council will continue cultivating a rural OER community to provide rural institutions a supportive network to take on the challenge of ZTC development.

Summary

OER work in Colorado has gained a national reputation due to state funding for the OER grant program, state level leadership of the OER Council, and significant success of six years of grant implementations.[33] As of this report, there are 17 complete ZTC degrees and certificates across Colorado with an additional 29 in progress through grant cohorts seven and eight. Colorado students have now saved nearly $60 million in textbook costs thanks to the use of OER and ZTC across 2,291 OER grant-funded courses. As a result of consistent state funding and work by educators, there has been a

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[33] Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition. (2025). Colorado's Continued Commitment to OER Benefits Students Statewide. Source: https://sparcopen.org/impact-story/colorado-open-educational-resources/

637% increase in the number of Colorado students enrolled in courses using OER or other zero textbook cost materials at public institutions of higher education from 2020 to 2025.

The Colorado OER community has demonstrated continued dedication to OER and ZTC initiatives through professional engagement and delivering the largest grant application pool to date with 35 proposals. The OER Council's leadership has been instrumental in shaping Colorado's statewide initiative, and reauthorization is essential to maintain the advisory council's role beyond November 1, 2026. Statewide enthusiasm for Open Educational Resources (OER) is at an all-time high, with strong momentum to extend ZTC program development. Coordinated leadership of the state through the Department to the OER Council has been one of the keys to the success of this initiative. Continued investment beyond 2026 will ensure that momentum is not lost, and allow the state to further reduce financial barriers and increase credential affordability for Colorado students.